

objectives, but the record of strategic nuclear arms control, at least until the rapid progress brought about by the end of the Cold War, tended to reinforce the centrality of nuclear force building in relations between the superpowers. Strategic nuclear arms control was possible in the early seventies because it meshed well with the security objectives of the superpowers. In this sense, the ABM Treaty and SALT I marked a significant step towards the establishment of parameters around which the superpowers maintained a balance of power. Neither side could seriously claim a first-strike capability. At the same time neither side was content to rest with the existing technologies that lay behind mutual deterrence. The search for new systems continued. The nuclear balance was never considered technologically static even if strategically a measure of stability appeared to have been achieved.

The SALT process, including the ABM Treaty, only served to entrench nuclear weapons, including advances in technology such as MIRVing, ever more firmly into the international system thus perpetuating the role of strategic nuclear weapons. The success of agreements rested upon the expectation that both sides would be left with what each believed was a necessary force level and composition, leaving the door open to further technological improvements. As Laurence Martin observed in 1979, "However frequently misunderstood, strategic arms limitation is not an alternative to giving nuclear weapons a major role in international politics, but merely one way of defining that role."⁴⁸

That nuclear weapons had a role in international politics was clear. What was not clear was how, where and when they would be used. The military balance was characterized by the 'usability' paradoxes of nuclear weapons, those, imponderable, self-contradictory concepts that were never resolved, and which clouded much of the thinking about security and strategy in the Cold War. Among them was the notion that while the Soviets and the Americans both sought to avoid waging nuclear war, the mutual deterrent postures created to achieve this end were based upon the capabilities and plans of each side which were designed to fight and win such a war. Whether the only outcome was MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction), each side adopted a NUTS (Nuclear Utilization Target Selection) approach.⁴⁹ It was assumed that these postures lent credence to the threat of nuclear war because it was believed that nuclear weapons deterred only if there was a possibility that they would have been used. This, however, led to another paradox. Although deterrence was strengthened by mutual perceptions of use under certain circumstances, it was believed that it was dangerous to make nuclear weapons so usable that anyone was tempted to actually employ one.⁵⁰ It was on this basis that arms controllers regarded the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons and so-called "flexible options," as inherently dangerous because they may have

⁴⁸ Martin, "The Role of Military Force in the Nuclear Age," pp. 5-6.

⁴⁹ These concepts are drawn from Spurgeon M. Keeny Jr. and Wolfgang Panofsky, "MAD Versus NUTS: Can Doctrine or Weaponry Remedy the Mutual Hostage Relationship of the Superpowers," in Charles W. Keegly Jr. and Eugene Wittkopf Eds, *The Nuclear Reader: Strategy, Weapons, War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ Harvard Nuclear Study Group, *Living With Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Bantam, 1983), p. 34.