

relationship between weapons and politics (war), and the implications of conceptualizing the Treaty as *the*, or *a* cornerstone. The key problems relative to both factors is the underlying assumption of a linear process that is difficult to sustain, and the assumed interdependence among the political situation concerning the likelihood of war, the existence of the inter-related bilateral and multilateral arms control/non-proliferation process, and the prospects for disarmament.

As a result, applied in its traditional *cloak*, or re-conceptualized, strategic stability remains problematic for one basic reason. It represents the triumph of technology (weapons) over politics. This is not to suggest that technology should be ignored. Rather, a concentration on the independent impact of technology on politics is only of limited value: primarily as one indicator of the state of political relations. Moreover, recognizing its limited value relative to the significant value placed upon it by many provides insight into another element of the relationship between technology and politics: the manipulation of value attached to managing the relationship (arms control) as a political weapon. It is here, in fact, that the real problem lies.

The Origins and Traditional Meaning of Strategic Stability

The traditional meaning of strategic stability emerges during the 1960s from separate sub-fields of academic research: general international relations theory (stability), and the new sub-field of strategic studies (strategic). The concept of stability surfaces during the 1950s. Drawn from general systems theory, stability is related to the notion of a system in equilibrium. The stability of a system is determined the system's response to a shock or disturbance, that contains the potential to transform the system, and/or create a new equilibrium (or resting point). The shock, or disturbance, by definition, moves the system away from its equilibrium point. A system capable of absorbing the disturbance, and returning to its equilibrium is considered a stable system. Alternatively, a system that is unable to return to its original equilibrium is considered an unstable system. In both senses, the stability of any system is in effect a prediction about how it will probably respond to a disturbance. Most importantly, one should not make a preferred value judgement about stability or instability, even though stability is implicitly perceived as positive or good, and instability as negative or bad. If one prefers the existing status quo, a stable system is valued. If one seeks to change the status quo, then an unstable system is preferred, assuming of course that the result of a disturbance will produce the preferred new status quo, or equilibrium; a key point to recall in assessing the two perspectives on strategic stability as well.

In classical balance of power theory, the status quo is defined as the existence of the system of sovereign states. Shocks to the system are understood as events, actions, or actors, which threaten the existence of this system. In this sense, events, actions, or actors revolve around two inter-related considerations relative to the European state system of the past. The first is the relationship between territory and power. The more territory a state acquired, the more powerful it was, and the more it threatened the existence of other sovereign states. The second is war, which has two elements. War can be understood as the means to obtain territory, eliminate sovereign states, and ultimately transform the system from anarchy to hierarchy – a universal empire. Thus, war is a disturbance. However, war is also the means used by states to prevent the likelihood of transformation. In this case, war is a mechanism applied to return to equilibrium. The important point is to recognize the dual nature of war, as one type of shock to the system, and as the means applied to return the system to its equilibrium– the *status quo ante bellum*. Naturally, balance of power theory in relation to stability entails many more elements and nuanced relationships. Nonetheless, it does highlight the original understanding of the concept of stability.