



Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*China and the Global
Nuclear Order: The Long
March to Strategic
Deterrence*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker :

Renu Rana

27 November 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker: Dr. Renu Rana, Faculty Member, International Studies, Department of Social Sciences, FLAME University, Pune.

Chair: Dr. M.S. Prathibha, Associate Fellow, East Asia Centre, MP-IDSA, New Delhi; and, Member, Editorial Board, *Strategic Analysis*.

Date: 12 March 2025

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar focused on China's evolving nuclear posture within the context of global changes in nuclear strategy, disarmament, and deterrence. Dr. M.S. Prathibha emphasised how shifts in the global nuclear order since the end of the Cold War have created challenges for international security. China's role in this evolving landscape has gained significant attention, particularly with increasing expectations for the country to engage more actively in nuclear disarmament and arms control.
- The presentation by Dr. Renu Rana was structured in three parts: the historical evolution of China's nuclear strategy, its role in global nuclear non-proliferation frameworks such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and implications for global security. Dr. Rana traced the evolution of China's nuclear journey from the early scepticism under Mao Zedong to the eventual development of its nuclear weapons programme, noting the significance of China's first nuclear test in 1964.
- While China publicly supports multilateral disarmament, Dr. Rana noted contradictions between China's advocacy for global stability and its reluctance to support nuclear development by other countries, such as India. Furthermore, China's own increasing nuclear capabilities, including hypersonic weapons and modernised delivery systems, present challenges to its narrative of promoting nuclear disarmament.

- A key point of contention is the lack of transparency in China's nuclear activities, particularly with regard to the reporting of fissile material to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), especially its plutonium holdings from 2017 to 2022, further exacerbating regional and global tensions. Dr. Rana explained that China justifies this opacity by emphasising its "No First Use" and "Minimum Deterrence" policies. Further, China also believes that that is needed to maintain a degree of secrecy to protect its second-strike capabilities.
- In conclusion, Dr. Rana argued that while China has transitioned from being a critic to a key player in global nuclear governance, its growing nuclear capabilities and strategic priorities obfuscate its commitment to global disarmament norms. The seminar concluded with a reflection on the challenges faced by international nuclear frameworks, with increasing divergence and a lack of consensus among nuclear powers. This fragmentation has undermined the effectiveness of treaties like the NPT, and the rise in mutual criticism within these platforms may lead to a more volatile international environment, prompting a potential nuclear arms race.

Disclaimer: This is a summary produced for purposes of dissemination and for generating wider discussion. All views expressed here should be understood to be those of the speakers and individual participants, and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies. Since this is a summary, it cannot be used for citation without confirming with the speaker(s).