

In general, throughout the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union cooperated in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to additional countries. However, these efforts did not prevent the United Kingdom, France and China from acquiring nuclear arms. On the other hand, this cooperation led to the conclusion of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, both to reduce the likelihood of nuclear war by limiting the centres of nuclear weapon decision-making and to provide a basis for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, thus contributing to the maintenance of bipolarity and its concomitant stability resting on assured destruction.

None of the three lesser declared NWS had the capacity or wherewithal to compete with or to threaten the two nuclear behemoths. As a result, their nuclear capabilities did not feature in the discussion on strategic stability and nuclear arms control between the two nuclear superpowers. Yet, both made allowances in their respective targeting plans and warhead inventory requirements to factor in targets in these lesser nuclear weapon states.

In the early 1960s, a study in the US had predicted the emergence of up to 25 nuclear armed states by the end of that decade. The extension of security guarantees, underpinned by nuclear forces, led to several advanced industrial states with active nuclear programmes to eschew nuclear weapons. Others renounced nuclear weapon ambitions under the NPT in return for access to safeguarded peaceful nuclear technology and commitments by the NWS to nuclear disarmament. Political expediencies of the Cold War led the US and the Soviet Union to tolerate undeclared nuclear weapon programmes in India, Israel and South Africa. However, these capabilities did not impact upon the nuclear powers and their calculus of strategic stability.

With the end of the Cold War nuclear standoff, attention in the US in particular turned to warning about the dangers of nuclear and WMD proliferation in the Third World. The threat to stability once posed by the USSR was then attributed to "states of concern" or so-called "rogue" states - Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Syria and Sudan. US threat assessments regularly characterized the threats posed by such "undeterrable" states to its expeditionary forces and allies, and even to its own homeland in the longer run.⁵⁴ Uncertainty, WMD and missile proliferation, and undeterrable states were and are posited by the US as threats to continuing strategic stability, requiring sustained high defence spending, missile defences and even new low-yield nuclear weapons.

In May 1998, India brusquely challenged the global nuclear non-proliferation norm and conducted a series of weapon tests followed by a declaration of its NWS status. Pakistan followed suit in short measure. These events, however, did not impact directly on existing strategic stability but further development, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons by these states could have an influence on strategic stability, particularly if China decides to undertake countervailing steps.

Post-Cold War Strategic Stability

As noted previously, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the traditional understanding of strategic stability based on crisis stability, first strike stability, and arms race stability has evolved to acquire new characteristics. At the same time, given sustained pessimistic intelligence estimates propounded by the US citing emerging threats of WMD and ballistic missile terrorism, the initial post-Cold War euphoria of achieving a new stable international system with reduced

⁵⁴ See Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Proliferation Threat and Response* (January 2001).