



**The Pacific Forum CSIS-China Foundation for  
International and Strategic Studies**

**8th China-US Dialogue on  
Strategic Nuclear Dynamics**

**Key Findings and Recommendations**

Issues & Insights  
Vol. 14-No.1

Beijing, People's Republic of China  
November 4-5, 2013

## **China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS)**

Founded by Chinese military officers on leave or retired from active duty and is authorized to engage in business as well as strategic studies. It publishes a few books a year and a journal and actively seeks “counterparts” overseas with whom to co-host conferences on political/military issues, including the future of the security environment.

## **Pacific Forum CSIS**

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS ([www.pacforum.org](http://www.pacforum.org)) operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum’s programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region’s leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

**The Pacific Forum CSIS-China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies  
8th China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics; Beijing, China; Nov. 4-5, 2013.  
Key Findings and Recommendations**

**Background**

The China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics started as a joint effort in 2004 by the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies (CFISS) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It aims to facilitate exchange and deepen understanding on nuclear policy related issues. The RAND Corporation and Center for Defense Analysis also co-sponsored a few sessions. In recent years, the Pacific Forum of CSIS has been the US partner. The nature of the dialogue is defined as unofficial and “track1.5.” The dialogue has been going on for 10 years, providing a unique channel for sustained conversation between government and military officials and think tank experts from China and the United States, who have in the process gained better understanding of each other’s nuclear policies. It has also been attempting to set up steps toward official dialogue on nuclear-related issues.

The 8th China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics was held in Beijing, China on Nov. 4-5, 2013. Some 85 Chinese and US experts, officials, military officers, and observers attended, all in their private capacity. The off-the-record discussions covered nuclear doctrine and force modernization, current nonproliferation challenges, missile defense, space cooperation, crisis management, and confidence-building measures, with break-out sessions on arms control verification and development of a space code of conduct. The US delegation also met with the Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff Department, who expressed support for continued military-to-military dialogue, given high-level political support for such activity.

**Key Findings**

- The Sunnyside Summit’s commitment to forge a “new type of major country relations” set a positive tone for the meeting and provided an important guide and framework for reflecting over the bilateral nuclear relationship. All agree that the “new type” of relations did and should include a strategic or nuclear dimension (as yet to be more fully defined). There was also general acceptance of the term “strategic stability” as a positive goal and foundational element in the “new type” of relations. Chinese participants also stressed that mutual respect of each side’s core interests was part and parcel of this new vision.

- Compared with the Cold War, the world nuclear situation has had many positive changes, with US-Russia nuclear reductions and more cooperation among nuclear-weapon states on nonproliferation, nuclear safety, and anti-nuclear terrorism. Nonetheless, there are still uncertainties. DPRK and Iranian nuclear issues persist without resolution. Further nuclear weapon reductions are confronted with many obstacles. Challenges to nuclear safety and security are on the rise. Questions of outer space, cyber space, missile defense (MD), and conventional prompt global strike (CPGS) capabilities are increasingly linked to the nuclear issue.

- Chinese participants acknowledged and applauded Washington’s desire to further downsize its nuclear arsenal (in tandem with Russia) and to develop stable strategic relations with China, but

expressed disappointment in current US nuclear doctrine, arguing that Washington has failed to address non-deployed and tactical nuclear weapons and that it maintains first use, counter-force, and launch-under-attack strategies.

- Despite reassurances to the contrary, Chinese participants are still particularly concerned about the potential threat to its second-strike capability posed by US MD, conventional prompt global strike (CPGS), and other conventional systems. Chinese participants are concerned with MD numbers as well as system integration between US and its Asian allies, especially the deployment of early-warning radar in East Asia. There is a large perception gap over CPGS capabilities. Americans argued that the long-range conventional ballistic missile capabilities usually associated with CPGS are many years from being deployed and will be limited in number if ever developed. Chinese concerns were much broader; they considered a larger group of conventional, space, and cyber capabilities such as HV2, X37, x47b, etc., as part of their worries. Further discussion of how this broader set of conventional capabilities affects China's nuclear forces remains an important part of achieving strategic stability.

- Chinese participants explained that the sole purpose of China's nuclear arsenal is deterrence of nuclear attacks. There has been no change to this principle. Beijing continues to develop a "lean and effective" nuclear force, i.e., one that can survive a first strike and carry out nuclear counter attack. Chinese alert levels remain low. China is not interested in engaging in a nuclear arms race with anyone or seeking nuclear parity with the US and Russia while they downsize their nuclear arsenals.

- There are participants from both sides who take the view that China can only take part in the nuclear weapon reduction process after deep cuts by the United States and Russia. Policies and practices of de facto nuclear weapon states, US MD, and CPGS are also factors that China will take into account when making such a decision.

- Chinese participants adamantly dismissed claims that Beijing hides thousands of nuclear weapons in tunnels and expressed serious dissatisfaction with the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act in particular because it asked the US Department of Defense to evaluate whether China has hidden thousands of nuclear weapons in tunnels and whether the United States had the ability to neutralize those weapons with conventional (and nuclear) weapons.

- Chinese participants stressed that proliferation and nuclear terrorism are "crucial concerns" for China as well. Discussion focused on how Washington and Beijing can work together on UNSCR 1540 implementation, the development of best practices to combat nuclear terrorism, and the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. While China is not prepared to join the Proliferation Security Initiative, Beijing supports the objectives of the initiative and is making related efforts to achieve them.

- US participants insist that Pyongyang's quest to have nuclear weapons *and* pursue economic development is unacceptable. There was little agreement between Americans and Chinese participants on how to present Pyongyang with a "stark choice." Chinese participants argued that Beijing adjusted its DPRK policy according to the changing situation on the Peninsula, giving priority to denuclearization. Beijing supports DPRK efforts to develop its economy and improve

people's living, and calls for an early resumption of the Six-Party Talks. Chinese participants generally understood but were not fully sympathetic with US (and ROK) calls to set preconditions for the resumption of negotiations and remained hesitant to discuss DPRK collapse scenarios.

- Chinese and American participants agree that verification is the foundation of arms control treaties and that it helps build trust and stability. The challenge is to find a proper balance between secrecy and reassurance and between effectiveness and intrusiveness. Chinese participants showed some interest in verification technology cooperation with the United States.

- Both sides agree on the importance of establishing dialogue on space and cooperation mechanisms. Chinese participants did not oppose the development of a code of conduct in outer space, but argued for "a more comprehensive system of rules." Americans expressed skepticism that a treaty on the "demilitarization of outer space" could be verified; Chinese saw no harm in opening *negotiations* for a verifiable treaty. All agreed that existing differences should not preclude cooperation in other areas, including collision avoidance, debris reduction, and improvement of Space Situational Awareness (SSA).

- Participants agreed that the United States and China should develop strong crisis management capabilities and avoid being dragged into a confrontation by "third parties." US participants suggested that in crisis situations, ambiguity should generally be avoided and signaling should be clear. In this connection, the two sides may jointly develop a glossary of key terms and consider the establishment of a joint working group on crisis management. All agree that table-top exercises would enhance crisis management learning. Improved crisis management cooperation should be an integral part of the "new type" of US-China relations.

- There was strong support on the US side and growing support on the Chinese side for a track-1 bilateral strategic nuclear dialogue. Chinese tend to prefer this take place within established frameworks such as Strategic Security Dialogue (SSD) and Defense Consultation Talks (DCT), while Americans also saw value in more direct dialogue between the US Strategic Command and Second Artillery as well.

### **General observations and next steps:**

Participants made an obvious effort to look at each topic with an eye to positive signals that would be consistent with moving forward toward the "new type" relationship. The constructive, pragmatic tone was striking, especially in contrast to the more combative last session in January 2013. Discussions about opening an official strategic nuclear dialogue, the possibility of strengthened US-China cooperation to deal with the North Korean nuclear crisis and on nonproliferation more generally, as well as slow but increasingly robust space discussions are all encouraging signs. Also positive was the fact that a number of traditional "irritants" were mentioned in a more rational way. The Report by the Cox Commission was initially mentioned in passing but US efforts to dismiss this report were met with an impassioned response. Chinese believe Americans underestimated its impact, which continues to impede cooperation. Although Chinese participants no longer demand an apology, they sought acknowledgement that past cooperation was legal and beneficial as a prerequisite for resuming cooperation.

More consultations are needed on MD and CPGS: the next discussion on MD should better distinguish between national systems meant to defend the US homeland and regional systems intended to defend US allies and forward-deployed US forces. Moreover, it was argued that cooperation on arms control verification could advance if each side identified specific areas of agreement they would like verified. An in-depth look at how escalation could unfold in crisis situations is also needed to understand the possible chain of events and identify how to enhance or regain control. A table-top exercise would be particularly helpful in this regard. More focused discussions of space issues, specific CBMs, and escalation risks that may be caused by conventional attacks against components of a nuclear system are also needed. Such discussions will help address areas of uncertainty and provide practical, technical, and “hard” means of reassurance.

This China-US strategic dialogue seems well-suited to help define the nuclear or strategic elements of the “new type of major country relations” and design an initial agenda for a parallel track-1 dialogue.

*For more information, please contact the Pacific Forum CSIS or the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies. This is a preliminary report aimed at providing a general summary of the discussion’s key findings. They are the result of research supported by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) through the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (PASCC), as well as by CFISS on the Chinese side. The views expressed are those of the authors, however, and do not necessarily reflect those of CFISS, NPS, or DTRA; nor do they imply endorsement of the Chinese or US government.*