

## STRATEGIC STABILITY RECONSIDERED

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The emergence of the concept of strategic stability from the post-Cold War shadows is a function of one issue – the potential threat that US ballistic missile defence (BMD) plans pose to the future of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, as amended by the 1974 Protocol. Specifically, the US plans to develop and deploy a limited layered ballistic missile defence capability for the defence of the United States, and by default Canada as well. Although the architecture of the system remains unspecified, it is clear that there will be a ground component (likely deployed in Alaska) that will violate Article One, Paragraph Two, which prohibits an ABM system capable of defending the entire nation. It will also violate Article One of the Protocol, which restricts deployment of an ABM system to either the defence of the national capital, or an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) field. In addition, the likely integration of naval-based BMD systems, as well as the US Air Forces Airborne Laser, will violate Article V of the Treaty.

According to many critics of BMD, the threat to the future of the ABM Treaty is a threat to strategic stability. The Treaty is identified as either *the*, or *a cornerstone* of strategic stability, and strategic stability is understood or operationalized in two inter-related ways. First, it is understood in terms of the threatened Russian and Chinese response to increase significantly the size and capability of their respective strategic nuclear forces. Such a response is seen as generating a new arms race. Second, their response will also mean the end of the process of negotiated strategic force reductions, the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). With the collapse of START, the prospects for expanding negotiations to include eventually China, as well as the other nuclear powers will disappear. These two inter-related outcomes are subsequently drawn together to raise the spectre of the collapse of the entire arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation edifice. Hence, the collapse of ABM will produce strategic instability implicitly defined as a condition of deteriorating political relations among three of the nuclear powers, in which nuclear arsenals will grow, vertically and horizontally, in the absence of a mutually reinforcing legal bilateral and multilateral regime capable of checking or managing these, as well as other weapons.

While the polemics associated with this conceptualization of strategic stability are interesting in their own right, this current implicit understanding of the concept is significantly different from its original conceptualization during the Cold War. This raises two distinct perspectives for today and the foreseeable future. The first is the case for rejecting strategic stability as traditionally understood as a useful concept. The key political condition that informed its meaning and utility no longer exists. Instead, the key question from this perspective is whether missile defence deployment will automatically create strategic instability when, or if, the political condition appears. In other words, strategic stability may have no relevance for today and the immediate future, but developments today and in the immediate future could create instability in the future. In this sense, the threat to the ABM Treaty is a threat to the future, not the present. However, as a threat to the future, it implies that the traditional interpretation of the relationship between missile defence and strategic stability was useful, and that the political and technological situation of the future remains no different from the present and the past.

The second perspective is the argument for re-defining strategic stability to update its meaning and utility for the current strategic environment. This argument, as noted above, is evident in the predictions concerning international security, if or when, the United States withdraws from the Treaty. Assessing this perspective hinges significantly on two factors: the longstanding debate about the