

## Are we in another nuclear age?

- Possibility of nuclear war in Europe and China' s position
- China' s nuclear modernization and its nuclear policies
- Potential nuclear conflict between China and the US
- Strategic stability between China and the US
- Why no-first-use of nuclear weapons affordable for all nuclear powers

# Possibility of nuclear war in Europe

- Over 200 cases of Russian leadership referring to use of nuclear weapons in the context of war in Ukraine-how serious are they?
- Change in nuclear doctrine to lowering of the threshold: nuclear weapons may be used in response to an attack on Russia and Belarus using conventional weapons if that attack poses a "critical threat to sovereignty."
- Prominent Russian scholars join the choir
- Whether they use nukes depends on whether they could maintain control of Crimea, the four southeast regions, and if the war supported by the US-led West goes deeper into Russia territories especially (it is dangerous when the red lines don't look like redlines any more).
- How does the endgame in Ukraine look like?
- Russia's will play with thinly-veiled or direct nuclear threats for decades to come.

# China' s attitude matters

- China' s "unlimited partnership" with Russia, its largest neighbor.
- China is not a "decisive enabler" of Russia in the war in Ukraine.

"China can help the world by simply telling Putin: don' t use nuclear weapons, Mr President" - Zhou Bo, Financial Times  
27/10/2022

President Xi Jinping told German Chancellor Olaf Scholz : no use of nuclear weapons in Europe

P-5 joint statement in 2022: nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

China-Russia Joint statement in 2023 repeats the slogan.

The attitudes of China, India and Brazil matter for Russia.

# China's nuclear modernization

- China's alleged 500 warheads and its ambition to increase its nuclear arsenal to 1500 warheads won't be confirmed by China
- Even if this is true, China's nuclear arsenal still much smaller than that of the US and Russia
- Should China decides to increase, it is only a political decision.
- (comparison between China and Russia )
- China has no intention to enter into a nuclear arms race.
- Defense budget tells its self-confidence which matters for the world

## What are Nuclear capabilities at the minimum level?

- Defense white paper: “Nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required for national security”
- My understanding: no nuclear weapon state dare to launch preemptive nuclear strike on China in spite of China’ s no first use of nuclear weapons.
- This requires adequate strength of deterrence.

## Modernization of the PLA Rocket Force

- What will PLARF's recent launch tell Chinese and the world?
- "The PLARF is enhancing its credible and reliable capabilities of nuclear deterrence and counterattack, strengthening intermediate and long range precision strike forces and enhancing strategic counter-balance capability to build a strong and modernized rocket force. –2019 China's Defense White Paper
- Modernization means new capabilities and reasonably increased quantity
- China's notification appreciated by the US- mutual notification one day?

## A nuclear war in the Taiwan Strait?

“A war is not imminent or inevitable” (American secretary of defense )

- Chinese government still talks about peaceful reunification.
- China won't use nukes against its own compatriots in Taiwan.

## A nuclear war in the Taiwan Strait?

- The possibility of Russia using nukes shocks the world, but the idea of employing them in a war with China became normal in some American circles: Scowcroft Center at the Atlantic Council and Elbridge Colby talked about first use of nuclear weapons in the strait.
- More Chinese nuclear weapons will let them give up this crazy idea and make China more likely win in a conventional war against the US.



## two myths on China's nuclear policy

- China doesn't want talks on nuclear disarmament.  
(how about discussion no first use of nuclear weapon?)
- US has to prepare for coordinated nuclear confrontation with China, Russia and North Korea simultaneously - "nuclear employment guidance"

## China-US strategic Stability

- “Trust but talk” vs “Trust but verify”
- China-US guardrails hard to establish
- China-US strategic equilibrium is not entirely on nuclear weapons
- It should include cyber, AI and outer space

## China and the United States should take the lead in crafting rules and regulations in cyber, AI and outer space

- Cyber: In cyberwarfare, countries should refrain from striking critical information networks, such as military command-and-control systems. Beijing and Washington should exchange a list of sensitive targets that should be considered out of bounds and should not be attacked in any circumstance.
- AI: Even if it is not possible to prevent AI from being used for military purposes, China and the United States should at least lead in reducing risks related to AI-enabled military systems. In this regard, nothing is more important than ensuring absolute human control over nuclear command-and-control systems.
- Outer space: To avoid an arms race in outer space, they should agree to negotiate a binding treaty that would commit countries to not placing weapons in outer space and encourage deliberations on rules and responsible behavior.

## Why no-first-use of nuclear weapons affordable for all nuclear powers

- Impossible to ban nuclear weapons any time soon.
  - Impossible to convince nuclear weapons states to reduce their nuclear stockpiles amid ever-intensifying competition
- “No first use” looks to be the most realistic approach in reducing nuclear threats.

## Why ?

- All nuclear powers could afford to adopt no-first-use policy—taking the moral high ground without reducing their capabilities for retaliation.
- American, British and French nuclear policies not far away from China' s no first use

## US' 2022 Nuclear Posture Review

- It would only consider the use of nuclear weapons “in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners”

## Nuclear policies of UK and France

- UK: “we would consider using our nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence, including the defence of our NATO allies.”
- France would adhere to a principle of “strict sufficiency” .

## How to get Russia in?

- Russia' s escalate to de-escalate strategy has partially worked in the war in Ukraine, limiting NATO' s direct involvement and prompting the United States to put limits on what Ukraine can do with the weapons that it supplies.



## Dilemma of the “escalate to de-escalate” strategy

- It depends on threat and fear of threat.
- If a nuclear-armed state really launches an attack against another nuclear power, it cannot control the scale of the retaliation by its adversaries. A tit for tat risks becoming a full-blown nuclear war that no one wants.
- If Russia really uses nuclear weapons, it could prompt NATO involvement—the very thing that Moscow fears most.

## A dual-track approach

- In Europe:
  1. NATO can make a unilateral no-first-use pledge against Russia as a gesture of goodwill.
  2. NATO could pledge to halt any further expansion of its alliance in exchange for Moscow adopting a no-first-use policy.  
(affordable in that there are only three aspiring countries on the waiting list)

## A dual-track approach

- In Asia:
- Russia and China have already agreed to no first use against each other.
- China and the United States could reach a similar agreement, thus de-escalating potential conflicts involving U.S. allies—such as the Philippines and Japan—as well as the dangers that could be provoked through accidental collisions in the sea or air.

## Am I naïve?

- Lesson learnt from history:
- Five nuclear weapons states agreed on non-targeting after Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests in 1998.
- No first use is a natural step forward from non-targeting
- Non-targeting is not verifiable. No-first-use is verifiable if you use nukes first!
- If indeed a nuclear war cannot be won, why cannot we pledge no first use?