

Abstract

Great powers have almost exclusively decided the destiny of international relations. The birth, life, and death of an order have been regulated by those actors with the largest military, strategic, economic, and other capabilities. Conceptually building upon the premises of structural realism, the thesis claims that the Chinese nuclear rise is the decisive factor for the disappearance of the incumbent international system and the consequent rise of the new one, labeled as asymmetric triangular nuclear competition. This critically affects the notion of strategic stability, adjusting its characteristics for a different strategic environment. The research has twofold relevance. First, in the academic sense, it deepens a scantily treated debate on the interconnection between the management of nuclear weapons arsenal and the overall outlook of the international system. Second, in the practical sense, the study of the behavior of great powers provides an excellent foundation for policy analysis.

The aforementioned is achieved in the three stages. In the beginning, the Chinese nuclear rise is considered as a set of comprehensive reforms in terms of weapons systems, military apparatus, but also doctrines and strategic concepts. After that, the nuclear rise is put in the context of Chinese silent moves from defensive to offensive nuclear strategy in order to demonstrate its revisionist character. This is the main indicator of transition to a different great power interaction marked by the asymmetry of strategic domains, triangular systemic formations, and nuclear competition as a conceptual substitution for the outdated arms race. Finally, it is shown how the Chinese nuclear rise affects strategic stability by analyzing the six main characteristics and changes imposed on them. The hypothesized relationship is negative in nature: the higher level of Chinese nuclear rise, the lower level of preservation of the current strategic stability outlook.

Keywords: China; nuclear weapons; military modernization; strategic stability; great powers