



## **China's Responses to the U.S. "Golden Dome" Missile Defense Initiative**

John S. Van Oudenaren, BluePath Labs

On January 27, 2025 President Trump ordered the construction of an "Iron Dome for America," characterized as a next-generation missile defense shield to protect the U.S. homeland.<sup>1</sup> On May 20, President Trump held a briefing on the system now known as "Golden Dome" with the stated goal of completing the system by the end of 2029.<sup>2</sup> The initial responses in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Golden Dome (known in Chinese as "金穹") have been overwhelmingly negative, with Beijing raising both strategic and normative objections to the U.S. reviving its past efforts to build a strategic missile defense system. PRC objections to the Golden Dome system include:

- It undermines strategic stability by weakening mutual deterrence. PRC government and military sources are particularly concerned about "active launch suppression," raising the threat of preemptive U.S. strikes on China's nuclear missile forces.<sup>3</sup>
- It could intensify the security dilemma and spark an arms race in outer space, heightening the risk of conflict.<sup>4</sup>
- It reflects American unilateralism and the country's narrow focus on its own national security, in contrast to China's stated focus on "common security."<sup>5</sup>
- It exhibits the U.S.'s purported "cold war mentality" and pursuit of hegemony. PRC sources sometimes portray U.S. missile defense as a protection racket, with allies forced to pay in or suffer consequences.<sup>6</sup>
- Several PRC sources question the technical and budgetary feasibility of Golden Dome.<sup>7</sup>

## Background

China has historically viewed any expansion of U.S. missile defense architecture as threatening its limited deterrent capability, as its nuclear triad remains largely ground-based, comprising road-mobile, solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and silo-based ICBMs.<sup>i,8</sup> In early 2017, for example, Beijing strongly objected to the U.S. deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in South Korea.<sup>9</sup> Despite U.S. assurances that the THAAD deployment was solely intended to counter the growing nuclear and conventional threats from North Korea, the PRC retaliated with an extended campaign of economic coercion targeting South Korea.<sup>10</sup>

The announcement of Golden Dome has intensified longstanding PRC concerns over U.S. efforts to develop missile defense systems that could limit the effectiveness of its limited nuclear deterrent. PRC media and experts are particularly concerned that Golden Dome indicates a shift in the focus of U.S. missile defense from targeting “rogue states” such as Iran and North Korea to other large nuclear powers like China and Russia.<sup>11</sup> While such criticisms fault the U.S. for eroding strategic stability with its unilateral missile defense build-up, they do not acknowledge that the PRC has played any role in contributing to the present international security dilemma, both due to the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) rapid expansion of its own nuclear and ballistic missile forces and Beijing’s reticence to engage in trilateral arms control talks with Washington and Moscow, including during the first Trump administration.<sup>12</sup> Notably, at least one recent article in *China Youth Daily* acknowledged the role of Russia’s progress in developing hypersonic missiles as a possible motivation for Golden Dome.<sup>13</sup>

## Official Responses

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of National Defense (MND) have been the main PRC state bodies responding to the U.S. decision to develop Golden Dome. In February, shortly after the Trump administration initially announced the Iron Dome for America project, MND spokesperson Senior Colonel Wu Qian said, “America does not need an ‘Iron Dome’ but must instead break through the ‘Iron Curtain’ imprisoning its own thinking. China urges the U.S. to jettison its Cold War mentality, stop exaggerating threats from other countries, and cease manufacturing military confrontation.”<sup>14</sup>

At the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference held this April, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Arms Control Director-General Sun Xiaobo said the U.S. plans to spend \$1.7 trillion modernizing its nuclear arsenal while also developing Golden Dome.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>i</sup>Most, but not all, silo-based ICBMs now use solid fuel as well. Hans M. Kristensen, “Prepared Statement,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on China’s Nuclear Forces, June 11, 2021, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/Hans\\_Kristensen\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/Hans_Kristensen_Testimony.pdf).

According to Sun, this would be a detrimental combination that would “seriously damage the legitimate rights and interests of other nuclear-weapons states, increase the risk of unnecessary nuclear confrontation and conflict, gravely undermine global and regional strategic stability, and greatly worsen the international environment for nuclear disarmament.”<sup>16</sup>

On May 8, during Xi Jinping’s state visit to Russia to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II against Nazi Germany, the PRC and the Russian Federation issued a Joint Statement on Global Strategic Stability.<sup>17</sup> That statement notes that the construction of Golden Dome, a “global, multi-layered, multi-domain missile defense system not subject to any constraints, which can defend against all types of missile threats, including those from peer opponents, will seriously imperil strategic stability.”<sup>18</sup> The statement expresses particular concern that the Golden Dome program will provide the U.S. with kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities to engage in the suppression of foreign adversaries’ ability to launch nuclear or conventional missiles.<sup>19</sup> While the joint statement declines to mention either China’s or Russia’s development of space-based weapons, it stresses that both sides oppose security activities that seek military supremacy and approach outer space as a “warfighting domain.”<sup>20</sup>

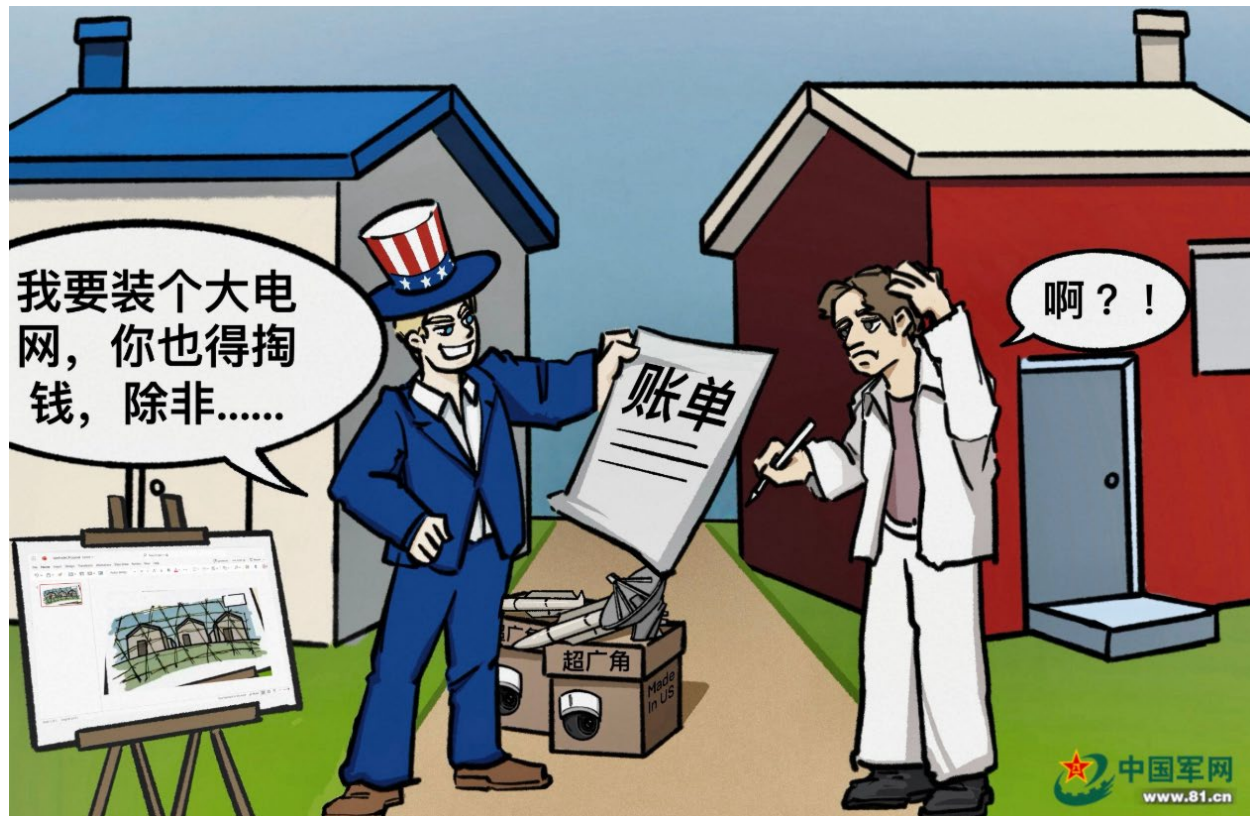
On May 21, the day after Trump’s press conference detailing Golden Dome, MFA spokesperson Mao Ning stated that China is “seriously concerned” about the system, claiming it contravenes a core principle of the Outer Space Treaty on the peaceful use of space.<sup>21</sup> She stressed that Golden Dome will contribute to the weaponization of space, including through the deployment of space-based interceptors, and significantly erode global arms control regimes. According to Mao, this unilateral pursuit of strategic missile defense underscores the U.S.’s myopic focus on its own national security at the expense of global strategic stability.

At an MND press conference on May 30, spokesperson Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang emphasized that the U.S. has been “consistently promoting the development of space-based weaponry such as the Golden Dome system, constantly expanding its outer space forces, and provoking an arms race in outer space.”<sup>22</sup> Zhang said that the U.S. missile defense program contravenes the principles of the Outer Space Treaty and he likened building Golden Dome to opening Pandora’s box. He characterized it as unleashing a new arms race, transforming space into a war zone, and unsettling the contemporary international security environment and arms control system.<sup>23</sup> According to Zhang, the PRC urges the U.S. to “stop its arms buildup and preparations for war in outer space and take practical actions to maintain global strategic stability.”<sup>24</sup>

## Media Responses

PRC state media coverage of Golden Dome generally echoes official criticisms of the system but provides more details, including examples of criticism of the system from within the U.S.<sup>25</sup> State media pieces on Golden Dome typically explain the U.S.’s interest in strategic missile defense as stemming from its ingrained hegemonic and militaristic tendencies. For example, a

Xinhua article on President Trump's announcement of Golden Dome on May 20 quotes extensively from Mao Ning's critical press remarks while also noting that some American experts have questioned both the technical and fiscal viability of Golden Dome while warning it could intensify an arms race in space.<sup>26</sup>



*The U.S. presents a bill to a stunned ally, saying "I'm building a large electronic network, and you have to pay for it, or else...."*<sup>27</sup>

Another piece on the state-run China.com news site, titled "Is America's Golden Dome a Real Threat or a 'Paper Tiger'?" notes that Chinese observers see a tension between the Golden Dome announcement and President Trump's interest in cutting defense spending by half once tensions with China and Russia are reduced.<sup>28</sup> The piece notes debate within the American scientific community over the viability of Golden Dome, specifically citing an American Physical Society study finding that 16,000 interceptors would be necessary to stop ten solid-fueled ICBMs.<sup>29</sup> However, the piece also cites the former director of the U.S. Space Force's Space Development Agency, Fred Kennedy, who according to the article provides a more optimistic assessment that the U.S. could assemble 273 interceptors within months and that the system would have a 96 percent interception success rate.<sup>30</sup> The article contends that regardless of whether Golden Dome is a genuine threat or a paper tiger, it will undermine strategic stability, noting that if it is a "real tiger," it would undermine the existing strategic balance of power, threaten the

effectiveness and credibility of the strategic deterrence of other nuclear weapons states, and create a “vicious cycle” of arms races and space weaponization.

On the other hand, the article argues that the U.S. moving forward with Golden Dome even if it turns out to be a “paper tiger” would indicate a recklessness in international disputes, including an inclination to use force to infringe on the territory and sovereignty of other countries that intensifies the risk of great power competition leading to direct military conflict.<sup>31</sup>

Some PRC state media commentaries frame Golden Dome as a means for the U.S. to squeeze concessions from allies in exchange for protection. For example, one cartoon (*see image above*) and accompanying commentary on the PLA’s public website, 81.cn, was titled, “Playing a Trick of ‘Turning Iron into Gold,’ White House Plans to Continue Reaping the Benefits of Hegemony.”<sup>32</sup> The theme of the cartoon is that, because the U.S. is “cash-strapped,” it seeks to coerce allies into paying for its expansive new missile defense system, a rewarmed version of Reagan’s “Star Wars” Strategic Defense Initiative programs.<sup>33</sup>

### Expert Commentary

Chinese arms control and military experts, including those at state-affiliated think tanks such as the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) [中国现代国际关系研究院], have expressed concerns that Golden Dome is a significant expansion of previous U.S. missile defense efforts. For example, Guo Xiaobing, director of CICIR’s Arms Control Research Center, noted in a recent editorial that Golden Dome marks an escalation in U.S. missile defense efforts, from focusing on “rogue states” to including other major powers.<sup>34</sup> According to Guo, this unilateral U.S. action will detrimentally impact strategic stability, trample the principle of the peaceful use of outer space, and make the world more chaotic and dangerous.<sup>35</sup>

In an interview, Song Xiaojun, a CCTV Special Military Commentator and former PLA Navy officer, stated that “there is a big difference” between Golden Dome and the current U.S. national missile defense system.<sup>36</sup> According to Song, Golden Dome is multilayered and very broad, and when put in place, it could intercept new missile technologies such as hypersonic weapons that older systems would not be able to defend against.<sup>37</sup>

A recent commentary by two other researchers at CICIR, Liu Chong and Xie Hao, claims that Golden Dome represents an extension of longstanding U.S. efforts to seek “absolute security” through ballistic missile defense.<sup>38</sup> However, Liu and Xie contend that the pursuit of the system will have the opposite of its intended effect and make the U.S. less secure, because it will generate a range of responses by foreign powers concerned about the potential erosion of their own security.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

The PRC has long been concerned by U.S. missile defense efforts. Beijing has expressed alarm over the U.S. Golden Dome system since its inception in late January, but exactly how the PRC will respond as the missile defense system takes shape remains unclear. Nevertheless, whatever form the PRC's response eventually takes, the initial Chinese government statements, state media coverage, and expert commentary underscore that Beijing is certain to proceed from a place of deep distrust regarding the U.S.'s effort to develop a next-generation strategic missile defense shield.

*Opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Air University, the Department of the Air Force, or the Department of Defense.*

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> “Trump selects \$175 billion Golden Dome defense shield design, appoints leader,” Reuters, May 20, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-make-golden-dome-announcement-tuesday-us-official-says-2025-05-20/>; Sandra Erwin, “Space Force officials say it’s too early to pin down Golden Dome costs,” Space News, May 15, 2025, <https://spacenews.com/space-force-officials-say-its-too-early-to-pin-down-golden-dome-costs/>.

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<sup>4</sup> “Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Global Strategic Stability” [中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于全球战略稳定的联合声明], PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs [中华人民共和国外交部], May 8, 2025, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/zyxw/202505/t20250509\\_11617805.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/zyxw/202505/t20250509_11617805.shtml); “Statement by Sun Xiaobo, Head of the Chinese Delegation and Director-General of the Department of Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the Third Preparatory Committee of the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” [中国代表团团长、外交部军控司司长孙晓波在《不扩散核武器条约》第十一次审议大会第三次筹委会一般性辩论中的发言], PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs [中华人民共和国外交部], April 30, 2025, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjtb\\_673085/zzjg\\_673183/jks\\_674633/fywj\\_674643/202504/t20250430\\_11613370.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjtb_673085/zzjg_673183/jks_674633/fywj_674643/202504/t20250430_11613370.shtml).

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<sup>7</sup> “Is Golden Dome a Real Threat or a Paper Tiger?” [美国“金穹”系统是“纸老虎”还是真威胁? ], China.Com [中国网], May 26, 2025, [http://www.china.com.cn/opinion2020/2025-05/26/content\\_117894519.shtml](http://www.china.com.cn/opinion2020/2025-05/26/content_117894519.shtml).

<sup>8</sup> “Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2025: Federation of American Scientists Reveals Latest Facts on Beijing’s Nuclear Buildup,” Federal of American Scientists, March 12, 2025, <https://fas.org/publication/nuclear-notebook-china-2025/>; “China,” Nuclear Threat Initiative, accessed June 10, 2025, <https://www.nti.org/countries/china/>; Tong Zhao, “Narrowing the U.S.-China Gap on Missile Defense: How to Help Forestall a Nuclear Arms Race,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/06/narrowing-the-us-china-gap-on-missile-defense-how-to-help-forestall-a-nuclear-arms-race?lang=en>; Jing-Dong Yuan, “Chinese Responses to U.S. Missile Defenses,” *The Non-proliferation Review*, Spring 2003, <https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/npr/101yuan.pdf>.

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<sup>11</sup> “Why does the United States want to build the “Golden Dome” missile defense system” [美国为什么要建“金穹”导弹防御系统], China Youth Daily [中国青年报], May 30, 2025, <http://www.news.cn/milpro/20250530/e2af915d18da4d038b13e95762f46d2d/c.html>; Guo Xiaobing [郭晓兵], “The “Golden Dome” system poses a serious threat to global strategic stability” [“金穹”系统严重威胁全球战略稳定], China-U.S. Focus [中美聚焦], May 31, 2025, <https://cn.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/20250531/43812.html>.

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