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I'm apparently in a bad enough mood today to engage with this, so allow me to point you towards the work that have been done on this, in the form of a bunch of shoddy, poorly organized tweets. <https://t.co/e9lopPuNLO>

To be clear, Chinese nukes are a major concern, but I'm far less worried about the PLA building thousands of DF-41's to wipe out the continental US. I am persistently the China hawk in the room raising concerns about Chinese nukes, but why matters.

China, simply, doesn't think about nuclear warfighting in this manner, and never has. China has always focused on a minimal, survivable deterrent geared towards resisting nuclear coercion and threats. They've oriented their posture towards a survivable, second-strike force.

The PLA's nuclear posture and discussions, and claims on the subject have all been quite consistent here for years, as well as discussions between the PRC and US on the matter. China seeks to ensure they have a survivable force that can retaliate after a first nuclear strike.

Their small force size, hardened deep underground and mobile force, with warheads typically not mated to their launchers, with ambiguity about where exactly they are, all supports PLA claims on this matter. <https://t.co/LqIEJ5n5lv>

History also doesn't support Chinese massive build up or a "leap to parity" as highlighted here. <https://t.co/jEWp9yEHZr>

This doesn't mean though that Chinese nuclear forces are irrelevant though. In my eyes, and those of other analysts, China may believe that a credible second-strike capability will allow them to "accept greater escalation risk at lower levels of conflict." <https://t.co/f35pByo2Zw>

We shouldn't be worried about large-scale attacks on the US, China's focus is not on that. Its primary military focus is on "winning informationized local wars." Its nuclear weapons can give it an edge in these regional campaigns. <https://t.co/j8rhHFgmzh>

For clues, look at the composition on Chinese nuclear arsenals and their debates on the topic. Most of China's nuclear weapons are not ICBM's, a lot are smaller, regional-range weapons, often integrated with conventional weapons. <https://t.co/OFGKMkw5PS>

Writings on the subject highlight "integrated strategic deterrence" and where these weapons work in concert with other tools of deterrence. Nuclear deterrence sits alongside conventional forces, ASAT weapons, network warfare capabilities etc. <https://t.co/9wnkXVN6cf>

Jiang Zemin highlighted this with the concept of the "conventional sword and nuclear shield," where conventional weapons were the versatile and preemptive leg, and nuclear weapons could be used to deter and constrain the extent of conventional conflicts. <https://t.co/kPmsg1wL29>

China is more concerned with getting the US to back out of local wars, here, nuclear weapons can be a more important consideration. Weapons like the DF-26 and DF-21 provide a formidable regional deterrent.

The PRC can use the risk of conflict potentially escalating to the nuclear level to deter US involvement. By raising fears of escalation and presenting a formidable, regional deterrent, it can seek to constrain the scope of escalation. <https://t.co/bSUdIU2NRc>

See some of my favorite lines from Science of Second Artillery Campaigns: "In local conventional wars under informatized conditions, just by moderately revealing one's nuclear strength, one is able to apply many types of deterrent methods flexibly..."

... An enemy that is using informatized, conventional air raids against us cannot but consider prudently how high the price might be, thereby achieving the goal of supporting conventional operations."

Or, “The most important type of regional wars will be conventional conflicts under conditions of nuclear deterrence, deterrence and actual warfighting will exist at the same time, and their function and effectiveness will be mutually complementary.”

Or “the demonstration of power causes the enemy to dread that the possible consequences of its actions will be that its losses will exceed its gains, thereby causing the enemy to change its plans...achieving the goal of restricting the war to a certain scope.”

To simplify, China can seek to capitalize on the uncertainty and risk of potential nuclear conflict to deter US intervention during aggressive conventional campaigns in the Pacific, with US partners and allies. They don't need to wipe out the US to do this.

This is even more important, considering we tend to think about escalation control in very different manners. China appears overconfident on its ability to control conventional escalation without going nuclear <https://t.co/moqArRSjp9>

Or the misunderstanding between how we may view things like space assets, whereas China has considered striking out satellite systems during potential conflict to be a “de-escalatory” move <https://t.co/b0wRpF2bxX>

Especially with assets like the DF-26, that can rapidly swap between conventional and nuclear warheads, unbeknownst to their adversaries which it is <https://t.co/5AbimAZiAK>

China doesn't have the capacity to engage in large-scale counterforce shoot-outs with the US, and nothing in its strategy or PLA writings and discussions on the subject seem to indicate a desire to depart from that.

The important changes we've seen up to this point have not been quantitative, they've been qualitative. China's nuclear forces are increasingly more precise, survivable, and integrated with its conventional force. I'd argue this may be even more concerning.

After all, as ADM Richards highlighted, purely quantitative comparisons are a “relatively crude measure of their capabilities.” <https://t.co/BV2GHE6waA>

This isn't the US vs the USSR at the height of the Cold War, nukes don't exist in a bubble, and our adversaries aren't thinking about it this way. Conventional counterforce options, hypersonic weapons, ASAT capabilities, war is changing. <https://t.co/1im6NgFLV3>

But please, dump all of our money into all the wrong assets, geared towards the wrong war, and watch while China isolates us from our allies and outcompetes us while you sit there waiting for the Chinese bolt-from-blue.

I should highlight this cites [@Michael_S_Chase](#) [@AndrewSErickson](#) [@Fiona_Cunning](#) [@fravel](#) [@ArmsControlWonk](#) [@DavidSantoro1](#) [@davidclogan](#) and several others who don't have Twitter or I may have missed in my haste. Didn't have space to tag you in the specific tweets.