



Chinese Perspectives on Arms Control and Strategic Stability in Emerging Technologies

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TIANJIAO JIANG



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Please direct inquiries to:
Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)
Secretariat 4th floor, 116, Pirundae-ro,
Jongno-gu, Seoul, ROK, 03035
Tel. +82-2-2135-2170
Fax. +82-70-4015-0708
Email. apln@apln.network

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CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON ARMS CONTROL AND STRATEGIC STABILITY IN EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Tianjiao Jiang

China's strategic community remains concerned about the cross-domain entanglement of emerging technologies, believing that this situation creates new national and international security risks. On November 27, 2025, China released a [white paper](#) titled "China's Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation in the New Era," which for the first time dedicated a chapter to outlining its international security governance propositions in emerging fields such as outer space, cyberspace, and artificial intelligence. This demonstrates that China will adopt a more proactive stance on arms control issues related to emerging technologies. However, the white paper also points out that the continuous improvement of missile defense technology and the rapid development of military applications in emerging fields such as outer space, cyberspace, and artificial intelligence are changing the traditional strategic offensive and defensive landscape and bringing new shocks to global strategic stability. In Beijing's view, it is not the emerging technologies themselves, but rather the unilateralism of specific countries that exacerbate security threats.

ON THE ISSUE OF SPACE ENTANGLEMENT

Space systems are crucial for strategic deterrence, enhancing command, control, communications, and intelligence. Space technology also maintains strategic stability by increasing transparency.

However, the imbalance of space power and the disorder of rules also bring instability. In the white paper, China explicitly raises four objections to the weaponization of space. One of the biggest concerns is the rapid development of mega-constellations like Starlink. These commercial satellite constellations blur the lines between military and civilian use, and lack clear international rules to constrain them. In times of crisis, Starlink could be rapidly militarised, providing communications and intelligence capabilities, thereby altering the military balance. Numerous examples have emerged in the [previous Ukraine war](#) and the [protests in Iran last year](#). Therefore, the white paper explicitly opposes "the use of commercial satellites to intervene in armed conflicts in other countries and to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries." More importantly, Elon Musk could decide to provide Starlink services to Ukraine or cease related services based on personal preferences or corporate interests, and such decisions would have serious geopolitical consequences. This poses a fundamental challenge to digital sovereignty.

Starlink enhances the resilience of the US space system through its distributed architecture, but it could make China's space assets vulnerable. [Starlink plans to launch 40,000 satellites](#), while China currently has fewer than 1,000 in orbit. [China's space station has been repeatedly approached by Starlink](#) without its true intentions being known. Even just by collision, Starlink could potentially destroy a large portion of China's space assets.

This is further compounded by the Trump administration's Golden Dome project. Starlink could be equipped with interceptors or possess non-kinetic attack capabilities such as lasers, microwaves, and electronic jamming. Non-kinetic attacks are particularly dangerous due to their reversible effects and the difficulty in attribution, and could be used as "probing attacks" during crises, increasing the risk of miscalculation and escalation of conflict.

ON THE ISSUE OF CYBER ENTANGLEMENT

As early as 2021, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace jointly released a [report](#) entitled "China-U.S. Cyber-Nuclear C3 Stability." The Chinese strategic community believes that cyberattacks bring challenges in attribution and uncertainty, leading to miscalculations and escalation of conflict during crises. Therefore, the US-China Track II dialogue called for attention to the risks of cyber and nuclear entanglement, but its points were not reflected in US-China policy outcomes. With the rapid development of Starlink, satellite internet has now integrated space and cyberspace. This has increasingly blurred the boundaries between space security and cybersecurity. Nuclear command and control systems could be compromised due to cyberattacks on satellites or ground stations.

Furthermore, mutual trust between China and the United States in the field of cybersecurity is very low, with frequent accusations of cyberattacks against each other. Recent examples include the [US allegations](#) of China launching the so-called multiple "Typhoon" cyberattack campaigns. In October 2025, China's Ministry of State Security [stated](#) that it possessed evidence of long-term NSA attacks on the China National Time Service Center since 2022, thus posing a significant negative impact on strategic stability. Meanwhile, China's strategic community has long expressed concern about [persistent engagement](#) and [hunt-forward](#) cyber operations by the US, believing these initiatives could be deployed for broader cyberattacks against China. This concern is also linked to the "left-of-launch" strategy that the United States has pursued for years. It aims to disrupt, disable or destroy enemy missiles before they are fired through electronic incapacitation of missile systems or cutting off command and control systems by cyber operations and electromagnetic warfare.

ON THE ENTANGLEMENT PROBLEM BROUGHT ABOUT BY AI

Adding AI to discussions of space, cyberspace, and nuclear entanglement complicates matters further. For example, a recent [Anthropic report](#) shows that traditional cybersecurity architectures are completely inadequate to handle cyberattacks by AI agents. In fact, we don't really understand what kind of disruptive impact AI agents will bring.

Chinese strategic circles believe that AI is a double-edged sword for strategic stability. On the one hand, AI technology can improve NC3's reaction speed, enhance situational awareness, and increase system resilience. On the other hand, AI brings the challenges of information overload and time pressure during crises. Cyberattacks and disinformation can make it difficult for decision-makers to distinguish truth from falsehood. AI-driven data analysis systems can help process massive amounts of information, but they can also become targets for data poisoning and [reward hacking](#), leading to misunderstandings and escalations.

The rapid development of AI technology itself, along with issues such as [algorithmic black boxes](#), [alignment issues](#), [synthetic data problems](#), and [the scheming, self-replication](#), and [agent drift](#) of frontier models, could all potentially trigger inadvertent or deliberate escalations of conflict. According to a recent [study](#) published by King's College London, advanced AI models tended to choose the use of nuclear weapons in 95% of simulated geopolitical crises. This has raised widespread concerns about the future role of AI in military decision-making.

Several China-US and China-Europe Track II dialogues are actively discussing these scenarios and exploring how to further deepen and broaden the commitment made by the top leaders of China and the United States to keep nuclear weapons under human control.

A nuclear crisis triggered by AI could be an extremely pressing and catastrophic security risk. Chinese and American experts should work together to send a message to both Beijing and Washington that the AI-nuclear issue needs to be a priority in bilateral relations, and that multi-layered safeguards against AI-induced crises are sorely needed. To that end, the following policies should be considered.

US-CHINA POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The leaders of China and the United States should **reaffirm the principle of keeping nuclear weapons under human control**. The aim of this agreement is to prevent other people or machines from making unauthorised decisions, thereby securing national leadership's absolute control of nuclear weapons. Simultaneously, both sides should **resume strategic stability dialogues** as soon as possible, incorporating this important topic, identifying risk scenarios that

could lead to loss of control (including frontier models, AI agents, and third-party interference), and conducting exchanges and discussions at all levels regarding the respective definitions and understandings of, and measures for, maintaining "human control".

2. Washington and Beijing should explore **commitments on refraining from attacking each other's AI systems within NC3**. This would include refraining from data poisoning and cyberattacks on related systems. Given that NC3 network nodes may be highly distributed and contain numerous civilian, dual-capable or dual-use systems, both sides should explore how to differentiate and avoid attacking dual-use nodes that could lead to misunderstandings.
3. Both sides should explore **banning unmanned platforms from carrying nuclear weapons**. This can be a gradual process. First, China and the United States should commit to non-deployment of such weapon systems in disputed areas and hotspots (including the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea). Second, consultations with other stakeholders should be held to further expand the ban to a global scope. Finally, an international treaty banning autonomous delivery vehicles carrying nuclear weapons should be discussed step by step.
4. Establish a **crisis management mechanism for emergencies involving unmanned equipment and space assets**, and clarify protocols for handling such situations, potentially along the lines of ICAO accident investigation procedures). New hotlines (such as [CATALINK](#)) should be instituted for extreme situations (such as nuclear strikes, or key power and communications infrastructure being paralysed due to cyberattacks or AI interference) to prevent conflicts from spiraling out of control.
5. **Dialogue regarding strategic stability and nuclear posture** remains indispensable. As human control extends beyond technology and institutions, how people perceive each other's advantages and disadvantages in AI empowerment (overestimating or underestimating) is crucial. The cognitive traps regarding AI will exacerbate the risk of loss of control and conflict. For example, some experts believe that the AI technological revolution leads to offensive dominance, enabling rapid decapitation strikes that paralyze all retaliatory capabilities. Thus, preemptive strikes guarantee victory, while reactive strikes lead to defeat. Could both sides accept this way of thinking? Some Chinese experts believe that NFU can significantly reduce the complexity of NC3 and alleviate time pressure, helping to address the risks of artificial intelligence and nuclear conflict at their root. As long as an actor's second-strike capability remains reliable, classic nuclear deterrence theory will continue to play a significant role. This will prevent actions that could trigger escalation due to concerns about the impact of emerging technologies. Both sides should stabilise strategic expectations through dialogue on these topics.

6. In addition to keeping humans in the loop, **insurance mechanisms like nuclear fail-safe are still key.** Both sides should strengthen nuclear safety and security review through unilateral measures. They should also share experiences and best practices on measures that can be openly discussed. To ensure the safety and reliability of artificial intelligence applications, measures that have been repeatedly discussed in conventional fields, such as ensuring algorithm transparency and interpretability, improving system resilience, testing and evaluation of AI weapon systems, building parallel systems to avoid single points of failure, and kill switches, should also be given attention and discussed bilaterally.
7. China and the United States should also **jointly engage in dialogue and exchanges with other nuclear-weapon states, providing training and technical support in order to prevent an AI-nuclear crisis.** While a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly, Security Council or the N5 (the five legal nuclear-weapon states) would be politically significant, it also faces geopolitical challenges. In contrast, China and the United States can leverage their respective diplomatic channels to engage with other de facto nuclear-weapon states. For example, China could engage in dialogue with Pakistan, and the United States with India (and possibly with North Korea and Israel). These countries do not fall under the NPT framework and do not accept IAEA safeguards, but they all possess nuclear weapons and are vigorously developing related artificial intelligence technologies. They may face a greater risk of spiraling out of control. Both China and the United States could also draw on the example of the Nuclear Security Summit to discuss how to prevent non-state actors from abusing AI and how to provide training and best practices for the rest of the world just like what they did through the Center of Excellence on Nuclear Security.
8. Culture eats strategy for breakfast. The United States is currently experiencing a revival in nuclear popular culture, such as Netflix's *A House of Dynamite*, while China has relatively few nuclear-related films or TV series. Both sides should **cooperate on pop culture featuring the AI-nuclear nexus to raise global awareness of the need for joint risk management.**

While these measures still fall far short of ideal credible and verifiable assurances on AI and nuclear weapons, doing nothing will only exacerbate the security dilemma and strategic instability caused by concerns that artificial intelligence may trigger a nuclear crisis, which is not in the interest of China, the United States, or all of humanity.

BROADENING THE ENGAGEMENT AGENDA

Progress on the above issues, while welcome, will still not address significant gaps inhibiting further public understanding and policymaker engagement on managing these

risks. First, unclassified analysis on how artificial intelligence technology further complicates the entanglement of space, cyberspace, and nuclear systems remains insufficient, particularly regarding the analysis of technical details. The academic community still has limited understanding of the extent to which AI has been applied militarily in various countries. However, this is crucial for understanding what constitutes meaningful human control and is a challenging task.

Second, deeper analysis of the involvement of non-state actors - and especially technology companies - is needed. For example, how do commercial satellite constellations alter the balance of communication capabilities during crises? How do cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the private sector propagate to nuclear facilities? What kind of domestic regulatory and international legal innovations are needed to regulate and govern these emerging actors?

Finally, the above official and Track-II dialogues need to better integrate Global South perspectives on these challenges and the role it will play in maintaining global strategic stability. Related questions include how competition among major powers in emerging technologies will affect the development and security environment of these countries; and ways to bridge the digital divide while avoiding the security risks posed by the proliferation of emerging technologies. Engaging on these topics will contribute to enriching global dialogue and building a more equitable and inclusive governance system.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tianjiao Jiang is Associate Professor at Development Institute of Fudan University. He also serves as deputy director of Center for BRICS Studies and research fellow of Center for Global AI Innovative Governance at Fudan. His research focuses on emerging technologies, international security and BRICS cooperation. He has published 4 books and more than 40 academic papers in the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, *Asian Perspective*, *Chinese Political Science Review*, *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, etc. Dr. Jiang is member of China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, ACONA fellow of Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University (2021-2022), and visiting scholar at Paul Tsai China Center of Yale Law School (2026). He is frequently interviewed by media outlets such as *The New York Times*, the *South China Morning Post*, and *Le Monde*, and has participated as an expert in P5 Young Professional Network and several Track II dialogues on Sino-US strategic stability.

ABOUT APLN

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organization and network of political, military, diplomatic leaders, and experts from across the Asia-

Pacific region, working to address global security challenges, with a particular focus on reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons risks. The mission of APLN is to inform and stimulate debate, influence action, and propose policy recommendations designed to address regional security threats, with an emphasis on nuclear and other WMD (weapon of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



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