

# Some Reflections on Strategic Stability and its Challenges in Today's World<sup>1</sup>

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There are many different lenses through which to view strategic stability in today's world. Defining strategic very broadly to encompass nuclear, missile defenses, space, global strike, and cyber capabilities, these lenses include: the legacy of Cold War strategic stability; stability in the central bilateral strategic relationships between the United States and Russia and the United States and China as well as that between India and Pakistan and in a different way, today's strategic confrontation between the United States and North Korea; multilateral strategic stability involving emerging interactions among several countries with strategic capabilities, best typified by the triangular relationship of China, India, and Pakistan; and global strategic stability. In each case, it also is possible to focus on both the narrower interactions of strategic capabilities and on the broader political-strategic context of those interactions.

Using these lenses – as well as both the narrower and broader perspectives – this short think piece reflects on the meanings of and challenges to strategic stability in today's world. It also briefly touches on implications for key countries involved, especially the United States and Russia.

## *Strategic Stability through the Cold War Legacy Lens*

Strategic stability in the Cold War was dominated by the stability of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear relationship. Stability was seen to be based most on the existence of mutual secure, assured nuclear retaliatory capabilities that ruled out a successful disarming nuclear first strike. Over time, both Washington and Moscow accepted their resulting deterrence relationship based on inescapable mutual vulnerability to society-destroying nuclear retaliation. They did so, however, with considerable reluctance and not without pursuit by both countries' defense establishments of capabilities to limit damage in a nuclear conflict should deterrence fail.

From this perspective, nation-wide missile defenses were seen as inherently destabilizing and for that reason were banned by the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. However, in the United States, limits on nation-wide missile defenses by the 1990s were increasingly perceived to be in tension with other U.S. strategic concerns. In particular, such limits precluded what were seen to be needed steps toward a capability to protect the American homeland from anticipated even if not as yet present third party nuclear missile threats. Efforts to adapt this aspect of the Cold War legacy and manage cooperatively third party spillovers for the U.S.-Russian strategic relationship after the Cold War proved unsuccessful in the Clinton administration. In large part for that reason (but also reflecting long-standing skepticism about

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the ABM treaty among some U.S. defense experts), the Bush administration exercised the U.S. treaty-based right to withdraw from the ABM Treaty in 2002.

More broadly, bilateral arms control agreements during the Cold War contributed to strategic stability by increasing mutual predictability and lessening the risk of strategic surprises. In principle, strategic stability in the Cold War also entailed use of arms control to constrain U.S.-Soviet arms racing; in practice, it is an open question whether arms control significantly impacted the offensive strategic postures of either country prior to the transformation of the broader political-strategic relationship between Washington and Moscow that accompanied the end of the Cold War.

After the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a strong sense of shared nuclear dangers – and of the grave risks arising out of any U.S.-Soviet crisis – provided the broader political-strategic context of strategic interaction between Washington and Moscow. Having once looked over the brink into a nuclear catastrophe, both countries' political leaderships became committed to avoid a future confrontation in which they would do so again. Ultimately, this sense of shared nuclear danger came to be reflected in the Reagan-Gorbachev injunction that a "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." In a different way, a broader sense of shared nuclear dangers also contributed to both countries' cooperation to resolve important differences and to negotiate successfully what became the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

### ***Strategic Stability through the Lens of Today's Bilateral Strategic Relationships***

***The U.S.-Russian Strategic Relationship.*** Immediately after the end of the Cold War confrontation, there was an expectation in both Washington and Moscow of a continuing fundamental political-strategic transformation of the broader U.S.-Russian relationship. It also was anticipated that over time issues related to narrower U.S.-Russian strategic stability, therefore, would become less important. It is beyond the scope of this short essay to speculate on why those expectations proved in vain. Instead, twenty-five years later, ensuring the stability of the U.S.-Russian strategic relationship is increasingly important in today's context of heightening East-West political-military confrontation.

The Cold War legacy lens' emphasis that the bedrock of bilateral U.S.-Russian strategic stability is mutual assurance against threats to either country's strategic nuclear deterrent provides a starting point. But such assurance – or what will be called here, deterrence stability – now also needs to encompass strategic capabilities other than nuclear weapons. Bilateral strategic stability also requires that both Washington and Moscow do not fear that the other can dramatically degrade its space and cyber assets. Otherwise, the result is likely to be unilateral responses, still further military competition, and a greater risk of miscalculation should a crisis be unavoidable between them.

Even assuming agreement between Washington and Moscow that bilateral strategic stability requires mutual assurance against threats to strategic assets, what such a commitment would lead to in terms of practical actions is even more complex and controversial today than a decade ago. Consider the nuclear and related missile defense dimensions.

Today, Moscow warns of a U.S. threat to its nuclear deterrent from U.S. missile defenses and conventional strike capabilities. For the United States, as already noted, those capabilities are perceived as essential to protect the American homeland against third party nuclear threats. Moreover, unless checked, North Korea's advancing nuclear missile program will only greatly reinforce that belief. North Korea's confirmed deployment of long-range nuclear armed ballistic missiles already has begun to impact U.S. assessments of required national missile defenses and will do so even more (from scope to deploying space-based elements) as well as will provide a much more compelling logic for going forward with actual deployment – vice R & D – of conventional global strike missile capabilities. In parallel, there is significant concern among U.S. defense officials and experts about the scope of Russia's across the board modernization of its offensive nuclear forces (including deployment of a new ground-launched cruise missile held by the United States to be in violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty) as well as deployment of aerospace defense forces (providing significant upgrades of missile defense for both Moscow and the western military region).

Thus, the Cold War legacy tension between U.S. and Russian strategic concerns will become an even greater challenge for bilateral strategic stability. Before too long, both countries may come to believe that actions by the other are undermining mutual assured strategic nuclear deterrence.

So far, efforts to meet this challenge and address both countries strategic concerns, however, have proved unavailing. In particular, Russian calls for new treaty-based limits on U.S. missile defenses have been repeatedly rejected as have conversely multiple U.S. proposals for non-treaty based confidence-building measures covering the scope, technical characteristics, and other parameters of U.S. missile defense deployments. Russian officials deny U.S. assertions that it is violating the INF Treaty. Finding a way forward that resolves this tension between each side's strategic concerns is essential to bilateral strategic stability. Any renewed attempt to do so, moreover, cannot be separated from the broader question discussed further below of whether Washington and Moscow still believe that their interests are served by efforts to cooperatively manage their overall strategic relationship.

With regard to mutual assurance against attacks on each other's space assets, Washington and Moscow also have very different views on how to proceed. The United States has rejected Moscow's (and China's) proposed Outer Space Treaty as a basis for constraining military competition in outer space; Moscow (and China) have rejected the European Union's proposed rules of the road for space. So far, only the first steps have been taken internationally, with participation by the United States and Russia, to try to develop a workable Code of Conduct to govern activities and advance cooperation in cyberspace. Moscow also appears to Americans to be only too ready to use its cyber capabilities as offensive means in peacetime, suggesting an even greater potential threat in a crisis, confrontation, or conflict.

In turn, for over five decades, since the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, Washington and Moscow have engaged in an arms control process to regulate their strategic relationship. As already noted, that process especially provided valuable windows into each other's strategic logic, decisions, activities and deployments. It also provided each country with some influence on the other's decision-making. Today, the future of bilateral treaty-based arms control but also

the wider process of cooperative management of the bilateral U.S.-Russian strategic relations at best is highly uncertain.

More specifically, the New START Treaty can be extended for up to five years at any point up until its expiration in 2021 – but even if that step is taken it only will buy time. Within the Trump administration, skepticism about arms control is deep-seated, partly rooted in historic opposition to the ABM Treaty. As long as the issue of Russian compliance with the INF Treaty remains unresolved, U.S. readiness to enter into new negotiations almost certainly also will be constrained, much less to gain U.S. Senate ratification of any new agreement. In turn, Russian actions regarding the INF Treaty appear to reflect a deeper and broader skepticism about the arms control process and the value to Moscow of cooperative efforts of any sort to manage the bilateral strategic relationship.

Increasingly, however, the most pressing challenge to bilateral strategic stability between the United States and Russia today is what the Cold War legacy would have called crisis stability, including especially whether Washington and Moscow still share a common perception of nuclear dangers. On the one hand, perhaps most easily since before the Cuban Missile Crisis, it is very possible to come up with plausible scenarios for a U.S.-Russian crisis, confrontation, and even actual conflict with use of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, at least as viewed from Washington, there are great reasons for concern that the Russian military and defense establishment – given Russia's military doctrine, rhetoric, and actions – at best seriously questions and at worst no longer accepts the Reagan-Gorbachev injunction that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

Against this backdrop of both countries competing strategic concerns, the deeper uncertainty about the future of cooperative management of their bilateral strategic relationship, and not least, questions about a shared perception of nuclear dangers, Washington and Moscow need to go back to strategic basics together. At best, they could do so officially; otherwise, the two presidents could create a graybeard panel of retired top-level civilian officials and military leaders to do so and to report back to them.

Any such joint return to strategic basics should begin with an assessment – first by each country alone, then jointly – of whether cooperative management of their strategic relationship serves their respective political-strategic interests. The different outcomes for their future bilateral strategic relationship need to be assessed: from the end of cooperative management and a return to unconstrained unilateralism through instead reliance on less formal means to regulate U.S.-Russian strategic interaction to renewed attempts to redefine and pursue a new mix of treaty-based but also less formal means of cooperative strategic management. Put simply, do the leaderships in Washington and Moscow care if five decades of cooperative strategic management reflected most in bilateral arms control treaties ends – and unilateralism becomes the order of the day?

Assuming the answer is that cooperative management still makes sense in principle, a next step would be exchanges on the full set of each country's strategic concerns, followed by efforts to identify options to harmonize their respective concepts of strategic stability and lessen each other's strategic concerns. In identifying those options, all concerns should be on the table

(from missile defenses to space) and all measures should be considered (from less formal confidence-building interactions to future treaty-based constraints). As part of this joint return to strategic basics, the Washington and Moscow also should seek ways to revisit their earlier appreciation of shared nuclear dangers. A joint assessment by defense and military officials of the risks run – and potential consequences had events gone awry – in both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1983 Able Archer Crisis would be one way to do so. In parallel, joint technical experts' assessments could be undertaken of the full set of potential impacts of use of nuclear weapons.

Finally, as for the broader dimensions of bilateral U.S.-Russian strategic stability, periodic instances of ad hoc political-military cooperation exist but are increasingly lost in political-military confrontation in Europe and beyond. The Trump administration's response to Russian meddling in the 2016 election has also greatly narrowed its own domestic political maneuvering room for engagement with Moscow. Nonetheless, there still are limited opportunities to renew habits of cooperation and in so doing, make it easier to address the narrower dimensions of bilateral strategic stability. As in the days of the Cold War, cooperation in non-proliferation stands out in that regard, from one last attempt to craft a diplomatic solution to head off the growing threat from North Korea to actions to prevent a growing loss of legitimacy of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

***The U.S.-China Strategic Relationship.*** Strategic stability in the U.S.-China relationship cannot be viewed through either the Cold War legacy lens or that of today's bilateral U.S.-Russian strategic relationship. Perhaps the most important difference is the broader political-strategic context. Although the overall political-strategic relationship between Washington and Beijing combines competition and cooperation, the many elements of cooperation provide an important incentive to minimize the narrower strategic instabilities between the two countries and facilitates efforts to do so. Strong economic interdependence further reinforces that incentive. In turn, given the very different nuclear force postures on each side, bilateral U.S.-China strategic stability also cannot be reduced to a Cold War-like relationship of inescapable mutual vulnerability to society-destroying devastation. Both of these differences are one of the reasons why Chinese experts and officials reject Cold War or U.S.-Russian strategic stability as sources of insights or lessons for stability in today's U.S.-Chinese strategic relationship.

Nonetheless, strategic stability in the U.S.-Chinese relationship cannot be completely separated from deterrence stability. Chinese officials and experts repeatedly express concerns that U.S. pursuit of nation-wide missile defenses and prompt global strike capabilities will undermine China's limited nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis the United States. They signal as well China's readiness – demonstrated by its ongoing modernization and development of its nuclear forces – to take whatever actions it deems necessary to sustain that limited deterrent capability. Conversely, China's nuclear modernization and its robust space-cyber capabilities have created U.S. uncertainties about the ultimate scope and intentions of China's expanding strategic capabilities. Those uncertainties are compounded by China's relatively limited transparency. Even more so than in the case of the bilateral U.S.-Russia strategic relationship, moreover, North Korea – and particularly U.S. responses should the Kim Jong-un regime consolidate its nuclear missile threat to the American homeland – is a significant wild card. From augmented U.S. missile defense deployments (including seeking capability enhancement via deployment of

space-based sensors as well as ground-based interceptors in Japan) to more robust strike options (including conventional prompt global strike and enhanced in-theater intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets), many U.S. response options would likely spillover to impact directly China's nuclear deterrence posture.

From this perspective, bilateral U.S.-China strategic stability requires reassurance to Beijing that the United States is not seeking to degrade China's limited nuclear deterrent and reassurance to the United States about China's strategic intentions and programs. Absent convincing mutual reassurance, the outcome almost certainly would be growing strategic competition between the two countries, as each country takes unilateral actions to reduce its strategic uncertainties. So far, however, it has not proved possible to put in place any such process of mutual strategic reassurance – not one of treaty-based Cold War arms control but a less formal process of engagement, confidence-building, and mutual restraint.

Perhaps the most challenging dimension of U.S.-China strategic stability, however, is crisis stability. An increasingly assertive Chinese military posture in the South and East China Seas and U.S. military deployments and actions in response combine together to create a mix that could lead to naval confrontation, political-military crisis, if not even to open conflict. Moreover, in such a situation, given the interaction of each country's respective conventional military doctrines – with a Chinese stress on using conventional missiles for anti-access and area denial and the United States keeping open the option of responding with conventional strikes against targets on the Chinese mainland – there is a risk of escalation should a conflict occur. Possible associated Chinese cyber or space attacks against American space-based assets that serve have both theater and strategic missions add to the risk of miscalculation and escalation. This is so because any such attacks could well be perceived as intended to degrade U.S. strategic not theater capabilities. The past record of poor crisis communication between Washington and Beijing further compounds crisis instability as does the weakness of existing crisis management mechanisms.

Here, the clear need is for Washington and Beijing to take additional steps to strengthen crisis avoidance confidence-building measures as well as crisis management mechanisms. Continued military-to-military dialogue as well as other semi-official dialogue can contribute to ensure that each side better understands how mutual miscalculation and missteps could result in a U.S.-China military confrontation or conflict – and how to avoid such an outcome. All such actions would be fully consistent with the more cooperative dimension of the broader bilateral political-strategic but also economic relationship.

***The India-Pakistan Strategic Relationship.*** Given the respective capabilities, postures, and doctrines of India and Pakistan, lessening mutual concerns about the vulnerability of their respective nuclear deterrents to a nuclear first strike is not the primary dimension of bilateral strategic stability between them. By contrast, crisis stability is the most pressing challenge to strategic stability in South Asia. In particular, the interaction of India's Cold Start conventional doctrine and Pakistan's full-spectrum deterrence nuclear doctrine offers a too credible pathway for escalation to nuclear conflict. The Cold Start doctrine threatens major cross-border Indian conventional military retaliation in response to yet another high-profile attack by Pakistan-based terrorists against India; full-spectrum deterrence threatens the deployment and if necessary use of

battlefield nuclear weapons should a cross-border Indian conventional strike threaten Pakistan's survival. Moreover, Pakistan's other red lines are uncertain. Regardless, in any such crisis, Pakistan's mobilization and movement of its battlefield nuclear assets toward the India-Pakistan border – and Indian mobilization of its own nuclear forces – would raise multiple opportunities for miscalculation, accident, and a breakdown of control.

Outside powers, not least, the United States, China, and Russia have an important stake in strategic stability in South Asia. Use of a nuclear weapon would directly impact their own interests, from putting at risk their citizens in these two countries to heightening international pressures within the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Moreover, there are actions that they can take, independently or in some cases cooperatively, to strengthen crisis stability and in the event of a future crisis to decrease the risk of crisis escalation. Efforts to influence evolving military posture and doctrine in Pakistan and India, induce Pakistan to restrain internal militant groups and India to exercise restraint in response to another terrorist attack, and to urge caution in any escalating crisis are three examples.

### ***Strategic Stability in Emerging Triangular Strategic Relationships***

Trilateral strategic relationships provide a very different – and much newer – lens through which to view strategic stability in today's world. No longer can strategic stability be viewed only through an updated variant of the Cold War U.S.-Russia lens or even that also of the U.S.-China strategic relationship.

***Strategic Stability between the United States and North Korea.*** The goal of the international community remains the denuclearization of North Korea through steadily stiffened sanctions combined with the prospect of diplomatic engagement to resolve the conflict on the Korean Peninsula and respond to North Korea's security concerns. Multiple U.S. administrations have also sought to avoid a mutual deterrence relationship with the Pyongyang regime. That said, neither goal may be fully attainable. Some type of U.S. deterrent relationship with a North Korea that has consolidated its nuclear weapon posture may prove an unavoidable if unpalatable least bad alternative to a nuclear conflict in northeast Asia.

Both now and in the event of North Korean nuclear consolidation, crisis stability once again is the most pressing challenge. In any number of ways, a crisis on the Korean Peninsula could occur and escalate. Possible triggers of such crisis escalation today include, for example: a North Korean missile test aimed over Japan that goes out of control, striking Japan and leading to U.S.-Japanese retaliation; a U.S. missile defense "shoot-down" posture to impede future further North Korean missile technology advances that triggers a conventional response by Pyongyang, followed by widening conflict; U.S. cyber-attacks to set back North Korea's nuclear-missile development that are met by North Korean responses in kind or otherwise; or a more comprehensive conventional U.S. preemptive strike that leads to more extensive conventional if not nuclear conflict. In the event of North Korean nuclear consolidation, possible triggers could range from yet another lower-level North Korean provocation (emboldened by nuclear weaponry) even to a roll of the dice by Kim Jong-un to reunite the peninsula on his terms.

Even more so than in the other bilateral strategic relationships, options are limited to lessen these types of crisis instabilities. Success of international efforts to pressure North Korea to freeze if not necessarily immediately give up its nuclear-missile programs clearly would be the best outcome. Enhanced U.S.-Russian-Chinese cooperation is essential for that effort to have any chance of succeeding. In the interim, U.S. restraint in possible pursuit of preventive options also is essential as are Chinese and Russian efforts to use their available influence to urge North Korean restraint. Ultimately, the United States and its allies may have no choice but to take whatever actions they deem essential to deter and defend against a North Korea threatening to use nuclear weapons against them.

***U.S.-DPRK-Russia and U.S.-DPRK-China.*** As already suggested, U.S. responses to the DPRK nuclear-missile threat to the American homeland almost certainly will spill over to impact the strategic relationships between Washington and Moscow and Washington and Beijing. Recent demonstrations of DPRK capabilities, moreover, make clear that the possibility of either that capability or such spillovers can no longer be dismissed as exaggerated speculation. In both the U.S.-Russian and U.S.-Chinese cases, strategic stability could well be undermined, from heightened concerns about nuclear deterrence to increased arms racing. The interests of all three countries would be better served cooperation to minimize these adverse spillovers. Those interests provide another reason for Washington and Moscow not to allow the process of cooperatively regulating their strategic relationship to fade away into history and for Washington and Beijing to move forward toward a process of mutual strategic reassurance and restraint.

***China-India-Pakistan.*** The emerging triangular strategic relationship among China, India, and Pakistan, however, best exemplifies this new dimension of strategic stability. Here, strategic stability has less to do with deterrence stability or crisis stability than with the potentially destabilizing and costly impacts of interacting and competitive nuclear force deployments.

Specifically, India's nuclear force posture decisions increasingly also reflect its concerns about China. As for China, after long dismissing India's nuclear program, China has begun to take India into account in making its own strategic decisions. In turn, other Chinese strategic deployments taken with the United States not India in mind could well have spillover impacts first for the China-India strategic relationship and then for the India-Pakistan relationship. The onward ripple effects of Chinese deployments of MIRVs on India and Pakistan are a good example.

The multiple countries involved directly and indirectly complicate efforts to strengthen strategic stability or at least limit instabilities. In this specific instance of MIRVs, for example, the United States and Russia could engage all three countries to discuss the instabilities that occurred with their Cold War deployments of MIRVs. But the key to heading off rippling MIRV deployments probably depends most on whether the United States and China can put in place a process of mutual reassurance, in part making it less necessary for China to deploy a significant number of MIRVed missiles and thereby, stopping the ripple effect at its source.

### **Strategic Stability through a Global Lens**

From a final perspective, global strategic stability has long been seen as inseparable from preventing a world of many nuclear weapon states. This assessment gave needed momentum both to national non-proliferation policies and the decades' long creation of global non-proliferation institutions. In particular, it was reflected in cooperation between Washington and Moscow in creating the NPT and among all of the NPT NWS in gaining its indefinite extension. That assessment was based most on the judgment that more widespread proliferation would greatly increase the risk of use of nuclear weapons, intensify already-existing regional conflicts, and otherwise undermine the global stability. There is no reason to question either that assessment or the underlying judgment. Two pressing challenges, however, stand out today to global strategic stability so understood.

The growing threat from North Korea's nuclear-missile program already has rekindled debates within South Korea about acquisition of its own nuclear weapons capability. It may yet do so as well within Japan. Decisions by these two countries to acquire nuclear weapons remain unlikely as long as their security relationship with the United States provides a credible and effective alternative – and as long as that security relationship is seen as reducing not increasing nuclear dangers. But such decisions can no longer be dismissed as completely implausible. Movement by either or both South Korea and Japan toward nuclear acquisition would be a major proliferation shock. Elsewhere, should the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action fall apart due to efforts by the Trump administration to force Iran to renegotiate its terms or renewed Iranian concerns about an American threat to its regime, a recrudescence of Iran's nuclear weapon program could well occur. It would have spillover effects in Saudi Arabia if not other regional countries. Combined together such developments in northeast Asia and the Middle East would greatly undermine the long-standing global policy assumption that a world of many nuclear weapon states is avoidable.

At the institutional level, the divisions among the Parties to the NPT are greater than ever before. Traditional divisions among the many more activist NNWS and the NWS reflect a belief on the part of many NNWS that the NPT and its Article VI commitment no longer offers a credible pathway toward nuclear disarmament – and deep frustration with today's nuclear disarmament stalemate. Their call for accelerated nuclear disarmament action has by greatly reinforced by concerns that the risk of use of nuclear weapons is significant and increasing. This combination of frustration and concern led directly to the recent successful negotiation of a Prohibition Treaty. For their part, the NPT NWS remain divided by differences on how to respond to NNWS frustration and concern as well as by the more fundamental bilateral strategic differences between them already set out above. Sooner than anticipated, these continuing divisions within the NPT could well result in an increasing loss of its legitimacy and effectiveness as a key foundation of global nuclear strategic stability.

Increasingly, strategic stability at the global level also can no longer be separated from activities in Outer Space and Cyberspace. Consider each dimension very briefly.

Military competition in space among the major powers and the likelihood that any conflict will include clashes in space are growing. Given that the economic well-being of virtually all countries now depends heavily on space-based systems, a future military conflict in space would have impacts on countries beyond those directly involved. However, it has not

proved possible to reach agreement among the major space countries on an approach to lessen the risks in peacetime or in conflict of such military competition in space. As already noted, the key protagonists are divided on proposals for pursuing next an outer space treaty or a code of conduct with rules of the road for space. Unless a mutually-acceptable way forward can be found by the three key protagonists – the United States, Russia, and China – greater instability via a prospect of war-fighting in space is the most likely result. Here, the best approach may be to seek limited incremental next steps, e.g., perhaps political agreement not to undertake kinetic anti-satellite testing that results in new space debris or to attack space-based systems that have a nuclear warning or command and control role.

Global dependence on cyberspace equals or perhaps exceeds dependence on space. Use of computer-based networks across cyberspace is integral to financial and economic commerce, governmental activities, military operations, personal social interactions, and with limited exceptions, the operation of critical national infrastructure. Both nations and non-state actors already have used cyberspace as a pathway to attack and disrupt other nations, for commercial and military espionage, for political purposes, and for financial and economic gain. There also is a risk of cyber-crises triggered by difficulties in attribution of the source of any cyber-attack and resulting miscalculation on the part of countries attacked or involved. Adding to peacetime instabilities, as shown by the Stuznet operation to damage Iran's centrifuge nuclear enrichment program, even limited cyber-operations may go out of control unintentionally to impact many non-targeted countries. Cyber operations are almost certain to be part of future military conflict. Some bilateral and multilateral initiatives have been undertaken to develop multinational and global rules of the road and bilateral cooperation among nations to lessen these cyberspace risks. But here, too, those efforts remain very limited and have not kept up with the stability challenges.

### **Strategic Stability Today – Some Concluding Thoughts**

This brief essay has highlighted how strategic stability today is different and considerably more complex than in the Cold War strategic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. It also has shown the various ways in which crisis stability is the most immediate strategic stability challenge today. There are credible scenarios of U.S.-Russia, U.S.-China, India-Pakistan, and U.S.-DPRK crisis escalation with a risk of nuclear threat-making if not use of nuclear weapons.

At the same time, strategic stability no longer can be viewed only through a bilateral lens. The new triangular relationship among China, India, and Pakistan – as well as the spillovers of the U.S.-North Korea strategic confrontation for U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China bilateral strategic stability – create new challenges yet to be fully understood let alone managed effectively. Global strategic stability continues to be heavily dependent on sustaining five decades of overall nuclear non-proliferation success, not least facing serious challenges to the credibility and effectiveness of the NPT. The new dimensions of global strategic stability associated with outer space and cyber-space are becoming increasingly important for all countries.

From a more focused U.S.-Russian perspective, today's bilateral strategic stability challenge is to find a way to cooperatively define and pursue a mutually-acceptable concept of

strategic stability that would serve deterrence and crisis stability as well as both countries' interests in reducing the risk of use of nuclear weapons. Doing so will be tough, given both the broader context of today's political-military confrontation, skepticism in both Washington and Moscow about cooperatively managing their strategic relationship, and Moscow's apparent rethinking of the usability of nuclear weapons. The way forward likely begins with a back to basics joint assessment of their respective stakes in the cooperative regulation of their bilateral strategic relationship and its risks. The alternative of heightened unilateralism is much more likely to result in greater strategic instabilities between the United States and Russia, costly competitive military deployments, future crises, and heightened risk of an escalating military conflict.

At the same time, both Washington and Moscow still have shared and compelling interests in addressing cooperatively the most pressing challenges to strategic stability today outside of their own bilateral strategic relationship. Not least, this includes reducing the risk of use of nuclear weapons in a proliferation-related crisis as well as sustaining the effectiveness and legitimacy of the NPT and wider nuclear non-proliferation success. Cooperation to do so is both necessary and valuable in its own right. But such cooperation also offers an opportunity to rebuild some limited habits of strategic cooperation in reducing nuclear dangers. In so doing, it also could help create a better context in which to reengage in working today's challenges to bilateral strategic stability between the United States and Russia.