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## **CHINA WILL NOT JOIN GLOBAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT**

*Junichi Abe*

During the G8 Meeting of Foreign Ministers in June this year, Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone pointed a finger at China, saying it is the only country building up strategic nuclear weapons. To be sure, China deploys nuclear missiles that have Japan within their range, making the country a greater threat to Japan than North Korea in a way. Why is China proceeding with nuclear weapons modernization amid growing international pressure toward nuclear disarmament?

*The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.*

China's attitude toward nuclear weapons has been complex. While pretending to make slight of American atomic bombs by calling them "paper tigers," Mao Zedong was aware that China would need to arm itself with nuclear weapons in order to counter the American nuclear threat. Due to its rivalry with the Soviet Union, China had to develop nuclear weapons on its own, but managed to declare itself a nuclear state after successfully conducting its first nuclear test in October 1964. By that time, however, the nuclear capabilities of the US and the Soviet Union had reached a significant level, with the two countries possessing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) capable of launching SLBMs. China was despairingly lagging behind the US and the Soviet Union in terms of nuclear capability. China managed to acquire nuclear weapons amid economic hardship with the kind of determination shown by then Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi, who insisted that China should develop nuclear weapons at any cost, "even if the Chinese people have to pawn their trousers for this." Thus from the beginning, China has had no intention of becoming a nuclear power like the US and the Soviet Union and has modernized its nuclear capability at its own pace.


Sun Tzu said in *The Art of War*, "if you know both yourself and your enemy, you can win a hundred battles without a single loss." As if to take the reverse, China has the tendency to keep quantitative military data secret, including the total size of its conventional forces. This lack of transparency concerning the Chinese military is nothing new. The Chinese leadership may consider hiding information an effective way of presenting its small nuclear capability to the world. Among the five nuclear powers under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), only China's nuclear capability is veiled in secrecy. China has, of course, showcased some of its strategic nuclear missiles during its military parades, but has never revealed data concerning its nuclear weapons, such as the numbers of nuclear warheads and deployed missiles. This has contributed to errors in data collected by foreign countries concerning China's nuclear capability. Given the small degree of these errors, however, we may be able to take the international data as broadly correct.

If we take this information as given and look at China's nuclear capability, the number of China's nuclear warheads stands at around 200 -- the smallest arsenal among the five nuclear powers and essentially on the same level as that of Britain. China places overwhelming emphasis on ground-launched ballistic missiles in its nuclear force structure. It is assumed that SLBMs, to which the other nuclear nations attach growing importance, are not functioning as war potential, for no Xia-class nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching JL-1 SLBMs have been found on patrol duty. Two Jin-class nuclear submarines have been confirmed through photographs, but the JL-2 SLBMs to be launched by these new nuclear submarines are still under development and there has been no report confirming their launch tests. China does not possess air war potential categorized as strategic bombers, such as B52s, B1s and B2s.

Technologically, China's current nuclear capability remains at the level of the US in the first half of the 1960s. China's nuclear capability can be summarized as about 130 ballistic missiles deployed on the ground with each missile able to carry only one warhead, meaning that no multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) have been introduced. Furthermore, middle- and long-range ballistic missiles, such as DF-5 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), are liquid fuel rockets not suited to rapid reaction. In other words, China lags more than 40 years behind the US in modernizing its nuclear capability.

China has argued that it is the responsibility of the US and Russia to first reduce their nuclear arsenals, stating that China's nuclear force level is no match to those of the two largest nuclear powers. In July, US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev agreed to reduce their strategic nuclear stockpiles to between 1500 and 1675 warheads each as part of a new treaty to succeed START I. Even if the proposed reduction is realized, however, the nuclear capabilities of the US and Russia will remain far stronger than those of China.

Nevertheless, China would go along with the ideas and philosophy of Obama's proposal for a nuclear-free world, which were outlined in his April 5 speech in Prague, for China has continued to advocate for nuclear abolition. However, if nuclear abolition means all the nuclear states abolishing their

arsenals at the same rate, China would strongly oppose the idea. This is because, in a world without nuclear weapons, the US would maintain absolute supremacy with its overwhelming conventional forces. What is most important for China is to secure deterrent capability against the US. 

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