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CTBT and China's Nuclear Disarmament Policy

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- After more than two and half year negotiation, on September 10th, 1996 the United Nation passed the CTBT treaty. China participated actively in the negotiation process of the treaty. Our Vice Prime Minister Qian Qisheng signed the document just after U.S. representative. China is the second country signed on the treaty.

- China did its last nuclear test on July 29th 1996 and on the same day Chinese government made an announcement saying that China would suspend all nuclear tests from July 30 1996. Actually, our industry and our military had prepared more nuclear tests before this announcement and they had to stop. There was a strong response from these two sectors at that time. However, they had to follow the order from the Central Government.

- China recommended that all the nuclear weapon states: 1) to abandon their nuclear deterrence policy and have a sharp reduction of their nuclear warheads; 2) to adopt the no first use policy and finally reach a international treaty related to this policy; 3) withdraw all nuclear warheads home and show respect to nuclear free zone; 4) not to deploy and develop outer space weapon system and missile defense system, which would de-stabilize the strategic balance and security; 5) to reach a convention of thorough prohibition and complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

- There has been a long debate for more than 13 years that whether China should ratify this treaty. The United States has been the target for China's ratification. One school argued that China should go ahead of the United States and other school said that China could not go ahead of the United States. The logic is that if the United States withdraws from this treaty and continues its nuclear test while China had ratified this treaty, China would have no way to go. They worry that China would face a "catch-22" situation.

- Most of those who in favor of going ahead are from academic circle while those against going ahead are from our military. Our Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this regard has been very patient to follow the debate.

- In April 2009, during his visit to Prague, US President Barack Obama declared that the United States would take the lead in building a “nuclear-free world”, including the ratification of CTBT.

- Along with the disarmament talks between the United States and Russia have come questions about how China will respond to this development in nuclear disarmament. If other nuclear powers begin the process of in-depth nuclear disarmament, will China follow suit ?

- The US government and speeches by high-ranking US officials have even suggested that the United States should put much more effort into persuading China to join a pattern of nuclear disarmament talks or negotiations, similar to US-Soviet diplomacy during the Cold War era. As it appears now, China will not wrestle with the United States because Beijing has its own strategic considerations.

- To explore China's current stance on nuclear disarmament, we must start at its source. From its 1949 founding until the 1960s, China's nuclear policy was primarily influenced by Soviet policy, its own socialist ideology, and Marxist-Leninist perceptions of war and peace. Under this logic, only the accumulation of nuclear weapons could dissuade other countries from attacking.

- At the summit meeting of the UN Security Council September 2009, President Hu Jintao gave a clear-cut response to questions about China's position on disarmament: "When conditions are ripe, the other nuclear-armed countries should enter into a course of multilateral disarmament talks. In order to bring about complete and thorough nuclear disarmament, the international community should, at a suitable point in time, formulate a feasible long-term plan with separate stages, including the establishment of a 'Treaty on the Complete prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.'"

- While President Hu's statement leaves no doubt as to China's commitment to a nuclear-free world, there are still a number of questions relevant to the country's nuclear disarmament policy in the future.

- Should Beijing persist with its old position or make a fresh start? Should China proceed with new promises and its own in-depth nuclear disarmament? Should it actively follow along, or should it quietly observe developments in the major of nuclear weapon states and then react? China needs to seriously consider all these questions, especially because, following substantial reduction of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems made by the United States and Russia with their nuclear disarmament, any step taken by China on nuclear issues will reverberate in other countries.

- Currently there has been a profound change in the international security environment as the United States and Russia are moving towards large reductions of their nuclear weapons, and medium-sized nuclear-armed states are also considering decreases. In this context, China's nuclear disarmament policy will be adjusted slightly in form rather than content. However, in the foreseeable future, China could not completely abandon its long-held positions on the "complete prohibition" and "thorough destruction" of nuclear weapons.

- While China has been a positive role model on nuclear issues for several decades, it is the United States that has the greatest impact on the evolution of the international arms control and disarmament process. But as the Obama administration outlines its plans for nuclear disarmament, should China be eager to follow along?

- China's position on disarmament will be determined by its strategic considerations such as its ability to deter foreign attacks and the necessity of closely guarding the exact extent of its military capabilities. China's current nuclear modernization is first and foremost for guaranteeing the safety, survivability and reliability of nuclear weapons, and for guaranteeing that its own deterrent force is not weakened in the face of external threats such as the United States' missile defense program.

- Furthermore, the policy of hiding capabilities and biding time has long been a guiding principle in China's strategy. China will not compete for credit with the United States in a new campaign for global disarmament. On the contrary, China will quietly wait and see, and will respond at the appropriate time.

- This is not only the most economical nuclear disarmament policy, but also the most effective one. Even though today we face all kinds of changes, China's nuclear disarmament policy will not undergo any fundamental alteration in the foreseeable future.