

Introduction

While analytical attention has been focused on issues related to international security, for example, fissile material accountability, many serious challenges to achieving international peace and security have sprung from regional instability and insecurity. Regional confrontations involving countries with a history of unresolved issues, no meaningful progress toward resolution of the sources of conflict, and the capability to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and advanced delivery systems such as ballistic missiles are of particular concern. While the term has not yet been introduced, "Regional Threat Reduction" may constitute the preferred method for defusing these potential crises before they erupt.²

During the past eight years, the United States and the republics of the former Soviet Union have been reducing their stockpiles of tactical and strategic missiles. At the same time, countries in troubled regions of the world have been increasing the numbers and types of ballistic missiles in their inventories; some are also establishing their own missile production facilities. Approximately 30 countries have surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, and more than half of those countries are in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Middle East. International security interests are seriously threatened by the increasing numbers and capabilities of missiles throughout the world, especially when the missiles are designed to also serve as delivery systems for WMD. Of particular concern is the number of countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia with ballistic missile and nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons programs.

Of all the potential systems for delivering WMD or conventional weapons, ballistic missiles have become the platforms of choice because of their short flight times, their capability to strike with little or no warning, a lack of effective missile defences in most areas of the globe, and thus, their virtually-assured penetrability. Their psychological impact can be almost as destabilizing as their military utility. Ballistic missiles can also degrade crisis stability by condensing decision-making time lines and accentuating perceptions of vulnerability. In a regional context, even an unsophisticated and inaccurate ballistic missile can serve as a weapon of terror or coercion, or as a deterrent to action on the part of the other party or parties. Indeed, because of the questionable accuracy of some regional ballistic missiles, a country may elect to arm them with unconventional warheads, such as nuclear weapons, the accuracy of which becomes relatively unimportant.³

² Regional Threat Reduction is defined on page 1.

³ The disadvantage associated with a lack of accuracy in certain regional ballistic missiles may well disappear over time as countries gain access to better inertial guidance systems or use the Global Positioning System (G.P.S.).