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# US-China Strategic Nuclear Relations: Time to Move to Track-1 Dialogue

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## **US-China Strategic Nuclear Relations: Time to Move to Track-1 Dialogue**

The Ninth China-US Dialogue  
on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics

US Perspectives

A Conference Report by  
Ralph A. Cossa, Brad Glosserman, and  
David Santoro

Issues & Insights  
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## **China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS)**

Founded by Chinese military officers on leave or retired from active duty and is authorized to engage in business as well as strategic studies. It publishes a few books a year and a journal and actively seeks “counterparts” overseas with whom to co-host conferences on political/military issues, including the future of the security environment.

## **Pacific Forum CSIS**

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS ([www.pacforum.org](http://www.pacforum.org)) operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum’s programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region’s leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

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**Key Findings**  
**9th China-US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics Dialogue**  
Beijing, China - February 9-10, 2015

The China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies and the Pacific Forum CSIS, with support from the Naval Postgraduate School's Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction (NPS-PASCC) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), held the 9th China-US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics Dialogue on Feb. 9-10, 2015. Some 80 Chinese and US experts, officials, military officers, and observers along with four Pacific Forum Young Leaders attended, all in their private capacity. The off-the-record discussions covered comparative assessments of the strategic landscape, nuclear dimensions of the "new type of major country relationship," nonproliferation and nuclear security cooperation, ways to address regional nuclear challenges (North Korea and Iran), strategic stability and reassurance, and crisis management and security-building measures. A sub-group of US participants met with VADM Sun Jianguo, Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff. Key findings from this meeting are outlined below.

Chinese and US participants were eager to frame China-US relations in the best possible light. Chinese continued to emphasize that a framework for the "new type" concept should ensure positive relations in the bilateral relationship, and that nuclear dynamics played only a minor role in this. Discussions were candid, but not contentious; differences of opinion were spelled out but a cooperative spirit prevailed.

Chinese participants continue to insist that conditions are not ripe for a more robust official dialogue on nuclear issues and strategic stability with the US. Instead, they favor deeper discussions at the Track-1.5/2 level and better use of existing official channels. They stressed that our Beijing meetings have been helpful in allowing participants to better understand US policies and intentions. These discussions also have been building consensus in China for enhancing the Track-1 step (and for building consensus in China about basic policy and strategic questions). Some Chinese participants stressed that they, too, would like to strengthen the Track-1 process.

Lack of clarity on what specific issues would be included in a Track-1 dialogue remains a Chinese concern. Moreover, some senior Chinese participants questioned whether Track-1 discussions could devote the time to examining issues in the depth displayed in Track-1.5/2 dialogue and thus that this Track-1.5 dialogue provided a "richer" discussion. An official dialogue appears impossible if it requires China to reveal exact current and planned future numbers of its nuclear arsenal, a level of transparency that is incompatible with China's traditional policy of ambiguity and would undermine China's limited deterrent. While maintaining that military-to-military dialogue remains important, senior Chinese participants also stressed that any future official dialogue should involve the US DOD and China's MOD, rather than STRATCOM and the Second Artillery.

US participants cautioned that the absence of meaningful official dialogue, and the unwillingness to provide the transparency that is an essential for it, is generating mounting frustration in Washington and that the window of opportunity for building a strategic military relationship that supports the objectives of the "new type" political relationship may be closing. Some were sympathetic to the idea that an initial Track-1 effort could be undertaken with limited transparency. All agreed that Track-1.5/2 efforts could help build mutually acceptable Track-1 agendas. One US participant stressed that more legwork is needed on the US side to prepare for possible Chinese agreement to initiate a Track-1 dialogue.

US participants stressed that the downturn in US-Russia relations, the worst since the Cuban Missile Crisis, is proof that major-power relations can quickly go sour and that it is imperative to work

through issues while relations are good. Chinese agreed, identifying Chinese President Xi's "new type" concept as the framework for US-China relations. Chinese hope that the differences between the US and Russia over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty can be resolved. They explained that this treaty is fundamental to stability "in Europe and beyond." Chinese participants acknowledged there were no significant changes in China's policy toward Russia as a result of the Ukraine crisis.

Some Chinese remain concerned about Japan, denouncing policy changes made and envisioned by the Abe administration and possible escalation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. They stressed that the US needs better management of its allies, including preventing Japan from developing nuclear weapons. One senior participant asserted that the US was overconfident in believing that it could control Japan, warning that the Japanese are trying to get rid of US control and move out from under the peace constitution. Some Chinese stressed that the four-point principled agreement reached between China and Japan is an important development, and that Sino-Japanese relations could gradually become more stable and improve if this agreement is fully implemented on both sides.

Chinese assert that a Japanese nuclear breakout is a real possibility given that Tokyo has "large amounts" of nuclear materials. US attempts to temper that assessment were unsuccessful.

Chinese regard their nuclear arsenal as a hedge against worst-case scenarios vis-à-vis the US and "other de facto nuclear-armed states." Beijing's number one concern remains maintaining a secure second strike capability in the face of US superior nuclear capabilities. Chinese, however, stressed that China's policy was not to seek parity with the US or Russia.

Some Chinese expressed concerns about the US determination to maintain "nuclear superiority" over Russia, China, and other nuclear-armed states. They saw US fears that China may sprint to parity with the US and Russia as the two countries draw down their arsenals as evidence that Washington wants to maintain nuclear superiority. US explanations that there is a stark difference between building down to parity and sprinting up to parity did not satisfy Chinese concerns.

Nuclear safety and security is an area where China and the US have expanded cooperation. The Chinese nuclear security Center of Excellence is a success story, where more bilateral cooperation can occur. General agreement at the Third Nuclear Security Summit was also highlighted as a positive step underscoring bilateral cooperation.

While nonproliferation cooperation between China and the US has improved, US participants believe that Beijing's nonproliferation policy is transactional. Chinese denied this accusation, stressing that they regard proliferation as a serious problem. They insisted that it is a shared China-US concern. US participants expressed readiness to enhance cooperation with Beijing, especially to target entities within China that facilitate North Korea's proliferation to Iran and others. China denied this claim and argued that, in recent years, the US has proved less enthusiastic about export controls at the working level.

The breakout group discussion on North Korea was described by both sides as the "best ever" on dealing with the North Korean nuclear challenge. There was general agreement on the nature of the challenge, with all seeing nuclear proliferation, nuclear safety, and security of nuclear assets as the primary concerns, among a longer listing of potential challenges. US participants believe that North Korea's nuclear capability now poses a real threat to the US, and some Chinese agreed. Chinese, however, and in contrast with some Americans, could not envisage a situation in which North Korea would use nuclear weapons first. Although some US participants believed that North Korea is likely to collapse, Chinese did not see a collapse as a likely outcome in the foreseeable future. They argued that the focus should be on how the two sides could cooperate to prevent Pyongyang from future nuclear or missile testing, with some receptiveness to deeper discussions to develop specific measures and to

identify agreed upon “redlines.” The possibility of discussing joint responses to onward proliferation from North Korea was also not rejected. US participants believe that it was unlikely that Pyongyang would give up its nuclear weapons, and some Chinese believed that the window is narrowing for that to happen. Chinese, however, continue to insist that resuming the Six-Party Talks is the best way to address the North Korean problem; US participants remained skeptical. Chinese also encouraged the resumption of dialogue between the US and North Korea. Furthermore, Chinese expressed concern over incidents between the North and South in the context of US-ROK military exercises, and hoped that the US would do more to reduce tensions.

The breakout session on Iran was cordial but less productive. Chinese and US participants regard the Iranian nuclear problem differently (a key disagreement is the value of the threat of force) but agree on the importance of reaching a comprehensive agreement if sufficient verification is granted over Tehran’s key facilities. There was also agreement that China and the US could cooperate to manage regional dynamics after an agreement is concluded. Some Chinese and US participants regard the P-5 diplomatic process as another arena where bilateral cooperation has been productive. One Chinese participant said that if the Iranian talks fail and the US is seen to be at fault, further P-5 cooperation will be difficult. Recommendations for further progress included discussion of ways to prevent nuclear use and a discussion with non-nuclear-weapon states, capitalizing on China’s role in the Non-Aligned Movement.

There were important areas of disconnect between Chinese and US participants. A few Chinese accused the US of having active offensive cyber and space programs, explaining that they are the victims of constant US attacks. They explained that US extended deterrence “molests” Chinese interests, downplaying US insistence that it helps keep US allies from acquiring nuclear capabilities. Without giving specific examples, and as in the past, a few Chinese also asserted that the US seeks “absolute security” and “absolute supremacy over others.”

Further engagement on strategic stability appears necessary and potentially fruitful. The challenge of thinking about nuclear strategic stability in isolation from other issues was also raised. Chinese presentations and comments indicated that Chinese experts continue to wrestle with how to define stability in the China-US strategic relationship. Those attempts suggest an effort to find some middle ground between stability defined as an overall productive political-military relationship and stability based on transferring US-Soviet concepts into the China-US relationship.

Chinese and US participants concur that more work is needed on both sides to better avoid and manage crises, particularly crises triggered by third-parties. This involves better communication mechanisms and hotlines. US participants pointed to the importance of giving the responsibility for managing crises to a single authoritative entity to avoid conflicting messages.

Next steps. There was agreement that the next dialogue should focus on more specific and practical areas, and address issues beyond the nuclear problem (to include missile defense, cyber, space, conventional strategic weapons including CPGS, among others). Opportunities for joint studies were discussed, such as research on the changing balance of power in Asia and implications for China-US relations, of which nuclear and other strategic issues are a subset. This dialogue could work on developing an agenda for a Track-1 dialogue and on fleshing out the components of the “new type” concept. Deeper discussion on developing common approaches to preventing North Korean nuclear and missile tests were endorsed by all, as was the need to better identify the major impediments to preserving strategic stability. US participants also saw the utility of table-top exercises at the companion track-2 Hawaii dialogue.





**Conference Report**  
**9th China-US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics Dialogue**  
Beijing, China - February 9-10, 2015

Proposed by Beijing at the beginning of 2013 and endorsed by US President Barack Obama and Chinese leader Xi Jinping at the June 2013 Sunnylands Summit in California, the concept of the “new type of major country relations” has received considerable attention but has yet to be implemented. Initially seen in the United States has a possible pathway to start robust official strategic nuclear dialogue between the two countries, there is now skepticism in Washington that this vision can be turned into practical steps. Until then, dramatic improvements in US-China strategic nuclear relations are unlikely, potentially creating problems to international peace and security and underscoring the need for track-1.5/2 dialogue.

To foster greater bilateral understanding and cooperation between the United States and China and to prepare for/support eventual official dialogue on strategic nuclear issues, the Pacific Forum CSIS, with the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS), and with support from the Naval Postgraduate School’s Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (NPS/PASCC) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), held the 9th China-US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics Dialogue on Feb. 9-10, 2015. (The meeting was originally planned to take place on Nov. 4-5, 2014, but, at CFISS’s request, it was postponed since it apparently conflicted with the APEC and US-China Summit preparations.) Some 80 Chinese and US experts, officials, military officers, and observers along with four Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders attended, all in their private capacity. The off-the-record discussions covered comparative assessments of the strategic landscape, nuclear dimensions of the “new type” concept, nonproliferation and nuclear security cooperation, ways to address regional nuclear challenges (North Korea and Iran), strategic stability and reassurance, and crisis management and security-building measures.

On the margins of the dialogue, as was the case in the previous round of this dialogue, a sub-group of US participants met with Vice Admiral (VADM) Sun Jianguo, Deputy Chief of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) General Staff, who opined that he was “more confident” about military-to-military relations following his “memorable” visit to the United States.

This report reflects the views of the authors. It is not a consensus document.

**The Strategic Landscape**

Our US speaker focused on the Russian military-supported takeover of Crimea, its subsequent annexation, and the protracted conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which led the United States and its allies to impose significant sanctions against Moscow. As a result, relations between the United States and Russia have become increasingly adversarial and confrontational, and key areas of cooperation have ceased. In hindsight, the United States was slow to recognize a longstanding anti-American component in the Russian approach to US-Russia relations, and a deep-seated belief in Moscow that Washington’s goal is to destabilize Russia. Resolution of the crisis in Ukraine will not resolve these fundamental issues and, at this stage, it is not clear what the future holds for bilateral relations.

Restoring mutual reassurance will be time-consuming and will have to be reflected in words and deeds. One casualty is US-Russia arms control. There will be negotiations before the New Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (dubbed New START) expires, however, because the United States is committed to progress in this areas and Russia wants the nuclear balance to be regulated. But these negotiations will be difficult, especially given the US-Russia dispute over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty; each country is accusing the other of noncompliance.

Our US speaker explained that there is no direct role for China in this crisis. There are, however, two important indirect roles. First, Russia may have been surprised by the extent and intensity of international reactions to its actions in Ukraine. As it continues to build its own relationship with Russia, China should avoid any appearance of condoning Russia's actions, especially given that these actions are inconsistent with China's well-known opposition to one country interfering in the internal affairs of another. Second, various types of cooperation in multilateral fora have continued during the crisis and China should ensure that such cooperation stays the course. More generally, from a US perspective, the current tension between the United States and Russia must not be allowed to become an excuse for a lack of strategic dialogue between the United States and China. On the contrary: the past year demonstrates that relations between major powers can quickly become strained, making robust, sustained, and official dialogue between the United States and China all the more imperative.

Our Chinese speaker declared to have mixed feelings about the past year. On the positive side, Chinese-US exchanges have increased considerably since the Sunnylands Summit, military confidence-building measures have been adopted, progress has been achieved on the climate change front, and US President Barack Obama issued an invitation for a state visit to Chinese President Xi Jinping, which was accepted. But geopolitical frictions have continued to increase in Asia, the security environment is deteriorating in Europe over the crisis in Ukraine, and the Islamic State is scoring important successes in the Middle East. Moreover, the prospects for progress toward nuclear disarmament are bleak and no advances have been made to denuclearize North Korea. While a comprehensive agreement over Iran's nuclear program may soon be concluded, many uncertainties surround the talks.

From a Chinese perspective, three factors are central to strategic dynamics. First, the United States and Russia are key drivers because they are countries with the largest nuclear arsenals and the responsibility for leading the disarmament process falls on them. Second, tensions between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states continue to be strong and are likely to be evident at this year's Review Conference (RevCon) of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). Third, there is the relationship between China and the United States, hence the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation and reducing inhibitions. This can be done via track-1.5/2 initiatives and by making use of existing official channels.

During the discussion, US participants stressed that the downturn in US-Russia relations, the worst since the Cuban Missile Crisis, is proof that major-power relations can quickly go sour and that it is imperative to work through issues while relations are good. Chinese agreed, identifying Chinese President Xi's "new type" concept as the framework for US-China relations. US participants expressed skepticism that the "new type" concept can bear fruit.

Chinese hope that the differences between the United States and Russia over the INF Treaty can be resolved since they believe that this treaty is fundamental to stability “in Europe and beyond.” Chinese participants acknowledged there were no changes in China’s policy toward Russia as a result of the Ukraine crisis.

### **Nuclear Dimensions of the New Type of Major Country Relationship**

Our Chinese speaker stressed that the “new type” concept, which promises no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and a constructive approach to bilateral relations, has been endorsed by Chinese President Xi and US President Obama. From a Chinese perspective, nuclear weapons do not play a significant role in this vision. Chinese and US interests are so interdependent that a nuclear exchange between the two countries is unthinkable. Neither is the establishment of an arms race or even deterrence relationship, as was the case between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

To Chinese, nuclear weapons have a role to play in the more general sense: they are a hedge against worst-case scenarios. Specifically, they help deter nuclear attacks on China and prevent escalation in a conventional conflict. They enable Beijing to preserve its sovereignty and maintain stability not just with the United States, but also and increasingly with “other nuclear-armed states, including de facto nuclear-armed states.” That is why Beijing is working relentlessly to develop an arsenal with an effective second-strike capability. Our Chinese speaker, however, stressed that there are important nuclear areas where China-US cooperation can be strengthened as part of the “new type” vision. This is the case in nonproliferation, counterproliferation, nuclear safety and security, and “hot-spot” challenges, including North Korea and Iran.

Our US speaker explained that, from Washington’s perspective, the “new type” vision is positive if it can be turned into practical steps to improve bilateral relations. It will prove unhelpful, however, if it is pursued to promote a US-China condominium over East Asia at the expense of others or if it is meant to safeguard China’s core interests at the expense of the region’s stability, the security of its neighbors, and the vital interests of the United States. A positive vision of a “new type” of US-China nuclear relations should include: progress toward more cooperative military relations that reinforces political cooperation; constructive management of bilateral differences; force modernization programs on both sides that avoids an action-reaction cycle and accommodates force adaptations consistent with stated intent; a shared concept of strategic stability; Chinese transparency consistent with the practices of the other P-5; and sustained, substantive, and high-level dialogue among civilian and military leaders.

From a US perspective, there have been too many missed opportunities for US-China engagement. In 1989-2002, each incoming US presidential administration attempted, in vain, to engage China on nuclear issues as part of a broader strategic dialogue. The April 2006 Bush-Hu Summit committed to nuclear dialogue, but it was weakly implemented and eventually stopped. In the lead-up to the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, China declined the invitation of the Obama administration to express its views. China has also declined repeated invitations to begin a high-level political-military dialogue on strategic stability. Our US speaker stressed that failure to make headway in nuclear dialogue stands out at a time when military-to-military relations are

becoming more sustained and security cooperation is becoming more comprehensive. The window of opportunity for action, in fact, is closing. Patience is giving way to skepticism even among US strategists most inclined to engage China. In the context of the current debate on the modernization of US nuclear forces and significant increases in the number of Chinese weapons deliverable on the United States (and growing concerns over Russia's and North Korea's actions), this trend will continue.

This suggests that China should work with the Obama administration to start a dialogue process that can be handed off to its successor. China should address US concerns and provide credible statements about its future strategic restraint. The United States, for its part, should address Chinese concerns and suggest confidence-building measures. During that time, track-1.5 and track-2 initiatives should be pursued. In particular, these initiatives should identify concerns, seek to understand perceptions, and develop and test ideas for cooperation, including through the conduct of joint studies.

US admonitions notwithstanding, Chinese participants continued to insist that conditions are not ripe for a more robust official dialogue on nuclear issues and strategic stability with the United States. Instead, they favor deeper discussions at the Track-1.5/2 level and better use of existing official channels. They stressed that our Beijing meetings have been helpful in allowing participants to respond to questions from senior-most levels about US policies and intentions. These discussions also have been building consensus in China for enhancing the Track-1 step (and for building consensus in China about basic policy and strategic questions). Some Chinese participants stressed that they, too, would like to strengthen the Track-1 process.

Lack of clarity between the two sides on what specific issues would be included in a Track-1 dialogue remains a Chinese concern. Moreover, some senior Chinese participants questioned whether Track-1 discussions could devote the time to examining issues in the depth displayed in Track-1.5/2 dialogue and thus that this Track-1.5 dialogue provided a “richer” discussion. The Chinese also made it clear that an official dialogue is impossible if it requires China to reveal exact current and planned future numbers of its nuclear arsenal, a level of transparency that is incompatible with China’s traditional policy of ambiguity and would undermine China’s limited deterrent. While maintaining that military-to-military dialogue remains important, senior Chinese participants also stressed that any future official dialogue should involve the US Department of Defense and China’s Ministry of Defense, not the US Strategic Command and the Second Artillery.

US participants cautioned that the absence of meaningful official dialogue, and the longstanding unwillingness to provide the transparency that is an essential part of it, is generating mounting frustration in Washington and that the window of opportunity for building a strategic military relationship that supports the objectives of the “new type” political relationship may be closing. Some Chinese participants were sympathetic to the idea that an initial Track-1 effort could be undertaken with limited transparency. All agreed that Track-1.5/2 efforts could help build mutually acceptable Track-1 agendas. One US participant stressed that more legwork is needed on the US side to prepare for possible Chinese agreement to initiate a Track-1 dialogue.

## **Nonproliferation and Nuclear Security Cooperation**

Our US speaker opened this session by stressing that the upcoming NPT RevCon will be a challenge because there has been no significant arms control progress (and no significant advances within the P-5 process). Several small positive steps have been made, however. China has been leading a P-5 effort to develop a glossary of nuclear terms and concepts. China has also established dialogue on verification with the United Kingdom. Launched by the United States, the new International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification will cast a wider net, bringing nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states together to explore disarmament verification beyond warhead dismantlement.

From a US perspective, the best prospects for US-China cooperation lie in nuclear security. The Chinese Nuclear Security Center of Excellence offers a good start to promote this cooperation and build upon the achievements made in the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) process. Between now and the next summit in 2016, both countries could take important steps. The United States should ratify the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. China should join the Strengthening Nuclear Security Initiative and Enhancing Radiological Security Initiative. The United States and China should jointly commit to conducting track-1.5 table-top exercises on radioactive sources management and cyber security. They should also make new commitments to support the goals and objectives of the NSS process, such as promoting the establishment of an enrichment free zone in Southeast Asia, tackling the security problem posed by military materials, investigating mechanisms for restarting lab-to-lab exchanges, and supporting non-isotopic alternatives to high-level radioactive sources (possibly in Africa). More generally, the United States and China should work together to identify next steps after the 2016 NSS.

On the nonproliferation front, our US speaker explained that the United States and China generally have different priorities, tactics, and targets. While Washington affords nonproliferation high priority, Beijing describes it as “important, but not urgent.” Beijing also favors diplomacy to deal with noncompliance, whereas Washington is less resistant to using sanctions or, in some circumstances, force. Geopolitical factors also matter: while Washington is mostly worried about Iran’s nuclear program, Beijing is more concerned by Japan’s. US-China nonproliferation cooperation could be improved. Given Washington’s concerns about Iran’s enrichment program and North Korea’s enrichment and reprocessing activities on the one hand, and Beijing’s concerns about Japan’s reprocessing work on the other, the two countries should work together and lead by example. China, for instance, should refrain from engaging in reprocessing activities and work with the United States to find a regional solution to spent fuel disposal or to prepare for management of North Korea’s nuclear program if the regime collapses. Moreover, as China looks to become an important nuclear exporter, Beijing should lay out specific legislation or language in its cooperation agreements to prohibit the transfer of enrichment and reprocessing technology and to include high nuclear security standards.

Our Chinese speaker indicated that China-US nonproliferation and nuclear security cooperation is stronger than ever and has the potential to be further strengthened. There is now trust between China and the United States on nonproliferation and the two should build upon this

trust to ensure that the upcoming NPT RevCon is a success. Nuclear security cooperation is even more encouraging. Much has been achieved since the launch of the NSS process in 2010. China and the United States should further advance such cooperation in the lead-up to the 2016 NSS by focusing on the new Chinese Center of Excellence. More cooperation is also possible to convert facilities that use highly-enriched uranium to low-enriched uranium.

Nevertheless, our Chinese speaker explained that there remain challenges. China and the United States do not always see eye-to-eye on nonproliferation crises. They need a common basis or standards to enforce rules in a consistent manner, while also safeguarding their interests. For instance, while Washington often accuses Beijing of not being “tough enough,” China regards the US decision to engage in nuclear trade with India as setting a dangerous precedent for nonproliferation. The two countries should enhance cooperation and find common ground to guide their action.

While nonproliferation cooperation between the United States and China has improved, there was a sense among US participants that Beijing’s nonproliferation policy is transactional. Chinese denied this accusation, stressing that they regard proliferation as a serious problem. They insisted that it is a shared US-China concern. US participants expressed readiness to enhance nonproliferation cooperation with Beijing, especially to target entities within China that facilitate North Korea’s proliferation to Iran and others. China denied this claim and argued that, in recent years, the United States has proved less enthusiastic about export controls at the working level.

Some Chinese are deeply concerned about Japan, denouncing policy changes made and envisioned by the Abe administration and possible escalation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (although the issue was not dwelled upon in this discussion). Chinese stressed that the US needs better management of Japan, including preventing it from developing nuclear weapons. Chinese asserted that a Japanese nuclear breakout is a real possibility given that Tokyo has “large amounts” of nuclear materials. US attempts to temper that assessment of Japanese intentions and capabilities fell on deaf ears. One senior participant asserted that the United States was overconfident in believing that it could control Japan, warning that the Japanese are trying to get rid of US control and move out from under the peace constitution. Some Chinese stressed that the four-point principled agreement reached between China and Japan is an important development, and that Sino-Japanese relations could gradually become more stable and improve if this agreement is fully implemented on both sides.

Participants also discussed nuclear safety and security, which is an area where China and the United States have expanded cooperation. The Chinese Nuclear Security Center of Excellence, managed on the US side by the Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration, is a success story, where more bilateral cooperation can occur. This is also one of the few areas of concrete bilateral cooperation that the Chinese could identify. Many other “examples” were merely cases of a coincidence of views between Beijing and Washington, not actual coordination of positions before a negotiating session. Still, Washington’s and Beijing’s general agreement at the Third Nuclear Security Summit was highlighted as a positive step underscoring bilateral cooperation.

## Dealing with Regional Nuclear Challenges

This year's breakout sessions explored comparative assessments of two important regional nuclear challenges: the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran. What follows are summaries of the discussions in each breakout session and subsequent exchanges in the plenary meeting.

### North Korea

Our Chinese speaker explained that the situation on the Korean Peninsula is characterized by mutual deterrence. North Korea says that it needs nuclear weapons in the same way that South Korea says that it needs US extended deterrence. Both the North and the South use threats to respond to threats. This is a concern for Beijing, which seeks to maintain stability in the region and worries about the possibility of a nuclear accident on the Peninsula. In Beijing's assessment, while North Korea's plutonium program is unlikely to develop because the regime does not have the industrial capability to keep it afloat, Pyongyang's uranium enrichment program is "astonishing." Meanwhile, Chinese note that North Korea has failed to conduct successful tests of medium-/long-range missiles. Still, over the past year and a half, Beijing has ramped up its efforts against North Korea's nuclear and missile technology transfers. Our Chinese speaker concluded by recommending that China and the United States should forge a common position if North Korea conducted new nuclear or missile test. He also recommended that the Six-Party Talks resume and offer Pyongyang a "comprehensive agreement" extending beyond nonproliferation and disarmament considerations only.

Our US speaker stressed that few in the United States (and elsewhere) worry about Pyongyang using nuclear weapons against South Korea or anyone else. From a US perspective, the real concerns are onward proliferation from the North, the use of nuclear blackmail by Pyongyang, and North Korean overconfidence that its nuclear arsenal gives it protection to freely engage in more aggressive provocations or even conventional wars. In these circumstances, Washington views US-China nonproliferation cooperation as critical and in both US and Chinese interests. The United States and China should also coordinate positions and responses before North Korea conducts a fourth nuclear test or long-range ballistic missile launches. If Pyongyang goes ahead, Beijing's endorsement of the Proliferation Security Initiative would be a positive development.

Both sides described this breakout group discussion on North Korea as the "best ever." There was general agreement on the nature of the challenge, with all seeing nuclear proliferation, nuclear safety, and security of nuclear assets as the primary concerns, among a longer listing of potential threats. Some Chinese agreed that North Korea now poses a real threat to the United States. Chinese, however, and in contrast with some Americans, could not envisage a situation in which North Korea would use nuclear weapons first. Chinese did not see collapse as a likely outcome for North Korea. They argued that the focus should be on how the two sides could cooperate to prevent Pyongyang from future nuclear or missile testing, with some receptiveness to deeper discussions to develop specific measures and identify agreed upon "redlines." The possibility of discussing joint responses to onward proliferation from North Korea was also not rejected. While both agreed it was unlikely that Pyongyang would give up its nuclear weapons,



Chinese continue to insist that resuming the Six-Party Talks is the best way to address the North Korean problem; US participants remained skeptical. Chinese also encouraged the resumption of dialogue between the US and North Korea. Furthermore, Chinese expressed concern over incidents between the North and South in the context of US-ROK military exercises, and hoped that the US would do more to reduce tensions.

## Iran

Our US speaker indicated that Iran is pursuing a nuclear-weapon *option*. There is no evidence that the Iranian leadership has decided to develop actual nuclear weapons, although it is a distinct possibility. Regardless of whether Tehran decides to maintain a latent nuclear-weapon capability or go all the way and develop weapons (and regardless of whether a comprehensive agreement is reached), deterrence will play a role in how the United States (and others) will deal with Iran. Most likely, any future crisis with Iran will be at least to some degree a nuclear crisis. Given that both the United States and China have an interest not only in keeping Iran as non-nuclear as possible, but also in maintaining stability in the Middle East, cooperation is essential. In the near term, this cooperation should focus on making sure that the highest standards of verification over Iran's nuclear program are attained. Long-term, the United States and China should work together to maintain regional stability.

Our Chinese speaker stressed that the Iranian nuclear issue impacts negatively on the nonproliferation regime and that it is critical that a comprehensive agreement be reached this spring. He noted important challenges, however, both at the technical level and at the political levels in Iran and the United States. China, for its part, has had a consistent and constructive approach to the problem, recognizing Iran's right to peaceful nuclear activities while refusing to let it develop nuclear weapons. As the deadline for the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement approaches, it is essential for the United States and others to remember that Tehran remains committed to never developing nuclear weapons, that its activities are under safeguards, and that it has duly implemented the first phase of the preliminary agreement.

Participants assessed the breakout session on Iran to be cordial but less productive than the breakout session on North Korea. Chinese and US participants regard the Iranian nuclear problem differently (a key disagreement is the value of the threat of force) but agree on the importance of reaching a comprehensive agreement if sufficient verification is granted over Tehran's key facilities. There was also agreement that the United States and China had an opportunity to cooperate to manage regional dynamics after an agreement is concluded. Some Chinese and US participants regard the P-5 diplomatic process as another arena where bilateral cooperation has been productive. One Chinese participant said that if the Iranian talks fail and the United States is seen to be at fault, further P-5 cooperation will be difficult. Recommendations for further progress included discussion of ways to prevent nuclear use and a discussion with non-nuclear-weapon states, capitalizing on China's role in the Non-Aligned Movement.

## Strategic Stability and Strategic Reassurance

Our US speaker kicked off this session by discussing a one-page “balance sheet” on US-China relations. On the plus side, there is strong economic interdependence between the two countries, important areas of political-security cooperation, compelling reasons and interests on both sides for building longer-term cooperation, and already existing elements of unilateral strategic restraint. On the negative side, however, the United States and China have some conflicting interests and there are areas of competition and even potential military confrontation between them. Miscalculations and misjudgment cannot be excluded and there remain many mutual uncertainties and suspicions about each other's goals, intentions, strategies, programs, and activities, as well as persistent difficulties in “taking relations to the next level.”

From a US perspective, there are many reasons to worry that bilateral relations are approaching a turning point because long-standing areas of mutual strategic concern, mistrust, and uncertainty have not been addressed, important changes in respective strategic postures are underway, and an increasing number of Americans are turning their backs on building strategic cooperation. At the moment, the “new type” concept is defined in the negative: no confrontation or conflict. A more positive vision is needed. That vision needs to be based on a reduction or successful management of conflicts and on efforts by both sides to reduce the other's concerns and build habits of cooperation. These efforts should include joint studies on the “new type” concept, no-first use, assurance gaps and ways to address them, crisis escalation, and cross-domain deterrence. They should also include joint threat assessments (e.g., on North Korea's missiles) and table-top exercises.

Despite landmark studies on the topic (which he referenced), our Chinese speaker argued that strategic stability and strategic reassurance are complex concepts for which there is no single definition. From a Chinese perspective, China-US relations are not stable. To the extent that there is some stability, it is fragile. During the Cold War, US-Soviet relations were based on a “balance of terror,” with big arsenals on both sides, and, today, the United States and Russia continue to deter each other with large arsenals, even though there are dialogue mechanisms and treaties that regulate their relations. China-US relations are different. Strategic stability between the two is uneven because Chinese capabilities are limited. US forces maintain “absolute supremacy” over China. This unevenness is likely to continue as Washington embarks on ambitious nuclear modernization efforts. Moreover, the United States, unlike China, extends nuclear protection to its allies and invests in ballistic missile, space, and cyber warfare capabilities.

Fortunately, our Chinese speaker argued that China and the United States do not regard each other as enemies, that they have endorsed the “new type” vision, and that both intend to push nuclear weapons in the background of their respective national security policies. These are reassuring factors. Yet, the US nuclear modernization program is a problem for China. However unlikely it may be, Beijing could decide to abandon its no-first-use (NFU) policy as a result. Extended deterrence, he explained, is also encouraging US allies to act recklessly; Japan, in particular, has been “acting wild” in recent years, so much so that this has unnerved South Korea, a US ally. Moreover, Washington's growing use of non-nuclear capabilities, including

missile defense, space, and cyber warfare tools, dangerously threatens strategic stability between China and the United States.

In these circumstances, our Chinese speaker recommended that China and the United States focus on three C's: communication, constraint, and crisis management. Beijing and Washington should considerably enhance their means of communication. They should constrain themselves: the United States should constrain itself and its allies, and China should refrain from dropping its NFU policy. Finally, Beijing and Washington should strengthen crisis management, including by running table-top or simulation exercises.

During the discussion, Chinese reiterated that Beijing regards its nuclear arsenal as a hedge against worst-case scenarios vis-à-vis the United States and “other de facto nuclear-armed states.” The number-one Chinese concern remains maintaining a secure second strike capability in the face of US superior nuclear capabilities.

Once again, some Chinese expressed concerns about the US determination to maintain “nuclear superiority” over Russia, China, and other nuclear-armed states. They saw US fears that China may sprint to parity with the United States and Russia as the two countries draw down their arsenals as evidence that Washington wants to maintain nuclear superiority. US explanations that there is a stark difference between building down to parity and sprinting up to parity did not satisfy Chinese participants.

Further engagement on strategic stability appears necessary and potentially fruitful. The challenge of thinking about nuclear strategic stability in isolation from other issues was also raised. Chinese presentations and comments indicated that Chinese experts continue to wrestle with how to define stability in the US-China strategic relationship. Those attempts suggest an effort to find some middle ground between stability defined as an overall productive political-military relationship and stability based on transferring US-Soviet concepts into the China-US relationship.

### **Crisis Management and Confidence and Security Building Measures**

From a Chinese perspective, there are five types of crises that could break out between China and the United States: a crisis over Taiwan, a crisis over the Korean Peninsula, a crisis over the East China Sea, maritime military crises, and crises involving cross-domain deterrence, i.e., the space and cyber domains. Our Chinese speaker explained that the most dangerous crisis is a dispute that involves a third-party.

Research on China-US crises shows that communication is often a problem, that hotlines are not of much use if they do not connect policymakers with authority to make decisions, that it is essential to send its interlocutor correct signals, and that knowledge of each other's decision-making process is critical. Much can be done to improve current China-US crisis management capabilities. For starters, China and the United States should focus on *crisis avoidance*. This requires liaison systems and dialogue about contentious issues, including Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, maritime issues, and space and cyber capabilities. Establishing a crisis management

task force would also be useful to conduct regular consultations. A good start would be to implement the two memoranda of understanding concluded at the end of last year.

Our US speaker assessed that US-China escalation could occur following a dispute over contested maritime territory; US military exercises along China's coastline; an incident at sea; the collapse of the regime in Pyongyang involving a "loose nuke" scenario or the movement of troops into North Korea; similar developments in Pakistan; confrontations over Taiwan following US arms sales to Taipei, Chinese pressure on Taiwan, or a China-Taiwan loss-of-life incident; a Chinese attempt to seize Allied-occupied or administered maritime territories, especially the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands; or a Chinese challenge to the U.S.-led alliance structure.

If history is any guide, the United States and China have both prized signaling resolve and seizing the momentum early in a crisis. This could prove highly destabilizing because both can easily misinterpret signals of restraint as escalation. China is most prone to escalatory behavior in disputes involving territorial challenges and threats to sovereignty and, worryingly, Beijing may have excessive confidence in the United States' clear understanding of its escalation limits. Meanwhile, the United States is most prone to escalatory behavior in cases that challenge its credibility as a security guarantor; Washington assumes that allies require clear and convincing displays of US resolve during a crisis. There are other potentially destabilizing factors inherent to US and Chinese strategic cultures. US leaders, for instance, tend to assume that superior military capabilities will ensure deterrence. This is not a given. Conveying resolve to defend principles is also critical. On the Chinese side, there is no national security decision-making structure that can confidently prevent or manage military crises, creating coordination problems and potentially leading to communication failure.

Research suggests that effective crisis management requires rigorous testing of hypotheses about each side's goals, capabilities, and resolve in specific crises; clear signals and language; and ability to reassure its interlocutor that its core interests are not threatened. In the US-China context, Crisis Risk Reduction Centers in Washington and Beijing would help prevent disputes from escalating. Unofficial mechanisms for crisis forecasting/prediction are also useful. Looking to the future, conducting a joint investigation of maritime incidents to avoid escalation between China and US allies would be helpful. Another positive development would be the establishment of communication networks linking the US Pacific Command (PACOM), the US National Military Command Center, and the General Staff Department Operations Department; PACOM and the Nanjing and Shenyang military regions; and the PLA Navy and the US Navy. As far as communications are concerned, it is important to designate a trusted individual emissary (not a sitting official) to convey messages between the US and Chinese leaderships.

Our US speaker also recommended the establishment of a Japan-China Maritime Communications Mechanism, the inclusion of crisis management on the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement agenda, and the establishment of military-to-military dialogue to discuss creating a glossary of crisis management terms (similar to the National Academy of Sciences Chinese nuclear weapons glossary project).

Chinese and US participants concur that more work is needed on both sides to better avoid and manage crises, particularly crises triggered by third-parties. This involves better

communication mechanisms and hotlines. US participants, however, pointed to the importance of giving the responsibility for managing crises to a single authoritative entity to avoid conflicting messages.

### **General Observations, Conclusions, and Next Steps**

Throughout the meeting, Chinese participants were generally eager to frame US-China relations in the best possible light. Chinese continued to emphasize that a framework for the “new type” concept should ensure positive relations in the bilateral relationship, and that nuclear dynamics played only a minor role in this. There was less confidence about China’s rise than had been apparent at recent bilateral engagements. Chinese made no mention of traditional hot-button items in the bilateral relationship, ignoring a reference to arms sales to Taiwan when it was made by a US participant and not even mentioning President Obama’s meeting with the Dalai Lama. Neither close-in US reconnaissance nor missile defense were emphasized. The just-released *2015 US National Security Strategy* was referenced in generally positive terms. Discussions were candid, but not contentious; differences of opinion were spelled out but, on the whole, a cooperative spirit prevailed.

There were important areas of disconnect between Chinese and US participants, however. A few Chinese accused the United States of having active offensive cyber and space programs, explaining that they are the victims of constant US cyber-attacks. They explained that US extended deterrence “molests” Chinese interests, ignoring US insistence that it helps keep US allies from acquiring nuclear capabilities. Without giving specific examples, and as in the past, a few Chinese also asserted that the United States seeks “absolute security” and “absolute supremacy over others.”

There was agreement that the next round of this dialogue should focus on more specific and practical areas, and address strategic issues beyond the nuclear problem (to include missile defense, cyber, space, conventional weapons including CPGS, among others). Opportunities for joint studies were discussed, such as research to better understand the changing balance of power in Asia and implications for US-China relations, of which nuclear and other strategic issues are a subset. It was also suggested that this dialogue work on developing an agenda for a Track-1 dialogue and on fleshing out the components of the “new type” concept. Deeper discussion on developing common approaches to deterring North Korean nuclear and missile tests were also endorsed by all, as was the need to better identify the major impediments to preserving strategic stability. In this context, US participants saw the utility of table-top exercises at the companion track-2 Hawaii dialogue. There was also some discussion on examining the implications a shifting conventional balance of power could have on nuclear policy.

# APPENDIX A

## The Ninth China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics A CFISS-Pacific Forum CSIS Workshop Feb. 9-10, 2015, Beijing, China

### CONFERENCE AGENDA

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#### February 9, 2015

- 9:00           **Opening Remarks**  
Chinese side: Qian Lihua  
US side: Dennis Blair
- 9:10           **Session 1: The Strategic Landscape**  
What are Chinese and US perceptions of the current strategic landscape? What are the primary trends shaping this landscape? What regional challenges offer the greatest opportunity for bilateral cooperation? What developments most concern each country? Within the region? Globally?
- In particular, what will be the future of US-Russia arms control and disarmament after the Ukraine conflict? What is each side's assessment of the conflict in Ukraine and the implications for its strategic relations with Russia? What can we predict or know about Russian behavior? What are the consequences for regional and global stability, P-5 cooperation on non-proliferation and arms control, and other nuclear policy issues? What can the US and China do to encourage Russian restraint? How important is it to sustain nuclear cooperation with Russia?
- Chinese moderator: Qian Lihua  
US presenter: Linton Brooks  
Chinese presenter: Sun Xiangli
- 10:45           Coffee Break
- 11:00           **Session 2: Nuclear Dimensions of the New Type of Major Country Relationship**  
What is each side's assessment of the "new type of major country relationship" between Beijing and Washington? How should it be defined positively – and not only negatively in terms of avoiding historic confrontation between an established and a rising power? Is the current nuclear relationship between China and the United States consistent with the “new type” vision or not? If so, why? And what does this imply for the future role of Tracks 2 and 1.5? If not, why not? And what steps should be taken to bring the relationship and the vision into alignment? Are there lessons from experience at Tracks 2 and 1.5 that can be useful at Track 1?

US moderator: Ralph Cossa  
Chinese presenter: Yao Yunzhu  
US presenter: Brad Roberts

12:30 Lunch

14:00 **Session 3: Nonproliferation and Nuclear Security Cooperation**

How can Beijing and Washington cooperate – bilaterally and within the P-5 -- to make the 2015 NPT Review Conference a success? Are there P-5 initiatives that should be considered, e.g., intensified dialogue with NPT non-nuclear weapon states and/or demonstrated actions in response to concerns about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear use? What are the opportunities for nuclear security cooperation between Beijing and Washington? What should they prioritize in the lead-up to the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit and what can they do to ensure that the summit is a success? What mechanisms will be needed after 2016 to sustain the momentum? More generally, how can the United State and China cooperate better on nuclear nonproliferation when they prioritize proliferation differently? Does China view proliferation as mainly “a U.S. problem?” Why is cooperation on nonproliferation so often transactional? [This session will include discussion of the key findings of a US-China Nonproliferation and Nuclear Security Dialogue which took place in Washington in June 2014.]

Chinese moderator: Yao Yunzhu  
US presenter: Miles Pomper  
Chinese presenter: Chen Kai

15:30 Coffee Break

15:45 **Session 4A: Breakout Session: Dealing with Regional Nuclear Challenges: North Korea**

This breakout session will focus on North Korea. Each group will compare assessments of the threat(s) posed by North Korea? What is likely to happen if Pyongyang continues to develop/deploy nuclear weapons? What are the similarities and differences in the Chinese and US assessments? What explains those similarities and differences? What is the confidence of each assessment? How can Beijing and Washington cooperate to bring Pyongyang back into compliance with their nonproliferation obligations?

US moderator: Lewis Dunn  
Chinese presenter: Yang Xiyu  
US presenter: Ralph Cossa

Group members on Chinese side : Qian Lihua, Zhu Xuhui, Zhu Chenghu, Ouyang Wei, Chen Kai, Wu Jun, Yang Mingjie, Huang Weiguo, Zhang Tuosheng

Group members on US side: Dennis Blair, Brandon Babin, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Robert Blum, Jennifer Bradley, Robert Gromoll, Erik Quam, Brad Roberts, Phillip Saunders, Shane Smith, Robert Spalding, Michael Swaine, Michael Urena, US Embassy Representative(s), Robert Vince

**Session 4B: Breakout Session: Dealing with Regional Nuclear Challenges:  
Iran**

This breakout session will focus on Iran. Each group will compare assessments of the threat(s) posed by Iran? What is likely to happen if Tehran continues to develop/deploy nuclear weapons? What are the similarities and differences in the Chinese and US assessments? What explains those similarities and differences? What is the confidence of each assessment? How can Beijing and Washington cooperate to bring Tehran back into compliance with their nonproliferation obligations?

(Simultaneous interpretation provided )

Chinese moderator: Li Bin

US presenter: Philipp Bleek

Chinese presenter: Ma Shengkun

Group members on Chinese side: Hu Side, Zong Jiahu, Zhang Yu, Sun Xiangli, Yao Yunzhu, Fan Jishe, Guo Xiaobing, Zhu Qichao, Hu Yumin

Group members on US side: Linton Brooks, Elbridge Colby, Dirk Deverill, Charles Ferguson, Leo Florick, Brad Glosserman, Stephen Hoffman, Luo Xi, Victor Ott, Miles Pomper, David Santoro, Christopher Twomey, John Warden, Jaime Yassif, Zhao Tong, Aaron Zhu

17:15 Session Adjourns

17:30 Dinner

**February 10, 2015**

9:00 **Session 4C: Plenary Reports on Breakout Sessions**  
Breakout-session leads will report on the key findings of their session.

US moderator: Brad Roberts

US presenter: Ralph Cossa (summarizing the breakout session of North Korea)

Chinese presenter: Li Bin (summarizing the breakout session of Iran)

10:30 Coffee Break

10:45 **Session 5: Strategic Stability and Strategic Reassurance**  
How does each side operationally define strategic stability? Is strategic stability the same in every setting? What can Beijing and Washington do (or avoid) to strengthen strategic stability and improve strategic reassurance, as part of building a new type of major power relationship? For instance, are there opportunities to pursue new cooperative measures to enhance mutual strategic predictability at the Track 1 and 1 ½ levels? What are the opportunities and key stumbling blocks to strengthening strategic stability and reassurance? What role does US extended deterrence play in this equation? As the two perceive different challenges to



strategic stability, is the term itself useful in focusing official dialogue? Are there good alternatives?

Chinese moderator: Zhu Chenghu

US presenter: Lewis Dunn

Chinese presenter: Yang Mingjie

12:30 **Lunch**

14:00 **Session 6: Crisis Management and Confidence and Security Building Measures**

What types of crises should Beijing and Washington be most worried about? What lessons can be drawn from past crises? What mechanisms are required to manage such crises? What steps can each side take to build habits of cooperation, develop confidence, improve coordination, and inhibit or control escalation in the event of crisis? What roles can regional multilateral institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia play in crisis management or in building CSBMs? [Discussions about nuclear crises could include developments and lessons learned from Indian-Pakistani crises.]

US moderator: Linton Brooks

Chinese presenter: Zhang Tuosheng

US presenter: Michael Swaine

15:30 **Coffee Break**

15:45 **Wrap-Up Session: Next Steps**

What are the meeting's key findings and conclusions? What are the next steps for this dialogue and for the broader China-US strategic relationship?

Chinese moderator: Qian Lihua

16:45 **Closing Remarks**

US side: Dennis Blair

Chinese side: Hu Side

17:30 **Dinner**

## APPENDIX B

**The Ninth China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics  
A CFISS-Pacific Forum CSIS Workshop  
Feb. 9-10, 2015, Beijing, China**

### CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT LIST

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