

be more destabilizing than considerable vertical proliferation by China. None of the authors see any prospect for total abolition of nuclear weapons (Harvey).

All four of the essays make frequent references to the question of ballistic missile defence, especially as regards the American plan for National Missile Defence (NMD).

The US insists that its NMD is intended only to maintain unilateral deterrence of aspiring nuclear powers, or for protection from an unauthorized or accidental launch from anywhere, and will not be capable of negating the deterrents of Russia or China. This contention is supported by the virtual impossibility of constructing a huge defence system with an effectiveness so high as to be able to intercept *nearly 100% of a large number of missiles*. But Russia and China are worried, understandably, that once established the American system could be quickly expanded.

However, Legault considers that the US would be content to see the Chinese offensive capability enlarged enough to compensate for a limited American defensive deployment. Fergusson suggests that NMD will enhance crisis stability, reducing the incentive to launch the retaliatory force on the basis of a false alarm. Harvey believes that missile defence could establish a new type of stable deterrence by bringing about a new balance between offence and defence. Thus, although critics of the NMD plan see it as the trigger for proliferation of offensive arsenals, it could have the opposite effect.

The destructive power of nuclear weapons is such that a small state possessing only a very few of them would be able to inflict terrible losses on the United States. In keeping with the established theory of deterrence, the USA could retaliate for an attack (or pre-empt against an anticipated attack) with utter destruction of the aggressor's country. Nevertheless, the possibility can be imagined where the "state of concern" might attempt to use the threat of nuclear attack (whether rational or irrational by Western standards) to influence US policy. A possibility could be to deter US intervention in some situation far from American shores, which held minor significance for American vital interests. Or, instead of a "state of concern" the threat could come from a dispersed sub-national conspiracy under ruthless leadership, such as al-Qaeda, which would not offer a suitable target for retaliation.

To counter the threat from a state possessing only a very small number of nuclear-armed ICBMs the US would require an NMD which provided nearly 100% probability of being able to intercept every one of the missiles aimed at American territory. This capability *against a small attack* may well be technologically achievable at some time in the mid-term future, albeit not without a long period of research, development, trial, error, and modification. And once deployment is undertaken there will be a very heavy cost.

Harvey and Fergusson consider that this investment is justifiable, and are convinced that it will be made in the near future. Legault and Rauf seem less impressed, but expect that some form of NMD is going to be deployed.

A concern evident in all four essays is about the unilateralist approach towards foreign policy displayed in the first few months of the new Bush administration. There have been encouraging signs of a more multilateral tendency, stimulated in September by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Nevertheless, the US had not shown much enthusiasm for strengthening or even maintaining the multilateral arms control institutions and treaties which have done so much to contain proliferation and build confidence.