

# Preface

During 2010, several seemingly unrelated events involving China occurred. In January, a Chinese rocket intercepted and destroyed a high-speed object in space. Soon thereafter, Google reported that its subsidiary in China had suffered a computer network intrusion exfiltrating a vast amount of data. Around that time, the U.S. Government released a new Nuclear Posture Review that cast its nuclear relationship with China in more or less the same terms as its nuclear relationship with Russia—in essence, based on strategic stability and, by implication, on mutual deterrence.

Although we were working separately at that time—one of us as a government official and the other in research—we both made essentially the same observation: the United States is increasingly exposed to China's growing strategic offensive capabilities. One of us had previously written an exploratory treatment of the possible implications. The other resolved to study the Sino-U.S. strategic relationship upon leaving government. When our paths crossed at National Defense University, it was natural that we should collaborate.

This study is the product of that collaboration. We readily confess to having a preconception, albeit a vague one: that the United States and China are *both* increasingly vulnerable to each other in strategic domains—nuclear, space, and cyberspace—where great harm can be done. Because capabilities to do such harm are growing and defenses against them are difficult and costly, it follows that the world's leading power and its fastest rising power each must look to the other to exercise restraint in using strategic offensive capabilities. This study looks deeply into the matter of strategic vulnerability. More than that, it addresses prescriptively the questions that that vulnerability poses: Do conditions exist for Sino-U.S. mutual deterrence in these realms? Might the two states agree on reciprocal restraint? What practical measures might build confidence in restraint? How would strategic restraint affect Sino-U.S. relations as well as security in and beyond East Asia?

The search for answers to these questions demanded research on both sides of the Pacific. Interestingly, our Chinese contacts seem less

acutely aware than their Americans counterparts of what we call the “paradox of power,” whereby growing power is accompanied by growing vulnerability. While the paradox is partly explained by the interdependence of security that grows with the integration of the world economy, technology, and infrastructure, it also has a historical precedent. When the Americans and Soviets came to realize that nuclear weapons brought a degree of vulnerability unknown in human experience, they entered a relationship of mutual strategic deterrence based on the fear of retaliation and the futility of defense. Although space and especially cyberspace do not fit neatly into the Cold War version of deterrence theory, the core principle of mitigating vulnerability through mutual restraint still stands.

Of course, early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Sino-American relations are fundamentally different and more textured than mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Soviet-American relations. True, China and the United States have divergent interests; if they did not, the idea of strategic restraint would be uninteresting and unnecessary. But they also have convergent interests as well as interactions that go far beyond mere Cold War–style “coexistence.” This raises the possibility of mutual strategic restraint based not just on fear but also, with work and patience, on growing trust and cooperation.

Implicit in this study is the idea that China and the United States both face vulnerabilities of the sort that will characterize human affairs under conditions of globalization and rapid technological change as nuclear weapons proliferate, as space becomes more essential, and as cyberspace unites economies and societies worldwide. Beyond fear of the harm that the other power can inflict, perhaps China and the United States can be motivated by awareness that vulnerability is a shared problem, that their chances of developing a constructive relationship can be advanced if they can deal with the problem cooperatively, and that with great power comes great responsibility.

Even with such lofty hopes, relations between the United States and China are clouded by mutual suspicion about intentions—whether China wants to displace the United States as the world’s premier power, and whether the United States aims to frustrate China’s legitimate ambitions. While leaders of both countries understand that armed conflict between them could be extremely damaging, such a contingency cannot be excluded in a region where China has outstanding territorial claims and growing military power and reach. Consequently, military modernization and operational-contingency planning are intensifying, stoked by technological change.

Herein lies the challenge, analytical as well as political: Despite divergent interests, probable frictions, and the possibility of conflict, can an established power and a rising one credibly pledge not to threaten or strike the other in these strategic domains? If they cannot, their relationship may be defined increasingly by the dangers they pose to each other. If they can, those dangers can be tamed, and the relationship can be more constructive for both countries, for the Asia-Pacific region, and for the world.