

capability. The ABM banned nationwide ballistic missile defences and was intended to prevent the offence/defence arms race that had traditionally plagued other military technologies. The principal breakthrough achieved by the ABM was the recognition that strategic offence and defence were closely connected and that deployment of defences would inevitably encourage increases and improvements in offensive forces to overcome them. SALT I froze the number of ICBM and SLBM launchers at their July and May 1972 levels, respectively, and formalized the principle of verification by national technical means (NTM), but as the number of missile launchers were capped, the arms race continued in warhead numbers. SALT II sought to establish equal quantitative limits on the aggregate number of ICBMs, SLBMs, and strategic bombers, as well as qualitative limits on destabilizing force developments (such as, the addition of MIRVs).

SALT contributed paradoxically to an erosion of strategic/(arms race) stability by freezing the number of targets (launchers) while placing few constraints on the proliferation of warheads (MIRVs) aimed at those targets. The US proceeded to increase its force loading through MIRVs, and its warheads on ICBMs and SLBMs grew from less than 2,000 in 1970 to more than 7,000 by 1978. Despite the US' initial lead in MIRV technology, the Soviet Union caught up and its warheads went from 1,100 in 1968 to 3,300 in 1976 and eventually to approximately 8,000 in 1982. Thus, SALT's goal of strengthening arms race stability was undermined, leading to destabilizing fears in the US of a "window of vulnerability". Even though President Ronald Reagan's "Special Commission on Strategic Forces" (the Scowcroft Commission) rejected the notion of US strategic vulnerability to a Soviet first strike, and the US engaged in a major strategic modernization programme designed for the US to prevail in a nuclear war.

Under pressure from the allies, the US returned to negotiations on "reductions" in strategic offensive forces but it also re-opened the debate on strategic defences. The Scowcroft Commission recommended in 1983 that, "Whether the Soviets prove willing or not, stability should be the primary objective both of the modernization of our strategic forces and of our arms control proposals."<sup>51</sup> In this respect, the US position represented a return to a concept of strategic/(first-strike) stability focused on reducing the incentives for a surprise attack through major structural modifications to, and reductions in, strategic offensive forces.

In contrast to the US, the Soviet Union's conception of strategic stability reflected an ability to predict and control military operations with a high degree of certainty. Thus, arms control could make significant contributions to stabilizing the threat environment for military planning. The Soviet Union regarded any change in the strategic environment, particularly the adversary's forces, which compromised their confidence in strategic planning as inherently destabilizing. Hence, the USSR criticized nearly every new US strategic weapon as destabilizing. From its perspective, the Soviet Union regarded as destabilizing any increase in the adversary's ability to hold at risk its command and control systems, or to conduct versatile nuclear operations. The Soviet Union exhibited a tendency to define stability both in political and technical terms, in other words stability depended upon managing the tensions of East-West political competition and also restricting US offensive capabilities (qualitatively within reach of Soviet capabilities).

In the START negotiations both sides sought to enhance stability, but their respective concepts differed. Both regarded stability as based on deterring nuclear war and reduced risk of miscalculation - i.e. both first strike and crisis stability. However, the US interpreted stability at the operational level as a

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<sup>51</sup> Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces (The White House: Washington, DC, April 1983).