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Implications of Russian Strategic Changes on China

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/69972>

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Implications of Russian Strategic Changes on China



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Research Question and Main Findings

- Question: How has China perceived and responded to Russia's recent strategic modernization?
- China characterizes Russian nuclear strategy as defensive, and views Russia's increased emphasis on nuclear weapons as deterrence
- China does not see Russian nuclear modernization as a concern or threat
- Little evidence that China is adjusting its nuclear doctrine, nuclear strategy, or nuclear modernization efforts in response to Russia



Russian Nuclear Forces Involved in Recent Exercises



Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin Meet to Discuss Global Strategic Stability (2019)

Reasons China Does Not Feel Threatened by Russian Strategic Modernization

- China and Russia have a comprehensive strategic partnership, including mutual trust and respect for each other's core interests (benign intentions)
- China does not see these capabilities as intended for China, but for the U.S. and the West
- China understands Russian rationale for increased emphasis on nuclear weapons
 - Russian conventional capabilities are weak
 - NATO expansion threatens and pressures Russia
 - U.S. missile defense and strategic modernization threaten Russia

Implications for Chinese Nuclear Modernization

- Russian strategic modernization has had little impact on China's nuclear modernization, nuclear strategy, or nuclear deployments
- Increasing discussion of "regional nuclear environment," but no mention of Russia as a threat or a challenge
- Regional nuclear capabilities aimed at Japan, South Korea, India, and most importantly, Taiwan



Chinese SSBN

Implications

- Russian strategic modernization unlikely to be a source of friction with China and unlikely to be something the U.S. can use to drive a wedge
- Should continue to monitor Chinese discussions of regional nuclear environment and regional forces to see if Russia becomes a more important factor

Areas for Further Research

- Russian and Chinese perceptions of a "post-INF world"
- Russian and Chinese assessments of current and future U.S. missile defense capabilities
- Success/failure in arms control and great power competition



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Topic Sponsor: N3/N5 - Plans & Strategy

This research is supported by funding from the
Naval Postgraduate School, Naval Research
Program (PE 0605853N/2098).

NRP Project ID: NPS-19-N260-A