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The Maoist conception of nuclear deterrence strategy 1955-1976

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*“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting”*¹ (Sun Tzu). The Chinese nuclear deterrence strategy is based on the very same assumption: the role of their nuclear weapon is not designed to fight efficiently on the battlefield but to refuse the possibility for their adversaries to win a decisive war. Hence, they enforced appropriately this principle proposed by the famous Chinese strategist.

When China exploded its first nuclear weapon on October 16, 1964 at the Lop Nor nuclear facility, the United States did their utmost to convince their Soviet adversaries to strike the nuclear Chinese facilities. Encouraged by the recent Sino-Soviet separation, John. F. Kennedy sincerely hoped the possibility to establish a coalition with them against this new growing threat frightening the American security services. The launch of the atomic bomb instead of a plutonium device surprised the American Intelligence services regarding the possibility for China to hide its very military and technological potential.

However, contradicting all the American fears regarding the spread of nuclear weapons outside the official balance of power relationship with the Soviet Union, China has not expanded dramatically her nuclear military arsenal nor entered in a vertical arms race with the USA and the USSR. Despite the dictatorial nature of the Chinese regime, the use of nuclear weapons in its official strategy remains limited. Far from being subjected to the financial constraints that were overwhelming it during the Maoist regime, the current Chinese nuclear program remained directed by the same principles, proving the consistency of the Chinese nuclear program and the deep relevance of the nuclear deterrence strategy. Hence, China developed a very vulnerable nuclear arsenal very slowly developed and almost never deployed. It contradicts the Western logical of nuclear deterrence based on the balance of powers and the exponential vertical development of nuclear arsenals in order to balance the threats imposed from the enemy. China developed a new approach of the nuclear deterrence based on a deeper understanding of the real strategic role of nuclear weapons. Therefore, it achieved to create a completely independent nuclear strategy, not enchained with the external pressures of the arms race between two superpowers.

China achieved with the least military means to deter its enemies and adversaries to attack it. According to Jeffrey Lewis²: China possesses unique view of deterrence and

¹ Sun Tzu, *The art of war*, Strategic studies, A reader, Routledge, 2008

² Jeffrey Lewis, *The Minimum Means of Reprisal: China's Search for Security in the Nuclear Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

believes that deterrence is a relatively easy objective that can be achieved with few nuclear weapons. How China achieved with this degree of vulnerability to deter its powerful and aggressive adversaries to attack it?

China perfectly understood the definition of deterrence in order to develop her power. For Alexander George and Richard Smoke³ deterrence is the persuasion of one's opponent that the costs and risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits. This definition applied to the nuclear context reflects the rational calculus by the deterred between the possible costs that could involve an aggressive policy. The nuclear deterrence is based on this rational calculus and also on the fear and emotional dimension of the nuclear weapons due to the huge impact of a nuclear strike.

This nuclear deterrence is made operative through two instruments. On the one hand, it will be expressed through the expression of the will from the deterrer of the acceptance of higher costs than could expect the adversary and on the other hand, through the credibility of this discourse through its military capabilities.

The success of the deterrence nuclear strategy is measurable only when the opponent is persuaded and when it is ensured that the opponent will act accordingly to the message transferred. China achieved to implement in the conscious of the American and Soviet decision makers that a nuclear deterrence or compellence strategy against China is useless and can backfire and the cost for such a strategy would be higher than the expected benefits.

Two parts in this essay will be analyzed according to the two components of the Chinese nuclear deterrence strategy. On the one hand, China assessed its will to suffer the cost of a nuclear strike through the Maoist phraseology, withdrawing to its enemies the possibility to deter it. On the other hand, it achieved to build a coherent military capability to reach its objectives.

I- The creation of a credible nuclear deterrence strategy

A- The Chinese acceptance to suffer from the highest costs

At the end of the 1950's the Chinese leaders insisted on the high probability of nuclear conflict with the United States or the Soviet Union. In Maoist phraseology, this war would take the shape of an aggression from one of these two powerful states. The probability during the Maoist period for China to receive a nuclear strike was particularly high. The recent tensions after the Chinese civil war, the support from the USA to the regime of Tchang Kai Shek, the conflicts in North Korea and Viet Nam and India presented the actions of the Chinese government from the wrong camp, considering the point of view of the Western powers. Moreover, the aggressive and dictatorial policy led by Mao Zedong causing the death of millions of Chinese was anything but reassuring from the Western point of view. The Chinese government was considered as a real rogue state from the Western point of view³.

Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1974), 11

³ Francis J. Gavin, *Same as It Ever Was: Nuclear Alarmism, Proliferation, and the Cold War*, *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Winter, 2009/2010), pp. 7-37

This aggression is all the more probable so as the first Chinese detonation occurred in 1964, smashing the precedent nuclear monopoly between the USA and Russia. The USA could have taken this event as a pretext to inflict surgical strikes against the Chinese nuclear facilities and destroy its nuclear program.

In this context, Lin Biao, the former minister of defense emphasized the ineluctability of a general nuclear war against one or the two superpowers.

In order to tackle this threat, the Chinese decision-makers stressed on the conception of the popular war. This strategy has been implemented in the guerilla warfare against the Japanese empire during the 19th century and during the Civil war against the troops of the Tchang Kai Sheck regime. The cornerstone of this war outlines the possibility for China, the weakest country in these wars, to defeat powerful, numerous and well-equipped armies. China wants to implement this strategy in the context of potential nuclear war against powerful enemies and in its nuclear deterrence strategy.

According to the theory of the popular war, human factor is considered as more important than the technical development of an army or the weapons used. In the context of the Japanese and civil war, this strategy was implemented through internal guerilla warfare, luring the enemies deep in the inlands and obliging them to cope with the massive guerilla warfare from the rural population. Decisive battles are impossible to implement and the enemy would be destroyed after an exhausting war of attrition in a huge hostile battlefield.

In a nuclear context, a nuclear strike would not destroy completely China according to this theory. It contravenes to the general Western widespread idea that nuclear weapons constitute “the absolute weapons” that forces a country to surrender, as it was allegedly the case for Japan with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Mao Zedong did not accept this theory. In his speech in 1956, he emphasized two assets in China that could enhance her resilience face to nuclear strike:

The first one hinges on the impossibility with a nuclear strike to destroy the whole country. China compounds 9 million square meters and 600 million inhabitants widespread on it. A nuclear strike would first target a large urban area. But China has more rural areas than concentrated urban agglomerations.

The second argument concerns the high resilience of China during her history. China has suffered several times in the past very violent conflict depriving it from large part of its population (Sino-Japanese Civil War, Maoist Cultural Revolution). But the country has developed the capacity to overcome these events through the spread of the population over its territory and its capacity of resilience.

Mao Zedong insisted that the eradication of a huge part of the Chinese population is not an unacceptable price to be deterred. This assessment emphasized the impossibility for Western powers to use the nuclear threat as a deterrent means against China “*I’m not afraid of nuclear war. There are 2.7 billion people in the world; it doesn’t matter if some are killed. China has a population of 600 million; even if half of them are killed, there are still 300 million people left. I’m not afraid of anyone.*”⁵

This capacity of resilience has not been developed among Western countries formed around large urban areas comprising the vital economic nodes of their country. China, mainly rural is not that sensitive on potential attacks on her cities. A nuclear strike became then an acceptable damage, which is not the case for urban or smaller countries.

Mao Zedong outlined then the possibility after a strike against China to trigger a generalized nuclear war with the possibility to trigger second strikes from the Socialist and communist camp against the Capitalist countries and the United States. However, due to its resilience capabilities, China would be able to survive. According to Mao Zedong, a nuclear war would probably destroy Western Capitalism and imperialism since their counties are based on fragile suburban areas and their vital economic centers would be erased in such wars. The socialist camp is based on the contrary on widespread rural and industrial centers with bigger territory and populations. After generalized nuclear war, China would be able then to implement Communism at the world scope and a worldwide peace.

The impact of such a speech and reasoning has been construed in an aggressive way by the West and the USSR. Mao Zedong appeared as an irresponsible leader, uncontrollable with whom the classical nuclear deterrence does not have any impact. In this way, Mao Zedong rejected the rational component of the nuclear deterrence by reversing in his speech the usual calculus between the costs and benefits and increasing thus the emotional component of the nuclear deterrence. He would accept the unacceptable costs for hypothetical benefits in the spread of communism around the world. It demonstrates the determination of this leader to wage a nuclear war in case of a first external nuclear attack demonstrating the impossibility for the Western powers to control him rationally by a nuclear threat. He applied this principle outlined by Sun Tzu: "The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable." ⁶

The impossibility to control China could encourage Western leaders to think carefully before launching any action or surgical strikes against it: "Why do we fear nuclear wars? After the destruction of our cities remain our towns. For those who want to wage a nuclear war, we tell them, come!" Lin Biao⁴

However, this speech could have had damaging consequences for China. In her nascent phase of the development of a nuclear program, these statements could have been construed by the United States as an incentive to intervene very early in damage limitation strikes against the nuclear facilities before the development of a real nuclear capability of China. The speech only is not efficient to protect China.

⁴ Lin Biao, *Vive la victoire de la guerre populaire*, Beijing, Renmin Press, 1965 et Ralph L. Powell, "Maoist Military Doctrine", *Asian Survey* 8, 4 avril 1968, pp. 239-262.

A- The tactical role of the Chinese nuclear weapon in her nuclear deterrence strategy

Since China could overcome a nuclear strike due to her geographical and demographic assets, the only way to beat her would be through a conventional operation and through the occupation of her territory. This strategy has already been implemented under the doctrine of the popular war against Japan where guerilla warfare is implemented after the support of movement warfare. The Chinese strategy would be to force the enemy to launch a conventional operation after a nuclear strike and to confront it to the Chinese guerilla and mobile warfare in her territory where the enemy would be beaten. A nuclear strike would be able to destroy only one city in China. If the enemy wants to destroy it, it must intervene conventionally.

Contrary to the Western counterpart, there is no dichotomy between nuclear warfare and conventional warfare. The nuclear bomb would not put into question all the rules of war. It is not considered as the ultimate weapon: the atomic bomb has a great power of destruction but cannot change the rules of war and decide the outcome of war. As Marshal Y Jinying emphasizes it “the use of atomic weapons is subjected to certain condition. They cannot be used to strike at any time or at any target as one pleases.”⁵

On the contrary, the nuclear weapon serves only to support the conventional strength of China. If China recognizes the absolute superiority of nuclear weapons; it means that she acknowledges also her own weakness due to the absence of a nuclear force. However, China is military superior regarding her conventional strengths with the development of her guerilla and mobile warfare. It also emphasizes the impossibility from the Western part to obtain a total military victory against China through the use of rude force or even deterrence. For Martin Von Creveld ⁶, this strand is translated into the abandon of the quest for the total victory from the West deemed inefficient in the configuration of asymmetric warfare. For Mao, the guerilla warfare to fight against the imperialism of colonial power and the strategy of insurgency is a total political conquest which limits the totalization of war from a Western part. Their disadvantage in the case of a conventional war would be too important. Human factor is more important and according to Mao, and the American nuclear strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not mean the resolution of war or force Japan to surrender.

Therefore, the utility of the atomic bomb is not placed on the strategic level for China but on a tactical level to support a conventional war. It should be developed in order to make its deterrent threat credible for its potential enemies and to avoid their attacks. Mao elaborated hence a dialectical definition of the nuclear bomb. It can be considered as a paper tiger only when China would obtain it too. “The atomic bomb is a paper tiger which the United States reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn't.”⁷ Mao Zedong was inspired by the definition of the French physician J. F Joliot

⁵ . Ye, Ye Jianying junshi wenxu

⁶ Beatrice Heuser, *The evolution of strategy, Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge press university, 2010

⁷ Mao Zedong, “A Conversation With American Journalist Anna Louise Strong,” in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 4 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1991), 1194–95

Curie: « A state has to possess its own atomic bomb in order to oppose atomic bomb ». For Marshal Nie Rongzhen: “when the Chinese people have this weapon, the United States nuclear blackmail toward people of the world will be completely destroyed”.⁸

In this way, the development of the popular war and the atomic capabilities is defensive and not offensive. The nuclear weapon is a tool to counter nuclear aggression and counter American and Russian coercion. The atomic bomb is a tool to deter nuclear compellence or deterrence. Nuclear weapons in the Chinese strategy are never designed to fight a war. The aim is to resist the intimidation and nuclear blackmail from nuclear armed powers.

The materialist dialectic can be reversed: nuclear bomb can constitute a real tiger for the Chinese security if she has not her own. After the creation of the Popular Republic of China, China had to tackle military threats from powerful nuclear enemies. The development of nuclear weapons has three consequences for the Chinese security.

On the one hand, it would avoid the American nuclear blackmail to work efficiently and be no longer subject to the nuclear threats from the USA: “if the US strikes with atomic bombs, we have none and can only allow it to strike”⁹ (Mao) “If we don’t have missiles, then the imperialists can use missiles against us”¹⁰(Zhou Enlai).

Then, it allows China to get rid of the nuclear umbrella offered by the USSR but asking on the other hand the stationing of Soviet military forces on the Chinese territory. Moreover, this umbrella and nuclear strength is limited through the political consent from Moscow to use the nuclear deterrence or compellence and the limited financial means allocated to provide this power to the whole socialist block. China could be compelled to accept all the Soviet political demands in order to have its security assured. It could be then, again determined by the Soviet nuclear blackmail through the absence of protection from Moscow, or worse nuclear strikes if China does not abide to the Soviet political line.

Eventually, it would enable China to expand its influence and prestige by expelling the American presence from the Asian zone and to widen its influence on the socialist block and Asian region. According to Mao, the more nuclear socialist countries, the less possible a nuclear strike from the USA. China uses then, the horizontal proliferation to gather approbation in the socialist block and in Asia.

However, this strategy is still insufficient to ensure the absence of nuclear preventive strikes. China must demonstrate in addition to its intentions, its military capacities to enforce its strategy. The latter represents a real challenge considering the little financial means available for the building of nuclear weapons in China.

⁸ Nie Rongzhen, *Nie Rongzhen junshi wenxuan* [Nie Rongzhen's selected works on military affairs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1992), p. 498.

⁹ . Quoted in Yin Xiong and Huang Xuemei, *Shijie yuanzidan fengyunlu* [The stormy record of the atomic bomb in the world] (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1999),

¹⁰ Zhou Enlai, *Zhou Enlai junshi wenxuan* [Zhou Enlai's selected works on military affairs], Vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997), p. 360.

I- The building of defensive nuclear military capacity through the concept of assured retaliation**II- The absence of a first strike policy**

The United States and USSR construed the nuclear deterrence strategy through an offensive point of view. They interpreted therefore the foreign and scarce nuclear strategies through the same lenses. Three objectives for the USA can be recorded regarding the development of a nuclear policy. It can cover the possibility to deter from a nuclear attack from the enemy but also constitute a tool to win a nuclear war and to maintain their hegemony and influence on the chosen areas. The USA and USSR have both a hegemonic objective behind their nuclear strategy. Their nuclear strategies follow these three objectives and utilities regarding the nuclear bombs. They consider the possibility to launch the first nuclear strike, the possibility to exert a nuclear blackmail against non-nuclear states, and the possibility to launch retaliatory strikes against retaliatory capabilities. For the USA and USSR, their offensive nuclear strategies are led by blind fears and incertitude characterized by the necessity to follow an arms race competition in order to balance and overwhelm the nuclear potential capabilities of the enemy.

However, Chinese leaders emphasized that in order to oppose nuclear war, the idea of hegemony must be opposed. These leaders maintained that hegemony is the root cause of nuclear war, and nuclear deterrence or blackmail and not nuclear weapons themselves. For China; this is not possible to follow an offensive nuclear strategy for three reasons.

On the one hand, its military scientific staff is considerably reduced after the SovietSino schism in 1962 due to the withdrawal of Soviet scientists and nuclear program financing.

The second reasons hinges on the protection of its nascent nuclear plants. The existence of a real offensive military strategy could constitute the final incentive for the United States to operate limited strikes against the Chinese nuclear plants before their development. The United States could be tempted to implement damage limitation strategy through preventive strikes in order to avoid a potential first strike from China. The call for the general worldwide disarmament just in the wake of their own first nuclear detonation had for aim to temperate the potential offensive message that they launched through their bombs and which could backfire against their own security. Their declaration of no first use policy is aimed also at reassuring the two offensive superpowers. On October 16, 1964, China successfully conducted its first test of a nuclear weapon by exploding an atomic bomb. On the same day, the Chinese government issued a statement, which solemnly declared that it “will never at any time or under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear and nuclear states”¹¹.

¹¹ “Statement by the Government of the People’s Republic of China,” People’s Daily, October 17, 1964.

Finally, financially, entering in the nuclear arms race along with the USA and USSR is impossible due to the international sanctions implemented since 1949 in the wake of the Civil war and with the Cultural Revolution.

China adopted hence two strategies regarding this situation and these constraints to develop its military capabilities at the lowest cost. The defensive policy is hence the best and most efficient choice. As Sun Tzu emphasized it, "defense is the best offensive option."¹²

China targets on the one hand to break the nuclear monopoly between the USA and USSR. According to China, the more nuclear states, the less probable a nuclear war. A horizontal proliferation would lessen the risk for atomic states to blackmail and threaten the other states or even to strike them directly. The monopoly of the nuclear bomb by the United States allowed then according to this point of view, the unilateral strikes against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For Jiang Zemin¹³, "China smashed the USSoviet nuclear monopoly and nuclear blackmail, making our country one of the world's few nuclear weapon states: We are doing this [making nuclear weapons] to break the nuclear monopoly and nuclear blackmail, as well as to restrict the two superpowers. If we succeed, we will be able to suppress nuclear war and hopefully, ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons. . . . We are not using this to scare people, so we do not intend to produce large quantities, but we must still have a certain quantity, quality and variety."

On the other hand, China strengthened the nuclear taboo through a no-first use policy. According to Lin Bin¹⁴, China would let the USA the responsibility to launch the first strike. China is playing with the nuclear taboo created by the USA and the USSR due to their arms race and vertical proliferation. The US cannot attack China first due to the possibility of retaliation by other countries. The Chinese power is playing with the impossibility of a total war among nuclear powers: although the possibility of the major powers fighting a world war remains, everyone does not dare to start such a war only because they have nuclear weapons.

The former real tigers are transformed in paper tigers when they are confronted to a nuclear country. Nuclear war fighting is not a war winning approach. "Nuclear wars are less likely to take place once we succeed in such development. Judging from strategic trends, future conflicts may not necessarily take the form of nuclear war."¹⁵

China would never enter in a costly arms race or adopt an offensive nuclear policy. Giving only the certitude to the enemy of the presence of the atomic bomb on their territory is sufficient to protect China from any external coercion. The goal is not to enter by itself in a nuclear arms race or to be recognizing by its own means as a great

¹² Sun Tzu, *The art of war*, Strategic studies, A reader, Routledge, 2008

¹³ Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan [Jiang Zemin's selected works]*, Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 585.

¹⁴ Lin Bin, Tong Zhao, *Understanding Chinese nuclear thinking*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016

¹⁵ CCCPC Party Literature Research Office and Academy of Military Science of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, eds., *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping on Military Affairs*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House and CCCPC Party Literature Publishing House, 2004), 362–64. ¹⁹ CCCPC Party Literature Research Office, ed., *Mao Zedong (1949–1976)*, vol. 5, 295.

power. “Dig deep tunnels, pile up stores of grain, and never seek hegemony”¹⁹. As this Maoist slogan emphasizes, the nuclear strategy is mainly defensive but it instills in the conscious of their adversary that China is a great watertight great power, without having to convey this strategy through the use of force or aggressive discourses.

There are two advantages in following this policy. On the one hand, China does not have to invest massively in the quantity of weapons and delivery vehicles to ensure its security. On the other one, being freed from the logical of the American and Soviet arms race, she is not submitted to the development of nuclear strategies from the other countries. She achieved to obtain her autonomy by playing with the fears between the USA and USSR in their balance of power.

However, this strategy has not been understood by the nuclear powers: for them, the conventional weakness of China would automatically lead her to use the nuclear weapon first. Due to lack of information on the American and Russian sides and due to their egocentric interpretation of the Chinese nuclear program, they understood their development of nuclear weapons to palliate the weakness of their infantry and conventional capabilities. This logical was implemented both in the USA and in the USSR. Under the Nikita Krushchev` mandate, the USSR envisioned the first use of nuclear weapons to compensate for the lower quality of its infantry in their military nuclear strategy. For the USA, they developed offensive nuclear strategy in Central Europe in the deployment of nuclear weapons in conventionally weak countries.

From a Chinese point of view, the nuclear weapons are not developed to wage a war:” our country may produce a small number of atomic bombs in the future, but we do not have the intention to use them; . . . we are just using them as a defensive weapon.”¹⁶ (Mao Zedong). The nuclear defensive strategy of China completely thwarted the logical of balance of power between the USA and the USSR. The nuclear bomb allows thus China to be completely independent from the two superpowers and their nuclear blackmail.

B- The building of an efficient and credible second strike policy

The Chinese defense does not hinder on the number of nuclear weapons. This is a defensive strategy, a deterrence by denial, not a hegemonic or offensive strategy. The absence of a first strike policy would be efficient only if there is credible second strike policy. The doctrine of assured retaliation developed by Mao achieved to demonstrate the military capabilities necessary for the Chinese nuclear deterrence policy.

The Chinese principle of assured retaliation is based on three pillars. The first one hinges on the absence of an immediate retaliation. This one can intervene later but it will be weaker than the first attack: Deng Xiaoping once mentioned in a public speech that “if you want to destroy us, you have to suffer from a little retaliation¹⁷”. The last

¹⁶ Mao Zedong’s conversation with foreign guests visiting China after attending the Tenth World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs held in Japan, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy* (Beijing: CCCPC Party Literature Publishing House and World Affairs Press, 1992), 540–41

¹⁷ Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping’s Selected Discourses on Military Buildup in the New Period* (Beijing: Bayi Press, 1993), 72

one, is constituted with the certainty of the retaliation. The enemy would not be able to know when it will occur and in which intensity but the retaliation through a nuclear strike would intervene sooner or later. The objective of this policy is to demonstrate that the enemy would be absolutely certain of the arrival of a Chinese nuclear answer.

In order to make this strategy completely relevant, the Chinese decision makers must develop highly survivable and reliable nuclear weapons. This policy is more complicated to implement technically than a first strike policy due to the development of almost invincible weapons and the matching delivery vehicles.

At the beginning of the building of a Chinese nuclear program, the impossibility to invest massively in this military field pushed the decision makers to adopt a strategy avoiding the production of a huge number of weapons but relying more on the high quality and technology. Hence, a small number of nuclear weapons would be enough for China to deter her enemies. This theory created since the first nascent nuclear program under Zhou Enlai has been found still consistent under the program of Deng Xiaoping through the strategy of a few but capable nuclear weapons or few but excellent or lean but effective. It allows also stemming the financial investment required for this military strategy and impossible to sustain for China during the Cultural Revolution.

China will try to develop all nuclear technologies present in nuclear countries in order not to lag behind technologically. However, in order to be completely coherent with her nuclear strategy, it will not be deployed or used on the ground. This was the case of the development of the neutron bomb, developed in laboratories but not deployed.

The same logical has been present through the development of the delivery systems. Although Zhou Enlai insisted on the importance for the dissuasion to build relevant and highly efficient nuclear delivery systems, they have been deployed very slowly by the Chinese powers. The reliance on the aircraft delivery vehicles only does not constitute a very serious deterrent due to their highly vulnerability. The short medium range missile has been developed only in 1966 with the concentration of efforts from the Central Special Committee trying to enhance the survivability of the weapons through the delivery systems. The development of a nuclear submarine has been reached only in 1981 constituting the cornerstone of the highest survivable nuclear potential for China.

However, the Cultural Revolution delayed these projects and the technological efficiency of Chinese nuclear weapons was doubtful. For three decades, China lagged behind for the development of technological sophistication in nuclear weapons. The first ICBM capable to strike USSR or the USA was created only in 1981. China targeted hence a sensitive point in the American and Russian nuclear offensive doctrine. Based on the assessment of the nuclear capabilities of their respective enemies, their nuclear strategies are dependent from the evolution of the enemy's nuclear potential. Chinese independence and silence on the number of weapons developed would put the USA in a tense situation based on the calculus of their hegemony only relating to the capabilities

of their enemies. For Harry Gelbert¹⁸:" the refusal from China to speak about her nuclear program is one important part of the Chinese doctrine of nuclear dissuasion", therefore, no declaratory strategy or operational doctrine has been made available internationally. Only two policies were formulated in 1964 which relied on the two pillars of the Chinese deterrence policy through the no first use policy and her opposition to the arms race, or its appeal to a universal nuclear disarmament.

The consequence of this policy in the rational calculus of the USA fosters them to consider the worst case regarding the Chinese nuclear potential in absence of any reliable information. This silence develops the deterrent power of China without having the necessity to build more weapons. This principle has been once again formulated by Sun Tzu: "Be extremely subtle, even to the point of formlessness. Be extremely mysterious, even to the point of soundlessness. Thereby you can be the director of the opponent's fate".¹⁹ From the point of view of the USA, it is impossible to assess precisely how powerful is the nuclear Chinese potential and if there is a possibility for the United States to strike China or not.

This impossibility is due to the high concentration of the secrecy around the Chinese nuclear program which is impermeable to the possible infiltrations of American or Soviet Intelligence services. The Central Special Committee in charge of the strategy around the nuclear weapons is under the direct commandment of the Chinese presidents and is composed only with a few members at the beginning. The military sphere is also dependent from the Communist party. The decision making process is concentrated at the highest levels. As it was the case before the first nuclear Chinese essay, the USA cannot rely on Intelligence to obtain this information and to be able to strike China. These fears reveal the sensitivity of the United States due to the development of arms weapons in other territories. According to the rational calculus part of the nuclear deterrence strategy, the United States decided to recognize de facto the nuclear potential of China and not intending military strikes against it. The worst scenario has been implemented in this rational calculus, implementing hence, the aims of the Chinese nuclear policy.

Conclusion

Contrary to the predictions formulated during the Cold war, the nuclear deterrence strategy of China has not been formulated around its financial constraints but proved its real consistency through the adoption of the very same principles by the following Chinese leaders. Having been considered as an irresponsible rogue State during the Maoist period, China proved its ability to build a responsible nuclear program and to understand in depth the role of nuclear weapons. It achieved to play with the incoherence and emotional dimension of the nuclear arms race between the USA and the Soviet power to thwart their aggressive potential toward it. The nuclear weapon has

¹⁸ Lin Bin, Tong Zhao, Understanding Chinese nuclear thinking, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016

¹⁹ Sun Tzu, The art of war, Strategic studies, A reader, Routledge, 2008

been adopted only to be put on the same equal footing as the same superpowers and nuclear states to avoid any kind of blackmail. It emphasizes that nuclear weapons are not the problem in itself but the discrepancies regarding the aggressive or offensive strategies of nuclear states toward those deprived of it. It should be wondered however, if horizontal proliferation is the only way to achieve a national security.

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