

China's Views on Arms Control and Proliferation Issues

~~(S/NF)~~ Arms Control. Beijing has its own list of high priority arms control objectives. China's leaders want to prohibit deployment of space-based missile defenses; drastically reduce the level of nuclear weapons the superpowers deploy; increase the exchange of technology; and establish its own arms sales programs free of outside controls.

- o ~~(S/NF)~~ Each of these priorities supports China's efforts to expand its global influence, access advanced technology, earn hard currency, and accelerate its modernization. One measure of Beijing's determination to achieve its goals is the unprecedented sale this past year of ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia.
- o ~~(S/NF)~~ The Chinese are playing an active role in international negotiations regarding nuclear and conventional weapons. Although vigorously opposed to the inclusion of Chinese forces in the negotiations between Washington and Moscow, Beijing nevertheless wants Chinese interests considered, and protected, during such discussions.
- o ~~(S/NF)~~ Beijing's position regarding the conditions under which Chinese nuclear weapons would be accountable has not changed. Beijing has no intention of putting its nuclear forces on the table. Since the INF treaty was concluded (which did address Chinese concerns of Asian-based SS-20s) and START negotiations began, Beijing has supported the results and applauded the trends. Beijing asserts that a 50 percent reduction of superpower strategic weapons would be a step forward but that a drastic reduction would be required to ensure the world's safety. China's improving capability for nuclear conflict will, nevertheless, become an increasingly significant factor, even if not formally acknowledged, in bilateral US-Soviet arms negotiations.

- o ~~(S/NF)~~ In the UN General Assembly and at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, Beijing actively seeks European and Third World support for Chinese initiatives to prohibit the deployment of space-based weapons, to drastically reduce the level of deployed nuclear and conventional weapons, and generally to encourage the evolution of US-Soviet bilateral arms talks into a multilateral process.

~~(S/NF)~~ Nuclear Non-Proliferation Issues. The Chinese continue to explicitly pledge that China will not help other nations to acquire nuclear weapons. Beijing, however, continues to object to the Non-Proliferation treaty on the basis of national sovereignty. Moreover, while no longer highlighting China's position that all nations have the right to develop nuclear weapons, Beijing did not renounce that view. Beijing's current position is that every country has the right to acquire whatever weapons it believes necessary for its defense.

~~(S/NF)~~ Ballistic Missile Proliferation Issues. China has become the focus of attention for those who wish to control ballistic missiles and ballistic missile technology. It has also become the focus for those who wish to purchase missiles and missile technology.

- o ~~(S/NF)~~ The sale of CSS-2 IRBMs to Saudi Arabia illustrates beyond any doubt that Beijing will sell ballistic missiles when the benefits outweigh the risks. Each of these missiles possesses ten times the range of any missile sold to another country, comes directly from China's own inventory, and assists a nation with which it has no diplomatic relations and small leverage in keeping future control of the weapons.
- o ~~(S/NF)~~ Beijing is actively marketing its M-family of SRBMs and has a new, mobile MRBM with a range of 2,500 km which may also be for sale. China's leaders appear not to accept the view that ballistic missile sales, even with conventional warheads, can lead to a greater threat in the future if chemical or nuclear warheads are acquired. They believe that the Missile Technology Control Regime is being used to preserve a Western and Soviet monopoly on the development and sales of ballistic missiles.

~~(S/NF)~~ Atmospheric Test Ban. In March of 1986 Premier Zhao Ziyang announced publicly that China would no longer conduct atmospheric nuclear tests. Beijing has adhered to that policy at no cost to itself.

- o ~~(S/NF)~~ Cessation of atmospheric nuclear testing could have slowed research and development of future Chinese nuclear weapons. Beijing, however, has no priority to develop and deploy new weapons at this time. More than seventy percent of nuclear ministry resources has been diverted to the production of civilian goods and the development of nuclear energy systems.

~~(S/NF)~~ Strategic Defense Initiative. Beijing will continue to oppose the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) out of concern that it will lead to a buildup of US and USSR ballistic missile defenses. China believes such a trend would neutralize its current strategic deterrent capability and result in Beijing having to invest heavily in new forces and counter-ABM technology.

- o ~~(S/NF)~~ Some Chinese, especially in the technical community, are concerned that China might be left behind in significant new technology research. This group continues to stress the need to cooperate with an independent European or Asian-based consortium in order to gain access to the advanced technology that would be developed.

~~(S/NF)~~ Beijing has not stopped its international marketing of ballistic missiles and other weapons. It likely will not stop such sales unless there is serious international diplomatic pressure. China's leaders calculate there is little possibility of a large-scale, joint effort by the major powers to cut off China's access to new markets and technology. In the absence of any serious risks, China should be able to continue its present policies indefinitely. China's weapons are less costly than any competitor's, are effective, and sold without significant conditions.

~~(S/NF)~~ China's aim is to maintain an independent role for itself as a global actor, earn the currency it needs to modernize, and gain the technology it needs from others at the lowest possible price. Beijing's arms control and arms sales policies in the future increasingly will be in the service of these goals.