

THE END OF STRATEGIC STABILITY? NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF REGIONAL RIVALRIES

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THE END OF STRATEGIC STABILITY?



**NUCLEAR WEAPONS
AND THE CHALLENGE OF
REGIONAL RIVALRIES**

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EDITORS

Book Examines

- How regional rivals understand strategic stability
- How these understandings of strategic stability affect arms-racing, posture, and doctrine

Why Strategic Stability Should Be Refined

- The way the US understands it is not the way others do
- The post-Cold War environment is multidimensional and multipolar
- Strategic Stability means different things in different contexts to different actors but it remains important

Tailored Strategic Stability

- A framework rooted in basic tenets not solely focused on the nuclear dimension as the organizing principle
- Incorporates the idea that national strategies are motivated by different understandings of strategic stability **and** deterrence
- A set of conditions under which regional rivals have no incentive to pursue unilateral advantage by a devastating first strike and mutual fears give pause to demonstrate restraint

Findings Highlight Future Directions



- How non-state actors matter
- How transparency matters
- Distinguishing between global vs. regional concepts

Beyond a Complex Number Problem

- Asymmetries
- Interdependencies
- Subjective interpretations
- Diversity of practical meaning

Cross-cutting Conceptual Distinctions

- Nuclear as Absolute Weapon/Existential Threat
 - Incontestability of costs?
- National Core Values/Fears
 - Reciprocal fear of first nuclear use?
- Parity
 - Nuclear-centric assured destruction?
- Interdependence Across Multiple Domains/Relationships
 - Balance/attributes of state power?

Implications for U.S. Strategy

- Distinguish Russia/China vs. Regional Requirements
- Direct
 - Entanglement
 - Regional vs. strategic contradictions
- Indirect
 - Extended deterrence vs. moral hazard problems
 - Different escalation pathways/fulcrums
 - Europe- hybrid-/sub-/low-level conventional warfare
 - East Asia- large-scale conventional warfare
 - South Asia- non-state/sub-national attack
 - Middle East- large-scale conventional

From Inductive to Deductive Exploration

- Role of Transparency vs. Opacity?
- Role of Non-State Actors?
- Tradeoffs: National Deterrence Strategies vs. Regional Stability?
 - US: ED vs. deep-strike
 - PRC: A2AD vs. entanglement/regional security priorities
 - Russia: “Deliberate ambiguity” over nuclear threshold
 - India-Pak: Cold Start/CF-targeting? vs. tactical nukes/delegated launch/ISI-LeT
- Trade-offs: Global vs. Regional Levels?
 - US-Russia/PRC redlines, escalation scenarios, mutual interests, global vs. regional levels
- Future of Arms Control?
 - Reciprocal unilateral vs. coordination/CBM scenarios
 - Gap between local criteria for strategic stability and negative externalities of interacting deterrence strategies

Conclusion

- Strategic Stability Useful But Tailored Organizing Framework
 - Condition, not strategy
 - Bargaining > nuclear-centric tenets
- Asymmetries Both Material and Subjective
 - Contested regional conceptions/conditions
- US as Broker vs. Patron or Pivotal Player
 - Explicit security guarantees vs. indirect effects, moral hazard
 - Prominence/centrality to bolster credibility/trust & manipulate alignment/interdependent ties
- Strategic Implications
 - Managing divergent escalation pathways
 - Contending with trade-offs
 - Identifying equilibrium points

Discussion