

allows for discussion here. Nonetheless, the disarmament component of strategic stability re-defined provides an alternative way to understand missile defence. It is stabilizing, rather than de-stabilizing.

Alongside these elements related to strategic stability re-defined resides the issue of the linear process that will be set in motion by the collapse of ABM. In this context, an agreement between Russia and the US to amend the Treaty is all that is important. In contrast to the traditional meaning of strategic stability, where the intent of the Treaty is arguably more important than the letter, neither intent nor letter is relevant. The details of a revised Treaty are irrelevant. Agreement is all that counts, because it is either evidence of stability, or of a process that does not lead to instability. Russia does not walk away from START, the NPT holds, and the arms control/non-proliferation regime remains viable.

Of course, this places China's response as irrelevant, which is somewhat problematic. Moreover, the outcome is not necessarily irrelevant either. If the amendments are a setback for nuclear disarmament, such as allowing for MIRVing, this could be interpreted as unstable according to the new definition, if one emphasizes the nuclear disarmament element. In a way, this is the heart of the dilemma within the new definition. Is it the political element alone, or the political element if, and only if it is consistent with disarmament? That is, one can have a stable strategic world in which the bilateral/multilateral process of arms control/non-proliferation remains in place, but stability continues to rest upon nuclear weapons. One could also see a stable a world where the process remains in place, but nuclear weapons decline in relevance to stability. Also, one could have an unstable world in both situations.

Assuming that Russia refuses to amend the ABM Treaty, it is also not necessarily the case that the linear process will take place. It is highly likely that in this scenario, the US will also announce that it is unilaterally cutting its strategic forces by a significant amount. From the new meaning of strategic stability, this unilateral decision is apparently de-stabilizing, because stability also demands a bilateral and/or multilateral process. Yet, the unilateral reduction is also evidence of the US meeting its commitment to the NPT. In fact, if the ultimate goal of US strategic plans is to marginalize nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence by developing and deploying missile defences, then a significant problem for the linear process related to strategic stability arises. The ultimate goal of the US is consistent with the nuclear disarmament component of stability, but it is not done through a bilateral or multilateral process. Does its unilateral nature by definition make it de-stabilizing, or does it create a political environment in which neither Russia, China, nor any of the other nuclear powers can politically afford to be seen as expanding their strategic forces, and thus generates conditions for a new arms control process? If one accepts the former, it is a triumph of process over substance. If one accepts the latter, the collapse of the ABM Treaty does not necessarily lead down the linear path to strategic instability.

In other words, there are a host of unpredictable factors that have to be considered in asserting that the collapse of the ABM Treaty will lead to strategic instability defined as *hostile political relations, the collapse of the bi/multilateral arms control/non-proliferation process, and the end of prospects for nuclear disarmament*. At the heart is the linkage between the strategic arms builds up of Russia and China and the collapse of the NPT. In response to the US withdrawal from ABM and deployment of a limited missile defence, the actual Russian and Chinese response will be driven by a host of internal and external considerations. For example, both will have to calculate the political fallout of their response on other key aspects of their relationship with the US (political and economic) relative to the response of other states.

Regardless, the assumption that the expansion of Russian and Chinese strategic forces will deal a death blow to the non-proliferation regime in general, and the NPT in particular is difficult to sustain. It assumes that non-nuclear adherents to the NPT signed only because of the commitment by the nuclear