

# Miscalculation Scare:

Why ASBM and CPGS Weapons Will Not Increase Nuclear  
Escalation Risk

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# Chinese 'Populist' conceptualisation of U.S. nuclear use after a Chinese ASBM launch

- 1, Incorrect Early Warning: The U.S. mistakenly sees a '(nuclear) ICBM' coming instead of a (conventional MRBM/IRBM); so it retaliates.
- 2, Perfect Nuclear Umbrella: The U.S. provides extended deterrence to its aircraft carriers so when attacked by whatever means, it retaliates with nuclear weapons.
- ➔ • 3, Inadvertent Nuclear War: Due to the 'nuclear-conventional commingling' features of ASBMs, the U.S. mistakenly attacks nuclear systems when it attempts to pre-empt ASBM launches. Facing a seemingly successful disarming first strike, the Chinese initiates nuclear 'retaliations'. The U.S. retaliates later.

# The particularities of these ‘Populist’ escalation pathways

- 1, Do not understand how the U.S. early warning system works. Think that the U.S. nuclear force is ‘trigger-easy’ (error-prone, automatic nuclear responses).
- 2, Do not understand how the U.S. extended deterrence works. Think that the U.S. nuclear force is ‘trigger-happy’ (deliberate nuclear responses).
- ➔ • 3, Do not consider the Chinese nuclear force to be nuclear/conventionally invulnerable.

# U.S. conceptualisation of nuclear uses introduced by CPGS strikes

- ➔ • Warhead Ambiguity: Thinking they are nuclear-armed.
- ➔ • Destination Ambiguity: Thinking they are attacking major nuclear powers instead of terrorist targets.
- ➔ • Target Ambiguity: Thinking they are attacking nuclear forces instead of A2AD/ASAT/conventional targets.

(Categorisation according to James Acton, *Silver Bullet*, 2013)

# The particularities of these U.S. proposed escalation pathways

- ➔ • Do not consider the Chinese nuclear force to be nuclear/conventionally invulnerable.

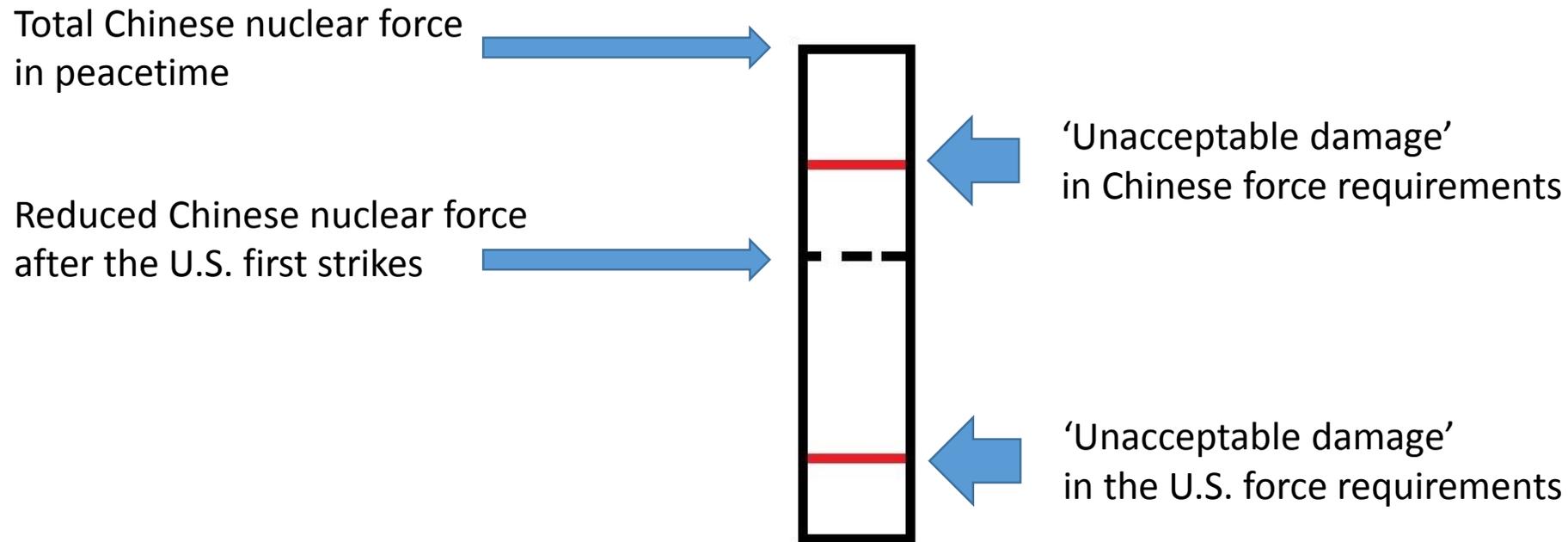
# Commonalities:

- Accept the existence of an American nuclear war-fighting/war-winning superiority.
- Accept that the Chinese nuclear forces are vulnerable to conventional/nuclear first-strikes.
- But: why the U.S. experts still concern about ‘nuclear escalation’? Why not view ‘the greatly reduced Chinese nuclear retaliation’ as acceptable? Isn’t it a ‘successful damage limitation’?

# Commonalities:

- ~~Accept the existence of an American nuclear war-fighting/war-winning superiority.~~
- Argue that MAD is a fact today between China and the U.S.
- ~~Accept that the Chinese nuclear forces are vulnerable to conventional/nuclear first strikes.~~
- Consider the Chinese nuclear forces survivable to both conventional and nuclear pre-emption.
- ~~But: why the U.S. experts still concern about 'nuclear escalation'? Why not view 'the greatly reduced Chinese nuclear retaliation' as acceptable? Isn't it a 'successful damage limitation'?~~
  - There will not be
  - Then why the Chinese escalate so easily?

# Possible Explanation?



**Is there ‘an acceptable (nuclear) damage level’ for the U.S. government at all?**

# Implications and Questions

- Without dominance at the highest rung of nuclear escalation, escalation control and war-termination at favourable terms at lower conflict intensity will be elusive if not impossible. More and superior flexible response and selective/tailored options will not help.
- How can the U.S. conduct escalation control when it only accepts 0 chance of nuclear attacks? Will ballistic missile defence or any defence preparations help at all?
- Should we publicly acknowledge the U.S. nuclear war-fighting superiority? Does it matter? What about the worries concerning ‘the Chinese sprint to parity’?

# Implications and Questions

- If there is an acknowledged imbalance of resolves, due to the Sino-American imbalance of interest in West Pacific regions, should the U.S. increase its nuclear superiorities further to compensate that?
- What about other possibly painful consequences: global economic chaos, global cyber breakdown, massive orbital debris, environmental disasters...?
- Should we welcome the Chinese trade crisis instability for arm race instability, when the U.S. escalation control works in the future?