

The Threat that Leaves Something to Chance in U.S.-China Relations

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Concerns about Non-Nuclear Forces

China concerned about the evolution of...

- U.S. missile defenses, non-nuclear long-range strike (e.g., prompt global strike), & intelligence, surveillance, & reconnaissance (ISR)

Fear is that...

- U.S. will locate and destroy nuclear missiles with conventional weapons and intercept remaining ones with missile defenses

Concerns about Non-Nuclear Forces

U.S. Concerned about...

- China's conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, counter-space and cyber weapons

Fear is that...

- China will launch a blinding attack on U.S. satellites & computer networks, leaving U.S. forces less capable of deterring and responding to conventional strikes

These Concerns Create Pressure for...

- U.S. strikes (conventional & non-kinetic) at first signs of Chinese interference in space and cyberspace
- Chinese counter-space and cyber attacks if U.S. appears to be preparing to launch conventional strikes

Miscalculation in Space & Cyberspace

- Will U.S. & China have similar views about which actions are expected & accepted in peace, crises, & war?
- Is a kinetic response to a non-kinetic attack always escalatory?
- Does an attack on a satellite ever justify retaliation against targets in an adversary's homeland?

Blurred Nuclear & Conventional Thresholds

- Missiles of the same model, but some carry conventional warheads & some carry nuclear warheads
- Could U.S. distinguish the two in crises and conflicts?
- U.S. attacks a conventional target, but China perceives it as an attack on nuclear forces

Threats that Leave Something to Chance

- Miscalculation, misperception, & miscommunication create risk of inadvertent escalation
- Inherent element of “chance” in conflicts between countries with large nuclear arsenals
- Recognizing this shared risk could induce caution, but one country may exploit it to deter or coerce the other

What are the Implications?

- China can destroy targets but not necessarily control consequences and achieve objectives in conflict
- U.S. deterrence strategy should emphasize risks of unintended consequences & escalation
- The more U.S.-China relations improve, the more steps both can take to institutionalize caution and restraint

First Steps: how do we make assurances more credible?

- GMD system “does not have the capacity to cope with large scale Russian or Chinese missile attacks, and it is not intended to affect the strategic balance with those countries.” – *2010 Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*
- The U.S. will size its non-nuclear prompt global strike forces to address regional threats and avoid “negatively affecting the stability of our nuclear relationships with Russia and China.” -*2010 Nuclear Posture Review Report*

First Steps: how do we prevent miscalculation & enhance deterrence in space and cyberspace?

- Need a shared framework for determining proportional and escalatory responses to counter-space & cyber attacks
- Shared framework within U.S. government would enable more effective contingency planning across domains
- Shared framework with other countries would enable more comprehensible and credible deterrence messages

Are we ready to explain this to China & other countries?

- “the United States is developing a range of capabilities, plans, and options to deter, defend against, and, if necessary, defeat efforts to interfere with or attack U.S. or allied space systems; **such options could include necessary and proportional responses outside of the space domain.**” – *Dr. James Miller, HASC Hearing on March 2, 2011*