

stability provides little utility in answering this question, because it is really about the level of strategic forces necessary to practice deterrence in the future. In other words, what level of forces in being provided insurance for unforeseen circumstances which create the political situation in which deterrence and strategic stability come into play.

The answer requires one to image the actors, issues, and situations that could lead to a hostile adversarial relationship. It is important to remember that the Cold War condition was not simply a function of two Great (or Super) Powers possessing fundamentally opposed global ideologies. It was also the existence of specific location, the inter-German border and Berlin, in which one could and did image war breaking out. Stability in every sense of its Cold War meaning was informed by this image. Today, however, it is difficult to image the political conditions in which the probability of war would be high between the US and the other major nuclear powers. With the withdrawal of Russia from Central/Eastern Europe, it is extremely difficult to image where the war would break out. Similarly, it is also difficult to image where war would break out between China and the United States, with the noted exception of Taiwan.

The cases of Russia and China are illustrative of the key stability issue. If one is concerned about stability, defined as a low probability of war between or among nuclear powers, the key issue is diplomatic; understanding what political actions could bring the powers into a direct clash of interests at a specific territorial point. With regard to Russia, NATO enlargement is a case in point. By bringing the alliance to the borders of Russia, one is creating a territorial point for war. In so doing, assuming relations between Moscow and the West become increasingly hostile, strategic stability starts to come into play. Similarly, a decision by Taiwan to seek recognition as an independent, sovereign state supported fully by the US would create the political and territorial context for war, and thus strategic stability would become relevant again.

The prescription is simply to focus upon political or diplomatic stability, so as to avoid creating the conditions in which strategic stability comes into play. This brings one key consideration into play with regard to the implications of missile defence for strategic stability as traditionally understood; the impact of missile defences on a relationship that becomes politically unstable for whatever reason. The answer is twofold. First, it depends upon the missile defence system. Second, it assumes that strategic stability as understood during the Cold War was an overly useful concept.

As noted above, missile defences are not de-stabilizing by definition. In some cases, such as defending strategic forces and command and control centre(s), they serve to stabilize a strategic relationship. Moreover, theater missile defence systems, unless possessed by the US and employed in a strategic role (i.e. boost-phase and/or early mid-course phase from forward-deployed naval or air assets), also appear not to be de-stabilizing, even though a theater missile defence for Israel and Europe, for example, has a strategic function. Regardless, defending one's strategic forces and its command and control centre(s) ensure that an adversary will not escape a devastating retaliatory attack. Moreover, a nation-wide layered defence, à la some SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) visions, is also not necessarily de-stabilizing, as long as the adversary in the mutual deterrence relationship responds in a manner that maintains its ability to retaliate. In other words, the strategic equilibrium point (mutual vulnerability) receives a shock (large-scale missile defences), and the system responds to return back to its equilibrium. The response is the expansion of an adversary's strategic forces, thus creating a so-called arms race.

However, an arms race in this context is not a negative phenomenon, but rather a positive one. The response returns the system to strategic equilibrium. While one may envision a never-ending action-reaction process, there are naturally constraints or limits on both. It is these constraints that Paul Nitze