



Evolution of China's Nuclear Capability

Recommended Citation

James A. Sands:, "Evolution of China's Nuclear Capability", Nuclear Strategy, April 14, 1995, <https://nautilus.org/projects/nuclear-strategy/evolution-of-chinas-nuclear-capability/>

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In the dissertation for the fulfillment of his curriculum requirement to the Air War College at the Air University, Lieutenant Colonel James A. Sands of the U.S. Air Force outlines some of the main events in China's development of nuclear weapons and nuclear strategy over the years until 1995. He examines the implication of these developments for U.S. policy and argues that the United States is negotiating arms control policies with China without a clear understanding of the Chinese perspectives, interests, and concerns.

Chinese leaders basically do not trust the United States, Sands argues, partly due to U.S. support of Chiang Kai Shek in the 1940s and 1950s, the use of nuclear blackmail during the Korean War, and threats of trade sanctions and criticism of human rights in China. He further suggests that Chinese leaders are concerned with the emergency of the U.S. global preeminence, primarily because they believe it more likely the U.S. will try to overthrow the Chinese Communist Party.

Sands points to two specific areas in the Clinton administration's arms control policy with China that could give credence to Chinese paranoia:

- The U.S. insistence that China reduces its nuclear forces is unrealistic given the significant size of U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.
- The development of missile defense systems and proposed sharing of such technology with other countries including Russia will degrade the utility of the Chinese nuclear arsenal and lead to Chinese counter-acts.

To overcome these deficiencies, Sands argues that the U.S. must first and foremost build trust with the Chinese government and that both governments must be more transparent regarding their actions and goals. Second, the U.S. should have a clear understanding of the evolution of nuclear weapons in China so that the best possible arrangements can be negotiated that will address both the concerns of China and the United States in the region. To accomplish this, Sands proposes to begin with an increase in the military-to-military exchange between the two nuclear powers.

A PDF-version of Lt Col Sands' paper is provided below:

James A. Sands, Lt Col, USAF, "[Evolution of China's Nuclear Capability: Implications for U.S. Policy](#),"
Air War College, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, April 14, 1995.

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