

Deterrence, Intervention, and Weapons of Mass Destruction

William Miller

Although globalization may enhance stability in certain key ways, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) threatens to damage it. The United States will need new strategy precepts because the old nuclear doctrines of the Cold War—for example, deterrence, mutual assured destruction, flexible response, and controlled escalation—may no longer apply. Today’s aggressors may not be as restrained as the Soviet Union was during the Cold War, but they will not be as powerful. A world of nuclear plenty does not mean that the United States will be stripped of its capacity to deter aggression or to intervene forcefully in crises where its interests are at stake. It does mean, however, that the United States will need to develop new military doctrines aimed at employing forces wisely in reaction to the political situations at hand in peace, crisis, and war.

Emerging Trends toward WMD Proliferation

The Nonproliferation Treaty and other arms control accords provide important bulwarks against WMD proliferation. Yet recent trends suggest that proliferation is now gaining momentum. The governments of India, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and other countries are trying to create nuclear arsenals and effective delivery systems. What does this trend mean in strategic terms? Will it be greatly destabilizing or not? How will U.S. strategy be affected?

Answering these questions requires understanding how globalization helps create today’s setting for WMD proliferation. In the 1970s, the United States and its key allies took steps to allow flexible currency exchange rates and to promote increased flows of capital, trade, and investment across national boundaries. At the same time, information technology took giant steps forward. This combination was the underpinning of economic globalization. The important implication is that globalization began in the very midst of the Cold War. Although a large part of the world was not participating in this process, Western countries were opening their economies to one another, strengthening the nucleus of today’s political and economic community of democracies.

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This experience might suggest that peace is not a necessary condition for the progress associated with globalization. Stability and security, however, are essential. Despite the severe tensions of the Cold War, the international environment was characterized by stability in the sense that it was mostly peaceful and did not constantly threaten the outbreak of war. It was in this environment that democracy and capitalism could succeed, relatively unmolested, within those countries that constituted the "West" (including Japan). The Western democracies first created strong security ties to protect themselves from communist aggression. Only by doing so were they able to start growing together politically and economically.

Cold War era stability stemmed from two factors in addition to the Western alliance system: the bipolar international system, which allowed the two superpowers to manage their political conflict peacefully, and nuclear weapons, which provided them with a strong incentive to do so. Within this context, the United States and the Soviet Union shared a common interest in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other parties. Because most countries fell within one of the two competing blocs, superpower military aid and implied direct involvement in crises dampened the pursuit of indigenous nuclear postures on the part of client states. Extended deterrence enabled both the United States and the Soviet Union to stabilize the superpower conflict and thereby lessen the likelihood of war through miscalculation. Limited wars occurred, but they were conventional, not nuclear, and the involvement of the superpowers was carefully orchestrated.

Some nuclear proliferation, nonetheless, did occur during the Cold War. To a degree, the entry of additional states into the nuclear club adversely affected the stability of the bipolar conflict, but not in catastrophic ways. In 1960, France developed its own nuclear capability and a few years later opted out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Integrated Military Command. In the mid-1960s, China detonated first an atomic bomb and then a hydrogen bomb. By the end of that decade, the Sino-Soviet bloc had split asunder. Both instances of nuclear proliferation thus reshuffled the strategic deck between the superpowers, providing them with opportunities and hazards.

For the United States, the effects were complex. French possession of nuclear weapons increased the likelihood that a military conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact would escalate. On the other hand, by extending diplomatic recognition to China, the United States opened a new front against the Soviet Union. This step obligated the Soviets to divert both conventional and strategic forces to face this new threat, lessening their ability to launch a concerted attack against Western Europe. In neither the French nor the Chinese case did the acquisition of nuclear weapons originate the tensions that developed between these countries and their respective superpower patrons. Instead, nuclear weapons allowed both France and China to wriggle out from underneath the dominance of the superpowers. Nuclear weapons served as enablers, allowing these two previously junior partners to strike out in pursuit of their own strategic interests. However, this limited proliferation did not fundamentally transform international politics.

In today's setting, WMD proliferation is likely to have similarly complicated effects. The scope of globalization continues to expand, but this is an ongoing, uneven,

and erratic process. Governments representing a large part of the world's population have slowly turned away from autarky and protectionism to engage in the global economy as economic partners of the West. Their national priorities have shifted, with economic well-being now ranking along with physical security as the primary national concern. Other countries are actively resisting the norms embraced by the nations of the more globalized West. Some are seeking WMD systems in order to buttress their strategic fortunes rather than relying on globalization to do so.

The evolution of national autonomy is similarly uneven. While the Western democracies may be undergoing a process of "denationalization,"¹ in which countries are trading their sovereignty for collective endeavors, within other regions the state symbolizes hard-won independence from colonial powers. Now that the state has finally evolved into a cohesive unit, with distinct interests and ambitions, its leaders are not about to trade in that independence for subjugation to rules devised by wealthy Western countries.

For the industrialized democracies, the shift in priorities to commercial gain has resulted in the easing of export controls, including those over high-technology products. The Cold War restrictions associated with the Coordinating Committee on Multilateral Export Controls, in which one country could veto the export of certain goods and technologies, have been replaced by the much looser Wassenaar Arrangement, which merely suggests guidelines. Accordingly, world markets are becoming buyer's markets, where countries are often eager to export materials, equipment, services, and technology that can be employed to develop nuclear weapons. No longer do countries that seek to acquire nuclear weapons have to rely solely on national industries and scientific establishments, or the aid of friendly nuclear powers, to provide the necessary technology. Lowering economic barriers and accelerating transactions allow information and expertise to flow more freely across national borders. Moreover, highly technical information is available on the Web. This more open environment enables countries to develop nuclear weaponry that would have been impossible for them to create indigenously.

Iraq's near-development of nuclear weapons demonstrates the ability of resourceful countries to tap into Western technology to aid in the development of their nuclear weapons programs. Material and equipment purchased from companies based in Austria, Finland, Germany, Britain, and Switzerland were instrumental in allowing Iraq to create its nuclear weapons infrastructure. Perhaps some deals went through in which the Western exporters knew full well the ultimate purpose of these items. In other instances, however, Iraq went through the effort of setting up numerous front companies to deflect suspicion and to facilitate technology imports. Iraqi deception was at least partially successful because the majority of technology and equipment purchased fell within the category of legitimate dual-use goods and technologies (those with the potential for both a civilian and a military application). If not sold by one company, they could be bought from another. The Iraqi experience suggests that as these technologies diffuse and as the competition for contracts increases in the global economy, export controls are likely to be harder to enforce and easier to contravene.

Within the West, economic incentive is a primary accomplice in permitting the spread of dual-use technologies. For other countries, the motives are more mixed.

Revenue remains a definite factor. In addition, countries may spread this technology in order to receive services in kind or for reasons of geopolitics (for example, to send political signals of dissatisfaction or merely to play the role of spoiler). Whereas the Iraqi nuclear program depended largely on technology and equipment bought from the West, the Iranian program draws from this second category of countries. Iran's WMD program began when it received short-range Scud missile systems from Syria and Libya. It extended the range of its missile forces with technology purchased from North Korea. Purchase of missile technology from Russia extended the range of Iranian systems even further, and Russia continues to provide technical assistance in the construction of the Bushehr nuclear plant. In a sense, the Iran example helps illustrate how proliferation is becoming a classic case of the free rider problem. Largely unconcerned with the ramifications of nuclear weapons outside their regions, some states will have less incentive to cooperate in nonproliferation efforts when, through providing technology and hardware, they may gain an edge in the global marketplace or further their own parochial interests.

Globalization exacerbates WMD proliferation and its consequences in other ways as well. With nuclear technologies becoming increasingly available, the effect of a single country's acquisition of nuclear weapons is likely to reverberate throughout the international system. The increase in range of North Korean ballistic missiles has served as a primary motivator for the United States to develop a national missile defense (NMD) system. As deployment nears, this prospect has created antagonism between the United States and Russia because the planned NMD system could violate the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Significantly, the country that has been most vocal in its opposition to the U.S. NMD system is China, which fears that its smaller nuclear arsenal may be counteracted and that it will thereby lose its deterrent capability against the United States. Similar systemic effects of accelerating nuclear proliferation are in evidence among China, India, and Pakistan, as well as Israel, Iraq, and Iran. In the Cold War bipolar system, the escalation and de-escalation of tensions often was the result of conscious actions made for reasons of state policy. Because the number of variables is increasing in today's setting, the international equation is becoming more complex and difficult to understand and influence. Indeed, actions taken to address one set of circumstances are having unforeseen and unpredictable ramifications in other settings.

Globalization is also stimulating proliferation as nuclear powers try to enlarge and upgrade their existing arsenals. As technology becomes increasingly available, countries with rudimentary nuclear arsenals will seek to increase the capabilities of their nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Encouraging Chinese involvement within the global economy is often viewed as a means of exposing China to democratic norms of behavior and bolstering democratic forces within that country. At the same time, Chinese business arrangements with Western companies may have improved Chinese military capability, including its long-range missile systems. Meanwhile, China's impressive economic growth and burgeoning technological development—both the result of involvement within the global economy—are broadening the scope of its regional political ambition and influence.

China has recently enhanced its nuclear capabilities by deploying the DF-31 intercontinental missile and by developing MIRVed warheads. One probable motivation for these actions is to deter the United States from involvement within China's expanded sphere of influence in Asia. In response, Taiwan, concerned about the weakening of implied U.S. security guarantees, is feeling a greater need for its own deterrent capability. As in the case of China, Taiwan's involvement in the world economy provides it with access to the technology needed to obtain this deterrent if it chooses to do so. Japan and other non-nuclear Asian countries are similarly situated to join the nuclear club, if they choose to do so.

If nuclear weapons were a key stabilizing element in the Cold War, why should nuclear proliferation be destabilizing now? A small but respected group of academics argues that the spread of nuclear weapons may be, on the whole, a positive phenomenon. This "more may be better" school holds that because the costs of total war between nuclear powers will exceed any possible gains, states will have no motivation for waging war. Because all states allegedly will be mutually deterred, Kenneth Waltz says, "the probability of major war among states having nuclear weapons approaches zero."²

Three points will suffice to rebut this thesis. First, the "more may be better" argument relies on a logic of nuclear deterrence in which the costs of actually using nuclear weapons are intuitively understood and commonly appreciated. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union shared this perspective. Whether the leaders of other countries will see things in similar terms is not clear. They do not have to be insane or emotional to bring a different calculus to decisions. Iraq has employed chemical weapons against Iran, and other countries might be inclined to use such weapons as well. Second, the nuclear balance of terror during the Cold War was stable because both the United States and the Soviet Union had invulnerable second-strike postures. A future of multiple countries with vulnerable first-strike postures could be a recipe for great instability. Third, even if nuclear deterrence does impose stability on the international environment, the nature of that stability may be opposed to U.S. national interests. Any stability achieved through the proliferation of nuclear weapons would not be one that results from mutual trust and interdependence, but instead from suspicion. Such an environment will not be conducive to prospects for future peace and community-building.

Such a world promises increased difficulties for the United States in carrying out its superpower roles in security affairs and economics. The current global economy has largely been constructed under U.S. auspices. A large measure of the innovation, capital, and leadership that promotes increased world interconnectedness is American in origin. The development and enforcement of international norms of behavior, as well as standard trading practices, reflects American (and European) initiative. The United States is not only the primary country supporting globalization but also its ultimate guarantor. Unrivaled in its ability to project power, the sophistication of its military forces, and the depth of its financial resources, the United States has been acting to ensure that the process of globalization continues unimpeded. The risk is that the U.S. capacity to continue performing this role will erode if WMD prolifera-

tion accelerates, especially if it produces countries willing to employ these weapons, either directly or indirectly, as instruments of statecraft.

The ability of the United States to act forcefully is partly a product of today's favorable strategic conditions. In the last decade, the United States has intervened in at least three crises that could have stunted globalization. In 1991, the United States expelled Iraq from Kuwait, thereby ensuring the free flow of oil that powers the global economy. In 1999, the United States led NATO in an air campaign against Serbia in order to preserve stability in the Balkans and Europe. Along with both of these events, but often overlooked, was the U.S. intervention in the Taiwan Straits in 1995. Although not a full-fledged crisis, the event was serious enough. China launched missiles that landed in the vicinity of Taiwan in an attempt to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate away from pro-independence candidates. In response, the United States moved 7th Fleet forces toward the Straits. Had the United States not intervened, China likely would not have invaded, but nonaction would have encouraged China to continue pressuring the Taiwanese overtly.

During this period of tension with China, the United States demonstrated resolve, but it did not employ force. Had China launched missiles against Taiwan, U.S. policymakers would have been faced with two unpalatable options: respond with force against the People's Republic of China and accept the possibility of Chinese retaliation against U.S. territory, or stand idly by. The proliferation of nuclear weapons will likely make such political conundrums more commonplace. The question among many countries will be whether the United States will be willing in such situations to intervene and to enforce international norms of behavior.

Other things being equal, if the United States does not continue performing this role, aggressive states could be encouraged to establish spheres of influence, as did the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The existence of two or three such spheres would damage the freedom of trade and ideas because suspicious regional powers likely would persuade or coerce weaker neighbors from cooperating with the democratic community. Bandwagoning behavior on the part of weak states could result in the formation of hostile, WMD-armed regional blocs. Suspicion, not cooperation and peaceful competition, would become the main characteristic of state-to-state relations. Globalization would be replaced by unstable regionalization.

Globalization has yet to reveal its full consequences. Likewise, WMD proliferation has yet to show its full colors. But there is already plenty to worry about even if WMD proliferation does not result in such a damaging outcome. The irony is that WMD proliferation is being stimulated by globalization's negative effects in ways that could undermine its positive effects.

Strategic Consequences for the United States

If WMD proliferation accelerates, the emerging challenge for the United States will be to remain involved and to shape international events in the tense setting of a world of nuclear plenty. Most likely, the United States will soon face an increasing number of nuclear powers of varying capability and with differing strategic intentions. It will need to devise an appropriate response. Current U.S. nuclear strategy

remains grounded in concepts stemming from the Cold War. During this period, the focus of U.S. nuclear strategy was on a single power. The Soviet Union, although hostile, was conservative in its actions and politically stable. In addition, its nuclear capability was comparable to that of the United States. The strategic environment was characterized by duality, stability, and equality. The future portends a radically different environment in which these characteristics are replaced by their opposites. The consequence will be to increase pressures on the United States to change its nuclear doctrines in appropriate ways.

Multiplicity, Instability, and Inequality

Proliferation likely will result in many non-nuclear friends and allies seeking protective shelter in the form of U.S. security guarantees aimed at warding off the threat or use of weapons of mass destruction against them. Indeed, this trend is already emerging in Asia and the Middle East. In both regions, the United States is discussing future goals and priorities with key partners. In Asia, discussions about theater missile defense and other options are under way with such key countries as Japan and South Korea. In the Middle East, the United States is pursuing a Cooperative Defense Initiative with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Jordan, and Egypt. What these efforts ultimately will produce remains to be seen. What can be said is that the act of providing extended deterrence coverage over NATO and Europe in the Cold War was one thing; creating it in new places, especially in zones where the peacetime stationing of large numbers of U.S. forces is not a politically feasible option, may be a different thing entirely. Whereas providing such coverage will further entangle the United States in the security affairs of turbulent regions, failure to do so could leave friends and allies exposed to new dangers and create incentives for them to develop their own nuclear arsenal or make political accommodations with adversaries. Dealing with these tradeoffs and making appropriate decisions will be among the most important challenges facing U.S. defense strategy in the coming years.

Dealing with nuclear-armed powers will be equally challenging. The relationship with a nuclear ally that has posed the least difficulty and most benefit for the United States has been its relationship with Great Britain. During the Cold War, U.S. and British nuclear policies were closely linked. Both countries shared the same risk perceptions, and the hierarchy of the partnership was fully understood: the United States led, Britain followed. The U.S.-British alliance therefore strengthened deterrence without heightening risk as a result of autonomous British actions. In the future, however, the U.S.-British relationship is likely to be the exception. The U.S. experience with France is more likely to be the norm. In such an often stressful relationship, there exist both benefits and risks. By acquiring nuclear weapons, U.S. allies will become more capable of shouldering their own security burdens. Yet these same weapons may embolden them to take autonomous action adverse to U.S. interests, thus increasing the likelihood that the United States will become involved in a nuclear crisis not of its own making.

Israel's alleged possession of nuclear weapons has lessened the likelihood of its being attacked by its Arab neighbors and thereby has helped stabilize Arab-Israeli conflict. The same beneficial side effects could be predicted for Taiwan or South Korea,

with regard to China and North Korea, respectively. Yet in these cases, were a nuclear-armed ally to become involved in conflict with another nuclear power, the United States would become linked to a conflict over which it might have little direct control. Whereas the proliferation of nuclear weapons on the part of an ally could provide short-term and localized benefits, the potential consequences posed to U.S. interests could be damaging in broad ways over the long haul.

Nuclear-armed states that have neutral relations with the United States and, by implication, do not threaten its allies pose the least immediate menace. India and Pakistan are two examples; U.S. involvement in the India-Pakistan conflict is limited, and the United States may even serve as a neutral arbitrator between them. India and China are a second pair where the United States is unlikely to suffer directly from a conflict. Yet the interaction of such countries can have ripple effects elsewhere, often engaging U.S. interests more directly.

Last are those countries that will possess nuclear weapons and that are openly hostile to the United States. The candidates at the top of the list include Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. These states either threaten U.S. allies or are in direct opposition to U.S. interests. Yet hostility toward Washington is not necessarily their sole or even main motive. A number of such countries have security concerns only tangentially related to the United States. Their situations also are transitory. Iran's potential nuclear capability will remain a concern but will not be regarded as a direct threat if Tehran achieves reconciliation with its neighbors, particularly Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Similarly, North Korea may not survive as a state beyond this decade. If North Korea is peaceably incorporated with South Korea, the threat of war on the Korean Peninsula will disappear. Yet the United States and its friends and allies in Asia will still face strategic dilemmas because a unified Korea might well possess nuclear weapons.

The nature of the nuclear postures acquired by countries gaining nuclear capabilities will help determine the strategic consequences. States that possess both stable political situations and secure second-strike capabilities may be expected to act according to the logic of mutual deterrence. By contrast, states with a small number of relatively vulnerable systems are more likely to fear a preemptive strike. During periods of conflict, they may be tempted to employ their weapons on a first-use basis rather than risk their being destroyed—especially if they can hope to disarm their opponents before they themselves are disarmed. Any country in confrontation with such a nuclear power would have to exercise extreme caution when employing military force. In addition, states with only a rudimentary nuclear capability are unlikely to have either adequate command and control capabilities or nuclear safeguards built into their nuclear infrastructure. Coupled with political instability, this situation increases the likelihood of both accidental launch and autonomous actions, such as renegade military units or terrorist organizations gaining possession of these weapons and using them.

In today's environment, actions taken by one state may have unintended consequences that reverberate across the international system. A great risk is that WMD proliferation will be contagious, producing an action-reaction cycle that motivates other countries to acquire these weapons and delivery systems. The calculus of deter-

rence will be less dependable because not all of these states will be politically stable. The smallest and least sophisticated may well be the most dangerous. This prospect calls for new thinking about how nuclear weapons are to be used in peace and war.

Nuclear Principles in the Globalization Era: Old and New

U.S. strategy and doctrine will need to remain flexible and adaptive because the strategic situation probably will vary considerably from one region to another. Most likely no single doctrinal formula will apply equally everywhere. Yet some common themes stand out in ways that will help create a similar framework for forging strategy and doctrine in each place.

While a number of countries will possess the WMD assets to inflict huge damage on their neighbors and elsewhere, the very act of owning these assets will make them natural lightning rods for countervailing actions, including devastating U.S. nuclear strikes if necessary. As a result, deterrence may not work in the straightforward psychological ways of the Cold War, although in new and cruder ways, it may still work all the same. The key point is not that the logic of deterrence will no longer apply, but that new and different ways may need to be found to make it work again in a manner that responds to the local politics and strategic affairs of each region.

Another dampening factor is that, in many cases, the proliferation of nuclear weapons will impose tighter upward limits on the intensity and ultimate objectives of conventional warfare. In a conventional conflict between two nuclear-armed states, military forces will be constrained from intensively targeting either civilian areas or nuclear infrastructures of the opponent. Fear of nuclear retaliation may also prohibit a country whose military forces are victorious on the battlefield from forcibly changing the regime of a vanquished nuclear-armed state. Removing a hostile regime from power by force of arms, as was done by the United States with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, could become a thing of the past in dealing with nuclear-armed states. A foretaste of these new restrictions has already been experienced during the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War. Clearly, one of the considerations involved in not occupying Baghdad and ousting Saddam Hussein was fear that chemical weapons would be launched against Israel, Saudi Arabia, or U.S. forces in the region. This upward ceiling on warfare may mean that many conflicts between states likely will not be resolved but will instead have to be managed. In political ways, such management will assuredly include violence, albeit strictly controlled. So, while nuclear proliferation could trigger escalation in some cases, its main effect might be to help limit wars in other cases.

Even so, the proliferation of WMD systems may give rise to a growing number of acts of aggression by countries possessing these weapons—not necessarily nuclear attacks, but a wide spectrum of actions ranging from peacetime bullying to conventional aggression. As was true in the Cold War, the ceiling imposed on conflict by nuclear weapons may tempt countries to run the risk of trying to pursue limited objectives, reassured by the logic that the United States will view small incursions as not worth the danger of unleashing nuclear devastation. Such logic allowed the Soviet Union to mount the Berlin blockade in 1948, China to enter the Korean War in 1950, and Egypt and Syria to attack Israel in 1973. The same phenomenon character-

ized the intensification of the Pakistani-Indian conflict over Kashmir in 1999. The dilemma for U.S. policymakers is that aggressive countries may use small, aggressive actions in order to acquire, over time, their strategic objectives. If so, no single action will cross the threshold in ways justifying a nuclear response, but taken as a whole, or even singly, all such actions could be detrimental to U.S. interests. Unable to invade and occupy the entire peninsula, for example, North Korea may be tempted to capture Seoul. Even so, the nuclear threshold—the point at which nuclear weapons actually are detonated—will likely remain high. If so, the ultimate result could be more small wars, but few, if any, nuclear attacks.

On balance, nuclear weapons will most likely remain primarily political symbols of power in peacetime and only secondarily military instruments of force in wartime. If so, nuclear strategy will retain its anchor in the nonuse of these weapons. One reason is that actually using these weapons in war will invite devastating retaliation. Moreover, most countries will probably lack the reliable delivery systems, command and control systems, and accuracy to employ these weapons for anything other than the crude targeting of cities. Using them on the battlefield will remain a difficult act. This too argues against their use, except in extremis.

In theory, mutual deterrence will extend to tomorrow's nuclear-armed countries with smaller arsenals because they will have substantial destructive power; the marginal difference between tens and hundreds of nuclear weapons is insignificant. Like the French *Force de Frappe* and China's posture, these limited nuclear arsenals assuredly will help deter outright aggression. In each case, however, such weapons must be highly reliable and attain a high level of confidence that they can be delivered to their targets. A country that possesses nuclear weapons but lacks such capability may find that its arsenal is a plausible deterrent but not a convincing instrument of coercion.

The current environment offers several examples. Scientists monitoring the 1995 Pakistani nuclear test dispute that country's claim of detonating an 18-kiloton nuclear device, instead stating that the yield may have been one-third of this level. If so, the test was a partial failure. Similarly, during a test, Iran's Shahab missile was destroyed in flight prior to impact, which suggests that the missile test was not a complete success. These weapons are still in the development phase. But the limited resources of these countries, international pressure, and bans on testing significantly reduce their ability to put these weapons and delivery systems through a rigorous series of tests to attain and demonstrate reliability. A state with such a dubious nuclear capability may still employ this capability to threaten, but if confronted, it would be wise to demur and seek compromise, lest its capability fail at a critical moment.

As for defensive systems, these may have greater utility than during the Cold War. The logic behind the ABM Treaty is firmly rooted in the Cold War standoff in which both countries shared mutual vulnerability. Any attempt to pursue defensive measures could result in offsetting offensive countermeasures or simply increase the number of weapons delivered. The result would be a continued arms race of no benefit to either side. This logic applied then, but whether it still applies today, especially in universal ways, is another matter.

With or without the deployment of an NMD system, the mutual vulnerability that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union will continue to exist in the U.S.-Russian relationship into the foreseeable future. At a certain level, it is inconsequential whether hundreds or thousands of nuclear missiles can reach their targets. The U.S.-Russian relationship may not be the norm, however. As with credibility, there is a point at which the potential damage that a country can inflict no longer has the same deterrent effect. Most future nuclear powers will be unable to rectify this situation because the cost of development and production will not allow them to produce enough weapons to ensure their ability to both overwhelm defensive systems and to inflict sufficient damage on the other state. Simply stated, a number of countries may acquire nuclear weapons and delivery systems, but these postures will remain small enough to contemplate defense against them. In such a world of nuclear power, ballistic missile defense may make sense.

Policy and Strategy Implications

During the Cold War, U.S. military doctrine for theater warfare against nuclear-armed opponents was animated by the concepts of deterrence, forward defense, and flexible response. These concepts arose largely in reaction to the NATO-Warsaw Pact standoff in Central Europe. Essentially, the United States and NATO tried to deter aggression by maintaining adequate nuclear and conventional force postures. In the event of aggression, their plan called for an initial forward defense of West Germany's exposed borders. If this did not hold, and the NATO conventional force buckled, the next step would involve crossing the nuclear threshold and gradually escalating in an effort to persuade the Soviet Union to desist rather than face total destruction. They retained the option for massive retaliation, but only as a last resort in the event that conventional defense and limited nuclear responses both failed.

In all probability, these old concepts will not be directly applicable to the regional crises of the future because the relevant political-military conditions will differ dramatically from those in Central Europe during the Cold War. Unyielding forward defense may not be as important as during the Cold War, thus lessening pressures in the United States to escalate prematurely. Instead, the United States might find itself rushing to deploy forces to distant areas in order to prevent an aggressor from consolidating gains through a surprise attack. The main task will be one of halting the aggression, building up strong U.S. and allied forces while degrading the enemy, and then launching a strong counterattack.

Efforts to create a new doctrine for a nuclear weapon-proliferating world will need to address the challenge of how to deal with such new situations, not those of the Cold War. These situations will be difficult and dangerous for reasons of their own, but perhaps not as troublesome as facing down a threat of 90 Warsaw Pact divisions armed with 5,000 nuclear weapons, and not yielding an inch of German territory. If U.S. strategy could find a sensible way to blend nuclear and conventional operations then, it likely will be able to do so again. The coming task is one of crafting a new doctrine that will allow U.S. forces to achieve their political-military goals

while not triggering a nuclear exchange, or the use of chemical and biological weapons, in the process.

U.S. military forces have already begun the process of acquiring new capabilities to meet the counterproliferation challenges ahead. Under the mantle of *Joint Vision 2010*, U.S. forces are developing a better capacity to conduct precision strikes against enemy WMD targets with cruise missiles and other smart weapons. They also are developing theater air and missile defense (TAMD) systems and other means to help protect U.S. and allied forces through dispersal, protective gear, and the like. As these measures mature, they will enhance the physical capabilities of U.S. forces. But if U.S. forces are to become fully effective, they will also need appropriate doctrines for skillfully employing their assets in crises and wars. To what degree will the existing doctrines of deploying swiftly and operating decisively, with ambitious battlefield objectives in mind, still apply? Will the goal still be to inflict total battlefield defeat on enemy forces, or will different goals, of a political nature, rise to the fore? The answers are not apparent, but the questions will need to be addressed.

The nature and variety of threats are so large that seeking to deter all of them through the threat of nuclear weapons would be unrealistic. In this world of multiple nuclear powers, moreover, the United States will not be seeking so much to deter nuclear aggression as to retain its ability to intervene once conventional aggression occurs. Often, it should be able to succeed in doing so. Whereas aggressive states may seek to change the status quo through incremental actions that remain below the U.S. nuclear threshold, the United States may resist these same actions by means that themselves remain below the nuclear threshold of the aggressor states.

Within this realm of limited conflict, the United States will possess distinct advantages. Washington will often be able to employ its leadership status as well as political and economic leverage to convince others to act according to international norms. In the event of military conflict, the United States will retain superiority in conventional forces that may be used to punish, deny, and compel states that seek to change the status quo. By maintaining superiority in this realm, the United States can reinforce deterrence, for if states understand that the United States retains both the willingness and the ability to intervene militarily in world affairs, they are less likely to engage in aggressive action, even if they possess nuclear weapons. Simply put, the United States will enjoy much more leverage than will its opponents.

Being able to react promptly to aggression is critical to its prevention. By taking sudden action, a country may seek to bypass the standard protocols of deterrence by which the United States presents the aggressor state with first a verbal warning and then a demonstration of resolve. If possible, aggressor states may seek to present the United States and the world with a *fait accompli*.

One key to avoiding such situations is timely and accurate intelligence. Because other countries do not have the capability to move large numbers of forces quickly, the United States, through its intelligence capabilities, must be able to anticipate and discern aggressive action. Potential aggressors can then be put on warning that their action will not be tolerated. If its warning is ignored, the United States can engage in an appropriate military response. Even if warned, the aggressor country may hope that the sustained buildup of U.S. forces will leave an open opportunity to grab and

keep significant gains. In this regard, the United States must have the ability to respond, if it so chooses, before and as the situation unfolds. The level of required response, of course, is variable, and could include anything from the positioning of aircraft carriers in the area of interest to standoff strikes against advancing forces.

To be able to strike the forces and infrastructure of a hostile state through the use of standoff weaponry is of undoubted utility in protecting the lives of U.S. military personnel. Often overlooked, however, is the role that standoff weaponry can play in deterrence. If a state realizes that the United States can oppose its aggressive actions at little direct cost to itself, the aggressor country can no longer calculate that the United States will hesitate before interposing U.S. forces between a hostile military force and its goals. The ability to engage a hostile state from a distance at low cost takes away an important disincentive to U.S. action.

On the battlefield, at every level of conventional escalation, a hostile power will be confronted by the superior capabilities of the U.S. military. Countries with lesser capabilities will likely be able to apply force only along a few and widely spaced rungs on the escalation ladder. An aggressor's inability to use force in carefully graduated amounts may create pressure to overshoot the objective of its escalatory response, something that it would be loathe to undertake. Therefore, as the United States maintains a high level of conventional superiority, "a sufficient asymmetry of capabilities at lower levels would ensure that an intolerable burden would be put on the side forced to raise the stakes."³ In crises, most often it will be an enemy, not the United States, facing the choice between escalation and capitulation.

While nuclear weapons clearly make enemies stronger, deployed U.S. forces would probably be less vulnerable to them than surface appearances suggest. For example, an Army division is normally spread out along a 50-mile front and in equal depth; it would take multiple accurate nuclear strikes—not just one—to cripple the division's maneuver battalions and other formations. U.S. naval forces are also hard to destroy because their ships are moving and widely dispersed. When in flight, tactical air forces are even harder to damage. Because airbases, seaports, and supply dumps are stationary and concentrated, they seem more vulnerable. But because these entities are typically located long distances behind front lines, enemy aircraft and missiles must penetrate thick air defenses to reach these targets and also require accurate data on their locations to strike effectively. As a result, an enemy must possess a fairly large nuclear inventory, effective delivery systems, and good intelligence in order to carry out a battlefield campaign against U.S. forces. Even then, their prospects would not be good. During the Cold War, many studies of nuclear war in Europe produced a key conclusion. Theater nuclear war is not a good way for an out-gunned force to compete against a more powerful force that also has nuclear weapons. It merely accelerates the ability of the stronger force to win quickly and decisively. The same conclusion likely would apply to any future adversary unfortunate enough to become locked in combat with high-technology U.S. forces.

The United States will retain freedom of action in conventional operations, so long as the intensity and objectives of U.S. military action remain below an aggressor state's nuclear threshold. Crossing such a threshold and triggering a nuclear response is not in the U.S. interest and is clearly to be avoided. For this reason, it is important

for the United States to match its methods and targets with its understanding of the other country's level of tolerance. Full-fledged invasions by hostile states will remain relatively rare, and often U.S. policy objectives will be to punish a country for a specific action or compel it to desist from some form of behavior. In such a case, the utility of immediacy and distance remains in effect. The intensity of the response will, of course, be commensurate to the aggressive action and therefore will likely remain below the aggressor state's retaliatory threshold.

In the case of major conflicts, where the possibility of nuclear retaliation must be taken into consideration, the intensity and targets of U.S. action will have to be chosen with great discrimination, for inappropriate escalation may result in a retaliatory response. This situation in no way implies that the U.S. response should be dictated by the aggressor state, but that the United States must comprehend what actions are most likely to trigger retaliation. A few common sense guidelines may be useful to remember. Attack by remote platforms (aircraft, cruise missiles, artillery), although destructive, will leave the regime of the aggressor state in possession of what remains. The regime is weakened, but its ultimate objective, retention of power, is not threatened. Advancing armies, however, are far more menacing, for they imply the destruction of the regime. A regime with a foreign army approaching the capital will have little to lose if confronted with ouster, death at the hands of its citizens, or a war crimes tribunal. It is at this juncture that the nuclear threshold might be crossed. The employment of land forces in a conventional military role, therefore, should be cautious and their objectives remain limited.

The retaliatory capabilities of a state are the ultimate guarantors of the regime's survival. In the event of a conflict with North Korea, for example, the United States would have to think carefully about destroying vulnerable long-range North Korean systems. If attacked, and not destroyed, the North Korean regime might take this step as evidence that its destruction is the object of U.S. action. Prior to the commencement of air strikes against Iraq on January 8, 1991, Saddam Hussein had dispersed his arsenal of missiles. Consequently, attacks upon missile storage sites had the effect of closing the barn door after the proverbial horse was gone. Consider, however, if the United States had been successful in destroying the majority of these systems. How would Saddam Hussein have responded if he had in his control a handful of missiles, and the United States Army was approaching the city limits of Baghdad? The answer suggests that allowing a hostile and aggressive state to retain its retaliatory capability may reinforce and strengthen the nuclear threshold. In effect, the United States could approach the upper limit of that threshold more closely, thereby enabling U.S. forces to degrade a country's war-making capabilities.

There is no mutually understood agreement as to which actions remain below the nuclear threshold and which surpass it. The United States must therefore be cognizant of signals sent by aggressor states as to when this threshold is being approached, yet willing to call a state's bluff if the United States feels that further action is required to achieve its military and political objectives. Undoubtedly, there is a danger that the United States may cross this threshold prematurely, but the ultimate guarantor of deterrence—retaliation—must not be put into effect unnecessarily or unwisely. Nuclear

retaliatory weapons are tools of strategy, and their use must take the form in which a state can apply them successfully.

The same judgment of relating means to ends applies to U.S. efforts to develop a TAMD and an NMD system. Both are tools that can aid in enabling the United States to intervene in the case of aggressor states' taking hostile action against their neighbors. A TAMD system allows the United States to protect its troops and limit the ability of hostile states to intimidate their neighbors into denying the United States forward basing. Both NMD and TAMD systems provide the last opportunity to protect the United States or its allies from significant harm. If a WMD-tipped missile is successfully intercepted, the United States retains options. It may return to a level of hostility that falls below the nuclear threshold, undertake some form of intensified yet limited retaliation, or attempt to remove the offending regime. These considerations argue for deploying such defense systems.

However, deploying missile defenses, especially NMD, could have significant negative ramifications if applied incorrectly. As an NMD system becomes more sophisticated, the risk exists of creating an arms race between the United States and the more advanced nuclear powers, Russia and China. To alleviate this problem, first and foremost an NMD system must remain limited. Only by U.S. limitation of interceptors will these countries feel that they will still possess sufficient nuclear weaponry to ensure a credible retaliatory capability. The difficulty is finding the correct balance in which advanced nuclear powers remain relatively unconcerned with U.S. NMD, while providing sufficient protection against possible nuclear use by less powerful states.

Conclusion

The strategic bottom line is that the prospect of accelerating WMD proliferation not only poses a major threat to global stability but also raises major implications for how U.S. military doctrine views the use of force in regional crises and wars. The United States will face the task of deterring WMD-armed hostile states from launching nuclear attacks against vulnerable allies and friends. Accomplishing this task may be easier than deterring and defending against states that employ their nuclear postures as an umbrella to carry out purely conventional aggression for limited political purposes.

The proper U.S. response will be neither to shrink from this challenge nor to apply the old doctrinal precepts inherited from the Cold War, but rather to craft new doctrinal precepts that apply to the fresh situations at hand. The time for thinking seriously about this subject is now at hand. 🌐

Notes

¹ David Held et al., *Global Transformations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3.

² Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," *American Political Science Review* 84, no. 3 (September 1990), 740.

³ Lawrence Freedman, "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 764.