

**A Decade of Chinese Arms Control:  
A Survey of Progress Ahead of Bush's Visit to China**  
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As President Bush prepares to visit China on Saturday, November 19, as part of his Asia tour, cooperation on nonproliferation efforts between Washington and Beijing are on the increase. Chinese leaders have worked together with the Bush administration—with varying degrees of success—on issues such as [North Korea](#), international terrorism, and the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540. U.S. and Chinese government officials have acted to strengthen China's export control system and have collaborated closely on securing China's nuclear industry.<sup>1</sup> This cooperation is in stark contrast to the relationship of a decade ago, and even differs from the situation earlier in the George W. Bush presidency. Much of the change is attributable to progress in China's foreign policy and, in particular, developments in its nonproliferation policy, which has led to some convergence of the two countries' interests and ideas.

A comparison of Beijing's official policy documents is one method of assessing China's progress in nonproliferation over the last ten years. In 1995, China's State Council issued its first [White Paper on Arms Control and Disarmament](#). A few months ago, in September 2005, Beijing published a new white paper detailing its arms control policy entitled "[China's Endeavors for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation](#)." (China also published a paper on "[China's Non-Proliferation Policy and Measures](#)" in 2003.) While similarities remain between the rhetoric and ideology expressed in the 1995 and 2005 papers, China's arms control and nonproliferation policies have clearly progressed. The differences between the two papers help explain how China and the United States can now work in unison on a number of international security issues. However, conflicts between the United States and China—some of which are still evident in the most recent White Paper—are palpable and should not be underestimated. Washington and China continue to disagree on missile defense and on the use of nuclear weapons in military doctrine. Many in Washington also remain skeptical about China's commitment to nonproliferation and question Beijing's lack of movement in improving implementation of their export control system. The issue of Taiwan, which is not directly tied to arms control and nonproliferation, also negatively impacts U.S.-China cooperation on issues related to regional and international security. These on-going disagreements—particularly regarding Taiwan—pose challenges to further cooperation and could threaten the viability of current joint efforts in the field of nonproliferation.

A comparison of China's 1995 and 2005 White Papers is not a comprehensive study of China's overall activities in nonproliferation and arms control over the last decade, but an examination can chart the progress of official policy, and this can reveal areas of possible U.S.-China cooperation. It is important to note that white papers only provide an official version of a country's policy and tend to be self-aggrandizing. While many experts believe that China's arms control policy has progressed markedly in the last decade, a number of officials and experts, particularly in the United States, continue to question China's commitment to nonproliferation.<sup>2</sup> Many skeptics view recent actions by Beijing's

leadership to strengthen its official nonproliferation policy as half-hearted at best, and they point to examples of continued proliferation of sensitive materials by Chinese companies as examples of China's failure to implement its policy.

*History of China's Arms Control and Nonproliferation Policy*<sup>3</sup>

China's arms control policy has seen drastic changes since the 1960s and 1970s when most Chinese leaders were largely dismissive of and even hostile to international efforts in this sphere. Beijing saw most burgeoning regimes, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), as means for the superpowers to maintain their superiority and dominate developing nations. Therefore, China refused to take part until the early 1990s.

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, Beijing used weapons sales and assistance in weapons development as a way to improve its political, economic and strategic ties. In this period, China cooperated in the development of Pakistan's missile and nuclear programs. Beijing believed it was in China's best interest to help Islamabad become a counterbalance to the perceived threat of New Delhi. North Korea also was a recipient of military assistance from China for a number of decades, and Beijing saw Pyongyang as a buffer state between China and the U.S. military forces in South Korea. Sales of weapons systems and technology to other nations, such as Arab states and Iran, were also seen as contributing to China's strategic stability by making friends in a vital—albeit unstable—region of the world. Economic considerations, especially with regards to China's fledgling defense industry, also played an important role in the proliferation of weapons and related equipment from China.

Pressure from the international community, particularly the United States, coalesced with an evolution in Beijing's strategic thinking to move China's arms control and nonproliferation policy significantly toward international standards by the mid-1990s. By 1995, the year Beijing's first White Paper on arms control and disarmament was published, China had joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (1984), ratified the Biological Weapons Convention (1984) and acceded to the NPT (1992), actively participated in the negotiations for and signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (signature 1993; ratified in 1997), took part in the negotiations for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (ultimately signing it in 1996) and agreed to the protocols of many nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Even with these changes, China's views on some aspects of nonproliferation and arms control that had long conflicted with Washington's view—especially with regards to the disarmament responsibilities of the United States and Russia, along with Beijing's distrust of supplier regimes—remained steadfast into the mid-1990s. Washington continued to disapprove of China's weak export control system and lack of serious effort to stem the flow of WMD-related technologies to unstable regions and countries.

Between the release of the 1995 and 2005 White Papers, however, a number of changes, both within China and in internationally, brought about adjustments in China's outlook

on nonproliferation. Beijing's increased integration into the global economy, the development of a nuclear rivalry in South Asia, and the rising threat of international terrorism led Chinese policymakers to realize that nonproliferation was increasingly vital to China's national security. Most recently, the standoff over North Korea's nuclear program and the revelations of the A.Q. Khan nuclear black market exemplified how China's policies and activities of the past were having negative ramifications on the nation's current security environment.

*Policy Movement in the Last Decade: A Comparison of the 1995 and 2005 White Papers*

Export Controls

Regarding control of the transfer of sensitive materials, the 1995 White Paper argued that "preventing proliferation should neither present an obstacle to the just rights and interests of all countries in the peaceful use of science and technology nor restrict or harm economic, scientific and technological development in developing countries," at the same time noting that "all countries, particularly developed nations, should strictly control the transfer of sensitive materials, technologies and military equipment, practice restraint and halt the irresponsible transfer of weapons." In a swipe at suppliers regimes in general, and the two largest nuclear powers in particular, the 1995 paper notes that the United States and Russia "resort to discriminative antiproliferation and arms control measures, directing the spearhead of arms control at the developing countries."

In a departure from the past, when Beijing consistently ducked responsibility for international nonproliferation efforts, China's 2005 White Paper (like the 2003 White Paper on Nonproliferation) exemplified a proactive approach in its nonproliferation policy, and detailed past and on-going activities to improve China's export controls on sensitive goods. In one section devoted to the developing relationship between China and supplier regimes, Beijing's attitude toward export control mechanisms shows a clear break from the past. Aside from detailing participation in the two groups in which Beijing is a member—the Zangger Committee (joined 1997), and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (joined 2004)—the 2005 White Paper described Chinese consultations with the other suppliers regimes, including Beijing's application to join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The paper also gave significant attention to discussions with the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group, hinting at Beijing's interest in joining these two export control arrangements.

Disarmament

China has in the past argued that the "major nuclear powers"—the United States and Russia—were ultimately responsible for overall disarmament, and that Beijing should not be expected to move on this issue until Moscow and Washington took significant steps to eliminate their arsenals. However, these efforts have lessened in recent years. While critiques of the "major nuclear powers" can be found in both the 1995 and 2005 White Papers, the incidence of these attacks is notably on the decline. While continuing to emphasize the importance of arms control and the ultimate goal of complete disarmament, China's official policy has shifted more of its focus to the importance of cooperation and preventing the dispersion of dangerous technologies.

### Use of Language

China's 1995 White Paper on Arms Control and Disarmament contained much of the dogmatic language typical of official documents emanating from Beijing at that time. The first section of the 1995 paper, entitled "Promoting Peace and Development for All Mankind," states that China "loves peace dearly and has made major contributions to peace and other progressive causes for all of mankind. Modern history has served as grim witness to China's great sufferings and the humiliation of the Chinese people as the result of imperialist and colonialist invasion and partition." Although consistent with the principles of China's stated foreign policy, this language was an exaggeration of China's efforts in the field of international security at the time, and also a reminder of the victim status that the Chinese leadership often evoked in its dealings with foreign powers. In keeping with the victim imagery, the 1995 paper also used terminology such as "imperialists" and "hegemonists" to describe Western powers.

While dogmatic language is not absent from the 2005 White Paper, hyperbole is notably reduced. Missing from the most recent White Paper is references to the "China as a victim." This change is explained to some extent by an attitudinal change in Beijing that recognized these allusions were not helping China's attempt to be seen as a major power.<sup>4</sup> It is also likely a sign that the arms control and nonproliferation community in China has matured since the mid-1990s and sees this type of discourse as unnecessary or counterproductive to its policy goals. Even with regards to the [aging chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on Chinese territory](#), China's tone—at least within the context of the White Paper—was less fiery than before.<sup>5</sup>

### *Beijing-Washington Convergence Still Far Off*

While some aspects of China's official nonproliferation policy have moved closer to those of the United States, an examination of the 2005 White Paper points to a number of significant conflicts that remain. Issues such as the weaponization of space, deterrence and the size of nuclear arsenals, and missile defense continue to garner attention in the recent White Paper and underscore differences between China and the United States that may remain irreconcilable in the near future. Even within the delimiting scope of arms control and disarmament, the 2005 White Paper also highlighted the extent to which the issue of Taiwan will hinder further U.S.-China convergence and cooperation.

### Arms Control in Outer Space

The 2005 White Paper detailed Beijing's call for a treaty on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS.) China and the United States have long disagreed over the need for this treaty; the conflict has halted the work of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) for the last seven years. This issue consistently is raised by Beijing during bilateral discussions with Washington as well as in various international fora. However, the United States has stood firm and avoided allowing this issue to be brought forward for further discussion. This disagreement will likely continue to hamper nonproliferation cooperation in other fields, such as limits on fissile material production, which have been held up in the CD due to the conflict over PAROS.

### Nuclear Weapon Disarmament

China also continues to raise alarms regarding the size and configuration of the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, as well as the perceived increase in the U.S. defense doctrine's reliance on nuclear weapons. In stark contrast to U.S. policies, China's 2005 White Paper calls for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, and the creation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. (Although the sincerity with which this proposal has been made can be called into question, it is not difficult to see how complete elimination of nuclear weapons would increase China's strategic security and power—since its current arsenal is dwarfed by that of the United States, China is unlikely to be able to catch up in quality or quantity, even in the longer term.) As in all official documents or statements that touch on China's nuclear weapons policy, the 2005 White Paper reiterates China's call for a no-first-use pact between the five recognized nuclear-weapons states. This option has not been welcomed by any of the other states with recognized nuclear arsenals and has been a non-starter in bilateral discussion between the United States and China.

### Missile Defense

According to the 2005 paper, while China “understands” the concerns that may lead nations to want missile defense, Beijing argues that these systems will not effectively solve problems of insecurity. The paper states, “China does not wish to see a missile defense system produce a negative impact on global strategic stability, bring new unstable factors to international and regional peace and security, erode trust among big powers, or undermine legitimate security interests of other countries.” Portraying missile defense as a nonproliferation issue, the White Paper also claims that missile defense development and cooperation will lead to the further proliferation of ballistic missile technology. However, China's vocal opposition to missile defense has lessened over the last few years as relations with the United States have improved. This is evident in the fact that Beijing does not directly call for the halting of all missile defense development but instead calls for the “relevant countries” to “increase transparency in their missile defense program for the purpose of deepening trust and dispelling misgivings.”

### Taiwan

Disagreement between the United States and China over Taiwan remains an overarching impediment to bilateral cooperation in many policy arenas, including nonproliferation and international security. Unsurprisingly, the issue of Taiwan is a hot button item in China's rhetoric—one that reverberates through most of China's foreign policy discussion. China's most stringent arguments against missile defense, for instance, are reserved for discussion of Taiwan's potential inclusion in any deployed missile defense systems. As stated in the 2005 White Paper, “China opposes the attempt by any country to provide help or protection to the Taiwan region of China in the field of missile defense by any means.” It is clear from China's most recent policy statements that the status of Taiwan—and the U.S. willingness to intervene if there were a conflict in the Taiwan Strait—remains a dangerous flashpoint

*What Lies Ahead—Cooperation or Conflict?*

While China's official policy on nonproliferation has come closer to internationally accepted norms, it is unlikely that Beijing will let Washington dictate its future direction. According to Beijing's official policy statements, China is a constructive member of the international community and is moving towards strengthening its nonproliferation policies. Whether or not Washington agrees with that assessment will not affect Beijing's expectation that its views—even when they conflict with those of the United States—should be given credence.

China and the United States appear to have a convergence of ideas on many issues in play in the nonproliferation arena. Both countries agree that WMD proliferation is destabilizing, and both want North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons aspirations. Washington and Beijing agree that international terrorism and the threat of WMD terrorism are serious problems. However, Washington and Beijing continue to disagree on how to approach many of these issues.

The question remains—what will the picture look like in another decade? Will Beijing's 2015 White Paper indicate a further convergence of ideas between China and the United States? Or will there be stagnation or regression in bilateral cooperation due to continued differing approaches?

Given the significant hurdles in U.S.-China relations vis-à-vis nonproliferation and international security that remain, progress is likely to be stymied, at least in the short term. Cooperation in the longer term will depend on how flexible both capitals are where the strategic needs and expectations of the other are concerned. If Washington's skeptics begin to interpret Beijing's activities as positive movement in the right direction, and not simply giving lip-service to certain ideas, a number of barriers to cooperation may be removed. In order for that to happen, however, Beijing must convince Washington both with word and deed that it is serious about its nonproliferation policies—including more transparency in how it deals with violations of its export control regulations.

When President Bush meets with President Hu Jintao in China on November 19<sup>th</sup>, they will have a number international security issues to discuss, in areas where mutual understanding has generally been achieved. They will be able to congratulate themselves on working together relatively constructively to keep alive the Six Party Talks, fighting international terrorism and creating a legally binding document—UNSCR 1540—that strengthens efforts to improve export controls internationally. However, whether there will be anything to add to that list of “successes” at their next meeting—or in other future meetings of their successors—remains unclear.

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<sup>1</sup> Joe McDonald, “U.S. Officials Conduct Security Demonstration for Chinese Nuclear Power Industry,” Associate Press, October 25, 2005; in Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, <<http://www.lexis-nexis.com>>.

<sup>2</sup> John Bolton, “Coordinating Allied Approaches to China,” Remarks Co-Sponsored by the Tokyo American Center and the Japan Institute for International Affairs (Tokyo, Japan), February 7, 2005, U.S. State Department website, <<http://www.state.gov/t/us/rm/41938.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> The history of China's arms control and nonproliferation policy is provided in greater detail in the *China WMD Database* on the Nuclear Threat Initiative website, <<http://www.nti.org/db/china/index.html>>.

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<sup>4</sup> This increase in sophistication in China's foreign policy is discussed in Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel "China's New Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2003, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/2003/6.html>>. According to Medeiros and Fravel: "China has begun to take a less confrontational, more sophisticated, more confident, and, at times, more constructive approach toward regional and global affairs," adding that "the Chinese foreign policy establishment has come to see the country as an emerging great power with varied interests and responsibilities—and not as the victimized developing nation of the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping eras."

<sup>5</sup> Always an emotive issue for China, abandoned CW—which has caused a number of deaths and injuries to Chinese civilians since Japan's retreat at the end of World War II—has in the past garnered strong language in official documents. As one example see "Some information on discovered chemical weapons abandoned in China by a foreign state," Working Paper by the Chinese Delegation to the Conference on Disarmament, 18 February 1992, <<http://www.nti.org/db/china/engdocs/cd0292.htm>>. As parties to the CWC, China and Japan are now required to negotiate the disposal of the abandoned CW. More recent statements by Chinese officials have expressed appreciation at the efforts Japan has made so far but still note Beijing's frustration with the slowness of the process. In a statement to the 2005 Conference of States Parties to the CWC, the head of the Chinese delegation stated that: "Some positive progress has been made in handling the Japanese ACW issue with the joint efforts of the two countries. However [...] the substantive destruction process has yet to start. China urges Japan to work harder and make all necessary preparations for their early destruction." See "Statement by Mr. Wang Qun, Head of Chinese Delegation, at the 10th Session of the Conference, of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention," National Statements, Tenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons website, November 7, 2005, <<http://www.opcw.org/docs/csp/csp10/en/china-en.pdf>>.