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## Nuclear First Strike: Consequences of a Broken Taboo; China's Nuclear Future

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### NUCLEAR ESCALATION AND CHINA

Quester, George. *Nuclear First Strike: Consequences of a Broken Taboo*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006. 159pp. \$22.95

Bolt, Paul J., and Albert S. Willner, eds. *China's Nuclear Future*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006. 221pp. \$52

George Quester's *Nuclear First Strike: Consequences of a Broken Taboo*, is a thought-provoking speculative analysis. His first chapter appeared in modified form as an essay in the Spring 2005 issue of the *Naval War College Review*. With well over three decades of experience in the field of security studies and deterrence theory, Quester backs up his examination of this speculative topic with very impressive credentials that span the disciplines of analysis, writing, and teaching. Quester has taught at a number of universities and colleges and is currently a professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland.

Having chosen his topic well, Quester could not fail to deliver a fresh, insightful piece of scholarship. The book is solidly framed on a structure that identifies a range of potential nuclear crises and propagates each through the various phases of use decision-making, from pre-use considerations to post-response international reactions. Essentially, Quester divides the spectrum of

use into seven generic scenarios along functional lines as follows: ambiguous use, use involving little or no collateral damage, use under conditions of compromised or uncertain command and control, government-directed nuclear use with weak international reaction, government-directed nuclear use with strong international reaction, full nuclear warfare, and limited nuclear warfare. Clearly, since the third and fourth generic scenarios differ only in the international responses they evoke, he probably ought to have combined them—they diverge temporally (that is, through the phases of use decision making) rather than functionally.

Quester then sequentially evolves these representative scenarios of use through the crisis phases that he envisions: pre-use considerations and use itself, likely world reactions, likely U.S. public reactions, and appropriate U.S. policy responses. He rightly makes and adeptly demonstrates the valuable point that in analyzing possible U.S. policy responses, we should be careful to avoid limiting

our examination to the case per se but rather look also to the potential precedents set by such use. He also documents his background material and speculations quite well and extensively—a distinct strength of the book.

One curiosity is that he did not choose to carefully examine the specific case of nuclear escalation between the United States and China in a Taiwan Strait conflict. Such a scenario not only would have to rank fairly high on the probability-of-occurrence spectrum but also receive a good deal of attention, and would have benefited from Quester's insightful analysis.

There may be one other way in which this otherwise very useful book could have been improved. Quester's decision to cut his speculative analysis "horizontally"—essentially handling each nuclear use decision phase separately, while spanning the entire range of scenarios within each phase—does not help the management of this complex topic. A "vertical" cut, in which each scenario is played out from cradle to grave before moving to the next, would have been more helpful to the reader. His resulting digressions and diversions into other scenarios and other crisis phases become confusing at points, detracting slightly from the otherwise enjoyable readability of his style.

In *China's Nuclear Future*, Paul Bolt and Albert Willner have edited an exceptional volume, which should be read by both nuclear strategists and China experts. Bolt is a professor of political science at the U.S. Air Force Academy, having also taught in China, and Willner is a colonel in the U.S. Army and chief of the Liaison Affairs Section at the American Institute in Taiwan.

The volume presents valuable scholarship across quite a range of issues under the umbrella of China's nuclear weapons future: strategy, doctrine, force development, political perceptions, and the Taiwan issue. Though all seven chapters are strong, three in particular stand out as exceptionally valuable to researchers: Evan Medeiros on Chinese nuclear strategy and doctrine, Ronald Montaperto on the effects of Beijing's political perceptions, and Brad Roberts on possible future paths for China's nuclear force and doctrine.

Evan Medeiros marshals substantial new Chinese-language materials to probe the history, development, and future evolution of China's nuclear doctrine. His historical outline of the maturation of strategic doctrine within China and its subcommunities of interest is well researched, crisp, and accurate. Equally important, however, the historical context sets the stage for his argument that China's deterrent strategy ought to be looked at, not in typically Western terms, such as "minimal" or "limited," but rather as embodying the Chinese decision to maintain an "effective" and "sufficient" posture. This is a highly informative, well written, and thought-provoking chapter, but it is possible that the distinctions raised in the deterrent terminology may be more of a semantic than substantial nature. Clearly, this is an issue ripe for further research, and the field would be well served by more of the same scholarly, analytic thinking from Medeiros.

In Ronald Montaperto's chapter on the effects of Chinese perceptions upon the nuclear weapons program, particular attention is devoted to how U.S. actions and policy might affect the direction of force planning and doctrine.

Montaperto keenly states China's overarching political dilemma as: "How does a rising nation committed to achieving reunification and a world class level of economic development so order its external relations that it is able to achieve its objectives and not provoke the opposition of a suspicious great power that possesses overwhelming comprehensive national power?" Four particular issues are claimed as critical in defining the evolving character of the China-U.S. relationship: counterterrorism, Taiwan, participation in international and multilateral organizations, and proliferation and arms control. Arguably, this short list should include missile defense, which strikes directly at the credibility of China's deterrent, in turn striking at U.S. freedom of action, U.S. intentions vis-à-vis China, and the nature of the bilateral relationship. Nevertheless, Montaperto makes the most salient point in the chapter when he concludes that both the Taiwan issue and the future character of the U.S. nuclear posture (including missile defense) strike directly at Chinese vital interests. On these matters, Montaperto claims, Beijing will not compromise, putting these two issues in a transcendent category of their own in the bilateral relationship.

With characteristic clarity, Brad Roberts outlines both the broad paths open to China's nuclear force over the coming decades and identifies the external and internal factors that will drive the decision making in choosing what Beijing calculates is the appropriate path. This chapter is perhaps the best in the book, giving the most accurate assessments regarding the current shape of the Chinese force, as well as the motivators and challenges to its evolution and maturation.

Roberts makes the good point that regardless of external stimuli, such as U.S. development of missile defense, the Chinese force will modernize along a certain predictable baseline. Beyond that baseline, the greatest driver to the size and character of China's future nuclear force will be the exact character of the coevolving U.S. national missile defense architecture. Since that architecture's final shape is uncertain, so is, to a large extent, the final shape of China's nuclear force.

Finally, Roberts lays out three broad paths along which the Chinese nuclear force may evolve: one defined largely by modernization and incremental response to U.S. missile defense, another in which China "sprints" to a window of maximum strategic leverage (particularly with an eye to a Taiwan conflict) vis-à-vis the not-yet-fully-mature "new triad" of the 2003 Nuclear Posture Review, and a third that would posture China for Eurasian nuclear superiority and avoid any near-term competition with the United States. Roberts concludes by offering a bit of very penetrating advice on dissuasion: a prudent course for the United States, especially with respect to missile defense, might be characterized by some amount of transparent restraint, attempting in the process to engender reciprocal restraint by China in its nuclear force evolution.

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Fukuyama, Francis, ed. *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006. 262pp. \$21.95