



CHINA'S WMD FOOT IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST'S DOOR

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China has an expanding body of strategic interests in the greater Middle East region. This is manifested in its security relationships with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, which entail WMD and ballistic missile cooperation. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan are pivotal states in the region. They are increasingly likely to view China in coming years as an alternate source of security and as a counterbalance to American power. Over the past decade, Chinese diplomacy has produced an impressive array of bilateral and multilateral arrangements for curbing WMD and ballistic missile proliferation. But China's strategic imperatives for access and influence in the greater Middle East will likely push Beijing to cut corners in the spirit, if not the word, of these international arrangements. The Chinese appear bent on playing a "cat and mouse game" with the United States in the proliferation field. They work against American counter-proliferation policy until caught, then deny charges, only to subsequently, and much belatedly, recant to say that it will not happen again. This game gets progressively harder for the United States to play. With each evolution of this cycle, the United States loses its edge in intelligence, and the Chinese adapt as the strengths and weaknesses of American intelligence are revealed. China's future corner-cutting will be doubly challenging to track, because Beijing has moved from supplying whole weapon systems, such as ballistic missiles, toward the provision of expertise and advice that are difficult for outsiders to monitor. The challenge will be for American intelligence, diplomacy, and policy to monitor and rapidly adjust to China's ever-changing efforts to aid and abet WMD-related programs in the greater Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan.

In recent years, China has diplomatically and publicly postured as an international "good citizen" in the array of norms and agreements that constrain the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. In December 2003, Beijing released a white paper on "China's Non-Proliferation Policy and Measure." This paper ostensibly reaffirmed its commitment to enforcing international export controls, an area in which past Chinese practice had been less than stellar.¹ Senior Beijing sources now tell western reporters that the white paper

signaled that China's "old policy of indifference, or tacit official acquiescence of sensitive technology sales by Chinese firms to states desiring a nuclear card, are ending."² Over the past several years, China's increasing overtures toward a body of international WMD export control arrangements, involving chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, as well as ballistic missiles, lends credibility to semi-official Chinese claims that China has made a marked departure from past practice.³ These activities have led some scholars, including Evan S.

Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, to assess that "although Chinese firms continue to provide some worrisome dual-use assistance to a few countries (such as Pakistan and Iran), the scope, content, and frequency of its export of sensitive weapons-related items has declined and diminished."⁴

But should these Chinese professions of a new commitment to stem the proliferation of WMD and ballistic missiles be taken at face value? After all, Pakistan and Iran are hardly insignificant exceptions, as they pose grave nuclear weapon threats to international security. Moreover, these countries, along with Saudi Arabia, are China's critical access points in the greater Middle East, the region that runs roughly from Egypt through Saudi Arabia to India. Beijing's strategic interests there are expected to grow in the coming decades.

This article traces the competition for power in the greater Middle East, China's strategic interests there, and the security relations that China has nurtured for years with Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. These histories of strategic cooperation strongly suggest that it would be difficult for all states involved to sever security ties "cold turkey" for the sake of diplomacy aimed at curbing WMD and missile proliferation; each state has strong national interests in perpetuating WMD-related cooperation.

THE REGIONAL STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

Struggles for power in the greater Middle East are influenced by major nation-states that lie beyond the region. The United States, Russia, and China each have important strategic interests in the region, whereas nation-states within the region turn to outside powers in order to bolster their positions in regional power competitions. Throughout the Cold War, the United States was especially concerned with the Soviet Union's political-military moves in the greater Middle East. American policy toward the region was always viewed as an appendage to Washington's policy of containment against the Soviet Union.

Today, Russia's power and influence in the greater Middle East is substantially less than was the Soviet Union's during the Cold War. The Soviets lost a foothold in the region when Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel. The Russians subsequently lost a major client in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, with the imposition of international sanctions ending lucrative arms purchases by Baghdad. The Russians can no longer provide its clientele with large weapon stocks. Moreover, Russia's lone bastion of political-military support, Syria, cannot afford to purchase massive amounts of Russian military hardware. India too is moving away from what had been Cold War dependency on Russian-built arms. Russia's major political-military activity now focuses on Iran, which favors the use of its limited

budgets for WMD procurement over conventional weapon modernization. Moscow is willing and able to pursue economic and strategic interests in adding and abetting Iran's nuclear weapons program.

While Russian power in the greater Middle East has crested, China's power and influence in the region is on the rise. Chinese security ties in the Middle East and South Asia are growing and are likely, over time, to pose an increasing security problem to American interests in the region. The Chinese are increasingly viewed by states in the region as a counterbalance or alternate source of military assistance by many nation-states in the Middle East and South Asia. The Chinese are nurturing security relationships with countries that benefit from American security assistance. These countries include Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, as well as states with which the United States has no security ties, most notably Iran. Chinese military and security assistance is a means for American security partners to seek weapons and training that are not offered by American security assistance programs, as well as to provide a source of military hardware that could be used in combat against U.S. forces in the event of war.

To be sure, China has other arms relationships in the region that are worthy of study. It has had talks with Syria on the purchase of M-11 ballistic missiles. China has also nurtured a security arrangement with Israel. As Richard Bitzinger observes, "Although Israel and China did not establish formal diplomatic relations until early 1992, secret military ties between the two countries date back to 1980, and various reports estimate that Israel has exported between \$1 and \$3 billion worth of arms and technology to the PRC."⁵

While Syrian and Israeli security relations with China are of concern, China's security ties with WMD-related activities with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan are considerably more significant to U.S. national security interests. Chinese security relationships with these countries, particularly in areas related to weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, will have a major impact on the regional balance of power as well as on American security policy toward these states and the region.

The Chinese, while publicly claiming to support international arrangements to stem the flow of weapon proliferation, actively support WMD programs in the greater Middle East in order to advance their strategic interests. As Robert Einhorn, former assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation, has characterized China's role in these spheres, "China's progress in complying with and enforcing nonproliferation standards has been so uneven over the years. The pattern has often been two steps forward, one step back."⁶ As Daniel Byman and Roger Cliff assess China's mixed bag on adherence to international agreements, "China's leaders evidently want to be viewed as abiding by these regimes. Thus, any accusations of violations produce vigorous denials and legalistic defenses. Nonetheless, as Beijing's ambivalence toward restrictions on arms transfers would suggest, China's adherence to these regimes is imperfect."⁷

The Chinese appear to look for gaps in international agreements and exploit them to the fullest in the pursuit of strategic and economic interests. Byman and Cliff rightly observe that "China has violated the spirit of the regimes by engaging in transfers which, if not necessarily explicitly banned, contradict the intent."⁸ The Chinese appear to look for

"plausible denial" explanations for WMD-related transfers in order to escape being slapped by international and U.S. economic sanctions. If caught, the Chinese, under U.S. pressure, make pledges or commitments not to undertake these actions in the future while looking for other avenues through which to advance their political, military, and economic interests. Perhaps China's strategy regarding WMD proliferation is best characterized as "cheat, retreat, and cheat again" as is evident in Beijing's security relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan.

BEIJING'S POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND MILITARY INTERESTS

What are the political, economic, and military interests that propel Chinese policy in the region? The Chinese for the most part see the natural resources of the greater Middle East as critical to their economic development. The Chinese economy is growing at a stunning pace and its demands for oil are moving in lockstep. As John Calabrese observes, "The critical importance of oil (and gas) to the global balance of power has not been lost on Chinese officials."⁹ China's economy is the engine that will drive China's growing political and military power.

China's demands for oil from the greater Middle East are high and likely to grow due to its growing economic infrastructure. China's "demand for oil is set to grow indefinitely, while domestic production will

soon reach a peak. By 2010 China will be one of the world's major oil importers."¹⁰ In order to meet its energy needs, China will increasingly, and perhaps invariably, have to look to the Persian Gulf, where most of the world's proven reserves lie.¹¹

China's increasing dependence on Gulf oil creates a strategic vulnerability. China needs to ensure that the United States will never be in a position to sever China's energy flow from the region. According to Erica Strecker Downs:

China's 'oil diplomacy' in the Middle East is an effort to ensure continued access to oil from a U.S.-dominated region that provides China with the bulk of its oil imports. These activities reflect Beijing's larger strategy of attempting to reduce its vulnerability to American power through the development of a broad network of secure bilateral relationships, particularly with its neighbors.¹²

China is attempting to nurture strategic relationships in the region, because it lacks the military means to stop the United States from imposing a sea-based blockage of oil tanker traffic out of the Persian Gulf in some future contingency. "China currently does not possess the naval capabilities necessary to defend its sea shipments of oil and, consequently, regards their passage through waters dominated by the U.S. Navy--

especially the Persian Gulf—as a key strategic vulnerability."¹³

Beijing has nurtured numerous strategic relationships in the greater Middle East in order to lessen the chances of a cutoff of oil from the region. For example, Chinese leader Jiang Zemin's 1999 state visit to Saudi Arabia pronounced a "strategic oil partnership" between the two countries. Saudi Arabia's oil exports to China rose from 60,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 1996 to 350,000 bpd in 2000. Likewise, Iran's oil exports to China increased from 20,000 bpd in 1995 to 200,000 bpd in 2000.¹⁴ More recently, in September 2004, China's Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing traveled to Saudi Arabia and met with Crown Prince Abdullah and King Fahd, who rarely receives foreign visitors given his poor health. Both parties agreed to hold consultations on a regular basis.¹⁵ The visit underscored Saudi Arabia's importance to China, as the Kingdom is China's largest oil supplier, accounting for 17 percent of Beijing's oil imports.¹⁶

Beyond oil interests, Chinese policymakers are mindful of the greater Middle East due to the fear that political and ethnic conflicts could spill over into Western China and the Chinese internal political realm. Calabrese takes stock that "the increased incidence of ethnic- and religious-based turmoil around the world has worried Chinese leaders."¹⁷ China's pursuit of security ties in the Middle East and South Asia is intended to hedge against resurgent Islamic fundamentalism stemming from the former states of the Soviet Union, as such resurgence poses a potential internal security threat to China's western provinces.

The greater Middle East region is also important to Chinese security policy. Beijing recognizes that the region is of critical importance to the United States, a key

regional and global rival. As Robert Sutter assesses, "Beijing probably calculated that discreetly keeping the United States off balance in the Middle East and other global hot spots diverted U.S. energies from containing China's expanding influence internationally."¹⁸ At present, U.S. policy attention is mired in the politics and military dynamics of the greater Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. As such is the case, the United States has less of an attention span for more critical Chinese security interests closer to the mainland, especially Taiwan.

The Chinese have adroitly coordinated diplomacy in the region with European states, in particular France, Germany, and Russia. This is in order to orchestrate a counterbalance to the United States in the region. As Sutter notes, China employs "strategic partnerships, such as those forged with France and Russia, and historical affinity with the region's developing countries to weaken U.S. dominancy; at the same time, it continued to promote cooperation and avoided direct confrontation in the ongoing dialogue with the United States on key regional issues."¹⁹ The conduct of Chinese diplomacy in this regard was most evident in China's collusion with France and Russia to lessen international sanctions against Saddam's regime in Iraq throughout the 1990s. This diplomacy of resistance came to a head with French, German, Russian, and Chinese opposition to U.S. efforts at convincing other nations to sanction the 2003 war to oust Saddam's regime.

Chinese diplomacy in and around the corridors of the United Nations allows the Chinese to punch politically above their weight in the international area. Sutter points out that "Another calculation driving China's newly assertive policy toward the Middle

East was the need--as the U.N. Perm-Five's only developing country--for China to demonstrate increased responsibility and activism in addressing global problems on behalf of its developing counterparts.²⁰ Beijing also nurtures diplomatic ties in the greater Middle East in order to impede Taiwan's increasing political efforts to garner international diplomatic recognition as a political entity separate from mainland China. Sutter notes that "Chinese officials, though victorious over Taiwan in establishing relations with the conservative Saudi Arabian government, devoted strong efforts to curbing any Taiwan inroads in the Middle East, as well as elsewhere."²¹

The Chinese have forged military and security links in the region by meeting demands for equipment and expertise that the United States could not, or would not, provide for political reasons. The security ties also help stem Taiwan's political recognition by states in the region, at the cost of recognition of Beijing. As Sutter judges, "The Chinese also sought to develop trade in military items and technologies with countries that were on poor terms with the United States (for example, Iran), in part to use those ties as leverage in dealing with suspected U.S. plots to contain or pressure China."²²

The Chinese see security relations involving WMD and delivery systems are particularly heavy leverage tools against American security policy. As Michael Swaine comments, Chinese efforts to sell

arms, ballistic missiles, and nuclear technologies are "linked to Beijing's efforts to augment both military and central government revenues, increase its diplomatic and strategic leverage against the United States and other potential antagonists, and assist important allies such as Pakistan."²³ Toshi Yoshihara and Richard Sokolsky elaborate, "Beijing has relied on the threat of proliferation as a counterweight to U.S. policies that threaten China's interests."²⁴

The Chinese military earns foreign exchange from arms sales abroad that, in turn, are invested in Chinese military modernization efforts. As Bates Gill observes:

There can be little doubt that the profit motive was an important factor driving the PRC to supply the combatants in the Iran-Iraq War. With the receipt of foreign exchange being the key element to China's modernization efforts--and ultimately, to China's security strategy--profitable arms exports to Iran and Iraq were promoted.²⁵

The sale of Chinese weapons, particularly those related to WMD, often puts the Chinese military, the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), at odds with diplomatic objectives of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The MFA, in some instances, may object to the PLA's incentive to push arms sales abroad to earn foreign currency for reinvestment into China's military

modernization programs. This is due to concern for the negative diplomatic fallout should such sales become public knowledge. As Gill observes, in the late 1980s as Chinese arms sales became more controversial, "the MFA became a more important and institutionalized participant in arms export decision-making, along with trade-related and military-related organizations. In the case of highly advanced exports and exports to 'sensitive regions,' the MFA takes part in a high-level interagency body--possibly the so-called Military Exports Leading Small Group that was established in 1989."²⁶ Swaine elaborates that in top-level party and military circles, the MFA likely serves as the major proponent for the need to restrain controversial arms sales in order to maintain good relations with the West. He notes, however, that the Chinese military and senior party leadership likely play a dominant, if not exclusive, role in determining and implementing controversial arms sales.²⁷

The bureaucratic battles between the Chinese military and diplomats often make it difficult for outside observers to interpret the thrust and intent of Chinese security policy. As Denny Roy observes:

Washington has sometimes received assurances from the MFA that China will restrict sensitive sales involving sophisticated weaponry, particularly nuclear technology and missiles, to politically unstable areas such as the Middle East, only to find the sales go ahead anyway. Often the MFA makes these promises in good faith. The problem is that the MFA cannot control Chinese arms sales; most of these come under the purview of the PLA, which is more willing than the MFA

to tolerate a deterioration of relations with the United States to maintain a good source of revenue.²⁸

So while policy making mechanisms may have improved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' say in arms sales since the 1980s, the PLA still prevails in many debates over arms and security relations.

In sum, a myriad of political, military, and economic interests shape Chinese policy in the greater Middle East. However, these factors only form half of the strategic equation for Chinese security ties in the region. What are the reciprocal interests of regional states that are cooperating with China in the security sphere?

THE SAUDI ARABIA CONNECTION

The Chinese and the Saudis launched an ambitious strategic relationship during the 1980s. The Saudis purchased CSS-2 intermediate range missiles from China. The deal paved the way for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the countries and laid the foundation for a security cooperation that continues still today. As Bates Gill recounts:

The Sino-Saudi CSS-2 missile deal was first publicly revealed as a fait accompli in March 1988. The first orders for the missiles were made in 1985, and a number of deliveries were made in 1987 and 1988 before news of the sale became public. The missiles delivered to Saudi Arabia came from an array of over 100 nuclear-capable IRBMs that were first tested by the PRC in 1969 and later deployed in 1971.²⁹

In a remarkably public and candid account of the brokering of the deal, General Khaled bin Sultan, the Saudi point person for negotiating the agreement for the CSS-2s purchase, recalls:

My task was to negotiate the deal, devise an appropriate deception plan, choose a team of Saudi officers and men and arrange for their training in both Saudi Arabia and China, build and defend operation bases and storage facilities in different parts of the Kingdom, arrange for the shipment of the missiles from China and, at every stage, be ready to defend the project against sabotage or any other form of attack.³⁰

The Saudis were no doubt concerned that the premature public disclosure of the missile deal and infrastructure build-up could lead to Israeli preemptive military operations.

Both the Saudis and the Chinese made great efforts to hide the relationship from American intelligence in order to preclude American diplomatic intervention to stop the deal. Saudi and Chinese denial and deception efforts paid real dividends. American intelligence was only able to detect the strategic cooperation long after the missiles had been deployed in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis placed greater weight on the strategic importance of the missiles than on the relationship with the United States, which they rightly calculated would weather the

political storm unleashed by the revelation of the Chinese missile transfer.

The features of the CSS-2s raised concern that the Saudis were moving to develop a nuclear weapons delivery capability. Originally, the missiles were operational in the Chinese nuclear force structure. Khaled made four visits to China beginning in 1987.³¹ He visited a Chinese missile base and, by his account, was the first foreigner to view the CSS-2 missile armed with a nuclear warhead.³² The CSS-2 missile, moreover, is highly inaccurate and is much more suitable for the delivery of nuclear than for conventional warheads. While the Chinese and Saudis maintain that the missiles in Saudi Arabia are conventionally armed, no international inspection has ever taken place to verify such claims. The Reagan administration reprimanded the Kingdom and demanded inspection of the missiles, but the Saudis adamantly refused.³³

The Chinese rationale for selling the missiles appears to have been heavily influenced by financial interests and political interests. As Jon Wolfstahl observes, as one of the few global suppliers of ballistic missiles, China can demand top dollar for sales and, in some instances, help recoup the design and production costs. These motivations limit Chinese conviction to stem the flow of ballistic missile sales.³⁴ According to Khaled, during negotiations for the missiles, the Chinese were eager for the Saudis to pay in cash.³⁵ The Chinese managed to parlay the missile deal into a

political strategic relationship in a critically important Persian Gulf state, as well as to deny the existence of any such relationship to Taiwan.

The scope of contemporary Chinese-Saudi security cooperation is difficult to gauge by outside observers. The relationship was born in great secrecy and both parties have labored to keep it that way. As Robert Mullins reports, according to a Defense Intelligence Agency study, there were at least 1,000 Chinese military advisers at Saudi Arabian missile installations in the mid-1990s. American and western technicians were denied access to such installations. Mullins also reports that China and Saudi Arabia have two secure telecommunications links for private leadership contacts.³⁶ Polytechnologies Incorporated, a Chinese defense firm under the control of the PLA General Staff, is well known as China's most aggressive arms dealer. According to Eric Hyer, it can handle sensitive training assignments and installation services, such as those required by the China-Saudi CSS-2 arrangement.³⁷

THE IRAN CONNECTION

Iran nurtured military ties with China throughout its war with Iraq in the 1990s. The relationship primarily focused around Iranian purchases of Chinese conventional military hardware. Gill notes that Chinese military-technical exports to Iran began in 1981 after the start of the eight-year Iran-Iraq War. Furthermore, he notes that the trade flow included thousands of tanks, armored personnel vehicles, and artillery pieces; several hundred surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles; thousands of antitank missiles and more than a hundred fighter aircraft; and dozens of small warships.³⁸ As the relationship matured, China made

internationally controversial sales of HY-2 Silkworm cruise missiles to Iran, which caused the Reagan administration to freeze the liberalization of technology sales to China. In March 1988, China gave private assurances to the U.S. that it would stop the export of the Silkworm to Iran. However, in January 1996, Iran tested an advanced Chinese C-802 anti-ship cruise missile, and the U.S. again pressured Beijing to stop these shipments. In September 1997, the Clinton administration received a pledge from China to halt future sales of the C-802 cruise missiles.³⁹

Iran has relied on Chinese expertise for weapons of mass destruction programs and delivery systems in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War. As Gill recounts, China has assisted Iran in the development of its ballistic and cruise missile production capability. Moreover, he notes that it has provided the Iranians with military-related scientific expertise, production technologies, blueprints, and possibly assistance in the development of clandestine chemical and nuclear weapons programs.⁴⁰

The Iranians recognize their conventional military shortcomings and are blocked by international isolation from major purchases of conventional military equipment needed to modernize their armed forces. Iran's international isolation has contributed to its reliance on China for help with WMD-related projects. As Barry Rubin judges, it is "Iran's pariah status that makes it an attractive market--or even a market at all--for China, as a supplier of last resort for certain conventional items and weapons of mass destruction."⁴¹ To make up for these shortcomings, the Iranians appear to be sinking their military modernization investments into WMD and delivery systems.⁴²

The Iranians and Chinese continue to maintain high-level contacts to nurture their strategic relationship. When Iranian president Mohammad Khatami visited China in July 2000 to enhance economic cooperation, Defense Minister Ali Shamkahi joined the delegation and met with his Chinese counterpart to discuss military issues. Though the content of the talks remains outside the public domain, it is suspected that arm sales were a topic of discussion.⁴³

Chinese activities in these areas have attracted international attention that has compelled Beijing to sell WMD-related equipment in piecemeal fashion in order to reduce the chances of attracting American and international attention, while at the same time preserving strategic ties to Tehran. Despite the U.S.-China summit of October 1997 in which China pledged to curtail sensitive transfers to Iran, "China has provided Iran with a range of nuclear- and missile-related assistance, including alleged technical assistance for uranium mining, enrichment, and conversion and for the development of nuclear research reactors, as well as other technical training and support. China 'went along' with the United States, but in subsequent interpretations of their nonproliferation agreements fell short of U.S. expectations."⁴⁴ More recently, "CIA Director Tenet testified that Chinese firms may be backing away from the 1997 commitment by China not to assist Iran's nuclear program."⁴⁵

The Chinese also aid and abet Iran's chemical weapons program. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Bruce Reidel testified to a House Committee in 1995 that Iran's chemical weapons program was receiving Chinese assistance: "Chinese firms have provided some assistance, both in terms of the infrastructure for building chemical plants and some of the precursors for developing agents."⁴⁶ In partially accounting for these transfers, Gill observes that "China has an enormous chemical industry but lacks adequate means to monitor and enforce export controls on the industry. Moreover, the dual-use nature of many chemical-related exports makes the task of policing chemical weapons-related transfer difficult."⁴⁷

The Chinese continue to dabble in Iran's ballistic missile programs. China and Iran may have seriously discussed the transfer of 600 km range M-9 and 300 km range M-11 in the 1991-92 timeframe. In spite of Iranian pledges in 1992 to abide by the MTCR, China continued to assist in the indigenous development of Iran's ballistic missile program, with technology transfers, scientific advice, and assistance in the construction of a missile production facility.⁴⁸

THE PAKISTAN CONNECTION

The Pakistanis today rely heavily on Chinese conventional arms for their defense posture, much as the Iranians did during the 1980s. Gill observes that Pakistan is one of the "few countries to have received weapons from all four major weapons categories of

Chinese production--aircraft, armor and artillery, missiles, and naval vessels--and in most cases receives the best weapons exports China has to offer. In short, the Pakistani arms trade relationship has been and remains China's most stable and most important."⁴⁹ Gill notes a significant characteristic of the relationship in that "China's military transfers to Pakistan have always been offered as outright free-of-charge grants or, to a lesser extent, under low-cost repayment terms."⁵⁰

Clearly, China's interest in security ties with Pakistan is for strategic reasons, rooted in China's competition for power with India, and not for financial gain. As Harry Harding historically traces the Sino-Pakistani relationship, it emerged in the early 1960s, as China sought a counterweight to India after the Sino-Indian border wars of 1959 and 1962. The relationship gave China an inroad into the Islamic states of South-west Asia while Pakistan gained a balance against India at a time when Islamabad could not count on its alliance with the United States as a reliable deterrent against New Delhi.⁵¹

China's unease over the rise of Indian power in South Asia likely strengthens Beijing's strategic interests in Pakistan. Michael Pillsbury observes that "Following India's nuclear tests in May 1998, in particular, numerous Chinese authors have accused India of pursuing a policy of military expansion since attaining independence, in order to become a military power, contain China, and dominate and control South Asia and the Indian Ocean."⁵² In Pillsbury's assessment, "China's analysts write that India, as a smaller scale version of Japan, also has a militaristic, religion-based strategic culture, seeks to dominate its neighbors, has had covert nuclear ambitions for two decades prior to its nuclear tests in 1998, attempts to foment conflict between China and other

nations, and has some areas of military superiority over China, such as its current navy."⁵³

Chinese security assistance has been instrumental in the development of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, a strategic imperative for Islamabad in its competition with New Delhi. According to Gill, after India detonated its "peaceful" nuclear weapon in 1976, Pakistani strongman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto managed to gain China's acquiescence in helping Pakistan develop a nuclear weapon. This included the provision of uranium for a Pakistani enrichment facility.⁵⁴ Zachary Davis recounts that in the 1980s the U.S. "had evidence that China was helping Pakistan operate its Kahuta uranium-enrichment plant and that Beijing provided Islamabad with a design for a 25-kiloton implosion device along with enough weapons-grade uranium to build two nuclear weapons. Chinese scientists have regularly visited the Kahuta complex in which gas centrifuges are used to produce weapons-grade uranium."⁵⁵ In 1995, China exported about 5,000 specially designed ring magnets to an unsafeguarded Pakistani nuclear laboratory.⁵⁶ Ring magnets are used in gas centrifuges to enrich uranium to weapon-grade. Parenthetically, in early 2004, the world discovered that the network built up by Pakistani physicist A. Q. Khan had supplied Libya with the nuclear weapon designs for building a nuclear warhead that could be delivered by ballistic missiles. The designs were those China had once given to Pakistan.⁵⁷

China has also provided critical assistance in laying the foundation for Pakistan's ballistic missile forces. As Robert Mullins recalls, "The origins of Sino-Pakistani cooperation in missile development can be traced to the late 1980s when China assisted

in the development of Pakistan's Haft missiles, two of which are very similar in design and function to the Chinese M-9 and M-11 tactical ballistic missiles."⁵⁸ China further nurtured Pakistan's ballistic missile capabilities in the early 1990s when it made shipments of M-11 ballistic missile systems. Chinese officials publicly referred to these missiles as "short-range" that did not violate the MTCR, but the United States imposed MTCR-related sanctions on China.⁵⁹ In order to get M-11 related sanctions lifted, in 1991, China pledged not to sell complete missiles of 'MTCR class', i.e., those capable of delivering a 500-kilogram payload to a range of at least 300 kilometers.⁶⁰

The Chinese may have violated the MTCR regime with the M-11s, in part, to retaliate or to use as diplomatic leverage against the United States for its perceived violation of an American-Chinese understanding on American military equipment provisions to Taiwan. The Bush administration announced in September 1992 that it would sell 150 F-16 aircraft to Taiwan, a move that the Chinese believed violated the terms of the August 1982 U.S.-China agreement on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. In this agreement, the United States had pledged that the quality of U.S. arms sold to Taiwan would not exceed the quality of arms sold during the Carter administration and would gradually diminish. Robert Ross judges that in retaliation for the F-16 deal, China transferred M-11 missiles to Pakistan. Furthermore, China reached a formal agreement with Iran to cooperate on

nuclear energy, thus breaking Beijing's February 1992 commitment to abide by the MTCR.⁶¹

THE CHINESE-U.S. SECURITY COMPETITION

Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan are pivotal states in the greater Middle East region and are increasingly likely to view China as an alternate source of security and as a counterbalance to American influence in the region. In a reflection of this strategic perception in the region, Saudi General Khaled opined that "China's rapid economic growth must soon make it a formidable military power, which we, in the Middle East, must take into account."⁶²

Chinese diplomacy over the past ten years has made an impressive array of bilateral and multilateral arrangements to curb international proliferation of WMD.⁶³ Nevertheless, the strong tendency for the Chinese to work assiduously around the letter of these agreements suggests that China continues to place greater importance on nurturing bilateral security relationships in the greater Middle East than on absolutely adhering to bilateral and multilateral constraints. China makes similar efforts to steer around international arrangements in its own weapons programs. Although China ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997 and claims that it "does not produce or possess chemical weapons," according to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Beijing has an advanced chemical warfare program

The program includes research and development, production, weaponization capabilities, and an inventory of chemical agents with a full range of advanced agents.⁶⁴ China also signed the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention in 1984. However, it is believed to have had an offensive biological warfare program prior to its accession to the convention, and it has likely been maintained.⁶⁵

The struggle for influence in the greater Middle East region between the United States and China will likely grow into an important subset of American-Sino strategic competition. It will likely manifest itself in the strategic calculus over ballistic missiles and missile defenses in the region. If the United States were to provide Taiwan with robust military capabilities, particularly ballistic missile defenses, the Chinese--as in their controversial delivery of M11 ballistic missile technology to Pakistan in the 1990s -- might again resort to violating the spirit, as well as letter, of the MTCR. Such a violation could include ballistic missile sales to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran in an effort to undermine U.S. counter-proliferation policy and to pressure Washington to reduce military support to Taipei.

Despite shortcomings, dogged American diplomacy and arm-twisting under the auspices of international agreements can make headway in the struggle to curb WMD and ballistic missile proliferation. The MTCR, for example, appears to have played a useful political role in stemming the international transfer of ballistic missiles. The political costs--particularly vis-à-vis the United States--of making sales of entire ballistic missile systems are much larger with the MTCR in place than would have been the case without the regime. Sales such as China's CSS-2 missiles to Saudi Arabia and

M-11s to Pakistan are the exceptions rather than the rule. The Russians too appear to have been restrained from making major sales to modernize ballistic missile inventories in the greater Middle East region, initially stocked with Soviet-built Scuds in the 1970s and 1980s.

China's strategic imperatives for access and influence in the greater Middle East will likely push Beijing to cut corners in the spirit, if not the word, of international arrangements for controlling WMD and ballistic missile proliferation. The Chinese appear bent on playing a "cat and mouse game" with the United States in the proliferation field. The Chinese act against American counter-proliferation policy until caught, then deny charges, only to subsequently, and much belatedly, recant to say that this will not be repeated in the future.

This cat and mouse game gets progressively harder for the United States to play. With each evolution, the United States loses its edge in intelligence, and the Chinese adapt as the strengths and weaknesses of American intelligence are revealed.

For example, in the early 1980s, the Chinese denied to the U.S. that they were selling arms to Iran or Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. American Undersecretary of State Michael Armacost was compelled to show Chinese officials pictures of missiles leaving China and arriving in the same ship at a port in Bandar Abbas, Iran.⁶⁶ Such exposures of American intelligence are often a necessity in counter-proliferation diplomacy. However, American intelligence will have to work hard to continue to compensate for such exposures to keep abreast of WMD and missile proliferation. Furthermore, monitoring China's corner-cutting will be doubly challenging, as Beijing has moved from supplying whole weapon systems to the

provision of expertise and advice, which is far more difficult for outsiders to monitor.

In the final analysis, blending intelligence, diplomacy, and policy to pressure China to abide by both the letter and spirit of international arrangements, with the aim of curbing weapon proliferation, will be a daunting task. The Chinese security policy will be much like a mountain stream; block it in one direction and it will move through another. The challenge will be for American intelligence, diplomacy, and policy to monitor and rapidly adjust to China's ever-changing efforts to aid and abet WMD-related programs in the greater Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan.

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NOTES

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