

spoke of in terms of one deployment criterion for SDI; the offense-defence cost ratio. If the cost of a unit of defence was significantly greater than the cost of a unit of offence to defeat the defence, then investments in defence made no sense. The inverse also holds true as well, and it is this calculation which must be considered in assessing the counter-proliferation utility of missile defences.

Furthermore, an increase in strategic forces in response to a nation-wide US missile defence does not necessarily result in an arms race. One side may act in response to the deployment by increasing its strategic forces, but it does not follow necessarily that the nation deploying missile defences will respond in kind. A nation-wide defence in serving to defend simultaneously cities and land-based strategic forces may be sufficient to negate such a response. If the defence is reasonably capable, a nation can be confident of its ability to retaliate without expanding its strategic forces.

In addition, missile defences if possessed by both parties may be stabilizing and negate requirements to expand strategic forces. If both can effectively defend their retaliatory capabilities against a first strike, neither possesses an incentive to go first, or an incentive to respond to the opponent's missile defence by increasing strategic forces. In fact, one can argue that the Cold War evidence provides support to this argument.

The problem for the relationship between missile defence and strategic stability is a process one. Like one of the arguments associated with deterrence and proliferation, the problem is extensive missile defences for one party in an adversarial relationship, and no defences for the other. If both develop and deploy defences at roughly the same time and with roughly the same capability and coverage, then they become stabilizing and may readily generate less, rather than more strategic offensive forces. In other words, an alternative response to missile defence is missile defence. Problematic, as reflected in Nitze's criterion, is relative cost. States such as Russia and China lack the resources, regardless of their technological capacity, to develop defences as cheaply as offenses largely because the sunk investment costs of offensive ballistic missile and nuclear weapons development have already been absorbed, and thus aren't counted. Once the sunk costs of missile defence development are absorbed, and the technology diffuses internationally, defence may prove cheaper than offense.

If effect, missile defence does not necessarily mean that the only option in response is to expand one's strategic forces. Not only is a defence response possible, but others exist as well, which also serve strategic stability functions. First, as noted above, any response depends upon the nature of the defence. As many observers suggest, current US missile defence plans would be insufficient against not only the existing Russian strategic arsenal, but also a much smaller arsenal, especially in light of Russian penetration aids technology, even without rejecting the START restrictions on multiple warheads. Second, strategic stability can be ensured in the Russian-US and US-China relationship simply as a function of distance. With approximately a thirty to thirty five minute ICBM flight time in the case of the former, adequate early warning ensures that Russia and the US could release their strategic forces in a coordinated manner in response to the launch of a counter-force first strike, even without adopting a launch on warning posture (this would be a launch under attack posture). In this case, US-Russian cooperation on joint early warning is an important stabilizer for the future, and extending the offer to China would also be stabilizing. Third, alternative strategic postures could be adopted. For example, SSBNs could be forward deployed off American coast lines enabling them to launch underneath the missile defence umbrella, although this option carries its own implications for strategic stability.

In effect, the answer as to whether deployed missile defences in the near future will automatically generate strategic instability in the distant future when the political conditions exist is ambiguous. Moreover, whether the answer lies in expanded strategic arsenals, or the proliferation of defences is also