CHINA'S NUCLEAR POLICY: A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the development, management, and execution of nuclear policies and strategies in China. Chinese nuclear policy has always been a center of discussion for military officials and researchers worldwide. Considering its internal and external security situation and strategic perceptions, China has made some crucial adjustments in its nuclear deterrent to cope with future threats and maintain the diminutive stature among nuclear powers. The issue of Taiwan and ballistic missile defense systems (BMDs) of India and USA may raise China's critical thinking in the coming future for which it must change its policy of No First Use (NFU) and must shift its nuclear intentions from narrow to limited nuclear deterrent posture. Due to changed cultural perspectives, China has its specific nuclear strategy that involves the minimum utility of nuclear weapons. Factors involved in the evolution of Chinese nuclear strategy are in line with technological modernization. However, China is not willing to leave adherence from its NFU policy. China possesses a limited capacity of nuclear experts, a comparatively lesser quantity of nuclear installations, and a relatively lower number of nuclear weapons because it mainly focuses on the "lean and effective" quality of its strategic nuclear approach.

Keywords: Nuclear policy, strategic perceptions, China, security environment.

INTRODUCTION

Right from the dawn of history man has been facing various kinds of security threats. Threats from nature such as floods, droughts, famines, earthquakes and storms are quite understandable for man. Under this understanding man has been taking different measures to protect human society from these natural threats. But, for men to tackle and cope with threats posed by other men is very complex undertaking. With the changing nature of man-made threats under ever-continued technological innovations in human society it has become challenging to formulate effective policies to counter threats emanating from rival/competing entities. States in international politics pose threats to one another because of intense competition for the scarce resources. To confront threats from other states, a state continuously finds new avenues. It is argued by strategic experts that the best way to counter external threats is augmenting military capabilities qualitatively and quantitatively. The realist theory of international politics defines the state's behavior quite remarkably. A state always looks for promoting its national interest even at the expense of other states. When a state enhances its power and security by modernizing its military prowess it is seen as a source of threat by the rival states. It creates security dilemma which is the main cause of arms race in international politics. Security of one state becomes insecurity for other states. It is this vicious circle which mostly drives a state to develop nuclear weapons. China's nuclear policy no exception but the outcome of its threat perception.

China's nuclear policy is determined by five significant contributions, for which it is stagnant. These are no-first-use policy, security declaration for non-nuclear and nuclear-free zones, limited resistance for strike back capabilities, the prohibition of nuclear deployment outside the nation's territory, repulsive proceedings for use, and the existence of nuclear weapons, and strategic deterrence (Riqiang, 2013). Nuclear strategy of China constitutes the main idea of having negotiations for stopping nuclear war to happen, reducing conventional conflicts from intensifying, and recovering from nuclear attack.

China's nuclear perception is not aimed at winning the wars but is attributed to primary objective of preventing massive disaster. The research will cover the factors involved in the formulation of nuclear

policy, followed by the understanding of nuclear doctrine and strategic perceptions (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). And at the end, plans and mission will be discussed considering the mission statement of military officials. Speculated China's nuclear deterrent approach for its future examination may face certain amendments to the ongoing requirements in the 21st century.

Beijing's nuclear commitment has declared a restrained policy of China, and the stated mission includes the least acceptance of any change. As the nuclear experts and analysts embody the firm belief that NFU policy and the vision of defensive nuclear deterrent would be accomplished at any cost, whatever nuclear rivals would give the extreme situation instead of targeting China's defense system (Zhenqiang, 2010). Both international and domestic drivers are responsible for bringing a robust change in China's nuclear policies. The possession of nuclear weapons is intentionally unfolded to deter the other nuclear states only for expressing self-defensive intentions. This moderate nuclear strategy will be strong enough to resist nuclear threats as this policy has brilliantly settled international stability among the Asian regions for security concerns across the borders.

China may bear an ultimate question about its serious rift from non-nuclear weapons states for its strategic vision or political upgrading. It is aimed to smooth the gateways for total blockage for nuclear weapons or the destruction of all nuclear possessions (Glaser & Fetter, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper is based on qualitative research method to examine the issue area. The recognized research techniques or procedures used in this research are descriptive and explanatory. The research mainly relies upon secondary sources.

UNDERSTANDING CHINESE STRATEGIC PERCEPTIONS

International politics is ruthless; it makes a state hostage to its demands. It might be possible that a state does not want to entirely focus on military capabilities but aims at maintaining balance to develop all facets of national power. It prefers economic progress over military modernization. But, pulls and pushes of international politics could compel a state to invest heavily in military as well. If we see Cold War security dynamics, we can argue that super power intense rivalry shaped China's strategic perceptions. Korean war of early 1950s was an eye opener event for China. Capitalist threat was looming on China's communist government. After several centuries it was first time in China's history that they were also facing threats from Moscow in the late 1950s. Military skirmishes with the Soviets also impacted on China's peculiar strategic perceptions.

Considering historical records, China has established a moderate nuclear doctrine focused on hampering the nuclear attacks with the power of second-strike capabilities. A vindictive nuclear throw will be delivered if the rival starts nuclear war. Implementing such a strategy requires a robust control system of radars and satellites through which the early and quick detection of nuclear attack can be made possible. As a response, counter-attack can be prepared against adversary's missiles (Yunzhu, 2010). According to a recently published report in 2016, China has designed a strategy to apply nuclear plans for the minimum level. As a matter of fact, these nuclear perceptions are formed only to give threats to counter future attacks.

China became the part of nuclear exclusive club in 1964 after its first explosion and set its nuclear policy that embodies no-first use strategy. The objective of such nuclear intentions was cost-effective nuclear developments to avoid expenses and to minimize the burden on the national economy. China governs with the rules of counter-nuclear attack for its self-defensive purposes only. Its nuclear perceptions are not related to fighting against the nuclear forces as committed to NFU policy being criticized by many other nuclear powers (Li, 2018).

The director of the Central Military Commission stated with an open declaration that China's nuclear policy of NFU had been demonstrated several times in its constitutional statements as the prior authentication for upholding China's nuclear strategy. However, these nuclear perceptions were assumed against the severity of principles throughout the world because they created ambiguities for owing nuclear challenges as a contributor to deterrence. China would go for multiple strikes of punitive attacks in case

of various invasions simultaneously. And these bulk disciplinary attacks would expand more rather than attacking against adversary targets. It will include some major cities and industrial destinations as a nuclear base. China has mentioned them as “key points counter-attacks” in its discourse seeking curtailing conflict (Glaser & Fetter, 2016). China's strategy of punishment and repudiation is not attached to the distinctive importance of counter-value and counter-force targets concerning nuclear retaliation (Li, 2018).

China's nuclear perceptions adopt the formula of “close defense” for the mobility of nuclear weapons. The nuclear strategy of 2003 further explains that China would launch a warning contributor for ensuring the nuclear survivability that has further elongated the military debates of the resultant future on behalf of the country's nuclear intentions. Second Artillery Force executed the responsibility of the conventional operation of nuclear weapons in the 1990s for future blasts against the direct command of military service so that country may resist the parallel nuclear destruction in case of sudden invasions from neighboring nuclear forces (Colby, 2018).

China's nuclear philosophy has been a jigsaw puzzle for many Americans based on two main nuclear strategies that are small and vulnerable nuclear arsenal and land-based nuclear blast because China has limited warheads that are isolated and constrained by the nuclear strategy of the country against the nuclear adversaries. There is a distinctive difference between the nuclear nonproliferation policies of China and the United States. That is why China is considered a violator of the international nonproliferation norms. But a clear and systematic analysis of China's nuclear nonproliferation policy tells another story (Riqiang, 2020). Tracing history, a considerable nonproliferation policy, owned by China, has narrow but steady considerations. This policy can be dissected into three stages, such as analysis of sovereign rights for the development of nuclear weapons (1948-958), acceptance of independent values of nonproliferation (1958-1982), and integration with national policies of military nuclear missions (1982-present).

Many analysts remarked that China possesses a dynamic targeting policy for nuclear deterrence for sticking to its No-first-use strategy. China did not show any reactionary application deployment of weapons concerning nuclear operation because it is still stagnant for its nuclear plans for limited preclusion (L. Liu, 2018). Maintenance of targeted forces is conventional for the relatively lowest alert and populated area to avoid the territory's maximum loss. A white paper statement for the Chinese nuclear strategy by 2015 is as follow: “The government of China will never appreciate for first atomic attempts in any situation and for any concern.” And this nuclear perception would not be changed in case of nuclear threats and war calls, steps taken by international security systems. Therefore, China's nuclear policy will remain unchanged even after the Cold War, whatever other lands will follow future trends. Any nuclear invasion from the US and Russia will bounce back unrewarded by China unless the nuclear attempt goes beyond the targeted boundaries. China will resist using any atomic weapon (Thomas, 2017). This friendly and cooperative nuclear strategy of China has immense controversies from the neighboring countries. Still, China has declared it with firm determinations against the raised questions about China's actual nuclear capabilities. This ambitious nuclear strategy of China will not be flexible, even in an extreme situation.

KEY FEATURES OF CHINA'S NUCLEAR POLICY

On the first day of launching its nuclear power to the world exposure, China declared its atomic policy as follows:

- China will conduct the nuclear application only in case of defending its land
- China will be stagnant to its NFU strategy for whatever the time and situation would be (McReynolds, 2017).
- China will not show any aggressive nuclear response to the threats given by neighboring powers like the US and Russia.
- China's nuclear policy is governed with narrow and dynamic deterrence with the least intention of using nuclear weapons.

- Nuclear weapons are prohibited according to the laws and rules of nuclear strategy of China. Even China is not supportive for their existence, reported by the state council's information office.
- China is not willing to threaten to non-nuclear power territories regardless of any strict condition.
- China's nuclear policy goes for the favor of collective and cooperative security concerns so that universal peace can be achieved avoiding the extra use of nuclear forces.
- China supports the accomplishment of good faith and obligation under the act of an article mentioned in NPT (Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons). Each state should shake hands for the negative undertaking of nuclear weapons.
- The nuclear policy of China has got a transition from a counterattack strategy to least deterrence plans.
- China has embraced the nuclear deterrence as its nuclear doctrine (Haynes, 2020).

After the Cold War era, China enlisted the United States and Russia as its two major enemies for non-traditional security challenges because of continuous disputes in political issues and terrorism. China's nuclear policy is against the expansion of destruction caused by the proliferation of WMDs as they are giving uncontrolled alarms to humanity's existence and progress. Because China is concerned with the stability of international peace and security, the nuclear arms race between great powers must be stopped according to China's policy because they are heightening the international security dilemma (Xiao & Jiang, 2018). Although, China does not support the possession of large nuclear capabilities. But it must increase the nuclear warheads to find a way out to counter BMDs by its enemies.

China's counterattack strategy was established due to two significant reasons: nuclear weapons may create mass destruction killing thousands of innocent people and can damage the massive property. Secondly, China's population creates hindrance in making nuclear plans against foreign invasions because that would require nuclear weapons in bulk quantity. From 1965 to 1986, China actively participated in a limited war scenario to design the guidelines at a public level to teach the people about the deterrence measures against any nuclear power so that minimum things may fall apart.

Consistency in China's nuclear policy has been encountered with many critical opinions because from the day of its first explosion of the atomic bomb. China has bound itself as disciplinary nuclear power only. China is critical at posing threats to the states who established nuclear free zones. China's government has stated many times in its constitution that its nuclear policy is not likely to be practiced (Fravel, 2019). Therefore, China sustains the lowest range of nuclear capabilities. China's survivable nuclear policy is attached with two conditional words that are "few but effective" meaning that China is not fighting state unless nuclear threats are extreme.

China is opposed to the extension of nuclear deterrence out of the national territory. Also, China is not friendly at deploying nuclear weapons on any foreign land without solid and unprecedented reasons. Besides all these policies, China is not the state who favors stationing troops out of the region for nuclear attacks. China possesses strategic-based nuclear power instead of operational because its government has clearly stated that nuclear weapons would be functional only against foreign bullets (B. Liu, 2018). Military operations are not supposed to be indulged in any political matters so that the utilization of nuclear weapons is restricted to the land only, avoiding the use of them as winning tools.

There is two-fold nuclear strike policy of China that will be implemented in a restrictive environment. Firstly, a nuclear attack will be conducted only when the external powers will proceed with the tactical nuclear invasion of China. China has to respond in defensive and warfare terms. China's nuclear policy is not for winning the wars, but it is associated with the reduction of intensity and expansion of nuclear war to avoid massive destruction. The rationality approach behind such a strict and limited nuclear policy is illustrated by a military officer as follow:

"We do possess nuclear weapons, not for the sake of threat, but the effective scare. Our deterrence force is strategic, not operational. Our possession will impart an effect on others, and it is sufficient for having nuclear power in this universe. I have stated many times that our small quantity is nothing but to show the nuclear deterrence only. It the

nuclear powers want to destroy us. They will have to suffer the same punishment (Heginbotham et al., 2017)".

The policy statement by Deng is as follow:

"The desirable value of nuclear weapons is deterrent only. The cause of utilization will be adopted as a counter force or to strengthen the deterrence posture." China's nuclear arsenal is embodied with nuclear forces that will be small but lethal and credible. The adherence to NFU policy has made China's focal point to the limited use of nuclear weapons, developing for "second strike capabilities." Considering the deterrent effect, it is noticeable for the practice of credible and survivable nuclear impact when the center of topic is China (Wen et al., 2018).

FUTURE OF CHINA'S NUCLEAR POLICY

Future trends and missions for a nuclear policy of China have become an essential subject for international affairs. Nuclear experts are keenly observing China's nuclear trajectory especially in the context of China-US nuclear deterrence stability. After developing sufficient nuclear capabilities and achieving nuclear triad, China has shifted its strategy to promote disarmament and non-proliferation. China has already joined Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) to reinforce its global nonproliferation commitments, ensuring a peaceful rise and avoiding maximum political use of nuclear weapons. Since the late 1990s, China has been showing grave concerns for nuclear modernization by its rival states. Many Western critics argue that nuclear doctrine of China has been shifted from minimum to limited nuclear deterrence.

The leadership of China regarding nuclear policy is facing three kinds of future challenges:

- Maintenance of credibility
- The obligation of NFU policy
- Confronting Taiwan issue (Fravel, 2016)

These are unchangeable constraints. If China wants to maintain credibility of its nuclear policy, then it should move towards the limited deterrent posture that will ultimately be termed as its nuclear modernization for the future concerns. The mobilization of nuclear weapons can improve the survivability range of China's nuclear arsenal. For example, silo-based and road-mobile SSBNs and ICBMs are better weapons to survive in case of a nuclear attack than traditional weapons. That is why China has started taking initiatives for nuclear modernization. The proficient spirit of China's nuclear policy can be upgraded with modest attempts of armed modernization, contrary to minimum nuclear deterrence requirements. Considering the reason-based approach of decision-makers of China, nuclear modernization is essential to achieve reliability and credibility. Otherwise, China will have to make amendments in its NFU policy or to amplify its nuclear arsenal.

It has become a constant debate on China's nuclear policy that whether it would be changed in the future or not (Kulacki, 2016). And for which reason, the plan would be replaced. China may consider these changes for a new suitable situation to make a more peaceful and defensive nuclear strategy. Decision making procedure of China regarding military confrontation has always created a severe curiosity for the rest of the world, such as Chinese march to Korea was a big surprise for America involving in major warfare stations.

China's foreign and defense policies run with traditional schools of thought. However, a radical change is expected in its nuclear strategy in foreseeable future, but it cannot be estimated that when and how it will be implemented. For the last few decades, China's nuclear approach has been focused on the shield-based sufficient survivability for both land-based and sea-based missiles. These include solid fuels and underground tunnels, manufactured specially in response to the other nuclear-armed forces such as the United States. Furthermore, future planning involves improving the operational space system to ensure increased accuracy for long term projects (Rosa, 2018). The range of nuclear missiles is also drawn from conventional to modern methods so that advanced techniques of nuclear invasions can be pushed out

of China's region with superior efforts. Professor Hu Side remarked that: "The only objective of the maintenance of limited counter-attacks is potential strike back of nuclear forces, attempted by foreign invaders. However, highly accurate and mobilized defense missiles are a targeted practice for the strategic concepts of nuclear policy to answer US ministries' attacks. Therefore, leading intention of China is to make sure the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence (Scobell et al., 2020)". China's nuclear determination's primary future concern consists of US missile defense plan regardless of its focus on the quality over quantity. Recently, some Chinese officials have declared one of China's crucial future strategy and that involve defense operation of the global missile for international stability and for ensuring environmental protection. But it will eventually decrease the value of nuclear disarmament for which China will never support under the risk assessment of collaboration. China is particularly worried about the Taiwan issue as US supports the latter overwhelmingly. This is precisely the main reason that compels China to enhance its nuclear capabilities (Logan, 2016). China must modernize its nuclear posture according to the demands of military development and international security trends.

The future of China's nuclear deterrence can be anticipated considering its non-reliance on the Cold War effects. Its nuclear policies are not fixed for any specific enemy and any nuclear scenario. However, India can be cataloged as the existing adversary against China for which its nuclear calculus can be altered. The issue of Taiwan and BMD have collectively moved the nuclear deterrence of China towards modernization. However, China will fundamentally follow its above mentioned nuclear strategic policies in the 21st century. The crux of whole discussion is the manifestations of the declared nuclear policy of China by its three consecutive generations' leaders who stated for its limited nuclear deterrence followed by NFU policy, avoiding the excessive utilization of tools because China supports self-defense only avoiding the winning strategy against nuclear invasions (Lai, 2020). In a nutshell, security is a relative proportion for any state. China may or may not change its nuclear policy, depending on the emerging regional and international strategic environment.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, China does not need to abandon its NFU policy, but the critical step would be keeping its credibility, reliability, and effectiveness within the current dynamic strategic situation (Liu, Lei, Xu, & Yuan, 2018). There is a controversy between the statements of officials and communists because to balance the credibility of NFU policy, China must stand with two-fold manipulations. Considering the danger of nuclear proliferation, China must make some flexible changes in its minimum nuclear deterrent posture. Because the current issues like Taiwan and US BMDs threats are standing at the threshold for knocking the doorstep of China's land. China is trying to avoid the war scenarios as it does not support conventional or unconventional war.

China's nuclear doctrine is aimed at only for defensive purposes. China has reduced its armed forces due to which it has declared that it will never be a superpower in the future. That is why its nuclear plans do not include any attack on foreign powers. It is noticeable that China's GDP has minimized to 1.8% for the past few decades. China has expanded a long-term social development relationship with neighboring nuclear powers by establishing its foreign policy as zero or non-nuclear. That is why China does not support threatening forces. The nuclear perception of China is only focused on military superiority. By the end of the Cold War, China has adopted new concepts of nuclear security under which it has formed many defensive plans out of the borders where missiles are kept ready for defensive purposes (Fravel, 2018). These agreements will help resolve international arms control and disarmament issues with the idea of cooperation for Taiwan issue.

Evolutionary measures in China's nuclear doctrine will follow the NFU policy of nuclear weapons, staying stagnant with self-defensive strategy. However, it is expected that China may take some critical considerations towards the amendments in its nuclear deterrent posture according to the foreign nuclear threats (Hameiri & Zeng, 2019). In a nutshell, China's nuclear doctrine can be summed up in the elements of atomic deployment, development, employment, disarmament, and declaration for the ongoing strategies in the coming future. At the end one of the most important factor which could impact on China's nuclear policy in foreseeable future is increasing Indo-US strategic partnership under which the

US wants to back India's rise to counter China. China will never ever compromise its national interest even it has challenge Indo-US strategic partnership.

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