

While the logical roots of the concept of strategic are found within the concept of strategy (as defined by Carl von Clausewitz as the use of an engagement for the purpose of war – victory), the term itself is directly related to the development of airpower and airpower theory in the Interwar period. Giulio Douhet in particular argued that airpower would make warfare as traditionally understood obsolete. Well before armies could engage on the battlefield, a massive attack from the air would bring a nation to its knees. In other words, the air engagement alone would lead to victory, and thus the airplane or airpower was a strategic weapon, and the idea of strategic bombing emerged. However, the results of the strategic bombing campaigns of World War II did not meet expectations for one primary reason, which was key to the development of the concept; the inability to deliver a devastating enough strike(s) to cripple the adversary. This would all change with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Atomic and subsequently nuclear (thermonuclear) weapons became strategic weapons, alongside the airplane and subsequently ballistic missiles (land and sea based) as the strategic delivery systems (the nuclear triad). With the means now available to make Douhet's theory reality, planners responded in two ways; developing offensive strategies to employ the strategic capability, and defensive strategies to offset the strategic capability. In the case of the United States, Strategic Air Command (SAC), and Continental Air Defence Command (CONAD) were created. At the same time, civilian analysts (the new community of strategic studies) examined the implications of this new strategic environment– what would become known as the golden age of deterrence theory as informed by the politics of the United States (US)– Soviet Union (SU) adversarial relationship.

The label of the Cold War for this relationship spoke to the linkage between politics and strategic weapons. The relationship possessed all the characteristics that could or would readily lead to war, but would, or should not because of the implications of strategic weapons, and the underlying thesis that nuclear war was unwinnable and thus unthinkable (hence the title of Herman Kahn's famous book *Thinking the Unthinkable*). It was in many ways from this linkage that the concept of strategic stability arose. In so doing, attention was drawn to the independent role of strategic weapons (i.e. technology) on decisions about war and peace. Basically, concern was directed to the implications of strategic nuclear force structures, deployment patterns, targeting, launch postures, and overall doctrine for decisions about war and peace.

Even though nuclear war was considered unwinnable, and thus unthinkable, a situation could arise within the adversarial relationship in which one or both parties would contemplate a first strike. If one, or both of the parties came to believe that the other side might go first, it would be driven to strike first itself; a strategic condition defined by Thomas Schelling as the mutual fear of surprise attack. While victory in a nuclear exchange appeared meaningless, a nation could still believe that it would do better by going first. It was this possibility that directly underpinned the meaning of strategic stability as it emerged in the mid-1960s in the context of the emergence of mutual vulnerability for the United States and Soviet Union.

A stable strategic relationship, thus, began with the postulate of an adversarial relationship in which the probability of war, *ceteris parabus*, was relatively high. As a component of war avoidance, each party required strategic forces or a strategic force structure capable of removing any incentives on the part of its adversary to go first, and incapable of being perceived by its adversary as designed and deployed to go first. If both parties possessed such a structure, then all strategic incentives to go first would be eliminated. This structure came to be defined as the possession of an assured retaliatory or second strike capability invulnerable to any and all attempts to destroy it in a counterforce first strike. Married then to the US concept of assured destruction, and resultant condition of mutual assured destruction, strategic stability was defined as a condition in which political adversaries possessed