

China and Arms Control

2019 ISODARCO Winter School

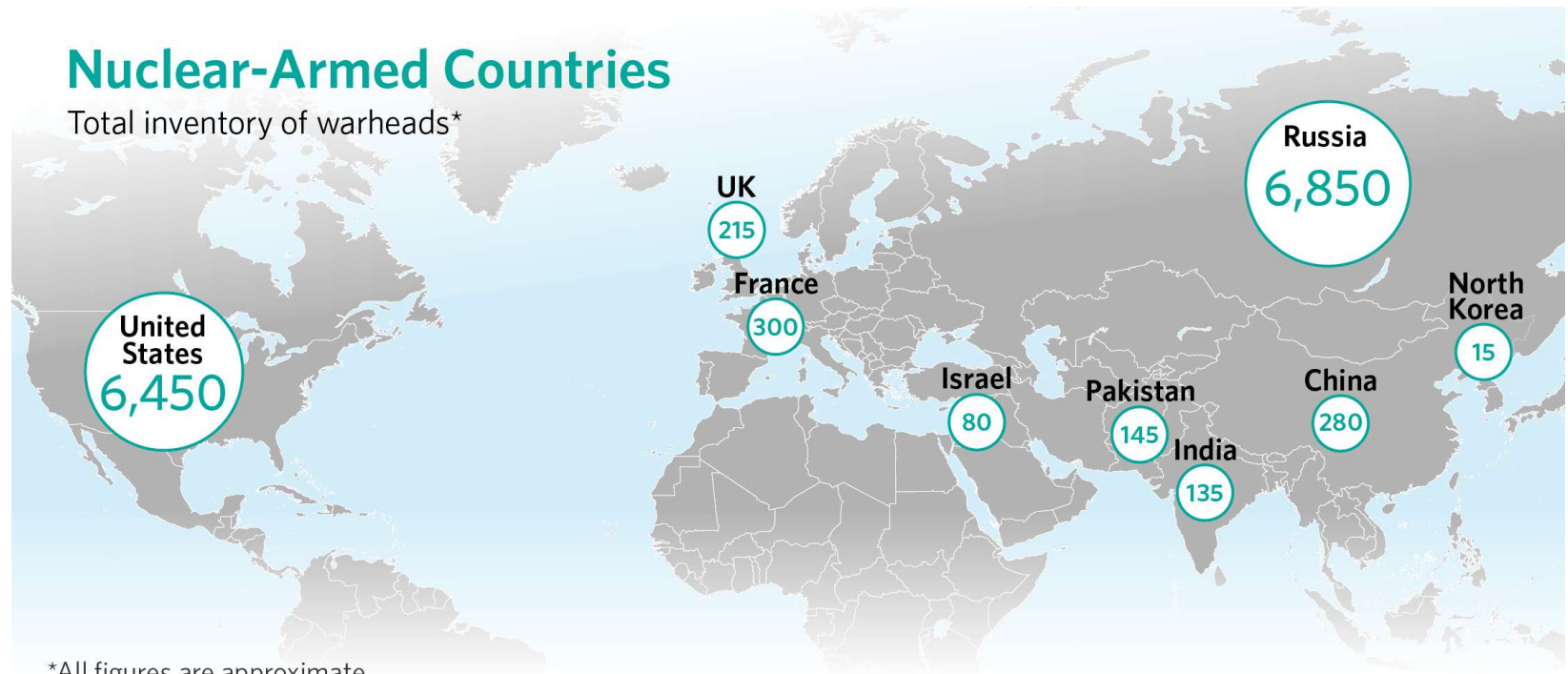
Tong ZHAO

Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy

zhaot2005@gmail.com

China and international arm control

- U.S.-Russia-
China
- China-
India-
Pakistan
- Korea
peninsula
- Japan, ROK,
Australia,
Southeast
Asia, West
Pacific



*All figures are approximate.

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2018.

Minimum nuclear deterrent

- Basic means of reprisal
- Strategic stability, mutual assured destruction (MAD)
- Credible deterrence based on a small arsenal:
 - Ambiguity: numerical & geographical
 - Protective measures



Nuclear modernization

- Mobile platforms
- Central objective: increase survivability, maintain MAD



Challenges with maintaining MAD

- Lack of consistent U.S. policy on mutual vulnerability
 - Obama; Trump
- Perceived U.S. interests in building counterforce capability
 - Accuracy; super-fuse for SLBMs; low-yield, low casualty nuclear weapons; better sensors.

Challenges with maintaining MAD

- Nuclear weapons used to be vulnerable only to nuclear attacks.
- New non-nuclear strategic military technologies:
 - Missile defense
 - Conventional precision strike weapons: hypersonic weapons
 - Unmanned and autonomous technologies
 - Cyber
 - Others

Missile defense

- Worst-case scenario thinking
- China:
 - ~60 ICBMs (DF-5A, DF-5B, DF-31A)
 - ~4 operational SSBNs (48 SLBMs)
- Even a small U.S. missile defense system can be perceived as a threat.
- Future development of U.S. missile defense
 - Multi-Object Kill Vehicle
 - Better distinguishing capability
- Shift of offense-defense balance
- Already driving nuclear investment
 - MIRV, SSBN

Political distrust

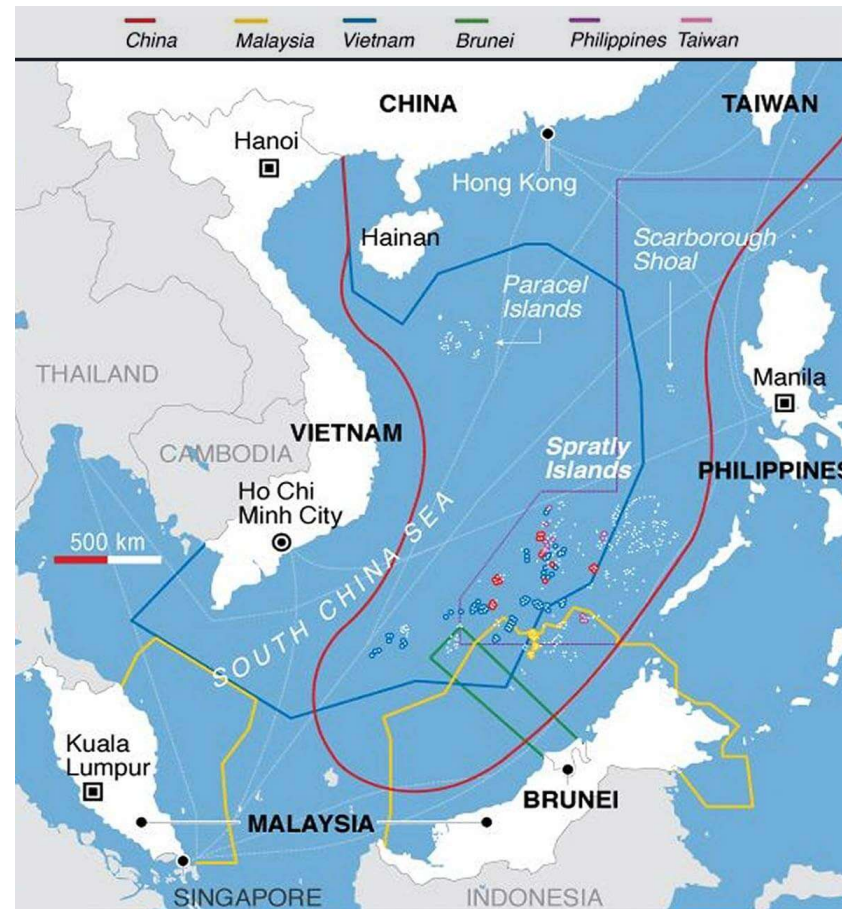
- THAAD dispute
 - Political distrust interacts with genuine technical disagreements
 - Chinese perception
 - U.S. perception
 - What shaped China's perception?
 - Radar, decoys
 - Lack of technical debate
 - Distrust → disagreement → distrust
- Future:
 - Greater strategic rivalry
 - Domestic check & balance

Challenges with maintaining MAD

- Extremely hard to reach common U.S.-China understandings on missile defense
 - How many more Chinese nukes are justifiable, due to the impact of U.S. missile defense?
- Equally or more difficult for other non-nuclear strategic technologies
 - Conventional precision weapons
 - Unmanned vehicles
 - Cyber
- A major challenge for nuclear stability in the future
 - No good solutions so far. More intense nuclear competition likely.

Efforts to maintain MAD and conventional arms race

- SSBN



Additional risks of nuclear modernization

- Preoccupation with building secure second-strike capabilities
 - Risks of crisis instability may not receive sufficient attention
- Following each other's example
 - MIRV
 - SSBN
 - Launch on Warning
 - Small yield tactical nukes
- Comingling, entanglement

Domestic factors

- Implication of U.S.-China strategic rivalry on domestic environment
 - Liberal voices
 - Understanding of nature of international relations
 - U.S. statements not helpful:
 - Peace through Strength
 - 2018 NPR: a strong nuclear force “ensur[es] that our diplomats continue to speak from a position of strength on matters of war and peace.”
 - Nuclear weapons translate into diplomatic leverage
 - Growing nationalistic view: nuclear weapons translate into international respect and status
 - South China Sea, Taiwan
 - Global Times: economic status; multiple editorials; impact on general public.
 - Equal negotiations require equal/similar capabilities

Domestic factors

- Implication of U.S.-China strategic rivalry on domestic environment
 - Top level attention
 - New leadership
 - Bureaucratic interests
 - China's self-perception about military modernization
 - History
 - Empathy, self-reflection, introspection

Promote arms control/contain arms race

- Systematic problem
 - Genuine belief: Others (the U.S.) are containing China. China needs stronger nuclear capability for defensive purposes
 - Domestic factors
- What can be done?
 - Change of perception is a long process
 - Starting with narrowing perception gap over each individual cases of dispute
 - THAAD
 - Shelving the disputes not helpful for the long run
 - Help China develop nuanced understandings of U.S. and others' policies and thinking
 - Missile defense as an example
 - Introduce domestic debates to Chinese experts
 - Entanglement: Conventional Trident Modification

Promote arms control/contain arms race

- Develop good understandings about China's policy and thinking
 - 2018 NPR, China subsection
- Develop common understandings about shared risks
 - Substantive, in-depth exchanges, simulations, table-top exercises.
 - Conventional-nuclear entanglement
 - Nuclear or dual-capable hypersonic missiles
 - Cyber on nuclear
 - AI on nuclear
 - Launch on warning
 - SSBN and conventional military conflicts
- For the long run, the hope to escape security dilemma rests with younger generations
 - Distrust is always a result of lack of nuanced understandings about each other.
 - Younger generations are better equipped to develop such nuanced understandings.
 - But also need deliberate efforts to:
 - Avoid superficial understandings; develop professional, nuanced understandings;
 - Cultivate the capacity of empathy and of conducting introspection/self-reflection;
 - Be open-minded, always prepared to learn new perspectives.
 - You can all make a great contribution to peace.