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Asia–Pacific Strategic Nuclear Policy Dialogues 2: Asia's Four Nuclear-Armed States

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Summary

Strategic nuclear policy dialogue with/between the Asia Pacific's four nuclear-armed states (China, India, Pakistan and North Korea) is under-developed. In recent years, overall dialogue has improved between the United States and China. Yet a dedicated strategic nuclear policy dialogue between the two is lacking. Meanwhile, efforts to launch dialogue between India and Pakistan have been unsuccessful, despite rising competition, which is in turn affecting India–China relations, where dialogue is also non-existent. Finally, and no less important, strategic nuclear policy dialogue with North Korea, which could in theory succeed where a denuclearization-first strategy has failed, remains an untested option. This paper reviews these efforts.

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1. What strategic nuclear policy dialogues (SNPD) are currently in place, developing or desired with/between the Asia–Pacific's four nuclear-armed states: China, India, Pakistan and North Korea? This is the focus of this paper, which is the second of two; the first paper reviewed the origins and evolution of SNPD as a process and examined the SNPD state of play between the United States and its Asian allies,[1] which is the regions' most developed.

2. This paper begins with an analysis of the dialogue situation between the United States and China as well as its potential for development. Next, it explores the South Asia dimension: not only what exists between India and Pakistan and how this could expand, but also the importance of and potential for establishing an India–China process. Finally, the paper closes by asking if it may be time to engage in SNPD with North Korea.

The United States and China

3. US president Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China ended nearly two and a half decades of separation between Washington and Beijing. It stood as the first step towards developing better relations between the two states, which had been at odds since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. After US President Jimmy Carter formally normalized relations with Beijing in late 1978, the stage was set for the launch of security talks and military-to-military contacts. The Chinese leadership responded positively and high level and working level contacts were quickly established and dialogue developed subsequently on a wide range of issues, including global and regional strategic problems.

4. Washington, however, suspended exchanges after the Chinese military suppressed the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 and, while they resumed in 1994, they have since remained on an on-again, off-again cycle, often suspended by Beijing (and sometimes Washington) to signal displeasure with the other's policy or behaviour.[2] A few crises have also occurred along the way, including over Taiwan in 1995–96, after a US aircraft bombed the

[1] David Santoro, "A Asia–Pacific Strategic Nuclear Policy Dialogues 1: The United States and Its Allies," APLN/CNND *Policy Brief* No. 26 (January 2017).

[2] See Phillip C. Saunders, "US–China military relations: competition and cooperation," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39 (Aug. 2016), pp. 662–84.

Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, and when a Chinese fighter collided with an American reconnaissance aircraft over Hainan Island in 2001, among others. Revelations that the 2001 US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) report had listed China as a state for which the United States needed to prepare nuclear targeting plans also prompted the Chinese to believe that Washington had adopted a pre-emptive nuclear strategy against them, beliefs that the 2003 US intervention in Iraq (without a clear mandate from the United Nations Security Council) only strengthened.

5. Still, the US–China relationship has remained overall cooperative and stable, especially since the beginning of the century (and despite Taiwan remaining a volatile issue). While they have not come anywhere close to becoming allies, the United States and China have not become enemies either. They have remained committed to developing good relations despite the existence of competitive interests and even potential military flashpoints requiring them to maintain mutual deterrence. In that sense, it has been a relationship fundamentally different from the one between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

6. As a result, regular and substantive dialogue developed rapidly between Washington and Beijing. In 2004, Presidents George W. Bush and Hu Jintao established a framework for bilateral cooperation on issues of mutual concern through the US–China "Senior Dialogue," also known the US–China Strategic Dialogue, and then launched the US–China Strategic Economic Dialogue in 2006 to discuss topics related to economic relations. Presidents Barack Obama and Hu Jintao upgraded these processes, replacing them in 2009 by the US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue.[3] With both a "strategic track" and an "economic track," this new dialogue has provided a high level forum for bilateral engagement on broad, crosscutting strategic and economic issues, such as nuclear proliferation, humanitarian crises, climate change, or the economic crisis. While producing concrete agreements in several key areas, the Strategic and Economic Dialogue's most notable achievement has been facilitating the development of closer relationships between high level US and Chinese officials.[4]

7. The Strategic and Economic Dialogue has also led to the establishment of several other bilateral sub-dialogues, including on political-military affairs. In 2011, for instance, Washington and Beijing launched the US–China Strategic Security Dialogue, which sits under the Strategic and Economic Dialogue's strategic track and is the first bilateral civilian-military dialogue. Created to address the slow progress of military-to-military relations and growing US concerns about the lack of coordination between civilian and military personnel in the Chinese system, the Strategic Security Dialogue addresses numerous issues, including aspects of strategic nuclear policy. To this day, however, there is no robust SNPD between the United States and China, let alone a dedicated dialogue for it.

8. The problem is that in recent years, and as mentioned earlier, China has been modernizing its strategic force, diversifying its delivery systems and increasing the number of nuclear weapons, especially those weapons capable of striking the US homeland. Beijing has also been improving its capacity for power projection into neighbouring waters and in the space and cyber domains, becoming increasingly capable of holding US forward military presence and US allies at risk.[5] The Chinese leadership argues that these developments are purely defensive, that China has and always has had only a "self-defence nuclear strategy," and that nuclear modernization is solely aimed at maintaining a "lean and effective" force in the context of improving US missile defence and conventional strike capabilities and, more recently, the US rebalance to Asia, which it regards as directed against China and as an attempt to maintain US military hegemony.[6] Beijing stresses that, unlike in the United States and Russia, its tradition of minimum deterrence is deeply ingrained and that it does not want to be drawn

[3] For more on the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, see https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tpp/bta/sed/

[4] Bonnie S. Glaser, "The Diplomatic Relationship: Substance and Process" in David Shambaugh (ed.), *Tangled Titans: The United States and China* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p. 158.

[5] Annual Report to Congress, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington DC: DOD, 2016).

[6] References to China's "self-defence nuclear strategy" and "lean and effective" deterrent, now used in numerous official documents, first appeared in the 2006 Defence White Paper. See Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, *China's National Defence in 2006*.

into a nuclear arms race.[7] Beijing is also quick to add that the best evidence of the exclusively defensive and non-provocative nature of its deterrent is its longstanding no-first-use (NFU) doctrine.[8]

9. Yet in addition to doubting the strength (even the veracity) of its NFU doctrine, the United States is concerned that China may decide to abandon its practice of minimum deterrence and instead develop more than just a "lean" strategic force. Along with Moscow, Washington worries that Beijing may want to build up its nuclear arsenal quickly to reach parity with them, especially as they are building down their own arsenals via arms control agreements.[9] These worries are magnified by China's continued lack of transparency about the current and future size and shape of its forces, especially in the context of sweeping reforms of the People's Liberation Army meant to transform it, per Chinese officials, into a "much more capable fighting force."[10] They are also deeply heightened by China's recent growing assertiveness in the East and South China Seas and apparent willingness to engage in more active role on the international stage.

10. Accordingly, to better understand Chinese nuclear and broader military developments, policies, and posture as well as address China's concerns about the United States, Washington has actively sought SNPD with Beijing. Chinese officials, however, have consistently rejected it.[11] They declined a US invitation to express their views during the drafting process of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review as well as repeated US invitations to engage in SNPD, even as military-to-military relations have become more sustained and security cooperation more comprehensive. The commitment made by Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping at the 2013 Sunnylands Summit in California to forge a "new model of major country relations" between the United States and China set a positive tone for the bilateral relationship but, to the displeasure of US officials, failed to help establish SNPD.[12]

11. US officials regard SNPD with Beijing as an opportunity to jointly define strategic stability, enhance mutual reassurance and eventually get to some form of arms control agreement. Chinese officials, for their part, contend that the conditions are not ripe for SNPD because the US arsenal is still much larger than China's and because the United States is investing in missile defence and conventional strike capabilities that are tipping the strategic balance in its favour. They also believe that they stand to lose in engaging in SNPD because they would be required to accept a level of transparency that would compromise the survivability of their strategic force and, therefore, undermine their ability to deter Washington.

12. Beijing has sought reassurance from Washington, however. In particular, it has encouraged the United States to adopt an NFU doctrine and to accept mutual vulnerability as the basis of the US–China strategic relationship, as is the case in the US–Russia model (and the US–Soviet model during the Cold War). Yet, so far, the United States has refused to make any policy changes of that sort. It has chosen to remain out of the NFU business and has neither formally accepted nor formally rejected mutual vulnerability with China. Because US–China relations have become so complex (much more than US–Soviet relations during the Cold War), Washington believes that policy changes can only be the consequence of in-depth bilateral SNPD, dialogue that takes into account the interplay between nuclear and non-nuclear offensive capabilities, defensive weapons, new forms of competition in the space and cyber domains, as well as the broader conventional force balances between the United States, China and other regional powers, notably US allies. Significantly, Washington's refusal to change policy is matched by its refusal to adapt its military posture vis-à-vis China. This reflects the fact that, from a US perspective, Chinese nuclear modernization, insofar as it is

[7] See Fan Jishe, "China's Nuclear Policy: Change and Continuity," APLN/CNND *Policy Brief* No. 23 (November 2016).

[8] China was the first state to pledge an NFU doctrine, which it made the day it exploded its first nuclear device on 16 October 1964, stating that it "will never be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances." See: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18055.shtml

[9] See Michael O. Wheeler, *Nuclear Parity with China?* (Washington DC: IDA, 2012).

[10] Ralph A. Cossa, Brad Glosserman and David Santoro, "Reaching an Inflexion Point? The Tenth China-US Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Dynamics," *Issues & Insights*, vol. 16, no. 20, Dec. 2016, p. 3.

[11] US attempts to establish SNPD with China began in the 1990s. All have been in vain. The commitment to a nuclear dialogue made at the 2006 Bush–Hu Summit was weakly implemented and quickly abandoned.

[12] "Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China After Bilateral Meeting," Sunnylands Retreat, Rancho Mirage, California, 8 June 2013.

understood, has not generated new strategic requirements, so far.

13. Is the current situation sustainable? In Washington, patience is increasingly giving way to scepticism that SNPD with Beijing will ever start. This is because no progress has been made despite repeated attempts and, significantly, the development of strong, foundational work at the track-2 and 1.5 levels, including the drafting of a joint glossary on nuclear terms and concepts, a solid dialogue process of ten years (co-hosted by the Pacific Forum CSIS and the China Foundation for International & Strategic Studies), and an increasing number of joint studies by US and Chinese scholars. As the United States is gearing up to make important decisions about the modernization of its arsenal in the context of rising nuclear dangers, including sabre rattling by both Russia and North Korea, it may well decide to abandon hopes of engagement with China and adapt its policy and posture as it sees fit. This would be an unfortunate development because one of the key components of what both sides recognize to be the most important bilateral relationship of the twenty-first century should be SNPD.

The South Asia Dimension

14. There are two principal strategic nuclear dynamics at play in South Asia: one between the sub-region's main actors, India and Pakistan, and one emanating mostly from that very dynamic, between India and China. As long-standing adversaries, India and Pakistan are in a deterrence relationship because they both envisage a war with the other. Yet, in addition to worrying about a war with Pakistan, India worries about a war with China. Because the strategic competition between India and Pakistan is driving India to build up its arsenal, China, too, has come to worry increasingly about a war with India, at the same time as it worries about a war with the United States (and Russia). Accordingly, when analysing SNPD in South Asia, or the lack thereof, it is important to examine both the India–Pakistan and India–China strategic nuclear dynamics, and the triangular dimensions of the two bilateral relationships.

India and Pakistan

15. Relations between India and Pakistan have been defined by the violent partition of British India in 1947 and subsequent wars, military conflicts, armed skirmishes and even periodic terrorist attacks, notably over Jammu and Kashmir. Significantly, in addition to the 1947 war, India and Pakistan fought two other major wars: one in 1965 over Jammu and Kashmir and one in 1971, which resulted in the secession of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). While numerous attempts have been made to improve bilateral relations, New Delhi and Islamabad have remained at odds with each other during most of their history.

16. After they exploded nuclear devices in 1998 and moved forward with the development of nuclear arsenals despite international pressure (and sanctions) urging them to disarm and join the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), India and Pakistan made efforts to establish bilateral SNPD to stabilize their relations.[13] While it was soon followed by an intense armed conflict in the Kargil district of Kashmir and surrounding areas that brought progress to a halt, the conclusion of the Lahore Declaration and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in early 1999 had initially generated much hope for the establishment of a framework not only for confidence building measures (CBMs) and arms control, but also for conflict resolution. A result of the famous summit between Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (which was the culmination of an eight month negotiation process), these documents included a pledge by each side to "take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental and unauthorized use of nuclear weapons and discuss concepts and doctrines with a view to elaborating measures for confidence-building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at prevention of conflict." They also called on New Delhi and Islamabad to commit to finding a peaceful resolution to the issue of Jammu and Kashmir and to intensify their composite and integrated dialogue processes to address other outstanding peace and security issues. While they were much more comprehensive, these documents were not the first ones to address nuclear issues. New Delhi and Islamabad had concluded their first bilateral nuclear treaty in 1988, the "Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities," signal of an early understanding in both capitals that it was

[13] India's first nuclear explosion had taken place 24 years earlier, in 1974. Note also that India and Pakistan (and Israel) are the only three states that never joined the NPT.

paramount to take seriously, discuss and manage nuclear-related matters.[14]

17. Implementation of the Lahore Declaration and MOU proved unsuccessful, however.[15] It failed not just because the Kargil War broke out soon after, but also (and mostly) because India and Pakistan did not find common grounds on ways to implement CBMs and arms control. Because its fundamental problem was India's conventional superiority, Pakistan proposed a strategic restraint regime, which emphasized the principle of nuclear *and* conventional restraint. This was unacceptable to India, which refused constraints on its conventional supremacy. Similarly, Pakistan rejected Indian requests seeking to limit its nuclear weapons development. India's proposal for a minimum nuclear deterrence posture, which included, among other things, the segregation of delivery systems from warhead locations and, later, a bilateral NFU pledge, was not practical for Pakistan, which relied heavily on nuclear weapons to offset the Indian conventional edge.

18. This resulted in derailment of the whole process, which subsequent negotiation attempts, notably the 2001 Agra Summit process, could not revive. To be fair, India and Pakistan did find agreements on several important CBMs in the years that followed. For instance, they established a hotline between the two foreign secretaries in 2004 (to complement the hotline between the director-generals of military operations that they had concluded in 1971) and signed, among others, an "Agreement on Pre-Notification of Flight Testing of Ballistic Missiles" in 2005 and an "Agreement on Reducing the Risk from Accidents relating to Nuclear Weapons" in 2007.

19. Little, however, has been done to discuss, control and reduce strategic competition between India and Pakistan, which has intensified in recent years. Pakistan has been rapidly building up its nuclear arsenal to offset India's conventional superiority (and counter its growing nuclear capability, especially since the conclusion of the 2005 US–India civil nuclear agreement).[16] India, as a result, has been increasingly concerned that the Pakistani nuclear arsenal will allow Islamabad to engage in conventional or sub-conventional warfare without fear of reprisal, as was allegedly the case in the 2001 attacks on the Indian Parliament and the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly and in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. In response, New Delhi has adopted a "Cold Start" doctrine, according to which the Indian military would mobilize quickly and undertake rapid and limited retaliatory attacks on its neighbour without crossing its nuclear threshold, in an attempt to terminate the hostilities.[17] While Indian officials have since distanced themselves from Cold Start (but without denying its existence), it has loomed large in Pakistani strategic thinking, driving Islamabad to develop tactical nuclear weapons for use as "super-artillery" options against Indian military advances.[18] This, in turn, has led some Indian (and American) strategists to advocate the development by India of its own tactical nuclear weapons to counter Pakistan's.[19] An arms race between India and Pakistan, in other words, has been in the offing, with the very real potential for escalation to the nuclear level soon after the first shots are fired.

20. What is the way forward in these circumstances? Experts disagree. Some call for the establishment of a more structured and institutionalized SNPD to build upon the CBM process, which has had only limited success, notably when it comes to addressing nuclear, conventional and sub-conventional issues and the interrelationship between them.[20] Others argue that it is best to just improve the CBM process incrementally, where progress is still possible in numerous areas. As Toby Dalton opines, "if progress can't be made in nuclear and conventional CBMs singularly, because of the interrelationships between them, is there a strategic framework for [a] dialogue that might work? Larger dialogue structures have a habit of collapsing under their own weight."[21] In an earlier paper reviewing and analysing Indian and

[14] In 1978, Pakistan had made a proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia, for which negotiations were never begun.

[15] To implement the Lahore Declaration and MOU, India and Pakistan triangulated bilateral dialogues with the United States as the third party player. Washington, therefore, played a role in that process.

[16] See Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Pakistani Nuclear Forces, 2016," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72:6 (2016), pp. 368–76.

[17] See Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32:3 (2007/08), pp. 158–90.

[18] See Toby Dalton and Michael Krepon, *A Normal Nuclear Pakistan* (Washington, DC: CEIP, Stimson Center, 2015).

[19] See Toby Dalton and George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Options and Escalation Dominance* (Washington, DC: CEIP, 2016).

[20] Tanvi Kulkarni, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: A New Approach," *South Asian Voices*, 19 May 2016.

[21] Toby Dalton, "What's the Future of CBMs in South Asia?" *South Asian Voices*, 26 May 2016.

Pakistani efforts to advance CBM and stability, Dalton had detailed an approach "based on a mix of small increments complemented by big, symbolic leaps that can establish a new baseline for relations."[22]

21. A middle-way alternative, which would initiate a baby step towards SNPD, may be for Indian and Pakistani officials to draft a joint lexicon on key nuclear and other significant terms and concepts, as US and Chinese officials have done. Some South Asian experts have suggested it, but of as now it has yet to receive political backing on either side and, therefore, may have to begin at the track-2 or 1.5 levels.[23] Meanwhile, strategic competition between India and Pakistan will likely continue uninterrupted, increasing the odds not only of conflict getting out of hand, but also of spill-over effects into other strategic nuclear dynamics, notably via China.

India and China

22. Until recently, the conventional wisdom was that spill-over effects from the India–Pakistan strategic competition into the India–China strategic dynamic with, in turn, knock-on impacts on China–US–Russia strategic interactions, were unlikely because of a significant convergence in nuclear policy, strategy and posture between India and China (and because the US strategic nuclear relationship with India is benign).[24] Both India and China, after all, have an explicit NFU doctrine as well as strategies calling for a minimalist approach to nuclear deterrence. Both keep their nuclear arsenals at a low alert level with warheads and missiles stored separately. Both also have made negative security assurances to non-nuclear weapon states, pledging that they will never threaten to use nuclear weapons against them. Moreover, both India and China have had the same longstanding position in support of nuclear disarmament.

23. In recent years, however, partly in the context of its increasingly intense strategic competition with Pakistan, India has made impressive progress towards the development of a sophisticated nuclear arsenal.[25] It has developed long-range, land-based missiles that can reach most parts of China. After obtaining an indigenous sea-based nuclear capability, which it is now on the verge of deploying, India will possess a full nuclear triad: land-based ballistic missiles, bombers and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. These developments, along with Chinese nuclear modernization, are de facto transforming India–China strategic relations, which, despite converging in numerous areas, have the potential to become much more competitive and indirectly impact on other strategic nuclear dynamics.

24. Yet, despite these developments, there is no SNPD between India and China. Beijing has been resisting it because it is concerned that it would imply either Chinese approval of India's possession of nuclear weapons, which New Delhi developed outside the parameters of the NPT, or give a tacit acknowledgement of India's nuclear-armed status. Beijing also worries that opening an SNPD with New Delhi would raise red flags in Pakistan, with which it has close relations. As a result, India and China do not discuss strategic nuclear policy at the official level and, to this day, exchanges at the track-2 and 1.5 levels have also been almost non-existent.

25. This is unfortunate because India's possession of nuclear weapons and efforts to improve its arsenal are realities that are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Moreover, it is possible for Beijing to engage in SNPD with New Delhi without violating non-proliferation rules and norms. Acquiescing to India's nuclear-armed status, which many other states, including the United States, have done openly, does not have to equate to legitimizing it or abandoning all hopes that it should disarm; Washington still officially calls on India (and Pakistan) to join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon states, for instance. SNPD with New Delhi also does not have to raise concerns in Islamabad: Beijing could do so while keeping it fully informed (and possibly even acting as a bridge in its relations with New Delhi). Given the sensitivities, however, it would be preferable to begin with a track-2 or 1.5 SNPD and build solid foundations before official dialogue can happen.

[22] Toby Dalton, *Beyond Incrementalism: Rethinking Approaches to CBMs and Stability in South Asia* (Washington DC: Stimson Center and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013).

[23] Kulkarni, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs."

[24] Lora Saalman (ed.), *The China–India Nuclear Crossroads* (Washington,DC: CEIP, 2012), pp. 171–90.

[25] See Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Indian Nuclear Forces, 2015," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 71:5 (2015), pp. 77–83.

26. There are numerous upsides to an India–China SNPD.[26] For one thing, it would help New Delhi and Beijing improve mutual understanding of the other's nuclear policy, strategy, posture and, especially, modernization goals, which neither side fully grasps. This, if anything, would stand as an important first step to maintain and hopefully strengthen bilateral stability. Other possible developments could include checking the use of nuclear weapons. For instance, to complement their NFU doctrine, New Delhi and Beijing could sign a mutual pledge not to use nuclear weapons against each other. As India and Pakistan have done in 1988, they could announce that neither would attack the other's nuclear facilities. They could also work to identify what could inadvertently trigger nuclear conflict between them and work on developing CBMs or crisis-management mechanisms to address key issues. Finally, and no less important, New Delhi and Beijing could use the SNPD platform to discuss the broader regional nuclear order, including non-proliferation, nuclear energy and nuclear safety and security issues.

North Korea?

27. Should SNPD be considered with Pyongyang? The question is puzzling because, when it comes to the North Korean nuclear conundrum, the goal has always been denuclearization. Yet the ad hoc negotiation framework working towards this goal, known as the Six Party Talks (which include China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the United States), has failed to produce results and its members have not met since 2008. All other attempts to get Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons program, be it through various forms of inducements, threats, sanctions or even the US approach of "strategic patience" (which assumed that it was possible to wait for North Korea to decide to denuclearize), have not been successful either. In much the same way as India and Pakistan a few years ago, North Korea is now well on its way to become a de facto nuclear-armed state, a status which North Korean authorities have even already enshrined in their constitution.

28. Looking to the future, the danger is that Pyongyang may be tempted by greater adventurism against its neighbours, thinking that its increasingly sophisticated nuclear arsenal will provide a shield against retaliation.[27] There are already signs that Pyongyang may have drawn these conclusions. For instance, it sank a South Korean corvette and shelled Yeonpyeong Island in March and November 2010, and threatened to conduct a pre-emptive nuclear strike against South Korea and the United States in March 2013.

29. Is it time, as a consequence, for the United States and its regional allies (perhaps also China) to initiate SNPD with Pyongyang in an attempt to improve mutual understanding on nuclear policy, strategy and posture, and, down the line, agree either on some form of CBMs or arms control? The few experts who have made this suggestion have been shunned. Their detractors have argued that doing so would "give North Koreans exactly what they want." In other words, it would mean recognizing North Korea as a nuclear-armed state and legitimizing that status, even though Pyongyang developed its arsenal in overt defiance of non-proliferation rules and norms.

30. These criticisms are short sighted. The United States and its allies engaging in SNPD with North Korea do not have to be any more problematic than China doing so with India. True, there is an important difference between India and North Korea: India never joined the NPT and was therefore never bound by its provisions (as is the case of Pakistan and Israel), whereas North Korea was an NPT state party, violated the treaty and then decided to withdraw from it in 2003. This legal difference, however, does not change the fact that both have now become (or will soon become) nuclear-armed states and that this reality cannot and should not be ignored. More importantly, as in the case of an India–China process, agreeing to SNPD with North Korea does not have to mean approval or legitimization of its nuclear and missile development efforts. It would just acquiesce to the reality of an increasingly substantial and sophisticated North Korean nuclear arsenal and seek ways to better understand and constrain it until disarmament becomes possible. CBMs and arms control, after all, are not (or do not have to be) mutually exclusive with disarmament. In this spirit, Van Jackson, who has recently recommended an arms control approach to North Korea, stresses that "Talking about capping, freezing, or

[26] For a comprehensive case, see Tong Zhao, "The Time is Ripe for a China–India Nuclear Dialogue," *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, 17 March 2016.

[27] See Shane Smith, *North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy* (Washington, DC: US–Korea Institute at SAIS, 2015).

otherwise constraining North Korea's nuclear and missile development no more recognizes North Korea's nuclear 'status' than entering into talks with North Korea to denuclearize it."[28]

31. Given the sensitivities, however, it would be preferable to begin by testing the waters at the track-2 or 1.5 levels, to build foundations and momentum, which, if successful, could be handed over to the official tracks. This approach, of course, would in no way guarantee a final and decisive solution to the North Korean nuclear problem. After all, at a recent US–North Korea track-2 dialogue (broader in scope than just the nuclear question), a senior North Korean participant stressed that his country would retain its nuclear arsenal "as long as the United States has one nuclear weapon!"[29] SNPD, however, has the potential to succeed where the denuclearization-first strategy has failed by improving understanding of North Korea's nuclear and missile arsenal and beginning to set limits to it, thereby reducing dangers in the event of crises, which, as mentioned earlier, may well become more common and more intense in the not-too-distant future.

Conclusions

32. SNPD with/between the Asia–Pacific's four nuclear-armed states is lacking or, at the very least, under-developed. Strategic dialogue has improved considerably between the United States and China, but despite the development of solid foundations at the track-2 and 1.5 levels, an official, dedicated bilateral SNPD has not begun and the window of opportunity for its launch may soon be closing. The situation is worse in South Asia, where attempts at starting SNPD between India and Pakistan have failed and are now virtually non-existent, despite rising competition between them. That competition is also beginning to impact on the India–China strategic dynamic, which, in turn, has the potential to impact on China–US–Russia interactions. While SNPD between India and China could help address these issues, this process has yet to be launched. Similarly, establishing an SNPD with North Korea could, in theory, help make headway to address the nuclear question, which has gone from bad to worse under a denuclearization-first strategy. Yet many are yet to be convinced that it is a good idea.

[28] Van Jackson, "Breaking the North Korea Arms Control Taboo," *The Diplomat*, 2 Dec. 2015.
[29] Confidential source.

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