

China's Response to the Nuclear Posture Review

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Chinese commentary on the 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)* was notably less alarmist and more positive than was that published after the 2002 “release” (via leaks) of the Bush Administration’s comparable statement on the role of nuclear weapons in defending American security interests. Commentators writing in 2010 focused on different elements of the new *Posture Review* and most attempted to strike a balance between praise for aspects that they liked and criticism of those they found troubling. Individually and collectively, they characterized the 2010 *NPR* as better than its immediate predecessor but still fraught with worrisome implications for China.ⁱ

China’s response to the 2010 *NPR* was shaped by the interplay of three factors: the content of the *Review*, the context in which it was released, and conviction that the United States is determined to constrain China’s ability to challenge US hegemony.ⁱⁱ This paper will focus on the interplay of the first and third of these factors but it is important to frame the discussion by noting that the 2010 *NPR* was released in a period of increasing tension in US-China relations. Developments contributing to the increase in tension—and to greater suspicion of ultimate intentions—included the announcement of new arms sales to Taiwan that had been approved by the Bush Administration, President Obama’s meeting with the Dalai Lama, China’s resistance to imposing stronger sanctions on Iran and North Korea, US efforts to strengthen relations with Japan and South Korea, and US pressure on China to revalue its currency.ⁱⁱⁱ

Setting the Stage: Concerns Fueled by the 2002 *NPR*. Although relatively few commentaries made point by point comparisons of the 2002 and 2010 *NPRs*, many seemed to employ an implicit checklist of issues and indicators intended to reveal “true” US intentions and to establish whether especially troubling elements in the 2002 *NPR* were temporary aberrations or fundamental components of US nuclear strategy.^{iv} It will be useful, therefore, to begin with a brief summary of points in the 2002 *Review* that Chinese found particularly troubling.^v

Chinese found much to dislike in the 2002 *NPR* and were eager to discover whether and how the Obama Administration would address the many points that had evoked suspicion and ire when it was leaked to the *Los Angeles Times*.^{vi} One point of special concern was inclusion of China on the short list of countries against which the United States had to be prepared to use nuclear weapons in an “immediate or potential contingency.”^{vii} Russia was on the list because it was (and is) the only other nuclear superpower, but the 2002 *NPR* stated explicitly that there were no ideological sources of conflict with Moscow and that Washington sought a more cooperative relationship with Russia and movement away from the Cold War balance-of-terror policy.^{viii} The other five countries on the list, none of which had nuclear weapons, were described as having long standing hostility to the United States and its security partners. China was said to have

earned its place on the list because of its “still developing strategic objectives and its ongoing modernization of its nuclear forces.”^{ix}

Chinese political leaders and military planners certainly had assumed that their American counterparts planned for contingencies that included the use of nuclear weapons against Chinese targets, just as they surely planned for the use of Chinese weapons against American targets. Nevertheless, China’s inclusion on the list was offensive and problematic for several reasons. Beijing did not like being grouped with “rogue” states deemed hostile to the United States, especially on a list that excluded other nuclear weapon states not allied with Washington (i.e., India and Pakistan). Moreover, since the report was intended to remain classified, it was construed as representing America’s “true” intentions with respect to China’s increasing wealth, power, and influence, and as belying oft-repeated official US proclamations that a strong, stable, and prosperous China was in the interest of the United States.^x To some, this validated suspicions—or assertions—that Washington’s fine words were insincere and that the United States’ true intention was to constrain and contain China’s “rise.” It also fueled suspicions that one long-time student of US-China relations has characterized as “mutual strategic mistrust.”^{xi}

The *2002 NPR* also fueled Chinese suspicion and concern by citing a military confrontation over the status of Taiwan as one of three examples of an immediate contingency with well-recognized dangers.^{xii} Several Chinese commentators, including Vice Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, took umbrage at this and decried attempts at “nuclear blackmail.”^{xiii} Chinese suspicion and ire were reinforced by the almost simultaneous visit to the United States of Taiwan’s Minister of Defense Tang Yiau-min [Tang Yao-ming] for meetings that included Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. This was the first visit of a Defense Minister from Taiwan since the US switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979.^{xiv}

Among other consequences, characterizing China in this way probably made it harder for political leaders to respond to US requests even when they might want to because doing so could be construed as yielding to nuclear blackmail or attempting to appease an administration that had blatantly disregarded China’s core interests.^{xv} It is impossible to determine the extent to which the treatment of China in the *2002 NPR* influenced Chinese decisions on specific issues—as opposed to providing an excuse for actions taken for other reasons—but there is no question that it soured the relationship and continues to be regarded by at least some influential Chinese as indicative of what Americans really think about China’s rise.^{xvi}

Chinese sensitivity about being grouped with rogue states and identified as a target by the *2002 NPR* resurfaced in early 2010. Military and civilian officials attending conferences in Washington (January) and at Stanford (March) asked many questions about the forthcoming *2010 Nuclear Posture Review*, the most frequent of which was whether China would again be identified as a target of US nuclear planning. One reason for their interest was the pending visit to Washington of President Hu Jintao, who was scheduled to attend the Nuclear Security Summit convened by President Obama.^{xvii} Their comments made clear that it would be embarrassing for Hu to attend the Summit if China was again identified publicly as a target, and some speculated that release of the new NPR was being delayed because of what it said about China and to minimize the danger that Hu would decide not to attend. Despite informed assurances by others attending

these meetings that what the report would say about China was not the reason its release had been delayed, Chinese participants continued to query everyone they thought might know what the *Review* did say about China.^{xviii}

A second worrisome aspect of the 2002 *NPR*, as interpreted by Chinese commentators, was that it seemed to redefine the purpose of nuclear weapons in a way that moved beyond deterrence of nuclear war to include the use of nuclear weapons to support conventional war.^{xix} As evidence of the change, commentators cited plans to develop new warheads for use against targets that could withstand attacks by non-nuclear weapons (e.g., underground factories and hardened underground military targets such as command posts and missile silos), threats to retaliate with nuclear weapons in the event of attacks on the United States and its allies with chemical or biological weapons even if the attacking state did not possess nuclear weapons, and the appearance of “startling development of military weapons” by certain countries.^{xx} A related argument accused the US of rejecting the “Cold War strategy of mutually assured destruction” and seeking absolute nuclear superiority that would allow the United States to win without fighting or to wage (and win) conventional conflicts without fear that they would escalate to nuclear war.^{xxi}

Some commentators interpreted the 2002 *NPR*'s references to missile defense as part of a strategic shift intended to degrade the retaliatory capability of other nuclear weapons states (i.e., China). The alleged reason for doing so was to facilitate “nuclear blackmail” and the pursuit of political objectives through intimidation and use of conventional military capabilities. Although no commentary that I have found explicitly links the *NPR*'s naming of China as a target, citing of possible conflict in the Taiwan Strait as an immediate contingency, and increased reliance on missile defense to argue that Washington's new strategy was specifically aimed at China, many articles evince implicit concern that such was the case.^{xxii} Not linking the points in this way might have been the result of a conscious decision or instruction not to reveal to foreigners or to Chinese citizens how worrisome this was to the leadership. A partial exception to this tendency is Li Bin's short but explicit injunction to “uphold the effectiveness of China's nuclear retaliatory forces” after the United States has installed a national missile defense system. Only by ensuring that China's nuclear retaliatory forces are reliable, he argued, can China safeguard its own territory and continue to uphold world peace.^{xxiii}

Many of the commentaries eschewed or downplayed China-specific implications in favor of general statements about the implications of changes in US strategy reflected in the 2002 *NPR*. This was not entirely disingenuous or intended to elicit international support to address concerns that really did apply more to China than to other countries. Indeed, a number of points made by Chinese commentators appear to reflect genuine concern about how the new departures in US strategy might affect international efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. For example, some commentators characterized the 2002 *NPR* as undermining the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) by threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS). One observed that “it can be predicted that nuclear weapons will proliferate on a global scale...for those non-nuclear states will believe that there is no reason for them to maintain their non-nuclear status.”^{xxiv} Another declared that expanding the scope for the use of nuclear weapons undermined the NPT and the role that it had played in curbing the spread of such weapons.^{xxv} He and others criticized the negative impact that the *NPR* would have

on efforts to ban all nuclear testing, and one cited damage to international efforts to create arms control mechanisms caused by the US decision to withdraw from the ABM treaty so that it could develop missile defense.^{xxvi}

Context and Concerns in 2010. Chinese often evince a proclivity to see precedents, patterns, and parallels where Americans see unique and unrelated developments. This cultural difference is sometimes compounded by a Chinese tendency to interpret any development or policy statement with potential consequences for China as having been crafted specifically to achieve the imputed impact. It can be further compounded by an American propensity to give short shrift to how actions and statements grounded in domestic politics or intended to address global issues might be interpreted—or misinterpreted—by individual countries. All of these proclivities and cultural differences were at play in the months before and after the release of the *2010 Nuclear Posture Review*. One such “pattern” (in Chinese eyes) and “coincidence” (as seen by Americans) involved the Obama Administration’s announcement (in January) of arms sales to Taiwan that had been approved by the Bush Administration.^{xxvii} This doubtless raised concerns on the part of some Chinese that the forthcoming *NPR* would contain references to contingencies in the Taiwan Strait similar to those in the *2002 Review*. Another “similarity” was the fact that American presidents had visited China before the release of their respective *Nuclear Posture Reviews* (Bush in February 2002 and Obama in November 2009).^{xxviii} The parallel of presidential visits before release of the *NPRs* caused some to wonder whether, in 2010, assurances of friendship and support for China’s rise expressed during Obama’s visit would again be followed by the announcement of policies that belied their sincerity.

There were also new elements in 2010, including President Obama’s embrace of the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and China’s continued rapid growth.^{xxix} Chinese commentators were understandably reluctant to criticize the goal of nuclear disarmament but evinced increasing unease with the attendant shift toward greater reliance on advanced conventional weapons.^{xxx} The *2002 NPR* had posited increased reliance on missile defense and non-nuclear means of defense and deterrence. Obama’s Prague speech did not refer to conventional weapons but Chinese interpreted decreased reliance on nuclear weapons as implying greater reliance on conventional arms, an arena in which the United States enjoyed unrivaled superiority.^{xxxi} They also took note of his brief reference to missile defense and inferred negative implications for China’s strategic deterrent.^{xxxii} Concerns associated with China’s rise—whether expressed by Americans or imputed by Chinese who suspect that it is only a matter of time until Americans reveal their “true intent” to check and contain their nation’s return to its “rightful” place in the world—are now a constant subtext in the relationship and, as release of the *2010 NPR* drew near, Chinese began to wonder what that document would reveal about American intentions.^{xxxiii}

Although Chinese officials, scholars, and the military were anxious to discover whether and how Obama’s nuclear strategy differed from that of his predecessor and, more importantly, what the new *Nuclear Posture Review* might reveal about American intentions with respect to China, most eschewed taking public positions, probably because they anticipated having little influence and/or did not want to demonstrate their inability to shape American policy. Their silence did not reflect indifference, however,

because they recognized that the *NPR* would have significant implications for both grand strategy and their own defense expenditures.^{xxxiv}

Chinese Commentary on the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review. Chinese commentaries on the new *NPR* rolled out in what has become a familiar pattern. The first was an unsigned article entitled “US Says Deterrence ‘Sole Purpose’ of Nuclear Weapons, Reaffirms Extended Deterrence Commitments.”^{xxxv} It was short, factual, and nonjudgmental. The “spin,” to the extent that there was one, was positive in that it did not mention missile defense, advanced conventional weapons, or other points in the 2002 *NPR* that Chinese had found worrisome. This approach was almost certainly adopted to avoid appearing overly critical of the Obama administration or overly concerned about the *Review* and its implications for China.

The next tranche of commentary employed the now familiar technique of quoting foreign experts whose observations were generally somewhat more negative. For example, a *Xinhua* “Analysis” quoted one expert as saying, “...[there is] a significant perception gap between, in particular, the United States and the developing world on how serious the threat of nuclear terrorism is.” It later noted, “Some [unspecified] experts argue that the United States should do more in disarmament than focus on nuclear terrorism and non-proliferation.”^{xxxvi} The piece found nothing to praise and asserted “...the United States is trying to strike a chord by cutting its own nuclear weapons and limiting use of its massive nuclear arsenal.”^{xxxvii}

The voice over narration of a video clip summarizing key points of the 2010 *NPR* broadcast on CCTV-4 later the same day (April 7) noted that the new *Review* had been criticized by both liberals and conservatives in the United States and elicited cautious responses from media commentators around the world. The narrator also claimed that many analysts had opined that the United States seemed to be laying a trap for other countries instead of just imposing restrictions on its own use of nuclear weapons.^{xxxviii} The narrator and the in-studio commentators did not elaborate this point but articles published in subsequent days suggest a number of possible explanations (see below).

For the most part, the two commentators on the CCTV-4 *Focus Today* program limited their observations to broad characterizations of the new *NPR* and differed more in tone than in substance. Xu Guangyu, a retired rear admiral now affiliated with the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, said that the *Review* had not changed the US strategic framework significantly but acknowledged what he characterized as “partial adjustments.” These included reducing the number of nuclear weapons, pledging not to conduct nuclear tests, and promising not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states that are parties to the nonproliferation treaty.^{xxxix} He described these “adjustments” as intended to give the US the moral high ground without affecting the fundamentals of its nuclear strategy.^{xl} He also observed that the *NPR* gave the US great leeway to use nuclear weapons against states that do not possess such weapons and does not rule out a first strike against countries with nuclear weapons.^{xli}

Xu’s counterpart on the program was Zhang Zhaozhong, a professor at China’s National Defense University. He described himself as cautiously optimistic about the *Review* but did not elaborate why or what he was optimistic about. Indeed, he went further than Xu in characterizing the *NPR* as disingenuous and dangerous to China’s interests. For example, Zhang argued that the United States was unlikely to use nuclear weapons against its allies or Russia. He described Russia as a strategic cooperation

partner of the United States and said China, the DPRK, and Iran are the only targeted countries. Zhang also asserted that he believed the United States must have developed new conventional capabilities and would deemphasize nuclear weapons in order to focus on developing new conventional weapons. Both themes harkened back to the *2002 NPR* but he did not mention it specifically.^{xlii}

The first point-by-point analysis of the *2010 NPR* that I have found appeared in *Jiefangjun Bao* on April 8.^{xliii} The article is based on an interview of retired colonel Teng Jianqun, the Director of the Center for Arms Control and International Security Studies of the China Institute of International Studies. Teng was asked to compare the *2010 NPR* to previous editions of the *Review*. In reply—and in contrast to the assessments of Xu Guangyu and Zhang Zhaozhong--Teng characterized the latest report as very different from previous versions.

The first difference cited by Teng was that this time the US Government had disclosed the entire report.^{xliiv} By citing this characteristic first, Teng seemingly sought to address perennial Chinese concerns about America's "true intentions." His implicit message seems to be that officials and Chinese citizens should focus on understanding and responding to what the *Review* says and not speculate about the existence or content of a "secret" document.

Neither Teng nor any other commentator that I have encountered explicitly notes that the *2010 NPR* does not group China with "rogue" nations or states described as hostile to the United States, and does not identify conflict in the Taiwan Strait as a "contingency" that might involve the use of nuclear weapons. The failure to do so suggests a judgment that China should pocket this "win" and not put it at risk by asking or bragging about it. A second, and probably more important message in Teng's injunction to pay attention to the *NPR* is that even though China is not stigmatized or threatened as it was in the *2002 Review*, it still has many reasons for concern about what the new *NPR* does say.

The second difference noted by Teng is that the *2010 NPR* has reduced the importance and role of nuclear weapons in the US national security strategy. Many other commentators also noted the fact and significance of this change.^{xlv} In aggregate, they welcomed this change, criticized the fact that it stopped short of declaring that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons was to deter a nuclear attack on the United States, and expressed unease about the concomitant shift to greater reliance on overwhelming conventional military capabilities.^{xlvi} Several commentators noted that the US no longer threatens to use nuclear weapons against biological or chemical attacks, generally characterizing this as a positive development but noting the reserved right to revise this position if there are significant changes in biotechnology. Many also link the change to advances in US conventional capabilities. Perhaps reflecting concern that Obama's embrace of the goal of a nuclear weapon free world and reduced US reliance on nuclear weapons was a "trap," some commentators suggested that Washington would use cuts to its own nuclear inventories, lower readiness levels, declaratory policies on the use of nuclear weapons, and efforts to prevent proliferation and nuclear terrorism to press for similar reductions by countries (i.e., China) that are more dependent on nuclear deterrence because they lack US conventional capabilities.^{xlvii}

The third difference cited by Teng Jianqun is that the *2010 NPR* gives priority to preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. He did not elaborate or state why

this had been made the top priority in the *2010 NPR* but a number of other commentators did. Some ascribed instrumental objectives to the inclusion of this point and the timing of the report's release, noting that they were intended to enable the United States to "dictate the agenda for nuclear dialog."^{xlvi} Another opined that releasing the report two days before the scheduled signing of the New START agreement with Russia and a week before the Nuclear Security Summit was intended to give the United States more bargaining chips in future bilateral negotiations.^{xlvii} Yet another observed that efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation, nuclear smuggling, and nuclear terrorism "cannot succeed without China's efforts."¹ One commentator took a more extreme position, describing Obama's advocacy of a "nuclear-free world" and opposition to proliferation as intended to both preserve American hegemony and justify military intervention in "rogue" states accused of developing nuclear weapons.^{li}

The *2010 NPR* changed the US position on a number of other issues that had been sharply criticized by Chinese commentaries on the *2002 Review* (e.g., ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and development of new nuclear weapons). Many of the changes could have been depicted as responsive to Chinese concerns and critiques, but most 2010 commentaries mentioned them only briefly and without spin or commentary.^{lii} Other issues were described or grouped as ones on which the new *NPR* had failed to make fundamental changes. This category included continued adherence to strategic deterrence, expenditures to modernize nuclear facilities, advocacy of regional deterrence and extended deterrence, and not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states party to the NPT and in compliance with NPT requirements.^{liii} In aggregate, the commentaries were grudgingly positive about these changes but generally treated them as less significant than the retention of other points Chinese found troubling.

Possibly the most worrisome—and most often noted—continuities are the continued importance ascribed to missile defense and advanced conventional weapons.^{liv} The reasons for concern were essentially the same as those articulated after release of the *2002 NPR* and reiterated during the intervening years, namely, the suspicion (or accusation) that missile defenses were intended to degrade or checkmate China's nuclear deterrent and increase its vulnerability to conventional attack or blackmail. Two developments appear to have made the situation more disturbing than it had been. One was the further reduction of American and Russian nuclear weapons mandated by the New START agreement signed on April 8, 2010 (i.e., two days after the release of the *2010 NPR*).^{lv} Signed on the eve of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review Conference, which convened May 3, 2010, New START enabled Russia and the United States to claim, accurately, that they were honoring their Article VI commitment to reduce their nuclear stockpiles.^{lvi} Chinese appear to have worried that this would be cited by the United States (and others) to put pressure on China to reduce its much smaller nuclear arsenal.^{lvii}

Whether to forestall such pressure or to reassure attentive constituencies in and outside China, a few commentators insisted that Beijing would do whatever was necessary to maintain the efficacy of its nuclear deterrent.^{lviii} The juxtaposition of such assurances and criticism of Obama Administration insistence that it will prevent (i.e., not accept) any restrictions on missile defense suggest that Beijing anticipates the "need" to increase the number of its own ballistic missiles and/or independently targeted warheads

in order to maintain what it determines to be required for minimum deterrence.^{lix} Indeed, ongoing modernization and quantitative increases in China's nuclear force may be in response to US plans for missile defenses going back to the Reagan Administration and/or the 2002 *NPR*.^{lx} Already being criticized for making qualitative and quantitative improvements to their strategic systems, Chinese seem to anticipate more criticism and heightened international concern about the "rise" of China if/when they take additional steps to ensure survivability and minimal deterrence.^{lxi}

China's concern about its international image and worry about potential backlash that could slow economic growth and jeopardize its social and political stability are reinforced, at least in some cases, by suspicion that US calls for greater "transparency" about China's nuclear weapons and global aspirations are intended to embarrass or undercut the regime. Like its immediate predecessor, the 2010 *NPR* cited lack of transparency about China's nuclear program as a source of concern for the United States and China's Asian neighbors.^{lxii} At least some Chinese appear to believe that US calls for transparency about China's strategic systems, presumably to include information on how they have changed and will change over time, are intended to foster invidious comparisons between large and steady decreases in Russian and American nuclear systems, on the one hand, and small but increasing capabilities in Chinese systems.^{lxiii} This may be the "trap," or an element of the trap, alleged by the voice-over narration introducing the April 7, 2010 CCTV-4 discussion of the new *NPR*.^{lxiv}

The second highly worrisome element of the 2002 and 2010 *NPRs* is their explicit reference to the link between increased non-nuclear capabilities and the US ability to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons.^{lxv} The 2010 *NPR* describes US conventional capabilities as "unrivaled," and Teng Jianqun's summary of the report notes that the United States has achieved "absolute advantages" in conventional weapons and will continue to improve them.^{lxvi} Although Chinese commentaries were not very explicit about why they found US conventional superiority troublesome, what they did say suggests a number of possibilities. For example, the combination of observations about the absolute size of the US (and Russian) nuclear arsenals; US determination to maintain nuclear superiority, albeit at lower numbers; US determination to press ahead with missile defenses that could degrade China's nuclear deterrent; and US conventional superiority suggest concern that the United States might be tempted to employ conventional weapons against what it considers to be rogue states (i.e., Iran and the DPRK), or to attempt to "blackmail" other nations, including China, by threatening to use conventional weapons—possibly to take advantage of China's unconditional no-first use commitment.^{lxvii} Another implied but not articulated concern might be that the US intends to ensnare China in a conventional arms race that would be expensive, entail high opportunity costs for China, and harm its image and prospects for continued rapid growth.

Chinese commentators were uniformly negative with respect to the 2010 *NPR's* positions on missile defense, US conventional weapons, and calls for greater Chinese transparency, but many evinced uncertainty or ambivalence about a number of other key elements. For example, there was little analysis of the new US declaration that the sole purpose of its nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States or its allies and partners.^{lxviii} Most commentaries criticized this position as still falling far short of an unequivocal "no first use" commitment of the kind that China has given and advocated for other nuclear weapon states since 1964, when it conducted its first nuclear test.^{lxix}

Most of the comparisons between the new US position and China's long-standing one seem intended to reassert Beijing's claim to the moral high ground, but a few acknowledged the link between the US stance and its extended deterrence commitment to allies.^{lxx}

Chinese commentators generally describe extended deterrence as an outmoded remnant of the Cold War but they are not very explicit about why they do not like it.^{lxxi} Some see US alliances with Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia as more than Cold War relics. On the contrary, they see them as instruments in the US strategy to constrain China's rise and do not like them because of what they symbolize as well as because of how they might be used. Nevertheless, even some who hold this view recognize that it is better for China that Japan and the ROK continue to eschew nuclear weapons and that the reason they are able to do so is that they benefit from US extended deterrence. Of the commentaries I have seen, only that by Yunzhu Yao addresses the 2010 NPR's oft-repeated trilogy of "the United States, its allies, and its partners" and asks "whether Taiwan will be considered a US defense partner for whose defense nuclear weapons are still on the table?"^{lxxii}

Commentators also evince ambivalence about the new NPR's more restricted conditions for the use of nuclear weapons. Most applaud, albeit faintly, the decision not to threaten nuclear retaliation for chemical or biological attacks on the United States, its allies, or its partners, but are mildly critical of the reservation allowing for reconsideration of this position in the face of emerging biological threats.^{lxxiii} Most also applaud the change from "calculated ambiguity" to a clear statement that "the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations."^{lxxiv} Many also note, however, that this qualification excludes Iran and the DPRK and some suggest that the new formulation, together with the increased priority accorded to preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism, might be used to justify US military action against one or both of those states.^{lxxv} One commentator characterized this as significantly better than the 2002 NPR but not as definitive as the Clinton Administration's 1994 *Nuclear Posture Review* which had reiterated the Carter Administration's negative security assurance pledge not to launch nuclear attacks on non-nuclear countries.^{lxxvi}

Composite Assessment. Although individual commentators focused on different aspects of the 2010 NPR and adopted approaches ranging from brief and selective but factual summaries of key points to more critical and speculative assessments of what the *Review* "really" means, taken together they evince more similarities than differences in terms of what they covered and what they had to say. Most were written by current or former military officers, but a few were prepared by academics affiliated with national security programs. I did not find systematic or meaningful differences between current and former officers, or between military commentators and civilians. This finding is probably a function of the relatively small number of people in China who do serious work on nuclear strategy and doctrine and the fact that most of them are in or closely associated with the People's Liberation Army. They do not appear to be simply articulating a "party line" view, but most do appear to view the issues through the same lens. This lens predisposes them to interpret the US nuclear posture (and other actions and statements of policy) in terms of what they say about and/or mean for China. As

noted above, it also predisposes them to view specific statements and policy documents through lenses sensitive to what is happening in the bilateral relationship and broader global context. It also conditions them to seek “hidden meaning” and “true intentions,” and to assume that every possible implication for China is intentional.

Taken together, the initial commentaries on the *2010 Nuclear Posture Review* find it to be substantially better than its immediate predecessor and to contain a number of positive elements. Among the developments considered positive are:

- The United States has declared that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attacks on the United States, its allies, and its partners.
- The United States is reducing its nuclear inventories and its reliance on nuclear weapons.
- The United States no longer threatens to retaliate with nuclear weapons against chemical or biological attacks by non-nuclear states.
- The United States will no longer use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.
- The United States pledges not to conduct nuclear tests and will seek ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
- The United States will not develop new nuclear weapons except under very restricted circumstances.
- China is not grouped with rogue states hostile to the United States or included on a list of states that might be attacked by the United States with nuclear weapons.

Despite these (and other) positive developments, most of which were characterized as steps in the right direction that did not go far enough, Chinese commentators found much to dislike in the *Review*. The list of things they disliked or cited as cause for concern include:

- Continued development of missile defense capabilities.
- Continued development of advanced conventional capabilities and their incorporation into what the *2010 NPR* refers to as “prompt global strike.”
- Continued reliance on the “new triad” of capabilities described in the *2002 NPR* and the possibility of using strategic bombers and missiles for conventional roles.
- Modernization of nuclear weapons complexes to preserve capabilities in case they are needed.
- Continued adherence to regional nuclear deterrence and extended deterrence.
- Citing concern about China’s lack of transparency and lack of clarity about its strategic intentions.

Commentators who commented on the point also agreed that the new *NPR*, New START, and the Nuclear Security Summit were conceived to preserve US global hegemony.^{lxxvii} Taken together, they would impede the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional states and reduce the weapons stockpiles of nuclear weapon states in ways that assured US qualitative and quantitative advantage by permitting missile defenses and greater reliance on advanced conventional weapons. Very few commented on the US call for dialog to preserve strategic stability and most who did so implied that it was a trap or trick to put pressure on China.

Speculative Note. The analysis above is based on published commentaries and conversations with informed Chinese academics, officials, and military officers. I am confident that it accurately reflects Chinese suspicion about American objectives and intentions and concerns about the implications for China and global efforts to limit the spread and prevent the use of nuclear weapons. But as a student of China for 45 years, I have a sense that there is more to the story than I was able to document. For example, the logic of the assessments summarized above, particularly those imputing to the United States the capability and intention to use its conventional superiority to “blackmail” other nations—China—seems to require reevaluation of China’s unconditional “no first use” policy. That may be happening, but there is very little evidence that such a reevaluation is taking place, and none that I have found since publication of the *2010 NPR*.

If such a reevaluation is taking place, it almost certainly is accompanied by debate over whether it is better to abandon or redefine Beijing’s declared position in order to deter attempted “blackmail” or other threats to China’s interests and independence, or to continue to claim the moral high ground and eschew actions or statements that risk triggering or accelerating actions by the United States and others to constrain China’s rise. How to “manage” relations with the United States is a critical and complex issue, only one component of which involves nuclear postures and strategies. In the end, decisions on what actions, if any, China will take in response to its assessment of the *2010 Nuclear Posture Review* will be derivative from and shaped by decisions on how to manage relations with the United States. But decisions on overarching policies will be influenced by judgments with respect to each of the component issues in the relationship and I find it hard to believe that the new *NPR* and the currently strained character of relations with Washington have not fueled deliberation and debate with more dimensions than I was able to discover.

ⁱ General characterizations noting positive and negative aspects of the *2010 Nuclear Posture Review* can be found at Guo Xiaoping, “Positive and Negative Signals from the New NPR,” [email from CICIR—get published citation]; Lu Desheng, “Does ‘Spring of Nuclear Disarmament Come? —Interpretation of US Nuclear Posture Review by Teng Jianqun, Director of the Center for Arms Control and International Security Studies, China Institute of International Studies,” *Jiefangjun Bao Online* (Chinese) April 8, 2010; and Yunzhu Yao, “A Chinese Perspective on the Nuclear Posture Review,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 6, 2010 at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=40758>. Perhaps the most positive assessment is Zhang Tuosheng, “Positive Change in US Nuke Policy,” *China Daily Online*, July 21, 2010 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2010-07/21/content_11028290.htm.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, Qu Xing, “Why Does US China Policy Always Turn Hostile?” *Guangming Ribao Online* (Chinese), April 12, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ See, for example, John Pomfret, “US-China Relations to Face Strains, Experts Say,” *The Washington Post*, January 3, 2010 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/02/AR2010010201751.html>; “Timeline: Straining of US-China Relations in 2010,” Singapore Institute of International Affairs, February 11, 2010 at <http://www.siaonline.org/?q=programmes/insights/timeline-straining-us-china->

[relations-2010](#); Ravi Somaiya, “New Tensions Come to the Fore in US-China Relationship,” *Newsweek*, June 4, 2010 at <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/06/04/increased-tensions-come-to-the-fore-in-us-china-relationship.html>; and Alex Spillius, “Analysis: The Worsening Relationship Between America and China,” *Telegraph*, February 1, 2010 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/7130310/Analysis-the-worsening-relationship-between-America-and-China.html>.

^{iv} This report is sometimes identified as the 2001 *Nuclear Posture Review* because it was delivered to the Congress on December 31, 2001. This paper employs the more frequently used convention by referring to the 2002 *Nuclear Posture Review*. See Phillip C. Bleek, “Nuclear Posture Review Released, Stresses Flexible Force Planning,” *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2002 at http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_01-02/nprjanfeb02.

^v I recognize the pitfalls of aggregating and homogenizing the assessments of Chinese commentators from the Foreign Ministry, the People’s Liberation Army, academic institutions, and elsewhere, but my review of available speeches and articles suggests that differences in focus are more reflective of institutional perspectives than of disagreements about the substance or implications of the 2002 *NPR* and the 2010 *NPR*. In other words, I think it more accurate to view commentaries from persons in different bureaucratic roles as reflecting a division of labor commensurate with expertise and responsibilities than to interpret such differences as indicative of substantive analytic disagreement.

^{vi} See Paul Richter, “US Works Up Plan for Using Nuclear Arms,” *Los Angeles Times* March 9, 2002 at <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/mar/09/news/mn-31965>. Excerpts from the classified 2002 *National Posture Review* (hereafter 2002 *NPR*) are available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>.

^{vii} 2002 *NPR*, pp. 16-17. The other countries in this category were Russia, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Syria. Chinese reactions can be found in Li Bin, “Are US Nuclear Weapons Aimed at China?” in *Beijing Shijie Zhishi*, April 1, 2002, pp. 16-17; and Zhou Rong, “Can a New Nuclear Strategy Guarantee US Security?” in *Beijing Shijie Zhishi*, May 1, 2002, pp. 20-21.

^{viii} 2002 *NPR*, p. 17.

^{ix} 2002 *NPR*, pp. 16-17.

^x For one of many such expressions, see “US Ambassador Randt: US Welcomes Emergence of Strong, Peaceful, Prosperous China,” *Xinhua* interview distributed by the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, October 20, 2002 at <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/zysj/jzmfm/t35919.htm>.

^{xi} David M. Lampton, *Power Constrained: Sources of Mutual Strategic Suspicion in US-China Relations* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2010).

^{xii} 2002 *NPR*, p. 16.

^{xiii} Li Zhaoxing’s demarche to US Ambassador Randt can be found at “China Summons US Ambassador to Make Representations,” *Xinhua* (English) March 16, 2002. See also, Li Bin; and Zhu Mengkui, “Where Will the Dangerous Policy of the United States Lead Sino-US Relations?” *Beijing Renminwang* (Chinese), March 20, 2002 at <http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/guandian/26/20020320/690752.html>.

^{xiv} See Peter Brookes, “US-Taiwan Defense Relations in the Bush Administration,” The Heritage Foundation, November 14, 2003 at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Lecture/US-Taiwan-Defense-Relations-in-the-Bush-Administration>.

^{xv} On allegations of US nuclear blackmail and attempted diplomatic intimidation see, for example, Tan Xinmu, “‘Strategic Nuclear Review’—New Change or Old Thinking!” *Xinhua* (Chinese) *March 20, 2002*.

^{xvi} See, for example, Li Haibo, “Pentagon as Teacher, *Beijing Review*, Vol. 45, No. 16 (April 18, 2002), p. 14; and Jinghao Zhou, “Does China’s Rise Threaten the United States?” *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2008), pp. 171-182 at

<http://www.asianperspective.org/articles/v32n3-g.pdf>.

^{xvii} Information on the Nuclear Security Summit (April 12-13, 2010) is available on the Department of State website at <http://fpc.state.gov/c35775.htm>.

^{xviii} I attended both of these meetings but they were off the record and it would not be appropriate to identify the participants.

^{xix} See, for example, Zhou Rong; and Zhou Jianguo, “Nuclear Strategy of Bush Administration Moving Gradually from Deterrence to Actual Combat,” *Jiefangjun Bao* (Chinese), March 18, 2002.

^{xx} Zhou Jianguo; Liu Changhong, “The Nonproliferation Treaty is Currently Faced with Challenges,” *Jiefangjun Bao* (Chinese) April 22, 2002; and “*Global Times*: Five Types of US Global Nuclear Targets,” *People’s Daily Online*, April 28, 2002.

^{xxi} Zhou Rong.

^{xxii} Examples include Zhou Rong; Liu Changhong; Li Bin; and Chen Xiaoping, Luo Jinwen, and Sun Yafei, “Is the Nuclear Target List Intended to Frighten China?” *Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan* (Chinese) March 25, 2002, pp. 34-36.

^{xxiii} Li Bin.

^{xxiv} Liu Changhong.

^{xxv} Mei Zhou, “The World Does Not Need a Nuclear Overlord,” *Renmin Ribao*, March 19, 2002.

^{xxvi} See articles by Mei Zhou; Liu Changhong; and Zhou Jingguo.

^{xxvii} See, for example, Helene Cooper, “US Approval of Taiwan Arms Sales Angers China,” *New York Times*, January 29, 2010 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/30/world/asia/30arms.html>; “China Again Opposes Arms Sales to Taiwan as US Moves to Approve Package,” *Xinhua* January 26, 2010 at http://www.gov.cn/english//2010-01/26/content_1520096.htm; and State Department Daily Press Briefing, January 29, 2010 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2010/01/136282.htm>.

^{xxviii} On Bush’s 2002 visit see, for example, “President Bush Meets with Chinese President Jiang Zemin,” The White House, February 21, 2002 at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/02/20020221-7.html>; and Kerry Dumbaugh, “China-US Relations,” Updated March 14, 2002, CRS Issue Brief for Congress at <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/9062.pdf>. On Obama’s 2009 visit, see “US-China Joint Statement,” The White House, November 17, 2009 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>.

^{xxix} See “Remarks by President Barack Obama,” Prague, Czech Republic, April 5, 2009 at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/. For early Chinese reactions, see Wei Xiong, “Obama’s Nuclear Policy a Smart Move,” *Global Times*, April 27, 2009 at <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/Commentary/2009-04/428171.html>; “Obama Calls for Elimination of Nuclear Arms,” *Xinhua*, April 5, 2009 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/05/content_11134760.htm; “Bumpy Road Ahead of Russia-US Nuclear Arms Reductions,” *Renmin Ribao* (English) April 14, 2009 at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90853/6636189.html>; and “A Nuclear-Free World is an Inspiring Ideal,” *Renmin Ribao* (English), May 7, 2009 at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6652527.html>.

^{xxx} Examples include Wang Zhongchun, “Nuclear Challenges and China’s Choices,” *China Security* (Winter 2007); Rong Yu and Peng Guangqian, “Nuclear No-First-Use Revisited,” *China Security* (Winter 2009); Ge Tingfei, “Change in US Nuclear Stance: Nuclear Weapons Capability Looks Good But is Useless,” *Yangcheng Wanbao Online* (Chinese) May 6, 2010; and Han Xudong, “The United States Playing the ‘Nuclear-Free’ Card is a Move of Taking Preventive Measures,” *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao Online* (Chinese), April 16, 2010 at http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2010-04/16/content_3186031.htm.

^{xxxi} Han Xudong; and Lu Desheng.

^{xxxii} Examples include “A Nuclear Weapon-Free World an Inspiring Ideal”; and Hui Zhang, “China’s Perspective on a Nuclear-Free World,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 139-155.

^{xxxiii} Examples include Jinghao Zhou; Wu Xinbo, “How Should the United States Adapt to China’s Rise?” *Shanghai Jiefang Ribao Online* (Chinese), November 13, 2009; and Fu Mengzi, “Reassurance is a Two-Way Street,” *China Daily Online*, November 12, 2009 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2009-11/12/content_8954793.htm.

^{xxxiv} Illustrative examples include Liu Zikui, “Strategic Analysis of Obama’s World Without Nuclear Weapons,” *Beijing Meiguo Yanjiu* (Chinese), 2009, No. 3, pp. 58-72; and Hu Yimin, “Is US ‘Nuke-Free World Pledge Sincere?’” *China Daily Online*, March 10, 2010 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2010-03/10/content_9565333.htm.

^{xxxv} “US Says Deterrence ‘Sole Purpose’ of Nuclear Weapons, Reaffirms Extended Deterrence Commitments,” *Xinhua* (English), April 6, 2010.

^{xxxvi} “Obama Sets US Nuclear Agenda by Introducing Nuclear Posture Review,” *Xinhua* (English), April 7, 2010.

^{xxxvii} A more factual and less critical summary of foreign commentary can be found in Wang Fengfeng and Du Jing, “New Thinking and Intention of US Nuclear Posture Review,” *Xinhua* (Chinese), April 7, 2010.

^{xxxviii} The video clip is available on the CCTV-4 *Focus Today* program broadcast on April 7, 2010 (hereafter *Focus Today*) at <http://bugu.cntv.cn/news/talk/jinriguanzhu/classpage/video/20100406/101170.shtml>.

^{xxxix} Xu did not mention the *NPR*’s requirement that states also be in compliance with their NPT obligations.

^{xl} Xu Guangyu developed this point at greater length in “Global Nuclear Security Still Needs to be Treated Carefully,” *Jiefangjun Bao Online* (Chinese), July 3, 2010.

^{xli} Xu Guangyu, *Focus Today*.

^{xlii} Zhang Zhaozhong, *Focus Today*.

^{xliii} Lu Desheng.

^{xliv} Extracts of the Clinton Administration's 1994 *Nuclear Posture Review* were released soon after the report was completed but the basic document remained classified. See, for example, "Nuclear Posture Review (Extract from the 1995 Annual Defense Report)" at http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/usa/doctrine/dod/95_npr.htm; and "The 1994 Nuclear Posture Review" at <http://www.nukestrat.com/us/reviews/npr1994.htm>. The 2002 *NPR* was also prepared as a classified document and only portions were released after being leaked to the *Los Angeles Times* (see above, note 6). In his remarks at the time the 2010 *NPR* was released, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, "I believe this is the first unclassified *NPR* in its totality." His remarks are available at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4599>.

^{xlv} See, for example, Fan Jishe, "The 'Third Path' of United States Nuclear Policy," *Renmin Ribao Online* (Chinese), April 20, 2010; Ge Tengfei, Changes in US Nuclear Stance: Nuclear Weapons Capability 'Looks Good but is Useless,'" *Yangcheng Wanbao Online* (Chinese), May 6, 2010; and Yunzhu Yao.

^{xlvi} See, for example, "Is New Strategy Enough?" *China Daily Online*, April 8, 2010; Han Xudong; Ge Tengfei; and Yunzhu Yao.

^{xlvii} See, for example, "China Sets Higher Standard for Nuclear Security," *Global Times*, April 12, 2010 at <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/commentary/2010-04/521321.html>.

^{xlviii} Wang Fengfeng and Du Jing.

^{xlix} "Is New Strategy Enough?"

¹ Lu Guojun and Zhen Zhiping, "The China Factor is of Crucial Importance in Rebuilding of the World's Nuclear Order," *Guangming Wang* (Chinese), April 12, 2010.

^{li} Han Xudong. See also, Xu Guangyu, "Global Nuclear Security..."

^{lii} See, for example, Lu Desheng; Wang Fengfeng and Du Jing; and Fan Jishe.

^{liii} Lu Desheng; "China Says Nuke Weapons Reductions Important for International Disarmament," *Xinhua* (English), April 8, 2010; Yunzhu Yao; Han Xudong; and Fan Jishe.

^{liv} Fan Jishe; Han Shudong; Yunzhu Yao; Guo Xiaoping; and Lu Desheng.

^{lv} For additional information about and details of the agreement, see "New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) at <http://www.state.gov/t/vci/trty/126118.htm>.

^{lvi} See, for example, Rose Gottemoeller, "Opening Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, June 15, 2010 at <http://www.state.gov/t/vci/rls/143159.htm>; and Dmitry V. Suslov, "US – Russia Relations After the New START Treaty," *RIA Novosti*, May 18, 2010 at http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20100518/159060786.html. For a Chinese commentary, see Li Changhe, "How Will the United States Adjust its Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament Policy?" *Jiefangjun Bao Online* (Chinese), June 30, 2010, p. 4.

^{lvii} See, for example, Cheng Guangjin, "Nuke Strategy's Aim to Protect National Security, China Says," *China Daily Online*, May 5, 2010.

^{lviii} See, for example, "US Nuclear Review Misreads China," *Global Times*, April 8, 2010; and the statement of Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu as reported in "China Says

US Nuke Weapons Reductions Important for International Disarmament,” *Xinhua* (English), April 8, 2010.

^{lix} See *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (hereafter *2010 NPR*), April 2010 at <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>. Statements on missile defense and its implications for China can be found on pages x-xi and 28-29. See also Hui Zhang; and Cheng Guangjin.

^{lx} See, for example, Joseph Cirincione, “China’s Nuclear Modernization,” *Carnegie Proliferation Brief*, Vol. 2, No. 8 at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=93>; and Hui Zhang.

^{lxi} See Hui Zhang; and Jinghao Zhou.

^{lxii} *2010 NPR*, p. 5.

^{lxiii} See, for example, Cheng Guangjin; and Teng Jianqun, “What is the Purpose of US Calls For ‘Nuclear Transparency’?” *Jiefangjun Bao Online* (Chinese), May 19, 2010, p. 4.

^{lxiv} *Focus Today*.

^{lxv} *2002 NPR*, p. 7; *2010 NPR*, p. 6.

^{lxvi} *2010 NPR*, p. 6; Lu Desheng.

^{lxvii} See Han Xudong. Of the commentaries I have found, only that by Senior Colonel Yunzhu Yao argues explicitly that the way China is treated in the *2010 NPR* suggests that the United States will not develop offensive and defensive capabilities intended to negate China’s nuclear deterrent.

^{lxviii} Two of the few commentaries that even mention this point are “US Says Deterrence ‘Sole Purpose’ of Nuclear Weapons, Reaffirms Extended Deterrence Commitments”; and Yunzhu Yao.

^{lxix} See, for example, “China Says US Nuke Weapons Reductions Important for International Disarmament”; *Focus Today*; and “Is New Strategy Enough?”

^{lxx} Lu Desheng; and “China Says US Nuke Weapons Reductions Important for International Disarmament.”

^{lxxi} See Lu Desheng.

^{lxxii} Yunzhu Yao.

^{lxxiii} Guo Xiaoping.

^{lxxiv} *2010 NPR*, p. 15. For Chinese commentary, see Guo Xiaoping; Lu Desheng; and “China Says US Nuke Weapons Reductions Important for International Disarmament.”

^{lxxv} Zhang Zhaozhong, *Focus Today*; and Han Xudong.

^{lxxvi} Ge Tengfei.

^{lxxvii} See, for example, Wang Zhongchun, “Nuclear Security Summit: Seek Collective Action to Tackle the Threat of Nuclear Terrorism,” *Dangdai Shijie*, May 5, 2010, pp. 31-33; and Lu Desheng, “China to Speak up More on Arms Control and Disarmament—Special Interview with Secretary General of China Arms Control and Disarmament Association Li Hong,” *Jiefangjun Bao Online* (Chinese), June 10, 2010, p. 4.