

PEACE AND SECURITY

# CHINA'S ROLE IN MULTILATERAL ARMS CONTROL

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June 2022



It is no longer possible to relegate China to the status of a second-rate military power. This means that there is a need for action. China's involvement is crucial for the preservation and further development of the global arms control architecture.



In spite of a host of ambivalences in its arms control policy, China has displayed a willingness to engage on a greater scale. This offers points of departure for an arms control dialogue with Germany and Europe.



Specificity, flexibility and willingness to engage in dialogue can boost the chances of success in attempts to encourage an arms control policy dialogue with China. Regional confidence-building, verification, the implementation of positive obligations and risk reduction are topics for such an engagement.



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# FOREWORD

The People's Republic of China has abandoned its previous restraint and is actively shaping the global security order of the 21st century. For a considerable period of time, party and state leaders followed the "part one" of Deng Xiaoping's counsel in the field of foreign policy: "Hide your strength, bide your time". Under Xi Jinping's leadership, it would appear that the time has now come. China has shifted the logic underlying its foreign and security policy with a view to its increased political and economic power, thereby reprioritising a variety of security interests.

In the past, China's foreign policy moved mainly within the institutional bounds of the post-war order laid down by the U.S. American leadership was not questioned in many areas, also because this was in China's own interest. Now, instead of constantly adjusting to international norms and rules, the aim is to increasingly bring the world into line with Chinese ideas. The intent thereby is not to completely supplant previous structures upon which the international order is founded. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is willing to shape world politics in China's image, however. Its interests are being articulated ever more clearly and sustainably, lending momentum in recent years to the discourse surrounding an intensifying competition between systems, with the Chinese model of authoritarian state capitalism squaring off against the Western model of a democratic constitutional state and social market economy.

The analysis here is directed at changes in Sino foreign and security policy while explicitly focusing on China's role in multilateral arms control. The two authors, Dr Oliver Meier and Professor Michael Staack, posit and demonstrate that China's growing involvement is crucial to the preservation and further elaboration of arms control policy and international governance.

In contrast to its policy of actively building up its military capabilities, Beijing's behaviour in the area of multilateral arms control is more of a passive nature. It is also possible that the Russo-Ukraine war will throw a wrench into efforts to involve China more in arms control. Notwithstanding this, the authors' wide-ranging analysis suggests that

Beijing is willing to engage more in arms control despite conflicting objectives and ambivalences. In their comprehensive analysis, the authors outline why Beijing is prepared to engage more intensely in the area of arms control despite its various conflicting objectives and ambivalences. This offers starting points for a deeper dialogue with Germany and the European Union. Above and beyond the numerous challenges that exist, Oliver Meier and Michael Staack recommend a more sustainable dialogue on issues involving verification as well as confidence- and security-building in order to cultivate a dialogue with Beijing on cooperative security. Stepping up China's involvement in arms control regimes can make a significant and stabilising contribution to international governance.

The analysis is part of a series of publications put out by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) exploring Chinese strategies in a range of different global policy fields. The overarching question in it all is the future of multilateralism in the face of China's ascendance and increasing competition over the establishment of values and norms: What approaches could facilitate chances to initiate a constructive process of political negotiation between Europe and China on the framework conditions for international governance? In which areas is more coordination and cooperation with China possible? Where, on the other hand, is push-back by Europe warranted, and where does Europe have homework of its own to do?

Through this publication series, the FES would like to contribute to an informed approach to China. The aim and intent is to help European actors gain a more profound understanding of key Chinese notions, Chinese thinking and concepts as well as their manifestation and implementation in international relations in order to derive strategies and to be (more) self-assured in, and well-prepared for, dialogue with Chinese partners.

I wish you informative reading!

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# INTRODUCTION

The topics of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are particularly well suited to maximising opportunities for engagement associated with China's aspirations to attain greater influence while at the same time reducing the dangers associated with efforts to achieve military dominance. This study is not primarily interested in the general question of how to constrain China's military capabilities through arms control, instead focusing on which issues make good sense and constitute priorities from a German and European Union (EU) perspective. The following three assessment criteria guide the analysis: (1) The significance of the topical field: How important is the topic for German and European security? (2) The congruence of interests: To what extent are China and Germany/the European Union pursuing similar security policy interests? Is there potential for these actors to make joint contributions to a strengthening of norms in a multilateral order? (3) The potential for transatlantic and European conflict: How contentious is such a dialogue with China in NATO and the EU?

To facilitate a differentiated assessment of opportunities for cooperation, this analysis distinguishes between various fields of action: cooperation within multilateral non-proliferation regimes, cooperation in the context of current crises (Iran, North Korea), possibilities for cooperation in technology control as well as regional and nuclear arms control. The study is guided by the following principal questions: How can we effectively enhance predictability, transparency and confidence-building with China? Can new military capabilities or weapons systems be included in treaties and agreements with China? What role can Germany and the EU play in strengthening the multilateral arms control architecture?

This study is based on the premise that, without China's constructive participation, challenges to international arms control and the international order (such as those posed by Iran and North Korean, but also the further general development of the multilateral arms control architecture, which has become brittle) cannot be managed or, if so, then less effectively and sustainably. China's policy with regard to armament, arms control and cooperative security is also of great importance to the Indo-Pacific region, where the two latter components of the international order have received too little attention by almost every side. The deeper question of how to establish a policy of political understanding beyond strategic competition with China is not at the heart of the

analysis. This study assumes, rather, that China's involvement in multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements seeking to limit military capacities is a value in and of itself. Cooperation along these lines can also contribute to a longer-term change in the political relationship if it establishes channels of dialogue and promotes an understanding of shared interests. Moreover, concrete action can build trust and contribute to a strengthening of the international order through concrete agreements.

## 1

# CONDITIONS UNDERLYING ARMS CONTROL POLICIES

## 1.1 THE ASCENDANCE OF CHINA AS A PLAYER IN GLOBAL SECURITY POLITICS

China intends to and will actively shape the global security order in the 21st century. There are opportunities and risks associated with this departure from its previous restraint. China is ready to assume more responsibility within the framework of the United Nations (UN). Among the permanent members of the Security Council, China is now the biggest contributor of military troops to UN missions. Moreover, China's support was key in the finalisation of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. It is inconceivable that the conflict over North Korea's nuclear weapons programme can be contained and resolved without China's constructive involvement. As a member of the P5 (permanent members of the UN Security Council), China has been willing to move forward with the process of confidence-building among them. Beijing is participating, albeit hesitantly, in other cooperation formats of like-minded states, such as the Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament Initiative (CEND). Today, China is a member of all major multilateral regimes involved in the control of weapons of mass destruction and is party to a number of additional treaties. While China participates in nuclear-related regimes for the control of proliferation-relevant technologies (Nuclear Suppliers Group, Zangger Committee) and is a member of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), it has so far not become involved in export control regimes for chemical, biological or conventional dual-use technologies.

China's quest for more influence also carries risks, however, especially if China concentrates on achieving and expanding its military competitiveness with the U.S. By 2050, China aims to have military forces that are technologically on par with those of the U.S. It is developing a broad arsenal of state-of-the-art weapons systems, making technological leaps in development, becoming increasingly active as an arms exporter and initiating sophisticated defence cooperation programmes, for example with Pakistan and Russia. Parallel to this, it is investing in the expeditionary capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to safeguard and protect trade interests, investments and resources. Here as well, China is now following the European and U.S. model. In an effort to modernise its armed forces,

China is focusing primarily on the development of its anti-access/area-denial capabilities (A2/AD) in order to hold the military and security policy latitude of the U.S. and its allies in check.

High priorities are also being assigned to the military dimension of aerospace and cyberspace. Although the focus of China's military capacities is on East Asia, its projection capabilities already range beyond this. Beijing is also pursuing security interests in core regions of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for example, while expanding its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. China's engagement in Europe is based on strategic interests, which, however, aim rather at geo-economic objectives rather than security policy goals.

The People's Republic of China sees itself as a global player, a trading power, a major power in Asia and the world's largest developing country – although it would be more accurate to say: a country that has been developing rapidly. As a power in the discourse on the global stage, China wants to have a say in the development of the rules, norms and institutions for the international system in all areas and actively take part in setting and framing the global agenda. To this end, it is developing its own narratives and institutions, which are footed above all on China's success story over the past decades. China's ascendancy has basically taken place within the framework of the existing order, especially the security and economic order. China would like to change this global order or regional orders to align these more with its own designs, but does not want to discard them. This also explicitly applies to the area of disarmament and arms control. China is striving to create a global web of economic cooperation through networks and structures, which is also intended to increase its political clout in the world. The maximisation of welfare and favourable framework conditions for this are the most important goals underlying its foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

In China's self-perception, its rise to pre-eminence, unprecedented in terms of speed and multidimensionality, constitutes a "return" to a leading global position, which the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Noesselt, Nele (2021): *Chinese Politics. National and Global Dimensions*, Baden-Baden, pp. 165–228.

country had held for 18 of the 20 centuries after Christ, and which was shattered by the interventions of the imperial powers during the “century of humiliation”.<sup>2</sup> Although the emphasis in the rhetoric is often placed elsewhere, China’s understanding and practice of its role as a major global power is oriented towards its perception of the United States’ foreign policy behaviour, for example, the latter’s staunch belief in a strong military, its selective disregard for international law, its threats and projections of military and economic power, its rejection of compulsory dispute mediation, and its demands for “respect”. In terms of certain core interests – role as a global great power, the nine dash line, the territorial integrity of China including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang – a democratic China would most likely not differ fundamentally in foreign policy terms from today’s non-democratic China. The People’s Republic does not want to replace the U.S. as a world power, but instead be recognised as an equal player with the United States in all areas of policy in a multipolar system by the middle of the 21st century.<sup>3</sup>

The United States of America views the ongoing rise of the People’s Republic of China as a threat to its global supremacy and as the greatest geopolitical challenge of the 21st century. The U.S. considers China to be a “systemic rival” whose policies will have to be countered and thwarted for decades to come.<sup>4</sup> An ultimate objective in this confrontation has yet to be spelled out.<sup>5</sup> There is a broad consensus spanning the U.S. political spectrum regarding the adversarial relationship with China, notwithstanding differences in views of the right strategy to adopt.<sup>6</sup> In view of the deep structural cleavages afflicting the country, this consensus is of major importance, as it amalgamates Washington’s international policy, global strategy and alliances into an “or-

dering principle”<sup>7</sup>, serving as an imperative and central precept legitimising U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

China was surprised by the decisiveness with which the U.S. – first brutally under Trump, then with more deliberation under Biden – rolled out its new containment strategy, especially in the areas of trade and technology. Since then, it has developed and employed shifting counter-strategies.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2017, an all-encompassing rivalry in terms of power, system and military capabilities has developed between the U.S. and the People’s Republic.<sup>9</sup> At the epicentre of the “global Sino-American conflict”<sup>10</sup> is the power challenge: The U.S. would resist and oppose even a democratic China drawing level or overtaking it.<sup>11</sup> System competition with its three dimensions (juxtaposing models of rule and society, competition over efficient modern governance along the lines of output legitimacy, competition over the shape and structure of international governance) further fuels this power competition. Military competition is a by-product of power and system competition, and can to an extent take on a life of its own, but – depending on the respective cost-benefit calculation and degree of ideological confrontation – is in principle amenable to containment through arms control. This goal cannot be achieved in a climate of full-blown antagonism.<sup>12</sup>

On a global scale, China is still far from military parity with the U.S.<sup>13</sup>

2 “The century of humiliation” in official Chinese usage refers to the period from the beginning of the first Opium War (1840) to proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (1949).

3 Cf. Staack, Michael (2021): *Chinas Selbstverständnis und die Sicherheitskonstellation in Ostasien. Gibt es (noch) eine Chance für kooperative Sicherheit?* Discussion Paper for the European Security and Peace Study Group of the Federation of German Scientists (VDW), 2 July 2021, <https://vdw-ev.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Michael-Staack-Chinas-Selbstverstaendnis-und-die-Sicherheitskonstellation-in-Ostasien.pdf> (2 January 2022).

4 Ikenberry, G. John (2021): “Systemic Rivals. America’s Emerging Grand Strategy towards China.”, in *Global Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2021), pp. 14–17, [https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/systemic-rivals-americas-emerging-grand-strategy-toward-china\\_g-john-ikenberry](https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/systemic-rivals-americas-emerging-grand-strategy-toward-china_g-john-ikenberry) (4 January 2022).

5 Cf. Ashford, Emma (2021): “Great-Power Competition is a Recipe for Disaster”, in: *Foreign Policy*, 1 April 2021; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/01/china-usa-great-power-competition-recipe-for-disaster/> (4 January 2021). Ashford compares “great power competition” with the failure of the now twenty-year-old “War on Terror”, which also got underway without any goal or strategy.

6 Cf. U.S. Congress (2021): “Strategic Competition with the People’s Republic of China in the Twenty-first Century”, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 17 March 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/117/chrg/CHRG-117shrg44456/CHRG-117shrg44456.pdf> (3 January 2022); U.S. Congress (2021): “Strategic Competition Act of 2021 (Draft)”, 8 April 2021, Washington, D.C., <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DAV21598%20Strategic%20Competition%20Act%20of%202021.pdf> (2 January 2022).

7 Groitl, Gerlinde / Viola, Lora Anne (2021): „Die strategische Rivalität mit China“, in: Overhaus, Marco (ed.): *State of the Union. Langfristige Trends in der US-amerikanischen Innen- und Außenpolitik und ihre Konsequenzen für Europa*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/studien/2021S06\\_Overhaus\\_State\\_of\\_Union.pdf](https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/studien/2021S06_Overhaus_State_of_Union.pdf) (2 January 2022), p. 32.

8 Cf. Wang Dong (2021): “Reluctant Rival. Beijing’s Approach to US China Competition”, in: *Global Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2021), pp. 8–13, [https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/reluctant-rival-beijings-approach-to-us-china-competition\\_wang-dong](https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/reluctant-rival-beijings-approach-to-us-china-competition_wang-dong) (4 January 2022).

9 For definitions of power, system and military competition, cf. Czempiel, Ernst-Otto (1991): *Weltpolitik im Umbruch. Das internationale System nach dem Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts*, Munich 1991, pp. 20–26.

10 Rudolf, Peter (2019): *Der amerikanisch-chinesische Weltkonflikt*, SWP-Studie 23, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/studien/2019S23\\_rdf.pdf](https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/studien/2019S23_rdf.pdf) (3 January 2022).

11 The assertion of world primacy and a position of power “second to none” is part and parcel of the dominant foreign policy self-perception of the United States. This rules out any acceptance of any equal status for another, even democratic, power – such as Japan in the 1980s or, later, the European Union.

12 Between broadly conceived and highly charged rhetoric (e.g. the U.S. accusing China of genocide) and a need to come to an understanding on (important) individual issues, there is a tension that is not yet sufficiently reflected conceptually or taken into account in practical terms. This relates not only to arms control or climate protection, but also, for example, to a possible mediating role for China in the Russia-Ukraine war. One can only expect such agreements if confrontation or competition is contained in part in order to create a space for “antagonistic cooperation”.

13 Cf. Tan, Nian / Su, Fei (2021): *A New Estimate of China’s Military Expenditure*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm.

In its perception of itself as a great power, the People's Republic keeps a close eye on the potential of the U.S., especially with regard to its naval and special forces.<sup>14</sup> With the world's largest fleet in terms of numbers, China is still far from being the most militarily capable navy, however. In terms of tonnage, it is well behind the United States, has only two operational aircraft carriers compared to the U.S. Navy's eleven carrier groups, and is (still) predominantly geared towards regional missions. In East Asia, however, China's arms build-up and modernisation efforts have already shifted the military balance of power in its favour, sparking an arms build-up on the part of neighbouring states such as Japan and Vietnam, but also India in South Asia. Regional arms control regimes scarcely exist and there is an insufficient awareness among decision-makers of the usefulness of arms control as a stabilising instrument. Mutual security perceptions are characterised by a troubling worst-case scenario approach. Deficits in terms of confidence-building, communication and exchange of information have a negative impact on the security constellation. In particular, there is a dearth of cooperatively defined substantive benchmarks to guide multilateral arms limitation. It is no longer possible to relegate the People's Republic of China to the level of a second-rate military power; an unbridled arms build-up by the country with the consequence of new arms races and destabilisation is also highly undesirable. This translates into an urgent need to encourage and foster arms control and cooperative security.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which commenced on 24 February 2022, constitutes a turning point not only for European security. This war has far-reaching implications for the international order. The trajectory of the conflict to date and a comparison with other fundamental structural ruptures in history suggest that this war will act as a catalyst for already-existing, predominantly negative tendencies in the international system, i.e. tendencies directed against peace, security and cooperation. These include an intensification and hardening of great power competition between the U.S., Russia and China, an across-the-board gridlock of decision-making processes in the United Nations system and especially on the Security Council, a significant surge in arms build-ups both in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific region, a reinforcement of tendencies towards economic "decoupling", an intensification of hostile tendencies and "geopoliticisation" of regional conflicts and dynamics. All these trending developments impact Chinese policy as well as its role in the international system and translate into immense challenges and risks.

The Chinese leadership is vacillating between fundamental condemnation of the war, blaming the U.S. and NATO and holding them responsible for the conflict, while preserving its close strategic partnership with Russia and endeavouring to avoid further straining relations in the In-

do-Pacific region with the European Union and the United States, e.g. through direct support for Russia. After weighing out the returns in a cost-benefit analysis, the People's Republic is apparently not willing to play a mediating role at present.<sup>15</sup> The Russia-Ukraine war and its repercussions, as yet not fully foreseeable, may further impede prospects of successful arms control with China and steps being taken in the direction of cooperative security in the Indo-Pacific.

## 1.2 THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT IN EAST ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

In East, Southeast and South Asia, there is no such thing as an inclusive, sufficiently institutionalised and functionally adequate structure for cooperation between nation-states in place. In contrast to Europe, actors in East, Southeast and South Asia have not sufficiently come to terms with the Second World War in the way of a political assessment of history, both between nation-states and within societies. Although it has been possible to contain the consequences and legacies of the war, it has not been possible to lay this down in and "resolve" these legacies in the form of treaties. The same applies to various after-effects of the colonial era. Numerous territorial conflicts – including, but not only, involving China – remain unresolved down to this day. Nationalism is a dominant force in many countries. Above all, there is a lack of empathy on almost all sides as a basic precondition for any realistic foreign and security policy promoting peace. In short: East Asia, but also large parts of the wider Indo-Pacific region, are caught up in an inadequately contained security dilemma, which has so far only been mitigated to a limited extent by the increasing degree of economic interlinkages and interdependence (the Asian paradox).<sup>16</sup> Targeted action by external actors therefore requires a precise, in-depth and independent analysis of the Indo-Pacific region.

Six analytical dimensions are of key importance in gaining an understanding of political-economic developments in the wider region:

- the region's own dynamics with their processes of cooperation, competition and conflict;
- Sino-American power competition, which is taking place in a field of tension with regional dynamics, and is increasingly overriding them;
- a state-centred understanding of politics and a relatively low degree of regulation and institutionalisation;

<sup>15</sup> See Goldstein, Lyle (2022): "China-Russia Relations in the Wake of the War in Ukraine", in *Global Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (March 2022), pp. 80–83, [https://www.globalasia.org/v17no1/feature/china-russia-relations-in-the-wake-of-the-war-in-ukraine\\_lyle-goldstein](https://www.globalasia.org/v17no1/feature/china-russia-relations-in-the-wake-of-the-war-in-ukraine_lyle-goldstein) (15 April 2022).

<sup>16</sup> In Southeast Asia the regional organisation ASEAN is successfully pursuing just such a containment of the security dilemma.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Fravel, M. Taylor (2019): *Active Defense. China's Military Strategy since 1949*, Princeton/Oxford, p. 217 ff.



- specifically Asian ways of dealing with conflicts (e.g. priority of process over outcome, “saving face”);
- a conflict-laden and conflict-exacerbating history;
- the role of external actors.

Security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region is characterised by institutional diversity and relatively shallow depth and commitment.<sup>17</sup> Various institutions, dialogue and cooperation formats – e.g. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Plus Three (APT) with China, Japan and South Korea, or the East Asia Summit (EAS) – overlap not only in terms of their participants but also in terms of the tasks to be addressed. In these contexts, the discussion of non-traditional security challenges such as the prevention of climate and environmental disasters, drugs and arms trafficking or piracy has so far taken precedence over military security and arms limitation. The multilateral dialogue, which is approached as a process, is at the forefront of this cooperation.<sup>18</sup> The “European path” of placing cooperation and further integration on a legal footing is used as a point of reference, especially by ASEAN, but in actual practice takes back seat to the preservation of national sovereignty and ad hoc cooperation.

At least as important as multilateral cooperation in the security equation for the region are the bilateral alliance relations of the U.S. with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and – in formal terms below the alliance level – with the Republic of China on Taiwan.<sup>19</sup> These bilateral alliances not only include security guarantees for the respective partners, but also secure the United States military bases off the coasts of China. Similar functions are served by AUKUS, the new alliance between Australia, Great Britain and the U.S. forged in September 2021.<sup>20</sup> Following its withdrawal from the EU, the United Kingdom has fundamentally shifted its security policy, once again viewing itself an Indo-Pacific power, linking into its historic East of Suez policy.<sup>21</sup>

Less formalised than in classical alliances is the cooperation in the format of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) between Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. A loose coop-

erative framework until spring 2021, the Quad has since then been expanded upon the initiative of the United States into a more comprehensive format that includes meetings between heads of state and government or departmental ministers, security policy coordination and joint manoeuvres.<sup>22</sup>

China’s rise to power, as well as its often ostentatious use of power, have led many states in the region to support a significantly stronger balancing role for the U.S. as a sort of insurance policy. Because confidence in the strength and above all in the credibility of the security guarantor, the U.S., deteriorated under President Obama and even more so under his successor Trump, the resulting actual gain in security is fragile. This perception was confirmed by the circumstances surrounding the West’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021. Most states in the region also make a distinction between the policy fields of security and economics. For the most part, they are unwilling and in de facto terms unable to significantly scale down the close economic ties that have developed with China. Thus, they continue to cooperate closely with the People’s Republic in the economic sphere.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of Japan and Australia, they are also unwilling to clearly choose sides.

In the words of Egon Bahr, the unshakeable affiliation to a common geographic space and historical experiences are further influencing factors. The ideological “framing” of the Sino-American conflict as a major global conflict between democracy and autocracy is considered a “non-starter” by actors in the region.<sup>24</sup> Based on these well-founded, structurally based constellations of interests, the majority of countries want both: cooperation with China *and* the U.S. In principle, this is an important precondition for steps to be taken in the direction of co-operative security. Accordingly, the establishment of the AUKUS security pact was received critically, especially in ASEAN, and was predominantly seen as aggravating the regional conflict constellation.<sup>25</sup> On top of this, there are concerns about nuclear proliferation. With the exception of Singapore, all ASEAN states have signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into force at the beginning of 2021.

<sup>17</sup> See Bisley, Nick (2019): “Asia’s Regional Security Order: Rules, Power and Status”, in: *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (September 2019), pp. 361–376.

<sup>18</sup> See Muhabat, Fifi (2013): *Evolving Approaches to Regional Security Cooperation. A Conceptual Analysis of Cooperative Security with Illustrations of Practices in East Asia*, Baden-Baden.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. International Institute of Strategic Studies (ed.) (2021): *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2021*, London.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Roggeveen, Sam (2021): „Eine Frage des Interesses. Wettkampf um die Vormachtstellung? Die AUKUS Allianz wirft die Frage nach der strategischen Ausrichtung der verschiedenen Akteure in Asien auf“, in: *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 5 October 2021; <https://www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/aussen-und-sicherheitspolitik/artikel/eine-frage-des-interesses-5469> (4 January 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Niblett, Robin (2021): “AUKUS reveals much about the new global strategic context”, in: *Chatham House*, 18 September 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/09/aukus-reveals-much-about-new-global-strategic-context> (4 January 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Brown, Kerry (2021): “The Indo-Pacific, the Quad and the reality of Chinese Power”, in: *EastAsiaForum*, 23 September 2021; <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/09/23/the-indo-pacific-the-quad-and-the-reality-of-chinese-power/> (4 January 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ikenberry, G. John (2016): “Between the Eagle and the Dragon: America, China, and Middle State Strategies in East Asia”, in: *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 131, No. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 9–43.

<sup>24</sup> See Thu, Huong Le (2021): “Biden’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Traps to Avoid in South East Asia.”, in *Global Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2021), pp. 48–53, [https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/bidens-indo-pacific-strategy-traps-to-avoid-in-southeast-asia\\_huong-le-thu](https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/bidens-indo-pacific-strategy-traps-to-avoid-in-southeast-asia_huong-le-thu) (4 January 2022).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Müller, Matthias (2021): „Südostasien zeigt sich besorgt über das neue Sicherheitsabkommen zwischen den U.S., Großbritannien und Australien“, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 25 October 2021, [https://www.nzz.ch/international/asean-aukus-legt-defizite-desuedostasiatischen-buendnisses-offen-ld.1651559?kid=nl102\\_2021-1026&mktcid=nled&ga=1&mktcval=102&trco=](https://www.nzz.ch/international/asean-aukus-legt-defizite-desuedostasiatischen-buendnisses-offen-ld.1651559?kid=nl102_2021-1026&mktcid=nled&ga=1&mktcval=102&trco=) (3 January 2022).

Until the 2000s, the regional organisation ASEAN was the most important engine for security cooperation and confidence-building in the region, for instance through dialogue formats such as the ATP and EAS, norms such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (1976), the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Southeast Asia (1995), a Code of Conduct for managing disputes in the South China Sea (which is not yet ready for treaty status or legally binding) or the ASEAN Regional Forum for Security Issues (ARF), which also includes North Korea.<sup>26</sup> In view of China's return to a major power role and increasing tensions with other major powers, ASEAN has only been able to play this central role to a limited extent over the past decade. This is also due to internal tensions within this heterogeneous organisation, which includes both democracies and non-democracies. All ten member states stick to a policy of close, and not only economic, cooperation with China, while at the same time advocating a balancing of China with the U.S., whereby for the Philippines and Vietnam balancing is assigned greater weight, while Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar are interested in more cooperation, and for the other ASEAN states (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand) both goals are more or less equally important.

For the People's Republic of China, ASEAN remains a key, valued cooperative partner. China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with ASEAN on 15 November 2020, creating the largest free trade area in the world. On 22 November 2021, China and ASEAN upgraded their 30 years of cooperation to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". The initiation and steering of dialogue formats such as APT, EAS and ARF opens up institutional possibilities for ASEAN to initiate cooperative processes, including arms control in the region.<sup>27</sup>

Japan and Australia are clearly positioning themselves on the side of the U.S., while India – sticking to its basic orientation of strategic autonomy – is trying to leverage the changing constellation in its further rise to a great power. For South Korea, on the other hand, until the change of presidency in May 2022, national interests in peaceful developments on the Korean peninsula dictated policy, with good relations both with the U.S. and the People's Republic of China being needed.

It remains to be seen whether the new president, Yoon Suk-yeol, will actually be able to implement the intended fundamental change of course in foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> Over the

last decade, Japan has pursued a policy seeking to redefine the country's role in the region and, to this end, has articulated a security policy whose centre-piece is "normalisation" and making "pacifist" provisions of the post-war constitution a thing of the past.<sup>29</sup> With regard to the Second World War, governments formed by the conservative Liberal Democrats are once again openly pursuing a revisionist interpretation of history. In the region, however, the country is only accepted with reservation due to its problematic policy toward the past, hence continuing to make it dependent on the U.S. in the area of security policy.<sup>30</sup> Japan will not accept taking a back seat to China in the realm of power politics.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Japan supports global arms control regimes and is open to steps along similar lines in the region. The same goes for Australia, which is one of the closest allies of the U.S. and has taken part in all of Washington's wars. Bilateral relations between Canberra and Beijing have been particularly tense since 2018-2019 due to multiple sources of conflict (China's disputed influence in the fields of politics and economics, migration from China).<sup>32</sup> South Korea is also a close ally of the U.S., but has been equally interested in good relations with China for foreign policy and economic reasons. These interests have made the country one of the strongest advocates of arms control and confidence-building in the region. Seoul is keenly aware of Germany's experience with *détente*.<sup>33</sup>

India's foreign policy is aimed at establishing the country as a great power in all spheres and as an independent global political pole.<sup>34</sup> India is guided in its actions by the concept of strategic autonomy, which encompasses an emphasis on the principle of non-interference and rejection of involvement in alliances. It is seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and complete interna-

the acquisition of nuclear weapons is once again being debated in South Korea. Since the previous ruling Social-Liberal Party in Seoul still has a parliamentary majority and the country is very polarised politically, it will be difficult for Yoon Suk-yeol to implement all these plans. Cf. Ballbach, Eric J. (2022): „Richtungswechsel in Südkorea“, SWP-Aktuell 26, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik; [https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2022A26\\_RichtungswechselS%C3%BCdkorea.pdf](https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2022A26_RichtungswechselS%C3%BCdkorea.pdf) (15 April 2022).

<sup>29</sup> See Akimoto, Daisuke (2018): *The Abe doctrine: Japan's proactive pacifism and security strategy*, Singapore.

<sup>30</sup> See Smith, Sheila A. (2021): "The Growing Risk for Japan in the US China Rivalry", in: *Global Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2021), pp. 30–34; [https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/the-growing-risk-for-japan-in-the-us-china-rivalry\\_sheila-a-smith](https://globalasia.org/v16no4/cover/the-growing-risk-for-japan-in-the-us-china-rivalry_sheila-a-smith) (4 January 2022).

<sup>31</sup> See Choong, William (2014): *The Ties That Divide. History, Honor and Territory in Sino-Japanese Relations*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London.

<sup>32</sup> See Brophy, David (2021): *China Panic. Australia's Alternative to Paranoia and Pandering*, Melbourne.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Moon, ChungIn (2012): *The Sunshine Policy. In Defence of Engagement as a Path to Peace in Korea*, Seoul.

<sup>34</sup> See Destradi, Sandra (2018): "Towards a more Determined and Responsive Foreign Policy? Continuity and Change in India's Foreign Policy under Prime Minister Modi", in Staack, Michael / Groten, David (ed.): *China und Indien im regionalen und globalen Umfeld*, Opladen / Berlin / Toronto, pp. 143–159; Nissel, Heinz (2020): „Indien 2020 – Nicht mehr (geo)politische Peripherie, noch nicht globale Führungsmacht“, in: *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*, Vol. 162, pp. 397–438.

<sup>26</sup> See Bisley, Nick (2009): *Building Asia's Security*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London.

<sup>27</sup> See Acharya, Amitav (2021): *ASEAN and Regional Order. Revisiting Security Community in Southeast Asia*, London.

<sup>28</sup> President Yoon Suk-yeol, who was elected on 9 March 2022, has announced that Korea plans to deepen its alliance with the U.S., end its policy of dialogue with North Korea, pursue a rapprochement with Japan while putting aside its historical and political legacies, and also seek cooperation with the Quad. He also believes a trilateral alliance between South Korea, Japan and the U.S. to be possible; in addition,

tional legitimacy for its status as a nuclear power, notwithstanding the fact that it is not party to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Its nuclear weapons are targeted primarily against Pakistan, but also against the People's Republic of China. Equality with China is a paramount goal in Indian foreign policy. In step with its strategy of maintaining strategic autonomy and active multi-alignment, India wants to avoid being used as a pawn by other powers while strengthening its own position as a great power in the Indo-Pacific in the new constellation, e. g. through cooperation in the Quad format. At the same time, security and arms cooperation with Russia is being maintained and expanded. India is not opposed to multilateral and regional arms control, but is nonetheless rather reserved in this regard.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has already had serious repercussions in the region. Australia, Japan and the U.S. are accusing China of scheming to invade Taiwan along the lines of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. President Biden has abandoned the 40-year policy of "strategic ambiguity" and pledged Taiwan military assistance in the event of an attack by the People's Republic, even in lieu of any treaty cementing an alliance.<sup>35</sup> Japan and Australia have announced their intention to significantly boost their military budgets once again. Japan is also considering joining AUK-US. India, on the other hand, is adhering to its course of strategic autonomy and its decades-long partnership with Russia, and clearly resents protests coming from the U.S.<sup>36</sup> While India abstained from voting on the resolution condemning Russia's war of aggression in the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022, like China and 33 other states, especially from the Global South, eight out of ten ASEAN members voted in favour of the resolution.<sup>37</sup> ASEAN (with the exception of Singapore) is, however, just as unwilling as India to fall into line in the face of the Biden administration's pressure to adopt a clear position opposing Russia, impose sanctions or end economic relations. As a result of this difference, a U.S.-ASEAN summit at the end of March 2022 was cancelled at short notice and not rescheduled until 12 and 13 May 2022.<sup>38</sup> The shadow cast on regional cooperation by the dynamics of great power competition has become even darker.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Tessa Wong (2022): "Biden vows to defend Taiwan in apparent policy shift", in: *BBC news*, 23 May 2022; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-61548531> (24 May 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. "Indien will Handel mit Russland intensivieren", in: *n-tv.de*, 2 April 2022; [https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Indien-will-Handel-mit-Russland-intensivieren-article23242576.html?utm\\_source=pocket-newtab-global-DE](https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Indien-will-Handel-mit-Russland-intensivieren-article23242576.html?utm_source=pocket-newtab-global-DE) (15 April 2022); "India, U.S. hold broad 2+4 discussions, with Ukraine looming over talks", in: *thehindu.com*, 12 April 2022; <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/at-22-ministerial-dialogue-india-and-us-call-for-immediate-cessation-of-hostilities-in-ukraine/article65314212.ece> (15 April 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Laos and Vietnam abstained.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. "Biden's summit with Southeast Asian leaders postponed", in: *politico.com*, 25 March 2022; <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/25/bidens-summit-with-southeast-asian-leaders-postponed-00020543> (15 April 2022); "ASEAN-U.S. Special Summit, 2022: Joint Vision Statement"; <https://asean.org/joint-vision-statement-of-the-asean-us-special-summit2022/> (24 May 2022).

### 1.3 GERMAN SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL POLICY TOWARDS CHINA

Germany and China have developed a stable relationship, but it has by no means been free of tension in recent decades.<sup>39</sup> Both sides continue to regard the bilateral relationship as very important. While for several decades the focus was on a bilateralism heavily oriented toward economic interests, Germany's Sino policy since 2017 has – at least rhetorically – been placed more firmly within the coordination framework of the European Union. Since 2019, the EU has framed its relations with China in terms of partnership, competition and systemic rivalry:

*"China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a co-operation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance."*<sup>40</sup>

This approach was explicitly reaffirmed in the coalition agreement between the SPD, the Greens and the FDP from 24 November 2021, setting out the path for development of a German strategy towards China and setting the goal of a European and transatlantically coordinated Sino policy.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, with the Guiding Principles for the Indo-Pacific Region issued by the German Federal Government (1 September 2020), Germany has formulated a strategy for this large region for the first time in more than 15 years.<sup>42</sup> These guiding principles lay down the following key objectives:

- a stronger and more visible role for Germany in the Indo-Pacific region;
- a diversification of relations, especially economic and political;
- an inclusive cooperation policy, i.e. that also includes the People's Republic of China;
- a rejection of unipolarity and bipolarity in the region;

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Huang, Ying (2019): *Die Chinapolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung. Ein Balanceakt zwischen Werten und Interessen*, Wiesbaden.

<sup>40</sup> European Commission (2019): *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, 12 March 2019; <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf> (3 January 2021), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Koalitionsvertrag zwischen SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und FDP (2021): *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit*, Berlin, 24 November 2021, [https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag_2021-2025.pdf) (3 January 2022), p. 157.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bundesregierung (2020): *Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik*, Berlin, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2380500/33f978a9d4f511942c241eb4602086c1/200901-indo-pacific-guidelines--1--data.pdf> (3 January 2022).

- an expansion of previous cooperation formats to include a security policy dimension.

All these objectives are to be pursued to the greatest extent possible within the framework of intensive coordination within the European Union (cf. 1.4) and in consultation with the U.S. It is worth noting that the latter objective was set during the Trump Administration.

In terms of security policy, Germany wants to promote cooperative security and arms control as well as build or deepen security ties with “partners sharing similar values” such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea and India.<sup>43</sup> The regional organisation ASEAN is seen as another priority partner for cooperation. So far, articulation of the cooperative security dimension in the guiding principles has lagged behind the development of other dimensions. There have been no initiatives for cooperative security and arms control, while military cooperation has been pushed forward especially with Japan and Australia. So-called 2+2 consultations between foreign and defence ministers have also been agreed upon with both countries – a rather unusual format for German foreign policy.

The German Federal Ministry of Defence attached special symbolic importance to an Indo-Pacific voyage lasting several months by the German frigate *Bavaria*, which was seen to be performing the role of an “icebreaker”.<sup>44</sup> The mission of the frigate was also portrayed by the Defence Minister at the time, Kramp-Karrenbauer, as a German contribution to the containment of China.<sup>45</sup> The impact of these comments were then additionally amplified by statements by the Navy Chief of Staff at the time on the need for India, the U.S., Germany and Russia to form a coalition against China and his intention to gradually boost Germany’s military presence in the Indo-Pacific region to this end.<sup>46</sup> He also expressed his conviction that the ascendancy of China could only be stopped by force.<sup>47</sup> Even if

these remarks prompted his immediate dismissal, it is likely that Germany’s reputation as an actor without a “hidden agenda” in Beijing has suffered permanent damage due to this incident.

Such considerations have very little in common with German policy towards China. In 2011, Germany and China agreed on a “Strategic Partnership”, which was upgraded to a “Major Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” in 2014.<sup>48</sup> An essential component of this partnership is bilateral intergovernmental consultations, the continuation and stronger European input of which was laid down in the 2021 coalition agreement.<sup>49</sup> Although there have long been military relations between Germany and China, including high-level but not regular or structured (i.e. work programme) dialogue formats between the German Armed Forces and the People’s Liberation Forces (the defence attaché staff unit at the German Embassy in Beijing has been headed by a general since 2014, as is customary for central Western capitals and Russia), but security policy or defence ministers have not yet been included in the partnership or in governmental consultations, or this has only happened in rudimentary form.

In retrospect, it would appear to be a mistake not to have institutionalised this dialogue forum for the purpose of transparency, information exchange and confidence-building. Arms control and security policy issues in the broader sense have been addressed by the foreign ministers. Heiko Maas, Foreign Minister at the time, placed the focus on arms control for the first time during a visit to China in 2018. This has not yet evolved into an institutionalised format, however. The Coalition Agreement now states: “We want to involve states with nuclear weapons such as China more strongly in nuclear disarmament and arms control.”<sup>50</sup>

In his government declaration issued on 15 December 2021, Chancellor Olaf Scholz reaffirmed the goal of an arms control dialogue with China, placing it in context:

<sup>43</sup> In the 2021 Coalition Agreement, Singapore is no longer mentioned as a “partner sharing similar values”. There is also considerable criticism of India, inter alia the Modi presidency’s restrictions on fundamental rights and the elevation of Hindu nationalism to the status of a guiding principle of the state.

<sup>44</sup> Kurmayer, Nikolaus J. (2021): “German navy to send more ships into the Indo-Pacific”, in: *Euractiv*, 23 December 2021, [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/german-navy-to-send-more-ships-into-indo-pacific/?utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=17736&pnewsid=u7h3UztIKbclcy6Hfv-W62HoucAuiWYB5MOelmrM4qhRmmCCu2c0fjgoW4ajUhiXGiPG-JG1RtA](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/german-navy-to-send-more-ships-into-indo-pacific/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=17736&pnewsid=u7h3UztIKbclcy6Hfv-W62HoucAuiWYB5MOelmrM4qhRmmCCu2c0fjgoW4ajUhiXGiPG-JG1RtA) (3 January 2022).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Federal Ministry of Defence (2019): Speech by the Minister at the University of the Bundeswehr Munich, 7 November 2019, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/rede-der-ministerin-an-der-universitaet-der-bundeswehr-muenchen-146670> (3 January 2022); Staack, Michael (2021): “Die Debatte fehlt”, in: *Zur Sache BW*, Vol. 39, No. 1/2021, pp. 52–55, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/5083720/f0b94c0c6e0cb95283cfc0d6ddeb438/cause-bw-392021data.pdf> (4 January 2022).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the speech delivered by Navy Chief of Staff Kay Achim Schönbach on 22 January 2022 at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis (IDSA), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODmkoGQw1TU> (25 January 2022).

<sup>47</sup> “This has to be stopped, and in the end the only way to do it is by

force.” Cf. “Flottenchef versenkt”, in: *taz.de*, 24.1.2022; <https://taz.de/Vizeadmiral-Kay-Achim-Schoenbach/15829963/> (25 January 2022); as well as the recording (note 44). Schönbach’s remarks were made in the context of a series of lectures delivered along the route of the *Bayern*. In retrospect, it proved to be a gross error to leave strategic communication of the security policy part of the Indo-Pacific Guiding Principles to the Navy Chief of Staff and not to the diplomatic corps or political leaders. The navy leadership had opposed a port visit to Shanghai in China, which had been put on the agenda by the SPD Parliamentary Party Group led by its chairman Rolf Mützenich. In September 2021, China rejected this request for a visit. A review of this “strategic communication” by Schönbach and the navy, e.g. by the German Bundestag, would be warranted. Cf. Wirth, Christian (2022): “How to Anchor Germany’s Drifting Indo-Pacific Policy”, in: *GIGA Focus*, No. 1, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (2014): Gemeinsame Erklärung zum Besuch von Staatspräsident Xi: Schaffung einer umfassenden strategischen Partnerschaft zwischen Deutschland und China, 28 March 2014, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/bregde/suche/gemeinsame-erklaerung-zum-Besuch-von-staatspraesident-xi-schaffung-einer-umfassenden-strategischen-partnerschaft-zwischen-deutschland-und-china-411848> (3 January 2022).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Coalition Agreement (2021), p. 157.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

*“We have to align our China policy with the China we find in reality. This also means that we do not close our eyes to the critical human rights situation while naming and shaming violations of universal norms. This does not change the fact that a country of China’s size and history has a central place in the international concert of nations. That is why we are reaching out to offer China cooperation on human challenges such as the climate crisis, pandemics and arms control.”<sup>51</sup>*

A German Sino and Indo-Pacific policy anchored in the framework of the European Union with its inclusive and cooperative approach can influence developments in the region on a limited scale or in certain topical areas. Arms control, cooperative security and confidence-building are among these topical fields, including in relation to China. With the three-pronged thrust towards China and the dual strategy of cooperation and balancing, Germany and the EU have a concept that aligns with the interests of many countries in the region, especially ASEAN members. The chances of such a policy succeeding increase if it is independent, i.e. embedded within the framework of the European Union or pursued in tandem with like-minded countries. Such an independent European role and policy can also help to reduce deficits in perception and communication.

A mere repetition of U.S. positions will not be taken seriously either by China or by other countries in the region (especially ASEAN members) as a purposeful contribution to cooperative security. Moreover, with regard to the role of Germany and the EU, underlying conditions must always be taken into account: The specialisation constituting an advantage and the strength of both Germany and the EU is not to be found in the projection of military power, military partisanship or proactively seeking confrontation, but rather in the advocacy of equality and consensus-building.<sup>52</sup> A naval presence directed against China or communicated in a diffuse manner is likely to make an arms control dialogue considerably more difficult at the very least. It must also be taken into account in the political equation that regional “partners sharing similar values” are not allies. Even a European Union that is united in terms of its ability to act can only shape the strong dynamics characterising the greater region in the direction it desires to a very limited extent. Therefore, it should always carefully weigh up on which topics and issues it wants to engage and where its involvement makes a difference.<sup>53</sup>

## 1.4 NATO AND THE EU AS ACTORS IN THE AREA OF SECURITY POLICY AND ARMS CONTROL

NATO has only been commenting and stating its views on China in its official pronouncements since 2019. While it is the aim and objective of the hegemonic power, the U.S., to gain acceptance for a confrontational policy towards the People’s Republic in the Atlantic Alliance as well, many Alliance members – including France, Germany, Italy and Spain – are rather reluctant to fall in line. There are substantive reasons for this, as many NATO countries do not want to see the Alliance develop into an anti-China coalition, but legal considerations regarding the geographical scope of NATO, which was not founded as a trans-Pacific alliance, also play a role. The position of NATO vis-à-vis China will be spelled out in detail in the new Strategic Concept, which is to be adopted in 2022. The final communiqué issued at the last summit meeting by NATO heads of state and government on 14 June 2021 already contains a series of for the most part critical remarks about the People’s Republic in paragraphs 55 and 56. In contrast to the position of Germany and the European Union, China is characterised by NATO solely as a “systemic challenger” of the rules-based order. This also applies in areas bearing relevance to the security of the alliance. In the wake of several warnings of an increasing threat to NATO from China’s nuclear arsenal voiced by the NATO Secretary General since 2020, the communiqué states:

*“China is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal with more warheads and a larger number of sophisticated delivery systems to establish a nuclear triad.”<sup>54</sup>*

China’s military modernisation is said to be “opaque”. Negative commentaries about China’s military cooperation with Russia are also to be heard.

NATO’s criticism of Chinese development of a nuclear triad strikes one as odd, however. In the expert discussion, such a triad is not only touted as proof of a nuclear power with redundant capabilities, but also as forming the basis for a secure second-strike capability as well as strategic stability. In this respect, NATO’s position also needs some explaining.

Nevertheless, the Alliance proclaims its willingness to continue its “constructive dialogue” with China, which has been little developed so far, while pairing this with demands:

*“We call on China to uphold its international commitments and to act responsibly in the international system, including in the space, cyber, and maritime domains, in keeping with its role as a major power.”<sup>55</sup>*

<sup>51</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (2021): Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz, 15 December 2021, Stenografischer Bericht, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20008.pdf> (3 January 2022), p. 348.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Brzoska, Michael (2022): „Kooperation und Zurückhaltung. Für eine neue deutsch-europäische Sicherheitspolitik“, in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 90–96.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Dunay, Pál / Gareis, Sven Bernhard (2021): „Geostrategische Dilemmata: Deutschlands Beziehungen zu Russland und China“, in: Böckenförde, Stephan / Gareis, Sven Bernhard (eds.): *Deutsche Sicherheitspolitik*, 3rd edition, Opladen / Toronto, pp. 324–336.

<sup>54</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (2021): Brussels Summit Communiqué, 14 June 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_185000.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm) (3 January 2022).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Interest-based cooperation with the People's Republic is said to be warranted, for instance when it comes to international climate protection efforts. Thus, the communiqué elevates the exchange of information to a value in itself. This is particularly stated to be the case with security and defence policy, with a special focus on nuclear capabilities and nuclear doctrine:

*"Allies urge China to engage meaningfully in dialogue, confidence-building, and transparency measures regarding its nuclear capabilities and doctrine."<sup>56</sup>*

It is worth noting that the document does not contain any direct demand calling on China to participate in negotiations between the U.S. and Russia on strategic nuclear weapons and strategic stability. The fears of France and Great Britain that the inclusion of their nuclear forces could then be up for debate probably played a role here. However, such calls have been articulated by NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg several times.<sup>57</sup> The communiqué from June 2021 is perceivably a compromise containing a critical assessment of policy toward China, corresponding admonitions and expressions of a willingness to engage in dialogue, confidence-building and exchange of information. The thrust of a report issued by the High-Level Reflection Group "NATO 2030" is also in this direction.<sup>58</sup> Hence, NATO has not yet fully fallen in line behind the significantly more confrontational policy towards China pursued by the U.S. It remains to be seen what changes the new strategic concept of the alliance will bring about.

Like Germany, the European Union has also placed its Sino strategy in the broader regional context in recent years. The EU's objectives were last revised on 16 September 2021 in the *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*.<sup>59</sup> As a result of overriding economic and political interdependencies, the document states that the future of the major regions of Europe and the Indo-Pacific will be inextricably interlinked. It goes on to assert that the EU States therefore want to strengthen their engagement within and with the region in a long-term manner founded on guiding principles, while expanding partnerships for the rules-based international order, forging common responses to global challenges and fostering its values of democracy and human rights. As with the German government's Guiding Principles for the Indo-Pacific Region, an inclusive approach, i.e. en-

compassing the People's Republic of China, is being sought. Also along the lines of the Guiding Principles, an emphasis is placed on diversification, cooperation with other democracies and a special focus on partnership with ASEAN. Geopolitical dynamics, military build-ups throughout the Indo-Pacific region and heightening tensions in the East and South China Seas as well as the Taiwan Straits are singled out as developments that could have a direct impact on the security and prosperity of the European Union.

The seven priority areas in the Indo-Pacific strategy cite "security and defence" along with "human security" in sixth and seventh order. The first addressee in the call for deeper cooperation is once again ASEAN, but other security policy dialogue formats are also to be established or expanded. EU delegations to Indo-Pacific countries are to increase the number of military advisors – which are already present in China and Indonesia. There is no separate Sino-EU dialogue on security policy, however. Capabilities of regional partners to ensure maritime security themselves are to be strengthened. Furthermore, it is to be "explored" to what extent an enhanced naval presence can be provided by individual Member States "to help protect the sea lines of communication and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific".<sup>60</sup> Various topics are mentioned in connection with the area of arms control, some of which could also serve as bridges for cooperation with China:

*"The EU will cooperate with partners on nuclear safety and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. It will support the implementation and universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty, and seek to develop multilateral initiatives on arms export control and dual use export control with likeminded partners."<sup>61</sup>*

Overall, topics like "ocean governance" or "green transition" stand at the forefront in the strategy document. The chapter on security and defence is for the most part based on a notion of cooperative security, but does not assign high priority to arms control. This can be explained, for example, by differences between the nuclear power France and traditional arms control advocates such as Sweden or Finland. All in all, the EU strategy clearly bears the hallmarks of a compromise, whose shape and priorities will probably depend on future debates in the Union. It is therefore only "negotiable" to a limited extent vis-à-vis China or ASEAN.

In the wake of an initiative undertaken by Chancellor Scholz and French President Macron in March 2022, the EU leadership at its summit meeting with China's head of state and government on 1 April 2022 called upon the People's Republic to play a mediating role in the Russian-Ukrainian war. This attempt was initially without success, also due to inadequate preparation and a lack of direct communication.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> See North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (2021): "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the 17th NATO Annual Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament and Weapons of Mass Destruction Non-Proliferation", 6 September 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_186295.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_186295.htm) (4 January 2022).

<sup>58</sup> For the text see: NATO 2030. *United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General*, 25 November 2020, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> Cf. European Commission (2021): *The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, JOIN(2021) 24 final, Brussels, 16 September 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_indo\\_pacific\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf) (3 January 2022).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. „Europas geopolitisches Erwachen „, in: *taz.de*, 1 April 2022; <https://taz.de/EU-China-Gipfel/!5845774/> (15 April 2022).

## 2

# CHINESE POLICY IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT, ARMS CONTROL AND NON-PROLIFERATION

Chinese policy in the fields of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation is guided by clear principles while at the same time being marked by contradictory aims and understandings of roles. It is important to identify these cross-cutting characteristics in order to identify points of departure for a policy of engagement in arms control and to be able to assess such a policy's chances of success.

## 2.1 PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING CHINESE ARMS CONTROL POLICY

Three principles guide Chinese action in the fields of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. First, China does not want arms control agreements to impose constraints on its arms policy, at least not as long as the U.S. is not subject to similar provisions. China does not support, or is extremely reluctant to support, regional approaches to confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) or arms control, as these would run counter to Beijing's aspirations for regional supremacy.<sup>63</sup> China is dragging its feet regarding arrangements for the use of militarily applicable technologies that it wants to use for an asymmetric arms build-up against the U.S. or with regard to which China is a technological leader.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, Beijing rejects international instruments and procedures which, in its view, are tantamount to "interference in domestic affairs". From the Chinese perspective, verification and transparency measures need to be as non-intrusive as possible. China rejects an expansion of the powers and authority of international disarmament agencies when such measures would affect state sovereignty. In its view, arms control should be intergovernmental and the principle of consensus should be observed and maintained. Beijing is sceptical when it comes to governance approaches that involve non-governmental or private-sector actors, for example in connection with control of proliferation-sensitive technologies. This also makes regional approaches to confidence-building more difficult if they would lead to more openness towards regional competitors.

Thirdly, China meets the financial and technical requirements emanating from membership in or participation in arms control agreements to the letter, but is scarcely prepared to provide greater support than is required. China is increasingly resorting to secondment of Chinese experts to influence the policies of multilateral institutions, but does not differ significantly from other countries in this regard.

### 2.1.1 CHINA AS A GREAT POWER: ARMS CONTROL AT EYE LEVEL

China's claim to great power status on an equal footing with the U.S. is particularly evident in its nuclear weapons policy. Regional approaches to nuclear arms control in Asia are as necessary as they are difficult. In Asia, a multidimensional, asymmetrical nuclear arms race is taking place between countries with different strategic orientations, in which China (in addition to the U.S.) is a pivotal actor because it has the power to influence the behaviour of all regional actors. All four Asian nuclear powers – China, India, North Korea and Pakistan – are building up their nuclear arsenals, but they are orienting their deterrence potentials toward different reference points.

Until now, China's deterrent capability has been based on ensuring a second-strike capability and a nuclear arsenal numbering a few hundred warheads. An American expert, Hans Kristensen, estimates that China has around 350 nuclear warheads. India probably has "only" about 150 nucle-

<sup>63</sup> There is most definitely an academic, policy-advising debate taking place over such concepts. In 2013, the *Chinese Institute of International Studies* (CIIS), which advises the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued a study on the perception of the CSCE/OSCE in China and the region. The study critically assesses the human rights dimension of the OSCE and its partisanship against Russia. With regard to confidence-building functions, however, it states: "Lack of knowledge of the CSCE/OSCE both in the official circle and in the academic community in China is of no little importance, implying as it does poor understanding and poor perception. It means *inter alia* that the positive side and common values of the CSCE/OSCE are accorded too little awareness and recognition." Cf. Chinese Institute of International Studies (2013): *The Relevance of CSCE/OSCE to the Asia Pacific Region*, Beijing, pp. 255–256.

<sup>64</sup> China and Russia are acting in concert in multilateral forums. "The Chinese are letting the Russians steamroll the process, and they're happy to hang back," comments Laura Nolan, an expert with the International Committee of the Red Cross, about China's behaviour in the talks on control of autonomous weapons systems. Cited in: Chan, Melissa K. (2019): "China and the U.S. Are Fighting a Major Battle over Killer Robots and the Future of AI", in *Time*, 13 September 2019, <https://time.com/5673240/china-killer-robots-weapons> (27 January 2022).

ar weapons and a smaller assortment of delivery vehicles. While China's nuclear weapons are deployed on about a dozen different types of missile-carrying submarines, aircraft and missiles, India operates seven different types of delivery systems.<sup>65</sup> Different threat perceptions amplify these asymmetries in nuclear capabilities. China's nuclear weapons serve mainly to deter the U.S., while India plays a minor role in its strategic calculations.<sup>66</sup> Delhi's primary nuclear adversary is Pakistan, but its nuclear weapons are also pointed at China. China's support for India's "arch-enemy" Pakistan is another factor that complicates bilateral approaches to arms control. While China and India – at least officially – have renounced the first use of nuclear weapons, Pakistan, whose conventional forces are weaker, insists on being able to resort to nuclear weapons in response to a conventional attack by India.

China probably has no more than one-tenth of the approximately 4,000 nuclear weapons that Russia and the U.S. could use in the event of war. China rejects participation in the bilateral nuclear arms control process between the U.S. and Russia as long as there is a significant gap between the nuclear capabilities of the U.S. and Russia on the one hand and China on the other. Although many past projections of Chinese nuclear arms build-up have in retrospect turned out to be exaggerated and alarmist, Beijing is in the process of ending the phase of its previous nuclear restraint. It is diversifying its nuclear arsenal and upgrading it both quantitatively and qualitatively. China is aiming to have land, sea and air-based means of delivery and would thus in this respect be on par with the U.S. and Russia, which also have a robust nuclear triad as the basis of their deterrent.

One clear indication of the Chinese nuclear arms build-up is the construction of three large missile fields, which in future are to house up to 300 silos for intercontinental ballistic missiles. It is unclear to what extent China intends to use these silo capacities.<sup>67</sup> The large number of silos would make a U.S. first strike more problematic, even if not every silo contained nuclear weapons. Thus, China could improve its capability for a nuclear second strike through a kind of "nuclear shell game". This would be different approach than the previous strategy of deploying strategic nuclear weapons so deeply underground that they could be used for a retaliatory strike even after a nuclear first strike.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Haynes, Susan Turner (2020): "Acrimony, asymmetry, and the Sino-Indian nuclear relationship", in: *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 26 (5-6), pp. 427–447, here pp. 430–435.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Dalton, Toby / Zhao, Tong (2020): "At a Crossroads? China-India Nuclear Relations After the Border Clash", in: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Washington, D.C. (Working Paper), <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Dalton%20Zhao%20%20China-India%20Nuclear%20Relation.pdf> (4 January 2022).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Kristensen, Hans M. / Korda, Matt (2021): "China's Nuclear Missile Silo Expansion: From Minimum Deterrence to Medium Deterrence", in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist*, 1 September 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/2021/09/chinas-nuclear-missile-silo-expansion-from-minimum-deterrence-to-medium-deterrence> (27 January 2022).

Beijing cites the development of American missile defence capabilities as the main reason for its own rearmament. Like Russia, China distrusts Washington's assertions that these systems are intended solely to defend against a limited missile attack by North Korea or Iran. Fu Cong, head of the disarmament department at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cited other factors influencing China's nuclear weapons policy, namely Washington's hostile rhetoric towards China, U.S. military technological capabilities such as conventional weapons that could be used in a first strike against China's nuclear arsenal, and the threat of deployment of U.S. intermediate-range weapons within range of China.<sup>68</sup> This diversity of factors complicates an inclusion of China in nuclear arms control. It also pushes forward the development of nuclear weapons systems that would be capable of evading missile defence systems. In particular, China has a technological lead over the U.S. in hypersonic weapons, triggering an arms race in these destabilising weapon systems.<sup>69</sup>

It remains to be seen what final stage of nuclear capability China's arms build-up programme has as its objective. Does Beijing want to catch up with the two largest nuclear weapons states, the U.S. and Russia, over the long term, or is China aiming for a secure second-strike capability at a somewhat higher level?<sup>70</sup> U.S. intelligence agencies predict that China could deploy up to 1,000 nuclear weapons within this decade.<sup>71</sup> Beijing would then have about a quarter of the roughly 4,000 operational warheads held in U.S. and Russian arsenals.

A faster nuclear arms build-up by China is also limited by the amount of weapons-grade plutonium or highly enriched uranium available. U.S. intelligence agencies suspect that China has enough fissile material to produce a few hundred nuclear warheads. Although China is the only NPT nuclear weapon state that has not declared a moratorium on the production of weapons-grade fissile material, experts assume that China has not been producing fissile material suitable for nuclear weapons for some time.<sup>72</sup> Chinese

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Chernenko, Elena (2020): "Director-General Fu Cong's Interview with Kommersant", 18 October 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zjzg\\_663340/jks\\_665232/jkxw\\_665234/202010/t20201016\\_599378.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzg_663340/jks_665232/jkxw_665234/202010/t20201016_599378.html) (27 January 2022). See also Zhao, Tong (2021): "Digging Deep into China's Motivations and Intentions", in: *Arms Control Association*, December 2021, <https://www.arms-control.org/act/2021-12/arms-control-today/chinas-strategic-arsenal-world-view-doctrine-systems> (27 January 2022).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Bugos, Shannon (2021): "China Tested Hypersonic Capability, U.S. Says", in *Arms Control Today*, November 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-11/news/china-tested-hypersonic-capability-us-says> (4 January 2022).

<sup>70</sup> China itself denies pursuing a nuclear rearmament course on the scale claimed by the U.S. Cf. Moritsugu, Ken (2022): "China Denies US Report It's Rapidly Growing Its Nuclear Arms", in: *The Washington Post*, 4 January 2022, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-denies-us-report-its-rapidly-growing-its-nuclear-arms/2022/01/04/ecbb59906d2b11ecb1e20539da8f4451\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-denies-us-report-its-rapidly-growing-its-nuclear-arms/2022/01/04/ecbb59906d2b11ecb1e20539da8f4451_story.html) (5 January 2022).

<sup>71</sup> "Faster Chinese Nuclear Expansion", cf. Bugos (2021)

<sup>72</sup> China probably stopped producing highly enriched uranium in 1987 and plutonium in 1990. Cf. International Panel on Fissile Materials (2021): "China", 13 August 2021, <https://fissilematerials.org/countries/china.html>.



refusal to declare this moratorium as official policy may be an indication that China wants to keep open the option of resuming production.<sup>73</sup>

It is unclear whether China intends to use civilian nuclear facilities to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons in the future. Nuclear-weapon states, unlike non-nuclear-weapon states, are not obliged to open their civilian nuclear facilities to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>74</sup> The European nuclear powers France and the UK separate civil and military fuel cycles and place their civilian facilities under IAEA safeguards. Like Russia and the U.S., China limits access of the Vienna-based IAEA to a few specific facilities. Such “controls” are symbolic at best.

China’s approach of pursuing arms control primarily in the group of other nuclear weapon states is also evident in its active participation in nuclear talks in the P5 framework. Since the commencement of talks among the five nuclear powers recognised under the NPT in 2009, Beijing has actively used this framework to promote consensus-building among the P5 and articulate its interests vis-à-vis the other participants. Despite all the geopolitical tensions and friction with the U.S., China has taken the lead in developing a P5 glossary.<sup>75</sup>

China is furthermore coordinating the P5 dialogue on a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Southeast Asia (Bangkok Treaty). The Protocol to the Bangkok Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in South Asia has not yet been opened for signature.<sup>76</sup> Although China had begun signalling its willingness to sign the protocol beginning in 2004,<sup>77</sup> the other nuclear-weapon states still have reservations about provisions that go above and beyond the obligations of signatory states to other nuclear-weapons-free zones. These relate, among other things, to the application of some prohibitions – such as the ban on the stationing of nuclear weapons or the prohibition of nuclear weapons use – to (disputed) special economic zones (*continental shelves*) as well as the question of negative security guarantees for the nuclear weapon free-

zone participants.<sup>78</sup> The U.S., Russia and Singapore in particular have been unable to agree on whether the transit of ships with nuclear weapons is permitted and/or must be declared.<sup>79</sup> Beijing, in its capacity as P5 coordinator on this issue, has so far been unable to resolve this impasse.<sup>80</sup>

The P5 dialogue on issues revolving around “strategic risk reduction” is worth noting. In a working paper on *Strategic Risk Reduction* drafted for the 10th NPT Review Conference, the nuclear-weapon states recognise their responsibility to work together to preclude the danger of a nuclear or conventional conflict breaking out between them. To this end, they want to engage in confidence-building, create better channels of communication and effective crisis-prevention and crisis-management instruments.<sup>81</sup> Although the P5 talks have thus far not dealt with any concrete arms control steps, this framework nevertheless offers China the opportunity to act “at eye level” in the nuclear club. Beijing proudly claims that it has helped to shape and advance the P5 agenda.<sup>82</sup>

China has also temporarily cooperated with other major powers in efforts to eliminate Syrian chemical weapons. China supported disarmament activities in Syria between 2015 and 2017. The Chinese government also provided financial support for the joint Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations disarmament efforts and despatched a Chinese navy ship to assist in the undertaking.<sup>83</sup> This involvement was seen at the time as an important signal of Beijing’s willingness to cooperate, especially because China was directly supporting the joint disarmament efforts of the U.S. and Russia.

China’s policy towards the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is largely contingent on the behaviour of the U.S. China and the U.S. are the only two P5

73 Cf. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2021): “Engaging China on Nuclear Arms Control” (Transcript), Washington, D.C., 26 January 2021, p. 3, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Tanscript\\_of%20Engaging%20China%20on%20Nuclear%20Arms%20Control.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Tanscript_of%20Engaging%20China%20on%20Nuclear%20Arms%20Control.pdf) (4 January 2022).

74 Cf. Hibbs, Mark (2021): “China’s Nuclear Forces: Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission”, in: *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, Washington, D.C., 10 June 2021, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202106CHINA\\_USCC\\_WRIT-TEN\\_TEXT\\_FINAL\\_.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202106CHINA_USCC_WRIT-TEN_TEXT_FINAL_.pdf) (27 January 2022).

75 The glossary of common nuclear definitions is intended to simplify the P5’s dialogue on disarmament issues in the group itself, but also with non-nuclear weapon states. Cf. Hoell, Maximilian / Persbo, Andreas (2020): “Overcoming disunity: Reinventing the P5 Process a decade on”, in: *European Leadership Network*, London, July 2020, p. 10.

76 Cf. UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (1995): Protocol to The Treaty on Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, [https://treaties.unoda.org/t/bangkok\\_protocol](https://treaties.unoda.org/t/bangkok_protocol) (29 January 2022).

77 Cf. Crail, Peter / Liang, Xiaodan (2012): “Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and the Nuclear-Weapon States”, in: *East-West-Center – Asia Pacific Bulletin*, No. 148, 7.2.2012, [https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb\\_148.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=33289](https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb_148.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=33289) (29 January 2022).

78 Cf. “Bangkok Treaty”, in: *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, <https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and--regimes/southeast-asian-nuclear-weapon-free-zone-seanwzf-treaty-bangkok-treaty> (27 January 2022).

79 Cf. Hoell / Persbo (2020), pp. 18–19.

80 In view of the lack of progress, it is being discussed whether the P5 should even keep this topic on the agenda in the joint talks in the first place. In the last communiqué, they merely reiterated their commitment to the goals of the Bangkok Treaty, stressing the importance of dialogue between the States party to the Treaty and the nuclear weapon states. Cf. “P5 Conference. Joint communiqué”, paragraph 8d, Paris, 2-3 December 2021, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/p5\\_statement\\_2\\_31221\\_cle04ad34.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/p5_statement_2_31221_cle04ad34.pdf), (29 January 2022).

81 See United Nations (2021): *Strategic risk reduction*, Working paper submitted by China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, NPT/CONF.2020/WP.33, New York.

82 Cf. Chernenko (2020).

83 See Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (2014): *Status of Contributions to the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria*, <http://opcw.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Yw0vVMz-Jwvw=&ta=bid=205> (4 January 2022). At the time, Beijing underscored the importance of despatching the ship as a diplomatic signal. Cf. “Chinese Warship in Cyprus to Aid Syrian Chemical Weapons Removal”, in: *Reuters*, 4 January 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/syria-crisis-china-idUSL6N0KD2Q920140104> (27 January 2022).

countries that have not yet ratified the CTBT. Both countries have signed the treaty, but are among the 44 states with an advanced civil nuclear programme whose ratification is still required for the treaty to enter into force under Article 14 of the CTBT.

Suspensions have repeatedly cropped up that China might want to resume nuclear testing in order to develop and test smaller nuclear warheads that could then be deployed on intercontinental missiles with multiple warheads. The Trump Administration even accused China of violating the CTBT by conducting low-yield tests.<sup>84</sup> To date, however, there have been no indications of any preparations for a resumption of the Chinese nuclear test programme. This could change if the U.S. were to start carrying out nuclear tests again.

Militarily, China is also demonstrating in space that it aims to be on par with other nuclear powers. In January 2007, China destroyed one of its own satellites with an anti-satellite weapon and is said to have made a similar attempt in 2013. India, Russia and the U.S. have also demonstrated an ability to destroy their own satellites by direct-ascent weapons, despite all the risks space debris poses to the non-military use of space.<sup>85</sup>

## 2.1.2 CHINA AS A SOVEREIGN NATION: NO INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Multilateral disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are no longer limited to intergovernmental treaties in which countries mutually agree to limit military potential, and are increasingly concentrating on agreements aimed at preventing the misuse of dual-use technologies. In this context, cooperation of governments with civil society and private sector actors is being sought and encouraged, as the agreement and enforcement of norms and rules for technologies that can be used for civilian and military purposes is scarcely possible without engagement of these actors.

China is sceptical about such governance approaches at the very least, usually rejecting them out of hand. In Beijing's view, they amount to, or could amount to, "interference in the internal affairs" of the country. Beijing instead insists that disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation be

laid down in binding intergovernmental agreements and that implementation and verification be minimally invasive and based on clear rules.

This classical understanding of arms control is not sufficient (or no longer sufficient) because there is a growing necessity to complement intergovernmental agreements with new, transnational mechanisms. This becomes clear, for example, when it comes to multilateral discussions on intergovernmental rules and arrangements in cyberspace. Together with other non-democratic states, China is pursuing a fundamentally different approach than Western states to prevent the misuse of information technology. China's top-down philosophy implies intergovernmental rules and arrangements in cyberspace, the implementation of which remains the sole responsibility of respective governments. This strict national control also makes it possible to continue repressive policies at home and in cyberspace without applying international norms and rules.

In contrast, Western states are increasingly pursuing an approach based on establishing benchmarks for the behaviour of different actors in cyberspace through agreement on "codes of conduct" as well as an operationalisation of international legal standards. This bottom-up approach is intended to create structures that also engage private-sector and civil-society stakeholders into international norm-building through codes of conduct. From a Western perspective, this approach is best-suited to assuring the free access of citizens to information and the business models of internationally operating Internet companies.<sup>86</sup>

Discussions on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) run along similar lines. In the context of UN discussions, China and Russia have proposed a treaty to prohibit the stationing of weapons in outer space (Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, PPWT). The West criticises its object-based approach as no longer being up to date. Instead, it proposes favours a behaviour-based approach instead, which China for its part rejects.<sup>87</sup> China also argues that a PPWT is not verifiable for technological and economic reasons. In April, the U.S. announced a unilateral waiver of anti-satellite tests that destroy targets in space.<sup>88</sup> Against the backdrop of the ongoing threat posed to commercial use of space from space debris, China may also be interested in embracing such a waiver.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Cf. U.S. Department of State (2020): *Executive Summary of Findings on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Non-proliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, Washington, D.C., p. 8, <https://www.state.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2020/04/Tab1.EXECUTIVESUMMARYOF2020CRFINDINGS04.14.2020003003.pdf>. See also Pant, Harsh V. / Bommakanti, Kartik (2020): "Nuclear Games at Lop Nur", in *Observer Research Foundation*, New Delhi, 20 April 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/experts-peak/nuclear-games-lop-nur-64901> (4 January 2022).

<sup>85</sup> The U.S. carried out a similar attempt in February 2008, India in March 2019. Russia destroyed a satellite with an anti-satellite missile in November 2021. Cf. Panda, Ankit (2021): "The Dangerous Fallout of Russia's Anti-Satellite Missile Test", in: *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, Washington, 17 November 2021, <http://https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/11/17/dangerous-fallout-of-russias-anti-satellite-missile-test-pub-85804> (4 January 2022).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Cuihong, Cai (2018): "China and Global Cyber Governance: Main Principles and Debates", in: *Asian Perspective* 42 (4), pp. 647–662, [www.doi.org/10.1353/apr.2018.0029](http://www.doi.org/10.1353/apr.2018.0029).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Zarkan, Laetitia Cesari (2021): "A New Edge in Global Stability: What Does Space Security Entail for States?" in: *Observational Research Foundation*, 13 October 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/a-new-edge-in-global-stability> (27 January 2022).

<sup>88</sup> "Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Ongoing Work to Establish Norms in Space," Vandenberg AFB, 4/18/2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/04/18/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-on-the-ongoing-work-to-establish-norms-in-space>.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Panda, Ankit / Silverstein, Benjamin (2022). "The U.S. Moratorium on Anti-Satellite Missile Tests Is a Welcome Shift in Space Policy", Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,

China's scepticism about intrusive instruments also spills over onto traditional arms control issues. Beijing opposes new OPCW powers to investigate chemical weapons attacks and views this as a slippery slope towards expansion of the Chemical Weapons Agency's mandate. China has voted against including funding for the new OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) in the OPCW's regular budget.<sup>90</sup> Beijing justifies this on the grounds that the OPCW would be outfitted with investigative authority and powers beyond the intergovernmental sphere.

In the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), China together with Russia and states of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are calling for a resumption of negotiations on a verification protocol, which the U.S. torpedoed in 2001, even though this position does not have any realistic political prospects for success.<sup>91</sup> China backs the baseless accusations forwarded by Russia that biosecurity laboratories funded by Germany, the U.S. and other G7 countries are being used for prohibited bioweapons research.<sup>92</sup> Moscow and Beijing had already claimed in a joint statement in October 2021 that such facilities raised "serious concerns" about BWC compliance by the U.S. and its allies.<sup>93</sup> In early March 2022, the Chinese Foreign Ministry echoed Russia's claim that U.S.-sponsored biosecurity facilities do indeed serve clandestine military purposes, once again calling for an international BWC verification mechanism to dispel such doubts.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, since 2016 China has been working within the framework of the BWC to improve international cooperation security-relevant research. Noteworthy in this context is the cooperation between Tianjin University and the American Johns Hopkins University, which, with the support of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and U.S. State Department, developed and issued a joint proposal for a Code of Conduct for Biosecurity in 2021. This initiative was based on a proposal that China had introduced to the BWC jointly with Pakistan. The *Tianjin Guidelines* are to be discussed at the Ninth BTWC Review Conference, which is scheduled to take place in late November 2022.<sup>95</sup> In addition, as a result of its membership in a number of international conventions, China has begun to translate international obligations on biosafety into national law through implementing legislation. This process still has a need for improvement, however.<sup>96</sup>

China's BWC policy is overshadowed by U.S. allegations that the coronavirus (SARSCoV2) is not of natural origin, but instead originated in a Chinese laboratory in the city of Wuhan. Two factors make it difficult to get to the bottom of these allegations: First, the BWC (unlike the Chemical Weapons Convention, CWC) has no transparency or verification regime and thus no international organisation that could help ascertain the facts of the matter independently. Second, China has only showed the minimum degree of required transparency and done so only hesitantly. Whether the reason for this policy is its insistence on non-interference, incompetence on the part of the political leadership or an attempt at a cover-up remains unresolved.<sup>97</sup>

China supports the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO)<sup>98</sup> and is contributing to the development of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty's (CTBT) verification system, though unenthusiastically and with some foot-dragging. Five of the international verification facilities on Chinese territory envisaged by the treaty have so far been established. As a CTBT Signatory State, however, Beijing only transmits data from these stations to the Vien-

20 April 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/04/20/u.s.-moratorium-on-anti-satellite-missile-tests-is-welcome-shift-in-space-policy-pub-86943>.

90 Cf., inter alia, "Statement By H.E. Ambassador Tan Jian, Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the OPCW, At the General Debate of the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council", The Hague, 5 October 2021, [https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021/10/%EF%BC%88EN%EF%BC%89Chinese%20Statement%20During%20the%20General%20Debate%20of%20EC98\\_0.pdf](https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021/10/%EF%BC%88EN%EF%BC%89Chinese%20Statement%20During%20the%20General%20Debate%20of%20EC98_0.pdf) (4 January 2022).

91 China's argumentation regarding the establishment of a verification mechanism for the BWC is patently opportunistic. As long as there were serious prospects for the drafting of an additional protocol, Beijing tried to delay negotiations. It was only after the U.S. opposed such an instrument that China changed its stance and aligned itself with the NAM stance. Cf. Zhao, Tong (2022): "China's Approach to Arms Control Verification", Sandia Report SAND20223562 O, Albuquerque, New Mexico, March 2022, <https://www.sandia.gov/app/uploads/sites/148/2022/04/SAND20223562O.pdf> (23 April 2022), pp. 14–15.

92 Cf. Jakob, Una et al. (2022): „Biowaffen in der Ukraine? Hintergründe zu den russischen Falschinformationen“, IFSH/HFSK/JLU/ZNF, 22 March 2022, <https://ifsh.de/newsdetail/biowaffen-in-der-ukraine-hintergruende-zu-den-russischen-falschinformationen> (23 April 2022).

93 Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China: "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of the People's Republic of China and the Russia Federation on Strengthening the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. Beijing, 7 October 2021, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/202110/t20211007\\_9580297.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202110/t20211007_9580297.html) (23 April 2022).

94 "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on March 8, 2022", Beijing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202203/t20220309\\_10649938.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202203/t20220309_10649938.html) (23 April 2022).

95 See Wang, Leifan / Song, Jie / Zhang, Weiwen (2021): "Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines for Codes of Conduct for Scientists: Promoting Responsible Sciences and Strengthening Biosecurity Governance", in *Journal of Biosafety and Biosecurity* 3 (2), pp. 82–83, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.job.2021.08.001> (4 January 2022); Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health / Tianjin University Center for Biosafety Research and Strategy / Interacademy Partnership (IAP) (2021): *The Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines for Codes of Conduct for Scientists*, 29 June 2021, [https://www.interacademies.org/sites/default/files/202107/Tianjin-Guidelines\\_210707.pdf](https://www.interacademies.org/sites/default/files/202107/Tianjin-Guidelines_210707.pdf) (4 January 2022).

96 Cf. Cao, Cong (2021): "China's evolving biosafety/biosecurity legislations", in: *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* 8 (1), pp. 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jlb/lsab020>.

97 Cf. Wade, Nicholas (2021): "The Origin of COVID: Did People or Nature Open Pandora's Box at Wuhan?", in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 5 May 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/2021/05/the-origin-of-covid-did-people-or-nature-open-pandoras-box-at-wuhan> (4 January 2022).

98 Cf. Johnson, Rebecca (2009): *Unfinished Business: The Negotiation of the CTBT and the End of Nuclear Testing*, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, New York / Geneva, pp. 225–226, <https://digitalibrary.un.org/record/651336>.

na-based CTBTO only “voluntarily”.<sup>99</sup> In the CTBT negotiations, China had opposed giving the inspectorate far-reaching powers for on-site inspections to investigate suspected clandestine nuclear tests. In the end, however, it was unable to gain consensus support for its position.<sup>100</sup>

### 2.1.3 CHINA AS A MULTILATERALIST: MEETING INTERNATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

In the mid-1980s, China began to intensify its involvement in multilateral institutions and hence in arms control treaties and regimes. Although it remained a latecomer to the emerging arms control architecture for some time, it had largely caught up by the mid-1990s.<sup>101</sup> Today, China is a member of all major multilateral regimes for the control of weapons of mass destruction and also party to a number of other treaties (see the table on page 34).

In Asia, however, there are scarcely any regional arms control agreements in which China could become involved.<sup>102</sup> Beijing is not a driving force here, as is the case generally. Instead, for the most part Beijing prefers to fall in line behind the other permanent members of the Security Council, especially the U.S. In the area of nuclear arms control, China adopts a similar line to other countries possessing smaller nuclear weapon arsenals which are not subject to any limitations. Thus, it demands further steps toward disarmament from the two biggest nuclear weapon powers, Russia and the U.S., as a precondition for limiting its own nuclear arsenal.

China's record in meeting financial obligations as a state party or observer to multilateral disarmament treaties is mixed. While China was the country with the second largest debt burden to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs in August 2021. However, in absolute terms, these arrears were relatively small, hovering at around \$ 300,000.<sup>103</sup> As a signatory state to the CTBT, China has

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Taheran, Shervin (2018): “Five Chinese Test Detection Stations Certified”, in *Arms Control Association*, 9 March 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-03-09/five-chinese-test-detection-stations-certified> (4 January 2022).

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Johnson (2009), p. 135f.

<sup>101</sup> The Chinese government first published a White Paper in 1995: Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China (1995): *China: Arms Control and Disarmament*, Beijing, <http://www.china.org.cn/ewhite/army/index.htm> (4 January 2022).

<sup>102</sup> Exceptions include bilateral confidence-building agreements such as transparency agreements with Russia and India as well as an agreement on conventional arms limitations in border areas between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan from 1997. Cf. “The agreement between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and People's Republic of China on mutually reducing armed forces around border of 24 April 1997”, <https://cislegislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=3872> (29 January 2022). Under the latter agreement, China has also taken part in multilateral inspections, thereby overcoming its initial scepticism about the instrument. Cf. Zhao, Tong (2022), p. 16.

<sup>103</sup> See United Nations Office Disarmament Affairs (2022): *Outstanding Amounts / Prepayments by Year and Convention*, <https://is.gd/cidPGW> (4 January 2022).

paid all its contributions up until 2020 and has supported the establishment of a scientific centre with small voluntary contribution under the CWC.<sup>104</sup>

For some years now, China has been asserting its claim for more its international influence through stronger personnel representation in the United Nations. Like other UN states, Beijing is currently trying to influence political discussions in multilateral institutions by filling senior posts with Chinese staff. Overall, China is still underrepresented in such bodies and in 2017 ranked 24th in terms of staffing. The US seconded five times more staff than China to the UN.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese influence is growing and Beijing would appear to be making an attempt to “guide” UN staff possessing Chinese passports more closely politically.<sup>106</sup>

## 2.2 AMBIVALENCES CHARACTERISING CHINESE ARMS CONTROL POLICY

Although China's policy on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation is guided by clear principles, Beijing's actions are by no means “cast from a single mould”. Conflicts between objectives and a fractured understanding of roles cause China's policy in some areas to appear ambivalent or even contradictory. For example, China has an interest in strong non-proliferation regimes to minimise proliferation risks that could endanger regional stability. However, China's principled support for global prohibition norms and regional non-proliferation efforts occasionally comes into conflict with geopolitical power claims or economic interests. The informal alliance with Russia also imposes constraints on action that stand in the way of engagement with global regimes. This is particularly the case with regard to China's close ties to Russia in the Syria conflict, which influences Beijing's stance on the further development of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Regional non-proliferation thus becomes a dependent variable subservient to other interests, while China rarely views confidence-building and arms control in Asia as an independent foreign policy instrument.

At the same time, China assumes divergent roles in discussions on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. On the one hand, it acts as a recognised nuclear weapon state in the P5, but at the same time uses the rhetoric of a non-aligned state. China wants to strengthen non-proliferation, but from the perspective of a (former) developing country it attaches great importance to provisions that fos-

<sup>104</sup> For the financial year 2021, however, the CTBTO reports Chinese arrears in the realm of seven million US dollars. Cf. Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty Organization (2021): “CTBTO Member States' Payment at 19 September 2021”, [https://www.ctbto.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/treasury/38\\_19\\_Sep\\_2021\\_Member\\_States\\_Payments.pdf](https://www.ctbto.org/fileadmin/user_upload/treasury/38_19_Sep_2021_Member_States_Payments.pdf) (4 January 2022).

<sup>105</sup> See Fung, Courtney J. / Shinghon, Lam (2020): “China's ‘bureaucratic footprint’ in the UN”, in: *United Nations* 68 (6), pp. 243–248, [www.doi.org/10.35998/VN-2020-0026](http://www.doi.org/10.35998/VN-2020-0026), p. 244.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

ter an exchange of technology for peaceful purposes between states party to treaties. China's role is also determined by its experiences as a victim of Western and in particular Japanese aggression. This perspective oriented toward the past is in tension with its claim to regional supremacy and also impedes the development of arms control approaches in Asia. Arms control here is predominantly viewed through the lens of regional alliance-building.

From Germany's point of view, it is precisely these ambivalences, inconsistencies and fractures that could serve as the point of departure for a dialogue on arms control policy, as Chinese positions on issues like humanitarian arms control are relatively flexible- Berlin could enter into a dialogue with Beijing by virtue of this divergent understanding of roles.

## 2.2.1 CONFLICT OF GOALS: NON-PROLIFERATION VERSUS (REGIONAL) POWER POLITICS

China's membership in and support for global non-proliferation regimes sometimes comes into conflict with its regional and geopolitical ambitions. On the one hand, Beijing wants to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as this jeopardises international security and peace, especially in regions with which China has close economic ties. Moreover, China has the opportunity to act on an equal footing with other major powers within the framework of the E3/EU+3 and six-party talks with North Korea. On the other hand, China is pursuing its own interests in South and East Asia as well as in the Middle East or views candidates for nuclear proliferation as (difficult) regional partners – in competition with the U.S.<sup>107</sup>

### Pakistan

China's support for Pakistan is a case in point with regard to the ambivalence – or duplicity – of Chinese non-proliferation policy. China has tolerated and even encouraged Pakistan's development into a nuclear weapons power by sharing nuclear weapons-related information. Among other things, design information used for the nuclear warhead that China tested in 1966 made its way into Pakistani hands.<sup>108</sup> From Beijing's perspective, Pakistan serves as a

counterweight to its regional competitor India. Even today, China is supplying civilian nuclear technology to Pakistan, which, like India, is not party to the NPT.<sup>109</sup>

For decades, Pakistan has been blocking the start of negotiations in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament on a treaty prohibiting the production of weapons-grade fissile material (Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, FMCT), nominally making its consent conditional on including India's stockpiles of fissile material in any future treaty. Observers wonder, however, whether or not China might be behind the Pakistani stonewalling.<sup>110</sup>

### North Korea

China plays a key role in attempts to resolve the conflict over North Korea's nuclear weapons programme.<sup>111</sup> Beijing's traditionally close relations with Pyongyang and North Korea's economic dependence on China boost Chinese influence on North Korean policy. At the same time, bilateral relations have cooled considerably under Kim Jong Un, and China's annoyance with North Korea's conduct, e. g. its missile tests, has been unmistakable. Beijing wants to avoid a military (especially nuclear) escalation of the conflict between Pyongyang and Washington, but also prop up the North Korean regime to avoid its collapse. China has supported international sanctions against North Korea, but at times has only implemented them inadequately.<sup>112</sup>

China is interested in a denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula for several reasons: First of all, North Korea's nuclear weapons programme acts as a driver for the already massive U.S. military presence in the region. China is very concerned about deployment of the U.S. missile defence system THAAD in South Korea, because it fears that Washington may use the early warning and target acquisition radar systems to track and trace launches of Chinese long-range weapons.

Secondly, China is concerned about the direct impact of North Korea's nuclear programme on its own security. The North Korean nuclear test site is located in the immediate vicinity of the Chinese border. Fears have cropped up repeat-

<sup>107</sup> The ambivalences of Chinese arms control policy are also related to the fact that the centralised decision-making apparatus is only insufficiently suited to meeting the multi-layered demands arising from China's growing engagement in international governance structures and moulding everything into a coherent policy. This results in contradictions and tensions between the interests of various actors, which, however, are difficult to analyse due to the lack of transparency in China's political system. For an attempt at such an analysis of China's nuclear non-proliferation policy, cf. Hameiri, Shahar / Zeng, Jinghan (2020): "State Transformation and China's Engagement in Global Governance: The Case of Nuclear Technologies", *The Pacific Review* 33 (6), pp. 900–930.

<sup>108</sup> The Pakistani nuclear smuggler A. Q. Khan then sold this information to Libya. Cf. Lewis, Jeffrey (2005): "More on Libya's Bomb Design", in *Arms Control Wonk*, 8 October 2005, <https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/200816/more-on-that-chinese-design-that-ended-up-in-libya> (4 January 2022).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Hassa, Syed Raza (2021): "Pakistan's Largest Chinese-Built Nuclear Plant to Start Operating", in: *Reuters*, 21 May 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/pakistans-largest-chinese-built-nuclear-plant-start-operating-2021-05-21> (4 January 2022).

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Hoell / Persbo (2020), p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Boc, Annie / Wacker, Gudrun (2018): „China: Zwischen Schlüsselrolle und Marginalisierung“, in: Hilpert, Hanns Günther / Meier, Oliver (eds.): *Facetten des Nordkorea-Konflikts. Akteure, Problemlagen und Europas Interessen*, SWP-Studie 18, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, pp. 30–34, [https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/studien/2018S18\\_hlp\\_mro.pdf](https://www.swpberlin.org/publications/products/studien/2018S18_hlp_mro.pdf); Gareis, Sven Bernhard (2020): „Ordnungs- oder Garantiemacht? Chinas Rolle im Nordkorea-Konflikt“, in: Staack, Michael (ed.): *Der Nordkorea-Konflikt. Interessenlagen, Konfliktdimensionen, Lösungswege*, Opladen / Berlin / Toronto, pp. 139–153.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Berger, Andrea (2017): *A House Without Foundations: The North Korea Sanctions Regime and its Implementation*, Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall Reports 317, London, [http://theasiadialogue.com/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/201706\\_whr\\_a\\_house\\_without\\_foundations\\_web.pdf](http://theasiadialogue.com/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/201706_whr_a_house_without_foundations_web.pdf) (5 January 2022).

edly that an underground North Korean nuclear test could vent radionuclides and, if weather conditions are unfavourable, contaminate Chinese territory.

Thirdly, China must be concerned about proliferation risks emanating from North Korea. North Korea has in the past supplied missile technology to Pakistan and Iran, among other actors, thereby helping to exacerbate proliferation crises.<sup>113</sup>

### Iran

China has been a key player in attempts to resolve the conflict over Iran's nuclear programme since 2006, when the UN Security Council first adopted a resolution imposing sanctions on Iran. China engaged constructively in negotiation on the 2015 JCPOA and has occasionally mediated between Iran and the U.S. Beijing also participated in various aspects of implementation of the JCPOA, inter alia being leading efforts to convert the heavy water reactor in Arak into a facility for the production of medical isotopes.

China views the Iranian nuclear conflict primarily from an economic perspective. Iran is an important energy supplier for China. After the UN Security Council tightened sanctions against Iran in 2010, China also began to gradually wind down its energy trade with Iran. Upon commencement of JCPOA implementation in 2016, however, Chinese companies were once again able to invest in Iran without constraint. In violation of the JCPOA, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Iran from 2018 onward. Beijing in part complied and applied the U.S. sanctions, especially because Chinese companies would be facing the risk of being shut off from the American market if they had not complied. Currently, China has risen to become Iran's biggest customer for crude oil. From the opposite perspective, Iranian crude oil currently accounts for about six per cent of Chinese oil imports.<sup>114</sup> In 2020, China and Iran agreed on a long-term, primarily economic and security-related partnership.<sup>115</sup>

The Chinese interest in a diplomatic solution to the Iran conflict also has security policy motives. Beijing has to be concerned about Iranian weapon-delivery technology being shared with third countries, such as North Korea or Pakistan. Moreover, any military escalation would put Chinese investments and interests in the region at risk.<sup>116</sup> This applies espe-

cially to its energy supply: in 2019, up to 50 per cent of China's crude oil imports came from the Middle East as a whole.<sup>117</sup>

China sharply criticised the Trump Administration's decision in May 2018 to no longer respect the provisions of the JCPOA or UNSCR 2231. The Biden Administration, on the other hand, has been in contact with China in this regard, seeking to win Beijing's support for possible economic sanctions being imposed on Iran.<sup>118</sup>

An involvement of China along these lines also remains important as Beijing boosts its exports of civilian nuclear technology for economic and geostrategic reasons. China can become a serious competitor to Russia in the civil global nuclear market.<sup>119</sup> Problematic states such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are also beneficiaries of Chinese civilian nuclear technology exports. There is thus a risk that China may reinforce a worrying proliferation trend: Civilian nuclear cooperation with third countries is once again becoming a tool in great power competition.<sup>120</sup>

## 2.2.2 PERCEPTION OF ROLE AND RHETORIC: SUPERPOWER OR DEVELOPING COUNTRY?

China's self-perception in arms control regimes fluctuates between its claim to (regional) hegemony and its traditional role as a developing country as well as its experience as a victim of Western and especially Japanese aggression.

### Member of the Nuclear Club or non-aligned State?

Beijing (like India) has long criticised the NPT as discriminatory, arguing (not entirely without a point) that the U.S. and Soviet Union also used the treaty as an instrument to prevent countries like China from fully developing a nuclear arsenal. This position changed in the mid-1980s in the course of the country's economic opening. Beijing began to integrate itself into the nuclear non-proliferation regime step by

sponsible-power-chinas-new-role-during-the-jcpoa-negotiations (4 January 2022).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Arms Control Association (2020: *North Korea Proliferation Issues*, <https://www.armscontrol.org/taxonomy/term/141> (29 January 2022)).

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Aizhu, Chen / Lawler, Alex (2021): "China's Iran oil purchases rebound on lower prices, fresh quotas", in: *Reuters*, 11 November 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/chinas-iran-oil-purchases-rebound-lower-prices-fresh-quotas-2021-11-10> (4 January 2022).

<sup>115</sup> The agreement provides for military cooperation in training as well as exercises, joint research and development activities, and closer cooperation between intelligence services. Cf. Fassihi, Farnaz / Lee, Steven (2020): "China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership, Defying U.S.", in: *The New York Times*, 11 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/world/asia/china-iran-trade-military-deal.html> (28 January 2022).

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Johanson, Daniel (2019): "Becoming a 'Responsible Power'? China's New Role During the JCPOA Negotiations", in: *E-International Relations*, 4 April 2019, <https://www.eir.info/2019/04/04/becoming-a-re>

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Stanzel, Angela (2019): *Chinas Weg zur Geopolitik. Fallstudie zur chinesischen Iran-Politik an der Schnittstelle zwischen regionalen Interessen und globaler Machtrivalität*, SWP-Studie 26, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/studien/2021S26\\_China-Iran.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/studien/2021S26_China-Iran.pdf) (4 January 2022), pp. 8–9.

<sup>118</sup> See Mohammed, Arshad / Irish, John (2021): "EXCLUSIVE U.S. has reached out to China about cutting oil imports from Iran, officials say", in *Reuters*, 29 September 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/exclusive-us-has-reached-out-china-about-cutting-oil-imports-iran-officials-say-2021-09-28> (4 January 2022).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. The Economist (2018): "Russia leads the world at nuclear-reactor exports. China is its only real competitor", 7 September 2018, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/08/07/russia-leads-the-world-at-nuclear-reactor-exports> (5 January 2022).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Means, Aubrey (2021): "Saving the World Twice Over: How Addressing Climate Change Provides Opportunities for US-Russian Cooperation", in: Bidgood, Sarah / Potter, William C. (eds.): *End of an Era. The United States, Russia, and Nuclear Nonproliferation*, Monterey, CA, pp. 159–185, here pp. 166 ff.

step. In 1990, Beijing took part in an NPT review conference for the first time. In March 1992, China acceded to the NPT, half a year before France joined.<sup>121</sup>

Politically, China has since adopted positions in the NPT that range between those of the NAM, which primarily represents the interests of non-nuclear weapon states from the Global South, and its role as a nuclear weapon state and member of the P5. China declares that it is in favour of a world free of nuclear weapons and has repeatedly asserted that it does not want to be involved in any nuclear arms race. China is the only NPT nuclear weapon state to have adopted a nuclear no-first-use policy and advocates that other nuclear weapon possessors adopt a similar policy. This renunciation of a nuclear first-use option has always been an integral part of China's nuclear weapon policy.<sup>122</sup> In the same line of argument, China also backs legally binding negative security assurances by countries possessing nuclear weapons vis-à-vis non-nuclear weapon states. In addition, Beijing has been demanding since the 1960s that nuclear weapon states refrain from deploying nuclear weapons outside their own territory. These are all traditional non-aligned positions. This stance has become somewhat inconsistent in the wake of the Russian attack on Ukraine. In a joint declaration issued in December 2013, China had pledged to Ukraine that it would not threaten it with nuclear weapons and, in the event of a nuclear threat from a third state, would provide it security assurances (although these were not specified).<sup>123</sup> However, China has not reacted to Russia's explicit nuclear threats by following up on these assurances.

Chinese protests are vociferous with regard to the planned delivery of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia by the UK and the U.S. as part of the AUKUS alliance launched in 2021. Beijing criticises the P5 states for taking advantage of a loophole in the NPT that allows use of highly enriched uranium for non-explosive purposes, removing fissile material used for such purposes from IAEA safeguards. Although in principle – and understandably so in this particular case – the supply of sensitive nuclear technology to a non-nuclear-weapon state is being criticised, China is also no doubt concerned about the arms build-up by a regional adversary, and is leveraging this for propaganda purposes in the run-up to the NPT's 10th Review Conference.

Despite all the rhetoric on disarmament, Beijing firmly agrees with the other P5 in rejecting calls for a comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons. China has supported all the statements issued by the P5 against the TPNW adopted in 2017. China is not ready to join the TPNW and has not participated as an observer in the first conference of TPNW members in June 2022.<sup>124</sup> However, China's position is not completely consistent here, either. In December 2016, China was the only country possessing nuclear weapons that abstained in a UN General Assembly vote on the start of negotiations for a treaty banning nuclear weapons. And, at least rhetorically, China's stance on nuclear weapons overlaps with some positions of TPNW advocates.<sup>125</sup>

China's ambivalent understanding of its role is also reflected in its positioning with regard to export control regimes for proliferation sensitive dual-use technologies. In principle, Beijing is in favour of export controls which are "fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory".<sup>126</sup> On the one hand, China is interested in being part of arrangements in which relevant, (predominantly) Western supplier countries coordinate their export policies; on the other hand, such arrangements such as the Australia Group for the Control of Certain Chemicals and Biological Agents are criticised – in line with NAM positions – by Beijing as discriminatory because of their exclusivity and lack of transparency.

Despite its fundamental criticism of export control regimes, China has been involved in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) since 2004 and the so-called Zangger Committee since 1997. In the NSG, Beijing eventually went along in 2008 with an American proposal to exempt India, which is outside the NPT, from NSG rules. Yet, Beijing continues to oppose India's NSG membership, which Washington supports, and accepts Pakistan's demand for equal treatment of the two South Asian rivals. Geopolitical competition with the U.S. is having an increasingly strong impact on Beijing's behaviour even in such forums of "technology-holders" with similar interests.

Over the past three decades, China has gradually aligned its export control legislation with the guidelines of the Australia Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MT-CR).<sup>127</sup> Although implementation of these guidelines re-

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Zhu, Mingquan (1997): "The Evolution of China's Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy", in: *The Nonproliferation Review*, Winter 1997, pp. 40–48, <https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/npr/zhu42.pdf> (4 January 2022).

<sup>122</sup> The head of state at the time, Zhou Enlai, "solemnly" announced renunciation of first use to all heads of state in a telegram dated 17 October 1964, one day after the first Chinese nuclear test. Cf. Zhu (1997), p. 44.

<sup>123</sup> "China undertakes unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine as a non-nuclear-weapon state and to provide corresponding security assurances to Ukraine in the event of aggression or threat of aggression against Ukraine using nuclear weapons." Quoted in Kulacki, Gregory (2022): "China's Broken Promise to Ukraine", *All Things Nuclear*, 18 March 2022, <https://allthingsnuclear.org/gkulacki/chinas-broken-promise-to-ukraine> (23 April 2022).

<sup>124</sup> China did not participate in the three conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use in 2013/2014, either.

<sup>125</sup> See Wang, Raymond / Zhao, Tong (2017): "China and the Nuclear Ban Treaty", in: Shetty, Shatabhisha / Raynova, Denitsa (eds.): *Breakthrough or Breakpoint? Global Perspectives on the Nuclear Ban Treaty*, European Leadership Network, Global Security Special Report, London, pp. 26–31.

<sup>126</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2021): "China's Export Controls", First Edition, Beijing, December 2021, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1718303/1718303.htm> (4 January 2022).

<sup>127</sup> The same applies to the HCoC, which China has stayed away from, among other things, presumably because of the transparency requirements laid down in the regime. Cf. Bondaz, Antoine / Liu, Daniel / Maitre, Emmanuelle (2021): *The Hague Code of Conduct and China*, HCoC Research Papers 8, September 2021, <https://www.nonproliferation.eu/hcoc/wphcoc/uploads/2021/09/HCoC-and-China-vf.pdf> (4 January 2022).

mains patchy in many respects, a trend towards convergence with Western policies is unmistakable.<sup>128</sup> There are also economic reasons underlying this, as violations of export standards time and again have prompted U.S. sanctions against the companies involved.

In the CTBT negotiations, China has also insisted on equal treatment for all states possessing nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, Beijing has signed the CTBT although its regional rival India remains outside the treaty. Adopting the perspective of a developing country, China argued in the CTBT negotiations that nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes should not be prohibited, arguing that such explosions were necessary for its own economic development. In the end, Beijing was not able to gain consensus support for this position, and the CTBT now prohibits any nuclear test.<sup>129</sup>

China's special status is also underscored by the fact that Beijing acts in multilateral forums outside those regional groupings that coordinate the interests of their members. Politically speaking, China usually positions itself close to the group of neutral and non-aligned states. But often Beijing refers to itself as the "Group of One", for example in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament or at state meetings in connection with multilateral disarmament treaties.<sup>130</sup> Yet, Beijing – like other non-aligned states – argues that the positions of (former) developing countries have not been adequately taken into account during the negotiations of multilateral regimes and, against this background, calls for a reform of the rules and procedures of such regimes to accommodate the interests of emerging powers. From the perspective of many Western states, however, the demands forwarded by these countries, for instance for better access to dual-use technologies, are problematic because as a whole they would translate into a redefinition of these accords.

### China as a Victim on Support of the Perpetrators: Biological and Chemical Weapons

China has been a party to the CWC since it entered into force in 1997. Upon its accession, Beijing declared a chemical weapons programme, which apparently has been completely dismantled. Routine OPCW inspections in China are implemented without any major problems.

At the same time, Beijing backs Russia in the UN Security Council and in the OPCW whenever Moscow shields the Syrian regime from the consequences of its repeated use of chemical weapons. China and Russia have repeatedly wielded their vetoes on the UN Security Council to prevent referral of the investigation into chemical weapons attacks in

Syria to the International Criminal Court.<sup>131</sup> These two countries lead a group of 20-30 OPCW state parties – including Iran, Syria and Cuba – that in fundamental opposition to a larger group of Western states (so far without success) aims to prevent stronger reactions by the international community to CWC violations and the further development of chemical and biological weapons regimes to hold the perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks accountable.<sup>132</sup>

Chinese policy in the area of chemical weapons is encumbered by the consequences of the Japanese occupation during World War II. The Japanese army left behind large stockpiles of chemical weapons in China. Between 700,000 (the Japanese estimate) and 2,000,000 abandoned chemical weapons (Chinese figures) were found at 90 different locations in 18 Chinese provinces at the end of the war. Between 1945 and 2009, approximately 750 people died or were injured due to contact with these weapons.<sup>133</sup>

Under the CWC, Japan is responsible for the safe destruction of these stocks on site. The expensive and technically complex disposal process got off to a slow start at the end of the 1990s, but has still not been completed, in part due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>134</sup> China is exploiting this situation for propaganda purposes and loudly holding Japan responsible. Above and beyond this rhetoric, however, disposal of old chemical weapon stocks can also be viewed as a model for Sino-Japanese cooperation.<sup>135</sup>

During the Second World War, China was the victim of horrific Japanese biological weapons attacks and experiments that cost the lives of up to 250,000 civilians and soldiers. Under Japanese occupation, the infamous Unit 731 also conducted experiments with biological weapons on Chinese prisoners of war. This experience still shapes Beijing's policy today. When it acceded to the BWC in 1984, China issued a declaration that it would consider itself released from its obligations if it were attacked with biological weapons.<sup>136</sup>

### Humanitarian Arms Control: Landmines, Cluster Munitions and the Arms Trade Treaty

China's understanding of its role in humanitarian arms control as well is strikingly ambivalent. As a result of the great

<sup>128</sup> See Zhao, Jizhou (2013): China's Non-proliferation Controls: A Policy Overview, and Implications for the EU, NFG Working Paper No. 2/2013, Berlin, <https://refubium.fuberlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/18624/wp213-china-multilateral-export-control-regimes.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&save=y>.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Johnson (2009), p. 93ff.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Dee, Megan (2017): "Group Dynamics and Interplay in UN Disarmament Forums: In Search of Consensus", in: *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 12 (2-3), pp. 158–177, [www.doi.org/10.1163/1871191X12341364](http://www.doi.org/10.1163/1871191X12341364).

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Black, Ian (2014): "Russia and China veto UN move to refer Syria to international criminal court", in: *The Guardian*, 22 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/22/russia-china-veto-un-draft-resolution-refer-syria-international-criminal-court> (4 January 2022).

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Kelle, Alexander (2021): *Chemiewaffeneinsätze aufklären und ahnden – Syrien als Testfall für das Weltrechtsprinzip?*, Policy Brief 3/2021, Institut für Friedens- und Sicherheitspolitik, Hamburg, [https://ifsh.de/file/publication/Policy\\_Brief/21\\_03\\_IFSH\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_Alexander\\_Kelle\\_web.pdf](https://ifsh.de/file/publication/Policy_Brief/21_03_IFSH_Policy_Brief_Alexander_Kelle_web.pdf) (5 January 2022)

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Gao, Wanglai (2017): "Unearthing poison: Disposal of abandoned chemical weapons in China", in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 73 (6), pp. 404–410, [www.doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2017.1388678](http://www.doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2017.1388678).

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Statement By H.E. Ambassador Tan Jian (2021).

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Gao (2017).

<sup>136</sup> Cf. "China", in: *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, <https://www.nti.org/countries/china> (4 January 2022).



powers' obstructionism on arms control and disarmament since the 1990s, countries of the Global South in particular, as well as some Western middle powers, have been supporting efforts to negotiate agreements outside forums, in which the consensus rule applies. The focus here is often on the perspective of the victims of military violence, in contrast to the often stability- and state-oriented approach characteristic of traditional arms control instruments. This has resulted inter alia in the 1999 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (Ottawa Convention) and the 2010 Convention on Cluster Munitions (Oslo Convention).<sup>137</sup>

China is open to the humanitarian perspective, but rejects the norm-based approach adopted in these treaties as well as the evasion of the consensus principle. It can be assumed that China's ambivalent attitude towards humanitarian arms control is intended to improve its political standing vis-à-vis countries of the Global South without at the same time assuming any disarmament obligations. Thus, Beijing has stayed away from the negotiations on the Oslo Convention as well as the Ottawa Convention and has not signed either treaty. Like other permanent Security Council members who fear a loss of power, China has criticised negotiation of these agreements outside consensus-based institutions. Yet, Beijing attends meetings of states parties to both treaties as an observer and supports key principles embedded in the accords, such as the Oslo Convention's principle that the states responsible for use of cluster munitions are responsible for clearing them.<sup>138</sup>

China's ambivalent attitude is also reflected in the fact that, although it has admitted to producing cluster munitions, it claims to have never used such weapons.<sup>139</sup> China has considerably reduced its stockpiles of anti-personnel mines, but has not fully renounced the possession of these weapons.<sup>140</sup> Beijing refuses to join the Ottawa Convention, citing security-policy reasons, although it has presumably stopped producing mines without a self-destruction mechanism and destroyed many old mines.

Beijing's position on multilateral approaches to regulating the arms trade is similarly ambivalent. Arms exports are an increasingly important means of influence and an economic policy tool for China. Over the last decade, China has ranked fifth among the world's leading arms exporters, one place behind Germany.<sup>141</sup> The gap to the U.S., which remains by

far the world's largest arms supplier, has decreased significantly. Over the same period, Beijing was the third largest arms importer behind Saudi Arabia and India.<sup>142</sup>

Beijing acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in 2020. Up to the end of 2018, China complied to a limited extent with its reporting obligations under the UN Arms Register. Under the register, states are politically obliged to establish a certain level of transparency regarding arms transfers by reporting to the UN imports and exports of specific major weapon systems. Since 2018, however, Beijing has no longer reported any information of this kind to the UN.<sup>143</sup> Beijing is thus following an unfortunate tendency toward decreasing openness that can be observed worldwide since around the mid-2000s and is particularly pronounced in Asia.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>137</sup> The GCPT, with its emphasis on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use, can also be placed in this tradition of humanitarian arms control.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor (2020): "China: Cluster Munition Ban Policy", 19 November 2020, <http://themonitor.org/engb/reports/2020/china/cluster-munition-ban-policy.aspx> (4 January 2022).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor (2020): "China: Mine Ban Policy", 15 November 2020, <http://www.themonitor.org/engb/reports/2020/china/mine-ban-policy.aspx> (4 January 2022).

<sup>141</sup> Cf. SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/arms-transfers> (4 January 2022).

<sup>142</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> See United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, <https://www.unroca.org> (4 January 2022). China complied with its reporting obligations under the ATT in 2021, but on condition that the declaration was not published. See "Arms Trade Treaty: Initial Reports as of 25 October 2021", <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/initialreports.html?templateId=209839> (27 January 2022). We thank Michael Brzoska for bringing our attention to this.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, <https://www.unroca.org/participation> (4 January 2022).

## 3

## OPTIONS FOR AN ARMS CONTROL POLICY DIALOGUE WITH CHINA

Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are good issues to maximise opportunities associated with Chinese aspirations to more influence and, at the same time, mitigate the risks may arise through its ambitions for military dominance. In view of China's political, economic and technological importance, multilateral disarmament and arms control regimes will not be able to function in the medium term without Beijing's engagement. At the regional level, confidence-building approaches are necessary to check – at least to a certain extent – uncontrolled arms races. Nuclear risk reduction also requires China involvement, on an equal footing with other nuclear powers.

Arms control policy dialogues should not be based on Beijing's propagandistic maximum demands nor on demands for China's inclusion in Russo-U.S. nuclear arms control. Moreover, one should not assume that such talks are pointless in view of China's military build-up. Rather, it must be soberly acknowledged that China is not prepared to fundamentally alter its course for the time being. Its policies pursue the overriding goal of being able to stand up to the U.S. through asymmetric and increasingly symmetric arms build-up.

Crude and heavy-handed demands directed at China, for example by urging Beijing to limit its nuclear weapons arsenal to a minimum level within the framework of future trilateral talks with Russia and the U.S., are therefore not helpful. The Russian-American dialogue on strategic stability – aimed at negotiating follow-up agreements to the New START accord on the limitation of strategic nuclear weapons, which is set to expire in 2026, has been suspended. Thus, the issue of including China in such talks for the time being is no longer relevant.<sup>145</sup> China has scant interest in being included in existing arms control agreements or in new regimes as long as these are designed to cement China's own inferiority. This applies, among other things, to arrangements governing new weapons technologies, as long as Beijing sees these technologies as instruments of asymmetric power balancing. On top of it all, the issue of arms control is currently overshadowed by broader strategic challenges (trade, technology, intellectual property,

Hong Kong, Taiwan). At the same time, China sees arms control as a purely intergovernmental affair and remains sceptical of arms control policy instruments that are applied at the transnational and substate level.

Over and beyond these principles, however, there are generic points of departure for a coordinated or even joint approach to arms control issues. Germany should take careful note of the principles that guide Chinese arms control policies, in particular its efforts to attain strategic equality and its scepticism toward intrusive and governance approaches. When necessary, Berlin should openly state where German and European positions differ from Chinese policies. *Specificity, flexibility and willingness to engage in dialogue* can enhance the chances of success in attempts to encourage a dialogue on arms control.

First, arms control dialogue forums should be kept as separate as possible from discussions on other security issues. Greater Chinese involvement in multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements to limit military capabilities has merit in and of itself, as such cooperation can contribute to a long-term change in the political relationship, establish channels of communication and foster an awareness of shared interests.

Secondly, dialogues should be as issue-specific as possible. The field of disarmament and arms control has evolved and become so multifaceted and differentiated that the general demand for China's involvement rings hollow. Although interconnections between topics cannot be completely ignored, for example with regard to issues involving disarmament and non-proliferation, there is at the same time a risk of weighing down talks with too many linkages.

Thirdly, offers of talks should tend to take as their starting point topics in which China's understanding of its role is still ambivalent. Conflicting aims in the realm lying between Beijing's geopolitical ambitions and its general support for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction may offer opportunities to involve China in efforts to resolve regional proliferation crises. This remains true, for example, for efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict over Iran's nuclear programme. China continues to see itself as a developing country and is therefore ready to engage with existing humanitarian arms control treaties, to

<sup>145</sup> Detsch, Jack / Gramer, Robbie: "U.S. Halts Russian Nuclear Talks", *Foreign Policy*, 25 February 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/25/biden-russia-arms-control-talks-ukraine-invasion> (24 April 2022)

contribute to the implementation of positive treaty obligations and to discuss new issues in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.<sup>146</sup>

Fourthly, it is desirable to encourage and call for China's participation and involvement in groups of like-minded states, which have become diverse and multifaceted. China is involved with some groups, such as the CEND initiative, and has participated in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV) as an observer. The P5 are involved in talks with groups that are important from a German perspective, such as the Stockholm Initiative and the Nonproliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPD). This engagement is important in order to create channels for dialogue. Even low-threshold dialogues can help establish channels of discussion, provide insights into the formation of Chinese opinion and decision-making, and in this manner prepare the ground for the initiation of dialogue at the formal level at a later stage. Ideally, this would lead to China being involved in arms control dialogue frameworks that do not have Russia as a participant.

Two weeks before Russia's attack on Ukraine on the margins of the Winter Olympics, Beijing and Moscow agreed on principles upon which to base their foreign and security policy cooperation in a bilateral declaration issued by President Xi and Putin.<sup>147</sup> This declaration explicitly and at length places the principles underlying Chinese arms control policy explored here, such as Beijing's insistence on the inter-governmental nature of arms control and the principle of consensus, in the context of bilateral Sino-Russian cooperation. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent this solidarity will change against the backdrop of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Chinese abstention from voting in the UN General Assembly on resolutions condemning Russia's war of aggression, as well as individual statements made by Chinese representatives, suggest that Moscow's policy is viewed with concern by at least some key actors in Beijing.<sup>148</sup>

From a German perspective, three factors should guide the selection of topics and underpin the framework for an arms control dialogue:

1. *The significance of the topic*: How important is the topic to German and European security?
2. *The congruence of interests*: To what extent are China and Germany/the EU pursuing similar security and/or economic interests (e.g. regard to technology control issues)? Is there potential for joint contributions to be made to a strengthening of global norms?
3. *The transatlantic and European potential for conflict*: How contentious is such a dialogue in NATO and the EU?

On the basis of these principles, a cautious and preliminary assessment can be ventured regarding the likelihood of success for a dialogue with China on various arms control policy issues.

### 3.1 PROMISING TOPICS: REGIONAL CONFIDENCE-BUILDING, VERIFICATION, POSITIVE COMMITMENTS AND RISK-REDUCTION

#### REGIONAL CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

Germany could propose an exchange of experience to China, especially on issues relating to regional confidence-building. Since regional arms control in the Indo-Pacific is extremely unlikely at present, confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) could be viewed as an initial step towards cooperative security. At the same time, such measures have a value in and of themselves. ASEAN's security architecture and the interest of regional states such as South Korea also offer good points of departure in seeking regional arrangements on CSBMs. German and European experience in the East-West conflict shows that CSBMs also require a minimum of trust.<sup>149</sup> These measures only became comprehensive and substantial in the final phase of this conflict after 1985, following Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to leadership of the Soviet Union.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, German and European experience should not be understood as a model, but rather as an offer, along the lines of a toolkit. CSBMs and preparedness in the area of defence are not polar opposites; yet CSBMs can mitigate risks and reduce misunderstandings. The numerous dialogue formats existing in the region are already well suited for the purpose of political confidence-building. A Sino-German exchange of experiences, commencing in the Track 2 or Track 1.5 format,

<sup>146</sup> The Arms Convention aims to "prohibit or restrict the use in declared wars and other armed conflicts of certain conventional weapons which may cause excessive suffering or indiscriminate effects". Cf. German Federal Foreign Office (2020): „Waffenübereinkommen der Vereinten Nationen mit den dazugehörigen Protokollen“, 11 February 2020, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussepolitik/themen/abruistung-ruistungskontrolle/uebersicht-konvalles-node/vn-waffen-uebereinkommen-ccw-node> (27 January 2022).

<sup>147</sup> "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development," 4 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770> (23 April 2022).

<sup>148</sup> Cf. for example Gang, Qin (2022), "Chinese Ambassador: The Ukraine Crisis and Its Aftermath", *The National Interest*, 18 April 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinese-ambassador-ukraine-crisis-and-its-aftermath-201867> (23 April 2022).

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Richter, Wolfgang (2016): „Frühe vertrauens- und sicherheitsbildende Maßnahmen der Konferenz über Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa“, in: *Sicherheitsgemeinschaft*, No. 1/2016; <https://www.osce.org/de/magazine/250336> (4 January 2022).

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Lachowski, Zdzislaw / Rotfeld, Adam Daniel (2001): „Erfolg oder Fehlschlag? Vertrauens- und sicherheitsbildende Maßnahmen nach dem Kalten Krieg“, in: Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg (ed.): *OSZE-Jahrbuch 2001*, Hamburg, pp. 341–359; [https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/jahrbuch/01/Lachowski\\_Rotfeld.pdf](https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/jahrbuch/01/Lachowski_Rotfeld.pdf) (4 January 2022).

should also discuss conceivable measures based on reciprocity: Transparency, announcement of manoeuvres exceeding certain military personnel or weapon levels, inclusion in naval manoeuvres, invitation of observers, exchange on doctrines, military contacts and crisis communication.

## VERIFICATION OF ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS

Involving China in discussions on more effective verification of arms control agreements seems possible and makes good sense, as does addressing Chinese misgivings that Western states could abuse such procedures to engage in espionage.<sup>151</sup> Similar fears have long prevented progress in arms control with the Soviet Union and Russia. China has comparatively little experience in this important aspect of arms control, but has shown interest in principle in nuclear verification issues.<sup>152</sup>

China's relative isolation contributes to the propagation of myths in China. For example, a large percentage of Chinese experts apparently believe the government's claims that chemical weapons attacks in Syria and the Novichok attacks against Russia's political opponents are the result of U.S. intelligence operations and OPCW investigations manipulated by the West.<sup>153</sup> Even low-threshold, personal contacts with Chinese experts could contribute to a more objective view.

From 2014 to 2017, China participated with Russia as an observer in the first phase of the IPNDV, in which more than 25 nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states discussed procedures to jointly verify nuclear disarmament. In the second project phase, during the Trump Administration, Beijing decided to stay away from the dialogue.<sup>154</sup> The question of how to persuade it to return in the ongoing third project phase, which is slated to go until 2025, should be addressed swiftly.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Zhao, Tong (2020): *Practical Ways to Promote U.S.-China Arms Control Cooperation*, Policy Outlook, Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, Washington, D.C., <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/07/practical-ways-to-promote-u.s.-china-arms-control-cooperation-pub-82818> (4 January 2022).

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Zhao, Tong (2020): "The Case for China's Participation in Trilateral Arms Control", in: Kühn, Ulrich (ed.): *Trilateral Arms Control? Perspectives from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing*, IFSH Research Report #002, Hamburg, pp. 68–94, here pp. 81–85.

<sup>153</sup> Zhao, Tong (2022), p. 17.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV): "Participants", <https://www.ipndv.org/about/partners-participants>; Sanders-Zakre, Alicia (2018): "Verification Group Moves to Second Phase", in *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/201801/news/verification-group-moves-second-phase> (4 January 2022).

<sup>155</sup> This question was already raised by the Europeans in 2019. Cf. "Welcome Remarks by Mr Pieter Jan Kleiweg: Deputy Director-General for Political Affairs, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the IPNDV Working Group Meeting", International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, 18 June 2019, <https://www.ipndv.org/statements/joint-working-group-meeting-utrecht-welcome-remarks-by-mr-pieter-jan-kleiweg> (4 January 2022).

Joint discussions with China on how certain aspects of the TPNW review would be more ambitious, but also politically more important. Germany could use its observer status at the TPNW Conferences of the Parties to take part in debates on the verifiability of a ban on nuclear weapons. China as well could possibly be interested in participating in such debates.<sup>156</sup>

## IMPLEMENTATION OF POSITIVE ARMS CONTROL COMMITMENTS

Modern arms control agreements not only contain prohibitions and limitations, but are also based on offers of cooperation between the state parties. Cooperation, for example in the peaceful use of certain technologies or in the humanitarian area, offers incentives for participation even to those states that may have no primary security interests in the regime. Traditionally, the countries of the Global South are interested in effective implementation of obligations for assistance and cooperation.<sup>157</sup>

Germany and the EU support such ventures at cooperation in manifold ways, for example in the control and destruction of small arms and light weapons.<sup>158</sup> From the perspective of civil society groups, China's accession to the Arms Trade Treaty in 2020 may also offer points of departure for persuading Beijing to adopt a more restrictive arms export policy and to address arms deliveries to African countries in particular.<sup>159</sup>

Opportunities for cooperation with China may also present themselves in connection with implementation of the nuclear agreement with Iran. Despite U.S. sanctions, Beijing continues to work on the conversion of Iran's heavy water reactor in Arak into a research centre for medical isotopes.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, the EU is engaged with Iran in a dialogue on nuclear safety issues, which may overlap with China's interest in nuclear cooperation with Iran.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Wang / Zhao (2017), p. 29.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Meier, Oliver (2014): "Dual-Use Technology Transfers: Finding the Right Balance Between Control and Cooperation", in: *ibid* (ed.): *Technology Transfers and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Between Control and Cooperation*, Routledge, London / New York.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. German Federal Foreign Office (2021): *Jahresabrüstungsbericht 2020*, Berlin, p. 125f, <https://www.auswaertigesamt.de/blob/2457644/7a4fbb16352c3d2c3587fbc014ce6d4a/abrbericht2020-data.pdf>.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. "China's Accession to the ATT: Opportunities and Challenges", in: *Saferworld*, 15 July 2020, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/888-chinaas-accession-to-the-att-opportunities-and-challenges> (4 January 2022).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. "Iran Prepares to Revive Arak Nuclear Reactor, with Chinese Help or Alone", in: *Iran International*, 19 March 2021, <https://old.iranintl.com/en/world/iran-prepares-revive-arak-nuclear-reactor-chinese-help-or-alone> (4 January 2022).

<sup>161</sup> See European Commission (2018): *Joint Press Statement Following Today's Meeting Between Commissioner Arias Cañete and Vice President Salehi, Head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI)*, Brussels, 10.5.2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/STATEMENT\\_18\\_3871](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/STATEMENT_18_3871) (4 January 2022).

## REDUCTION OF NUCLEAR RISK

Issues relating to nuclear risk reduction could offer another topical point of departure for an arms control dialogue with China. From China's perspective, the P5 are the preferred framework for discussions on nuclear issues. Here, Beijing can act on an equal footing with the other nuclear weapon states. China has also recently reached an agreement in principle with the U.S. to engage in a dialogue on issues of strategic stability and risk reduction.<sup>162</sup> The war against Ukraine is likely to have countervailing effects on these dialogues involving risk reduction issues. On the one hand, U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin spoke with his Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe in mid-April 2022 for the first time since the Biden Administration took office. Both officials also addressed military escalation risks.<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, Russian lies and broken promises and violations in the context of its invasion of Ukraine, that any nuclear confidence-building measures will presumably have to be specific, reciprocal and verifiable, including in the P5 framework.<sup>164</sup>

The P5 are also in regular exchange with the Stockholm Initiative. Germany supports discussions on problems involving nuclear risk reduction in this format and – just like the P5 – has forwarded proposals for further steps to reduce the risk of armed conflict and the use of nuclear weapons in discussions at the 10th NPT Review Conference.

The CEND initiative launched by the U.S. in 2018, in which some 40 states are conducting informal talks on nuclear disarmament-related issues, can also provide a framework for engagement.<sup>165</sup> China participates in CEND.<sup>166</sup> Germany co-chairs the working group on risk reduction issues with Finland.

Some substantive commonalities exist between the German and Chinese positions in particular with regard to a reduction in the role of nuclear weapons. Germany – together with other like-minded states – has so far tried unsuccessfully to initiate discussions in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament on legally binding negative security guarantees by

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Leary, Alex / Wei, Lingling / Gordon, Michael R. (2021): "Bi den, Xi Open to Nuclear Arms Talks, White House Says", in: *Wall Street Journal*, 16 November 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-xi-open-to-nuclear-arms-talks-whitehouse-says11637098592> (4 January 2022).

<sup>163</sup> "Pentagon chief speaks with China's defence minister for first time under Biden", *Reuters*, 20 April 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/pentagon-chief-spoke-with-chinas-defense-minister-official-2022-04-20> (23 April 2022).

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Meier, Oliver (2022): "Back to Basics: The Nuclear Order, Arms Control, and Europe". in: *Arms Control Today* 52 (3), pp. 6–8, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/202204/features/back-basics-nuclear-or-der-arms-control-europe> (23 April 2022).

<sup>165</sup> See Potter, William C. (2019): "Taking the Pulse at the Inaugural Meeting of the CEND Initiative", in: *nonproliferation.org*, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, 15 July 2019, <https://www.nonproliferation.org/taking-the-pulse-at-the-inaugural-meeting-of-the-cend-initiative/> (4 January 2022).

<sup>166</sup> Little is known about Beijing's role due to the confidential and informal nature of the discussions, however. Cf. Potter (2019).

states possessing nuclear weapons.<sup>167</sup> China is in favour of a general renunciation of first use of nuclear weapons by states possessing them, so there is certainly an overlap of positions here.<sup>168</sup>

From a German perspective, China's principled support for global regimes could be leveraged to reduce nuclear risks. From this angle, a joint engagement with China to achieve progress toward accession to the CTBT in Asia would make sense. Germany, for example, has in the past sought to persuade India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT (simultaneously). More transparency for missile tests and launches of space missiles are also possible issues when it comes to an accession of China to the *Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation* (HCoC) or to the MTCR.<sup>169</sup> It also makes sense for MTCR participants to seek inclusion of hypersonic systems in export controls and to enter into a dialogue with China on this issue, at an early stage.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, China, the U.S. and Russia could notify each other about an upcoming launch of space missiles and hypersonic weapons.<sup>171</sup>

## 3.2 STICKY ISSUES: GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC STABILITY

### GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL OF TECHNOLOGIES BEARING RELEVANCE TO PROLIFERATION

Arms control policy dialogues with China are likely to be controversial whenever questions of governance are concerned, or weapons systems that Beijing considers important for deterring the U.S. Together with other Western countries, Germany supports the development of codes of conduct to reduce the risks of misuse of dual-use technologies, for example in the cyber sector. China, on the other hand, would like to rely on intergovernmental accords. Formats for informal dialogue between the EU and China on cyber security issues have corroborated these different approaches.<sup>172</sup> At the same time, China has an economic inter-

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Meier, Oliver / Maren, Vieluf (2021): „Deutschland, die nukleare Abrüstung und der Atomwaffenverbotsvertrag“, in: *FriedensWarte* 94 (3–4), pp. 358–389, <https://elibrary.bwv-verlag.de/article/10.35998/fw-2021-0018> (4 January 2022).

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Wang / Zhao (2017), pp. 28–29.

<sup>169</sup> A trilateral exchange of information between the U.S., Russia and China has already been proposed here. Cf. Acton, James A. / MacDonald, Thomas D. / Vaddi, Pranay (2020): "Revamping Nuclear Arms Control: Five Near-Term Proposals", Working Paper, Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, Washington, D.C., p. viii, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Acton\\_McDonald\\_Vaddi\\_Arms\\_Control.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Acton_McDonald_Vaddi_Arms_Control.pdf) (4 January 2022).

<sup>170</sup> See Brockmann, Kolja / Stefanovich, Dmitry: "Hypersonic Boost-Glide Systems and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles: Challenges for the Missile Technology Control Regime", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2022, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/202204/2204\\_hgvs\\_and\\_hcm\\_challenges\\_for\\_the\\_mtrc.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/202204/2204_hgvs_and_hcm_challenges_for_the_mtrc.pdf) (23 April 2022), p. 23.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Acton / MacDonald / Vaddi (2020), pp. 27–32.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Gamaggio, Gaia (2021): "Ninth Sino-European Cyber Dialogue", in: *The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies*, 28 October 2021, <https://hcss.nl/news/ninth-sino-european-cyber-dialogue> (4 January 2022).

est in having clear rules of play, for example in the field of information technologies. Without such a basis, there is a growing danger from the Chinese perspective that individual companies will be shut off from global trade. Whether and to what extent China is willing to compromise and subject itself to rules that would restrict its own latitude and scope remains unclear, but this could be discussed behind closed doors.

China also rejects strengthening the authority of the OPCW to investigate and identify those parties responsible for chemical weapon attacks. Germany is pushing for more accountability in concert with other partners. At the same time, Beijing's participation in the CWC is a precondition for the proper functioning of this regime, especially because a significant portion of the global chemical industry is based in China. As long as China and Russia jointly oppose efforts to hold accountable those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, any dialogue on control of chemical weapons has meagre chances of success.

## STRATEGIC STABILITY

*“China's involvement [in arms control] is likely only on a strictly pragmatic basis; it must be convinced of a valuable quid pro quo in return for greater transparency and limitations on weapons systems. In other words, China may change its current position if it believes that it stands to lose more politically and militarily by staying away from the arms reduction process than by joining it.”<sup>173</sup>*

China is not interested in a dialogue with Germany on those issues that China regards as a zero-sum game with the U.S. Washington's and NATO's pointed calls for participation in nuclear arms control are futile because China does not want to enter into such talks from a position of weakness. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg recently argued that China has “global responsibilities” and would also benefit from “common limits, more transparency and greater reliability”.<sup>174</sup> As long as France and the UK fail to make any serious moves in this direction, however, such appeals are likely to go unheeded in Beijing.<sup>175</sup>

The U.S. has already attempted in vain to engage China on nuclear arms control. Informal Track 1.5 talks between American and Chinese experts as well as government representatives took place from 2004 to 2019, until the US terminated the dialogue because China refused to move to an official mandate (Track 1) and Chinese participants had be-

come less senior.<sup>176</sup> Beijing can therefore hardly be expected to engage in talks with Germany or the EU on such issues if it is not willing to do so with the U.S.

Europe's policy has at most an indirect influence on China's strategic calculations. Since the demise of the INF Treaty in 2018, China has been primarily concerned about the possible stationing of American intermediate-range missiles in Asia. Because it is itself building up its own arsenal of such weapons, China has so far had no interest in a follow-up agreement that would lead to a global ban on intermediate-range (nuclear) weapons. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has dashed any hopes that this point of departure could provide the West with leverage to persuade China to participate in arms control talks.<sup>177</sup> Such a strategy of exerting pressure presupposes, at least implicitly, coordinated action by Russia and NATO, which is now out of the question.

Europe's role in the equally important and difficult issue of missile defence is likely to be similarly indirect. A Sino-American dialogue that leads to a better understanding of American missile-defence capabilities and the Chinese reaction to these capabilities has been repeatedly suggested. A link to NATO would at best be indirect because China is concerned, among other things, that the line between U.S. missile defence systems against intermediate and long-range weapons is becoming blurred.<sup>178</sup> Chinese experts share the Russian assessment that Aegis missile defence systems could also be used as a platform for launching offensive weapons.<sup>179</sup> Should Russia and the U.S. somehow succeed in resuming the dialogue on strategic stability and thus initiate a process of confidence-building on missile defences, it would make good sense to include Chinese experts in an evaluation of respective capabilities.

## MARITIME ARMS CONTROL

The chances of success for maritime arms control in the Indo-Pacific are low at present. This applies to the region as a whole as well as to sub-regions such as East Asia and South Asia. There are several reasons for this: (1) the excessive number of countries involved; (2) the predominant and ac-

<sup>173</sup> Arbatov, Alexei (2014): “Engaging China in Nuclear Arms Control”, in: *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October 2014, p. 7, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Arbatov\\_China\\_nuclear\\_Eng2014.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Arbatov_China_nuclear_Eng2014.pdf).

<sup>174</sup> NATO (2021).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Harries, Matthew (2021): “Why is the United Kingdom raising its nuclear stockpile limits?”, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2 April 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/2021/04/why-is-the-united-kingdom-raising-its-nuclear-stockpile-limits> (4 January 2022).

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Santoro, David / Gromoll, David (2020): “On the Value of Nuclear Dialogue with China. A Review and Assessment of the Track 1.5 ‘China-US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics Dialogue’”, in *Issues & Insights Special Report*, Vol. 20 (1), November 2020, Pacific Forum, Honolulu, Hawaii, [https://pacforum.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/issuesinsights\\_Vol20No1.pdf](https://pacforum.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/issuesinsights_Vol20No1.pdf) (4 January 2022).

<sup>177</sup> Former U.S. diplomat Rose Gottemoeller had suggested that NATO agree to Russia's offer of a moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range weapons west of the Urals. An associated transfer of Russian intermediate-range weapons to east of the Urals would then provide an incentive for China to participate in talks on a ban on intermediate-range nuclear weapons. See Gottemoeller, Rose (2020): “Rethinking Nuclear Arms Control”, in: *The Washington Quarterly* 43 (3), pp. 139–159, here p. 148, [www.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1813382](http://www.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1813382).

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Zhao, Tong (2020): *Narrowing the U.S. China Gap on Missile Defense. How to help forestall a nuclear arms race*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., pp. 42–43.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

celerating concentration by many countries – especially China and the U.S., but also Australia, India and Japan – on the build-up of naval forces as a central component in bilateral and multilateral military competition; (3) the complexity of possible arrangements in view of complex conflict structures; (4) the lack of interest in maritime arms control on the part of central alliance partners such as the U.S., France and Great Britain. In view of the generally poor prospects for success in this area, it makes no sense to squabble with partners at this point. Added to this is the experience that, even from a historical perspective, there have only been very few examples of success in the area of maritime arms control.<sup>180</sup> Since conditions are not propitious for success or such conditions cannot be brought about, Germany should not undertake any initiatives in this area at present beyond confidence-building measures.

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<sup>180</sup> Among them was the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, which was revised several times up until 1938. This treaty was intended to limit the naval arms race between the previous hegemon Great Britain, the U.S., Japan, France and Italy. A particular focus at the time was on the conflict constellation in the Pacific. Japan withdrew from the agreement in 1934. Cf. Kaufman, Robert Gordon (1990): *Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era. The United States and Naval Limitation Between the Two World Wars*, New York; Kennedy, Paul (1983): *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, London.



## FINAL COMMENTS

Increasing Chinese participation is indispensable for the maintenance and further development of the global arms control architecture. Despite the ambiguities inherent in its arms control policy described in this report, the People's Republic is in principle prepared for a more substantive engagement. From this assessment result points of departure for an arms control dialogue with Germany and the European Union. The selection of suitable topics (specificity), substantial preparation in terms of content, and sustained political earnestness and flexibility are key conditions if such dialogues are to be productive. An exchange on issues involving verification as well as on confidence- and security-building – starting in the Track 1.5 or Track 2 format – would appear to make good sense in order to stimulate a discussion on cooperative security. Boosting Chinese involvement in arms control regimes can make an important stabilising contribution to the international political order. Dialogue on arms control has a worth in and of itself in that it can establish channels of dialogue, foster transparency, empathy and an understanding of shared interests, while contributing to a longer-term change in the political relationship.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>A2/AD</b>	Anti-Access/Area-Denial
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>ARF</b>	ASEAN Regional Forum (dialogue format consisting of the ten ASEAN states and 17 partner states, including China, the European Union, India, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia and the U.S.)
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>APT</b>	ASEAN Plus Three
<b>ATT</b>	Arms Trade Treaty
<b>AUKUS</b>	Alliance between Australia, Great Britain and the U.S.
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>BWC</b>	Biological Weapons Convention
<b>CEND</b>	Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament Initiative
<b>CSBM</b>	Confidence- and security-building measure
<b>CTBT</b>	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)
<b>CTBTO</b>	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBT)
<b>CWC</b>	Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Chemical Weapons Convention
<b>E3</b>	Germany, France, Great Britain
<b>EU+3</b>	EU + China, Russia and U.S.
<b>EAS</b>	East Asia Summit (regional forum of 16 countries in the region plus Russia and the U.S.)
<b>FMCT</b>	Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (treaty that restricts the production of weapons-grade fissile material)
<b>HCoC</b>	The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation
<b>IAEA</b>	International Atomic Energy Agency
<b>IIT</b>	Investigation and Identification Team (of the OPCW)
<b>IPNDV</b>	International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification
<b>JCPoA</b>	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Vienna nuclear agreement of the E3/EU+3 with Iran)
<b>MTCR</b>	Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)
<b>NAM</b>	Non-Aligned Movement (group of neutral and non-aligned states)
<b>NPDI</b>	Nonproliferation and Disarmament Initiative
<b>NSG</b>	Nuclear Suppliers Group
<b>NPT</b>	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
<b>OPCW</b>	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
<b>P5</b>	Group of Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (also the group of nuclear-weapon states recognised under the NPT)
<b>PAROS</b>	Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space
<b>PPWT</b>	Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space
<b>Quad</b>	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (dialogue format between Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.)
<b>RCEP</b>	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (largest free trade area in the world, consisting of the ASEAN countries, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea)
<b>PLA</b>	People's Liberation Army
<b>TPNW</b>	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

China's participation in selected disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regimes					
Regime	Status	Year of signature / accession	Year of entry into force / establishment	Treaty parties / members / participants	Notes
<b>Multilateral arms control regimes</b>					
CCW	Party to the Treaty	1981	1983	125	Member for all protocols
Outer Space Treaty	Party to the Treaty	1983	1967	111	
Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)	Party to the Treaty	1984	1975	183	
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	Member	1984	1954	174	
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)	Party to the Treaty	1992	1970	191	
Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)	Party to the Treaty	1993	1997	193	
Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)	Signatory State	1996	1996	185	Treaty not yet in force
Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)	–	–	2021	61	
<b>Plurilateral technology control regimes</b>					
Zangger Committee	Participant	1997	1971	39	
Nuclear Suppliers Group	Participant	2004	1975	48	
Australian Group	Non-participant	–	1985	42	
Hague Code of Conduct (HCoC)	Non-participant	–	2002	143	
Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)	Non-participant	–	1987	35	Membership applied for/refused in 2004
Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)	Non-participant	–	2004	107	
Wassenaar Arrangement	Non-participant	–	1996	42	193
<b>Humanitarian conventional arms control</b>					
Convention on the Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines	Non-member	–	1997	164	Observer at the Meeting of the Parties
Convention on Cluster Munitions	Non-member	–	2010	110	Observer at the Meeting of the States
Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)	Party to the Treaty	2020	2014	110	
<b>Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones</b>					
Africa / Pelindaba	Signature under Pelindaba (1996) and Protocols I and II (1997)	1996/1997	2009	43	Signature under Pelindaba (1996) and Protocols I and II (1997)
South Pacific / Rarotonga	Protocols II and III	1987/1988	1986	13	
South America / Tlatelolco	Protocol II	1973/1974	1967	33	
Central Asia / Tashkent	Protocol	2014/2015	2009	43	
South East Asia / Bangkok	–	–	1997	10	No nuclear weapon state
<b>has signed the protocols</b>					
P5	Participant	–	2009	5	Observer at meetings of the State Parties
Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament	Participant	–	2018	Approximately 40	Observer at meetings of the State Parties
International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV)	Phase I observer	–	2014	Approximately 25	

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## IMPRINT

Publisher:  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e. V.  
Godesberger Allee 149  
53175 Bonn  
Germany  
Email: [info@fes.de](mailto:info@fes.de)

Issuing Department: Division for International Cooperation,  
Department for Asia and the Pacific

Responsibility for content and editing:  
Stefan Pantekoek, Head of China Desk  
Dept. for Asia and the Pacific  
<https://www.fes.de/referat-asien-und-pazifik>

Contact:  
[Meike.Adam@fes.de](mailto:Meike.Adam@fes.de)

Design: pertext, Berlin | [www.pertext.de](http://www.pertext.de)

Cover design: © Dominik Ziller | DZGN  
Illustrationen: © istock | SurfUpVector

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ISBN 978-3-98628-140-3

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## CHINA'S ROLE IN MULTILATERAL ARMS CONTROL



Challenges in the areas of international arms control and the international political order – such as those posed by the Iran or North Korean conflict, but also the general further development of the increasingly fragile multilateral arms control architecture cannot be managed, or at least only managed less effectively, without China's constructive participation. Beijing's passive behaviour in the multilateral disarmament and arms control architecture contrasts with its active arms build-up policy, however.



China is striving for strategic parity with the U.S. and is sceptical of intrusive and governance approaches. Above and beyond these principles, Beijing's actions in the areas of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are by no means consistent. Conflicting goals and a fractured understanding of roles make China's policy in some areas appear ambivalent or even contradictory. Despite these ambivalences, Beijing is in principle prepared to engage to a greater extent in arms control policy. This offers points of departure for a more in-depth arms control dialogue with Germany and Europe.



China's increasing involvement in arms control regimes can make an important stabilising contribution to the international order. More sustained dialogues on issues of verification, confidence and security building are recommended in order to engage in a dialogue on cooperative security. Dialogue on arms control is a value in itself in that it can establish channels of discussion, promote transparency, empathy and an understanding of shared interests, thereby contributing to a longer-term change in the political relationship. Berlin should take note of the principles guiding China's arms control policy and, wherever appropriate, articulate differences between these and the German and European position. Specificity, flexibility and willingness to engage in dialogue can increase the chances of success in attempts at dialogue on arms control policy.

Further information on the topic can be found here:  
<https://www.fes.de/referat-asien-und-pazifik>