

Zhao Tong: Tong, the direction taken by China on nuclear arms control – as Asia’s only NWS under the NPT, Asia’s only P5 member, and the most consequential global power among us – is going to matter enormously. Can you give us China’s take on the JCPOA/INF and indeed New START developments – and in particular your understanding of how China is likely to react to the Trump Administration’s apparent desire to bring China into any new arms control framework it might (Mr Bolton willing...) be willing to negotiate with Russia?

JCPOA: China has every interest to preserve the agreement. But how far China would like to go to help Iran continue receiving economic benefits and to fight the U.S. unilateral moves against the agreement and Iran depends on the overall status of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship and Chinese calculation of its geostrategic interests.

INF: Chinese perceptions: the U.S. uses a technical pretext to cover its political decision to withdraw; China is an important reason for the U.S. decision; and in order to find hosts for the possible deployment of U.S. land-based missiles in the region, the United States would step up smear campaign and spread fear across the region against China. China’s confidence in its long-term potential to outcompete the United States in developing advanced theatre missile capabilities contributes to its lack of interest in participating in multilateral INF talks.

New START and China’s participation in nuclear arms control regime: China has developed deeper belief in the thinking that a country’s relative military strength fundamentally determines its capability to defend key national interests, and thus the lack of interest in arms control in general. The perception that Trump may be simply using China as an excuse to end bilateral nuclear arms control arrangement with Russia makes China feel less necessary to seriously respond to the U.S. request.

Zhao Tong: What role can China play in defusing any moves toward nuclearization elsewhere in the region? What leadership can China play – as a country which at least until now has adopted a minimal nuclear deterrence posture, and a prima facie credible ‘No First Use’ stance – take in meeting the challenge of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament?

China needs to start to acknowledge that some of the nuclearization discussions in regional countries are partly driven by their growing threat perception toward China.

There needs to be greater awareness over the fact that even a modest goal of maintaining a minimal nuclear deterrence can drive up broader conventional arms race in the region. China’s nuclear strategic submarine program as an example.

Inflated threat perception toward missile defense development by the U.S. and its allies exacerbates regional security dilemma. China’s reactions to such development greatly contribute to other countries’ threat perception toward China. A lot of

engagement work is needed to narrow perception gaps and to prevent another THAAD dispute.

Maintaining a modest nuclear capability and posture is important but faces an uphill battle against domestic factors such as growing nationalism and a nuclear modernization program partially driven by resources and bureaucratic interests rather than strategic thinking.

All panelists: In this final round before we throw it open for participation by the audience, can each of you discuss your country's, and your individual, views on how best to achieve nuclear risk reduction, in the region and globally?

You will be aware of a fairly fundamental difference of approach between (a) disarmament advocates who have little tolerance for talk of anything other than 'Global Zero' elimination - with the Nuclear Ban Treaty the big normative standard-bearer, and (b) those (including most of us associated with APLN) who believe that only a step-by-step approach will ever bear fruit, and put the emphasis on 'minimisation' measures like doctrinal change (No First Use), dramatically reduced deployments, de-alerting and big decreases in overall numbers (the '4 D's'). Is it possible to bridge this gap, and get unanimity around the desirability of these and other risk reduction measures, even if they fall well short of achieving Global Zero?

First is to seriously look at new challenges facing strategic stability and start comprehensive dialogues to address them.

Second is to raise awareness and build common understanding about risks of certain nuclear development such as the development of dual-capable systems and unconventional nuclear weapon systems (such as nuclear torpedoes and nuclear-powered cruise missiles).

Third is to avoid negative action-reaction dynamics by developing nuanced and accurate understandings about each other's nuclear policy.

There is also a need to engage DPRK on nuclear risk reduction: to help DPRK develop sophisticated understandings about the limits of nuclear weapons, the problems of destabilizing nuclear postures/practices such as pre-delegation of launch authority, the complexity of nuclear signalling, and the risks of inadvertent escalation.