

strategic stability, as modernization was constrained within the basic parameters of the Treaty (thus the importance of the *narrow versus broad* interpretation around Strategic Defense Initiative).

Naturally, this is not the only explanation for the negotiation and signing of the ABM Treaty, nor is it for the bilateral arms control regime as a whole or the missile defence deployment decisions of the US and SU. In fact, one can readily debate whether strategic stability was, in fact, that significant for the actors as distinct from the academic community. At the practical level of politics, the actual motives of the US and SU may have been far divorced from strategic stability. Moreover, the idea of stability was an American one, as was the entire idea of arms control. Nonetheless, most important for understanding the current and future utility of the concept of strategic stability, and by default the ABM Treaty and arms control is the presence of a fundamentally hostile adversarial relationship. Stability served as a measure for decisions about strategic forces, and arms control was the means to manage the impact of this class of weapons in order to reduce, if not eliminate, the possibility that strategic weapons alone could or would result in a nuclear war which no one wanted.

The Contemporary Relevance of Strategic Stability Traditionally Defined

Above all else, strategic stability is an *apolitical* concept. It is premised upon the existence of a hostile adversarial relationship between two states (also two groups of states) in which the political conditions exist for war. In the absence of this type of relationship, and thus the likelihood of war, strategic stability has no meaning. If no one is contemplating the use of force for whatever political reason, then strategic weapons cannot play an independent role in leading to war. In other words, the end of the Cold War spells the end of strategic stability as a useful concept.

The United States and Russia are certainly not hostile adversaries, and neither are the United States and China. In fact, the only nuclear relationship that meets a level of hostile adversarial relations in which strategic stability would come into play is India-Pakistan. Even here, the conditions for systemic war are largely absent. While an Indo-Pakistani war, in which nuclear weapons were used, would be disastrous for the region, it is highly unlikely that the political conditions exist for its escalation or spread to a systemic level involving all of the major nuclear powers. Regardless, strategic stability may possess utility for the Indo-Pakistani relationship, not least of all because all the preconditions for a stable relationship are absent. In other words, on strategic grounds, this relationship is unstable.

The absence of an hostile adversarial political relationship underpins recent arguments in the US about the irrelevance of the existing bilateral arms control regime (and especially the ABM Treaty), and the political impact of the regime in perpetuating negative (i.e Cold War) relations between the United States and Russia. From a strategic stability perspective, the case for contemporary irrelevance is undeniable. But, the political argument is problematic, because it posits that arms control serves a range of political functions, and its past and future should be understood relative to these political functions (i.e. symbols of the state of relations, indicators of status, diplomatic tools to manipulate). In other words, the case for or against arms control is completely unrelated to strategic stability, unless strategic stability is re-defined to encompass politics.

If one accepts that the political conditions necessary to bring strategic stability into play are absent today, then the issue becomes the future. In a way, this issue is effectively about the broader question of the future of nuclear deterrence, as strategic stability is really about deterrence stability requirements from a force posture perspective. As noted above, strategic stability is one way to answer the question of *"how much is enough"*. In the past, it could be based upon a variety of variables that would dictate the size and nature of a nation's second strike capabilities. However, today strategic