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Is crisis stability still achievable?

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During the Cold War, the idea of crisis stability concerned whether the United States and the Soviet Union would be faced with powerful incentives to strike each other first with their nuclear weapons during periods of tension. This idea influenced the design of nuclear forces and guided aspects of nuclear arms control. The United States and Russia continue to operate large, alert nuclear forces, but at least three new factors have emerged that add significantly greater complexity to this picture. The first new factor consists of the development and deployment of new strategic military technologies that are entangled with nuclear weapons. These include strategic ballistic missile defenses, counter-space weapons, and strategic conventional weapons. The second new factor consists of new dyads of interacting strategic forces beyond US-Russia. These include US-China, US-North Korea, India-Pakistan, and India-China. The third new factor consists of the emergence of three-actor crisis stability dynamics, where the third actor is not necessarily nuclear-armed. This paper illustrates the concept with the US-North Korea-South Korea triangle. It briefly discusses the implications of these developments and reflects on the broad policy options that may be available.