

ICBM EAR Week of Dec 22, 2025, Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis and Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies.

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah

Summary: *This week's report primarily reflects five issues: the extent to which the Iranian nuclear capability has been over-hyped; whether a diplomatic solution to North Korea's nuclear proliferation is possible; an additional critique of the movie Dynamite especially its treatment of missile defense; the new cost estimates for the US nuclear modernization effort (\$21 billion); and an analysis of the administration's national security strategy. Also included is a review of Lee Smith's new book The China Matrix, as well as nuclear developments in China and Russia. Plus, our always of interest quotes of the week, international and administration developments. A new study on what the new administration should prioritize by the Atlantic Council by Kroenig and Rosenstein is highly recommended. Material in red are areas highlighted for ease of reading but also feature my editorial comments about the essays in question.*

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

The Secretary of the Navy: For the first time in generations, we will have a new leg in America's nuclear deterrence because the Trump-class battleship will carry the nuclear armed sea launch cruise missile.'

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: "This marks a historic day for America — the first new battleship class since 1944. NNSA stands ready to deliver the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles in support of President Trump and the Department of War, defending our nation and preserving peace through strength."

The Chinese Communist Party: "Similar hype by the U.S. side is its consistent tactic, designed to find excuses for accelerating its own nuclear strength modernization, undermining global strategic stability."

Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R-TN) As chairman of the @HASCRepublicans Strategic Forces Subcommittee, we have prioritized modernizing our nuclear triad, secured funding for the Golden Dome & ensured America is investing in our space defense capabilities."

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: "President Trump has signed the NDAA into law, delivering on his commitment to peace through strength! NNSA will ensure a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear deterrent that deters adversaries, reassures allies, and strengthens America's national security."

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND): "Reforming acquisition methods and improving procurement efficiency often happens outside the spotlight, but it is part of the comprehensive approach of this administration."

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND): Lt. Gen. White, the nominee for Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Critical Major Weapons Systems, is the right person at the right time to lead the Sentinel program."

USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Rich Correll: Modernizing the U.S. strategic arsenal is essential to maintaining credible deterrence.

U.S. State Department : The United States will "maintain the world's most robust, credible and modern nuclear deterrent to protect America and our allies, including Japan."

Jack Burnham, at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies: "For a country that still advocates a policy of 'no-first use,' China has become increasingly comfortable showcasing its nuclear arsenal, including [parading its nuclear triad](#)."

Chinese Foreign Ministry Lin Jian: Hype by the U.S. side is its consistent tactic, designed to find excuses for accelerating its own nuclear strength modernization, undermining global strategic stability."

Robert Peters, Heritage: Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's recent announcement that the U.S. will resume testing nuclear weapons has alarmed some nuclear-arms experts. It shouldn't. President Trump had already announced earlier this year that a resumption of testing "on an equal basis" with Russia and China, would be necessary.

ICBM EAR NEW COMMENTARY: China & Iran: Proliferation and Abolition.

The Chinese communists are angry this week with US estimates of projected future Chinese nuclear forces, complaining the estimates are exaggerated for the purpose of justifying US nuclear modernization. The Russians are also pushing back on a US intelligence estimate that Moscow has designs on other nations of NATO and Europe in general.

Like China, a new counter proliferation essay complains US and Israeli intelligence always hypes the Iranian nuclear threat to justify using military force such as Israel used against the Iraqi and Syrian nuclear reactors in 1982 and 2007. The argument echoes the same argument being made by Joel Whit, a former US negotiator for the USA who argues in a new book that the US could have ended the North Korean nuclear program through diplomacy and arms control discussions. The US failure says Whit was because of US belligerence and hostility to North Korea, what Pyongyang itself routinely describes as a US "hostile policy" that for Pyongyang justifies the North Korean nuclear weapons program, projected by some assessments to be approaching hundreds of such weapons over the next decade.

The new Whit book has a parallel assessment in a new essay highly critical of the US and Israeli military strikes on the Iranian nuclear facilities, attacks this new report claims are never justified, and are dangerous replays of previous Israel strikes against the Iraqi and Syrian nuclear reactors in 1982 and 2007, respectively.

A key source quoted for the Iranian assessment is former IAEA official Hans Blix. At a 2003 Senate staff briefing for the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Blix assured me there was no proliferation threat from North Korea or Iran. He also thought proliferation was no big deal and that other nations had every right to have nuclear weapons, such as Sweden or Peru, and it was racist for the rich northern tier nations to justify their nuclear forces (India and Pakistan?) as opposed to the global economically poor south which was deprived of such weapons under the terms of the NPT or nuclear non-proliferation treaty. At the end of the briefing, he declared that by many measures of magnitude, global warming was a far more serious threat than nuclear proliferation. .

On abolition, most interesting is a lengthy Scott Sagan and friends essay <https://thebulletin.org/2025/12/a-house-of-mistakes-what-kathryn-bigelows-a-house-of-dynamite-gets-radically-right-and-dangerously-wrong-about-nuclear-war/praising-but-also-highly-critical-of-the-Dynamite-movie-for-apparently-implying-that-missile-defense-might-be-useful-in-ensuring-strategic-stability-but-also-for-ignoring-the-growing-possibility-of-accidental-nuclear-use-that-might-trigger-a-global-nuclear-conflict>.

The Sagan essay details numerous accidents and nuclear close calls, implying that the US nuclear deterrent is but a likely imminent accident away from initiating nuclear conflict, however inadvertently. In fact, nearly all the previous nuclear related "accidents" occurred some 40-50 years ago, have been technologically solved, or usually involve normal commercial activities that have nothing to do with nuclear deterrence modernization.

Guest Essay from Mathew Kroenig and Jonathan Rosenstein of the Atlantic Council.

The two-nuclear-peer-plus threat environment and growing collaboration between US adversaries present unprecedented challenges. The United States must now prepare for the possibility of concurrent or cascading conflicts in theater and across different regions with multiple nuclear-armed adversaries. Questions related to deterring multiple peer nuclear powers simultaneously and preventing opportunistic aggression must shape US nuclear strategy, employment guidance, force sizing, and conventional operations.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/nuclear-priorities-for-the-trump-administration-a-time-to-decide/>

Peter Huessy Essay on the National Security Strategy

**By Peter Huessy
December 10, 2025**

The new National Security Strategy is addressing some established foreign policy mythologies, a long overdue analysis. Though a relatively new way of laying out the U.S. strategy, it was very important that it do so. The biggest drawback of the strategy is the lack of assessment of what security danger Russia poses to the U.S. and its allies even should the war in Ukraine be ended. But the importance of the document is that it does address ten mythologies that have been largely conventional wisdom over the past many decades for the U.S. foreign policy establishment. These are rejected by the Trump administration with many additional details part of Secretary War Hegseth's remarks at the Reagan Defense Forum on December 6th at the Simi Valley Reagan Library.

The most provocative section is the analysis of the direction which Europe has been moving---very low birthrates, massive and often illegal migration of people that reject western civilization, an absence of a commitment to defense spending, rejecting a robust nuclear deterrent and missile defense, (currently being adjusted), vastly too much regulation and government coercion (being partially undone with Brexit), and a deliberate policy of making energy expensive and scarce (also currently being partially rolled back).

Important is the high priority given to both nuclear deterrence and missile defense. After the breakup of the USSR, it was assumed nuclear weapons were largely irrelevant. And that Russia and China would become largely cooperative nuclear powers, such as with the Nunn-Lugar program cutting down "loose nukes" in the former USSR. By 2010, the Nuclear Posture Review emphasized both the benefits of U.S. restraint in nuclear deployment and seeking a general policy of seeking the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. The new strategy underscores how nuclear deterrence is and remains central to U.S. security and for the need for major investments in nuclear modernization. In 1991, even with the collapse of the USSR, Senator Sam Nunn urged that the National Defense University Foundation (NDUF) continue a long standing program of Hill nuclear seminars as he warned that nuclear dangers were not going away and would certainly re-emerge. Instead, the elites went on a 40-year holiday from history and put nuclear investments at the bottom of the priority requirements for the past Cold War era.

The new strategy also jettisons the false assumption that missile defense is dangerous or destabilizing, firmly foot-stomping that defenses are a critical adjunct and insurance policy for the U.S. as General Michael Guetlein Director of Golden Dome emphasized on December 6th at the Reagan Defense Forum. The strategy also captures an entire series of economic initiatives that are critical to U.S. security, for which it has been strangely criticized. In 1981, the National Governors Association assumed the U.S. did not need a steel industry as we could always buy cheap steel from China. The new Japanese investment in the U.S. steel industry and reshoring of U.S. industry is a welcome rebuff to the multiple decades hollowing out of U.S. manufacturing and heavy industry. And the key understanding that U.S. mineral mapping, mining, and milling is also critical to U.S. security is also welcome, as the recent mineral/trade deals have made clear.

On the Middle East, the strategy rejects the false notion that as former President Clinton noted in 2014, terrorism was largely related to Israel failing to offer the Palestinians a state. And implicitly reject the idea that Islamic jihad is some kind of peaceful religious individual empowerment as opposed to an ideology of conquest and murder. Keeping Iran from dominating the Middle East hydrocarbon reserves and engaging in terrorism while also being allied with Israel are priorities which is a welcome change from the embrace of Oslo, "the peace process" and Palestinian demands.

The strategy's western hemisphere embrace is a welcome switch. For decades, the U.S. assumed open borders was a welcome adjunct to U.S. economic requirements. It was assumed migrants were largely agricultural workers, unrelated to a massive illegal drug and human trafficking business closely associated with a campaign of "unrestricted warfare" by China against the United States and also including North Korea, Iran, Russia, and

Venezuela. And conventional wisdom assumed 100,000 drugs deaths a year was just the price one pays for a free and open society.

Critical to reforming our Western Hemisphere strategy is to understand the problem with an open border for agricultural workers is that it opens the borders to all potential “workers” including drug dealers and traffickers. And an open border with Mexico is also open to the rest of the world. That is why the section on Europe addresses that Europe is killing itself with mass migration of people that do not accept western civilization, but embrace Hamas and Jihad, condemn Israel, all of which itself will undermine the extent to which Europe can be an effective NATO ally and strengthen its western civilization heritage. As one top scholar recently surmised, Christendom may lose upwards of one billion or 50% of its adherents given current trends, especially in Europe, where hundreds of mosques are being built on top of what were Christian churches.

The requirement to keep Iran from its terrorism ways and its search for a nuclear weapons lever is also a welcome security plank. Gone is the strange notion the U.S. engineered a coup in Iran in 1954 or that because Khomeini was a “man of the cloth” his regime was benign. Gone too is the notion that scarce, expensive, and hard to secure energy is a great idea as the former Secretary of Energy and green energy mandates assumed. Coupled with establishing secure sources of minerals, both mining and milling, as recent deals with Australia, Malaysia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and others have done will further improve U.S. security and end our reliance upon China for rare earth and other key minerals.

For decades, NATO did not even meet its own 2% of GDP for defense spending as an unstated assumption was that NATO was special and although 80 years removed from WWII, NATO was special and couldn’t spend a lot on defense because Europe had to have a huge welfare state to prevent another Hitler from coming to power.

The strategy also drowns the idea that military strength is provocative and unnecessarily aggressive, a widespread assumption embraced by foreign policy elites through the Cold War, the era of détente and peaceful coexistence and most loudly during the Reagan “peace through strength” military buildup, which of course successfully led to the end of the USSR which fundamentally was in fact an explicit economic war against the USSR, as outlined by Warren Norquist in his 2000 essay in the National Intelligencer. The extent to which the Reagan administration used economic measures to dissolve the USSR is seriously underappreciated and leads to a continued inability to understand how effective such measures could be especially as the U.S. confronts two nuclear armed peer adversaries.

Warren Norquist details what Reagan confronted in 1981, but unlike what President Trump also faced when in 2025 taking office for a second time. “The incoming Reagan Administration faced many challenges: Western Europe was making loans to the USSR at half the normal interest rate. Sweden was buying restricted high technology needed by the Soviets and reselling the items with all the necessary instructions. Many western firms were selling restricted technology to companies fronting for the USSR. The technologies the Soviets could not buy they were trying to steal.

The USSR was earning hard currency by selling oil at three times its production cost. The USSR was earning hard currency by selling weapons to oil rich countries like Iran, Iraq, and Libya. Europe was financing two gas pipelines from Siberia. If completed, West Germany, for instance, would become dependent on Moscow for 60 percent of its energy and Soviet hard currency earnings would double to \$60 billion per year. The Soviets had effectively taken over Angola and Mozambique, and the Soviet military was providing aid and advice to many countries in Africa.

U.S. military spending had declined from 9.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) under President John Kennedy in 1962 to less than 4.6 percent under President Jimmy Carter in 1979 according to the Federal Government Historical Budget, Tables 3.1 and 10.1. In Nicaragua, the USSR financed equipment and thousands of

trainers to ‘... build ... an army of 60,000 regulars backed by an equal number ... militia" ... armed with heavy weapons." The plan was to expand to 500,000 under arms according to General Jack Singlaub. The Soviets were positioning themselves to threaten Western Europe into less cooperation with the United States. And the USSR had invaded and was assumed to be winning in Afghanistan.”

The economic agenda for the new security strategy is very innovative but also most needed. The security strategy gets many things right especially including China, the Middle East, the Western Hemisphere as well as the twin defense needs of nuclear modernization and missile defense. Particularly welcome is the emphasis on preserving elements of Western civilization and the implied negative impact of rejecting religious faith, rejecting the need to acculturate legal immigrants and to halt illegal immigration and its companion twin evils of trafficking and drug running.

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The Cost of Nuclear Weapons Modernization

The cost of a modern nuclear deterrent comes in at around \$20.8 billion according to the latest FY2026 National Defense budget just passed by Congress and signed into law by the President. The authorization bill allows the US to spend money but the appropriations bill—to be passed—actually sets the spending limits, most of which do comply with the authorized levels. The new platforms—the Sentinel, Columbia class submarines, the B21 strategic bomber, as well as upgraded B52s, LRSO and Navy nuclear armed cruise missiles and D-5 sea launched missiles, all came to \$20.8 billion in support, which includes 20% of the new bomber force as that was the portion allocated to the strategic nuclear role. New budget numbers for the US modernization and sustainment of nuclear forces confirm that roughly slightly more than half of all funding goes to the sustainment of legacy forces, not modernization of our forces that is somehow pushing an “arms race.” This breakdown depends in part of how one allocates the warheads SLEP programs and most of the NNSA budget, as well as what qualifies as the 2010 agreed upon program and what is being added for a better deterrent capability.

Here is the breakdown:

For modernization, the US is building new systems: \$17.2508 Billion

Sentinel at \$3.8B

Columbia Sub \$10B

SLCM-N \$210 M

M93 Mk7 \$619M

F-35 \$21.8 M

B-21 Strategic Bomber \$1.6B (20% of total of 100 planes)

LRSO: \$1B

Rebuilding/Upgrading Existing Technology \$3.531Billion

Trident II: \$2.6B

B-52 Upgrades \$931 M

This chart is from an article by the FAS. The Congress added \$2.2 B to the budget request or about 10%.

DOD Nuclear Weapons Funding for Select Programs

Program	FY26 Request	House	Senate	Final
Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD)/Sentinel	\$2.6 billion	\$3 billion (+\$400M)	\$4.6 billion (+\$2B)	\$3.8 billion (+\$1.2B)
Columbia Class Ballistic Missile Submarine	\$9.3 billion	\$9.3 billion	\$9.3 billion (+\$10M)	\$10 billion (+\$710M)
Trident II Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile	\$2.6 billion	\$2.6 billion	\$2.6 billion	\$2.6 billion
Sea Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N)	\$0	\$100 million (+100M)	\$320 million (+320M)	\$210 million (+\$210M)
W93 Mk7 Aeroshell	\$619 million	\$619 million	\$619 million	\$619 million
B-21 Strategic Bomber	\$5.8 billion	\$5.8 billion	\$5.8 billion	\$5.8 billion
F-35 Dual Capable Aircraft Nuclear Certification	\$21.8 million	\$21.8 million	\$21.8 million	\$21.8 million
B-52 Upgrades	\$931 million	\$931 million	\$931 million	\$931 million
Long Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO)	\$1 billion	\$1.1 billion	\$1.2 billion (+149M)	\$1 billion

From the Archives: Guest Essay #1: Why you can't always trust the intelligence on nuclear breakout

By [Kunal Singh](#) | July 8, 2025

The recent air strikes by Israel and the United States on nuclear infrastructure in Iran have revived disputes over intelligence on the imminence of a nuclear breakout—that is, how long it would take Iran to build its first nuclear weapon. In March, US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard [reiterated the longstanding view](#) in the American intelligence community that Iran had not yet decided to weaponize its nuclear capabilities. Israeli intelligence, on the other hand, indicated that Iran was not only accelerating its weaponization program but [also planning](#) for how to mate an explosive uranium core to a missile. It seems that President Donald Trump found the Israeli intelligence more convincing and decided that the United States would join in the air campaign started by Israel.

Much of the controversy over how close Iran was to breakout stems from the fact that intelligence reports tend to feed into a narrative justifying, or denying the grounds for, a preventive war on nuclear programs. This much is clear: No matter what the intelligence says about a potential nuclear breakout, the global nonproliferation architecture is harmed by preventive attacks. Rafael Mariano Grossi, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [has stated](#), as have former directors-general [Mohamed ElBaradei](#) and [Hans Blix](#), that nuclear facilities should not be attacked under any circumstances.

With that clarification out of the way, I would like to make two points that impinge directly on the recent attacks on Iran. First, intelligence about nuclear weapons programs carries uncertainty—and, in many cases, has turned out to be wrong. And second, intelligence about the imminence of a nuclear breakout almost always has a political component. It is often the case that motivated actors use this type of intelligence to justify their policy preferences. The intelligence that ultimately reaches the general public, mostly via news stories, has already been shaped by political actors who are involved in each step from data collection to interpretation and analysis.

The uncertainty of intelligence. The intelligence that feeds into counterproliferation decision-making is almost never an objective piece of fact, but rather an interpretation of raw data gathered by humans or equipment. This uncertainty implies that the decision to weaponize in Iran can never be fully understood by a foreign intelligence agency.

Moreover, even if analysts know, with a high degree of confidence, that the Iranian leadership has not decided to weaponize their nuclear capabilities, it does not mean that intelligence agencies would, in the future, be able to detect the moment a decision to weaponize is made. It is, therefore, imperative to understand how much time Iranian scientists and engineers would require to build a weapon if the supreme leader were to greenlight weaponization. John Ratcliffe, the director of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), has [reportedly compared the non-decision](#) to weaponize in Iran to football players who fight their way to the one-yard line but don't attempt to score a touchdown.

The uncertainty inherent in intelligence includes the possibility of both false positives and false negatives. The debate over Iranian breakout has been dominated by the 2003 US intelligence failure in which a [false positive](#)—or, more accurately, a [fabricated positive](#) alarm about Iraq manufacturing weapons of mass destruction—led to a costly invasion.

US intelligence also has a history of false negative cases. In March 1993, the South African president, F. W. de Klerk, [declared that his country](#) had destroyed a small arsenal of nuclear weapons, the existence of which was largely unknown until that point. [US intelligence experts had suspected](#) that [South Africa possessed nuclear weapons](#) but did not have concrete details. This intelligence failure occurred despite the Soviet Union detecting preparations for a nuclear test in the Kalahari Desert in July 1977 and [passing the evidence](#) to the United States before [going public with it](#). The knowledge of test preparations did not automatically mean that intelligence agencies in the United States and the Soviet Union could discover the subsequent manufacturing of six atomic devices in South Africa.

In another example, US intelligence agencies discovered test preparations at a nuclear site in Pokhran, India, in December 1995. The tests were postponed after Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao received a visit from the US ambassador in New Delhi, Frank Wisner, and a phone call from President Bill Clinton. However, when the tests finally happened in May 1998, the United States was caught off guard.

Other states have also surprised US intelligence agencies. Israel was able to build nuclear weapons by diverting spent fuel from the Dimona reactor and keeping it hidden from suspicious American inspection teams.

The CIA was puzzled by preparations for a nuclear test in 1964 in Lop Nur, China, because they did not believe the Chinese had enough weapons-grade plutonium to make a bomb. The CIA had completely missed that China was enriching uranium for its first nuclear bomb, ignoring the Chinese uranium enrichment facility at Lanzhou as an “incomplete and possibly incompletable [sic] gaseous diffusion plant.” The United States and particularly Israel have much better penetration in Iran, but there is still no guarantee that a decision to weaponize would be discovered quickly. [Editor’s note: which is precisely why military strikes have had to be undertaken re Iran.]

The politics of intelligence. In addition to uncertainty, intelligence often has a political component. Those who see Iranian nuclear weapons as a big threat are likely to interpret any evidence as more dire than it is. They tend to exaggerate the advances made by Iran in its pursuit of the bomb, because they want to build a coalition to stop or delay Iran as soon as possible. As a small state in the Middle East, Israel perceives nuclear weapons in the possession of one of its regional adversaries as a much bigger threat than distant states in Europe and America do. Therefore, Israel tends to project a shorter timeline for Iran to reach the bomb. This Israeli tendency was also visible in response to the Iraqi and Syrian nuclear programs, which Israel bombed in 1981 and 2007, respectively. [Editor’s note: As Israel PM Golda Meir once said: “We cannot afford to be wrong once.”]

The IAEA estimated that the Iraqi Osirak reactor could produce enough plutonium for one bomb every four years. However, Israel estimated that the reactor could produce that amount of plutonium every year. The Osirak reactor was under IAEA supervision, but the Israelis feared that the Iraqis would be able to divert spent fuel rods between two inspections. When the skeptics pointed out that French technicians at the reactor site would also present an obstacle to diversion, the Israelis retorted that a few French officials could be bribed by the Iraqis. In June 1981, the Israeli Air Force bombed and destroyed the Osirak reactor before the Iraqis could make it operational. [Editor’s note: the Iraqi’s had dual nuclear programs---one they showed the IAEA, the other remained hidden. The hidden program was within 6 months of having produced a nuclear warhead when the US uncovered the program following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, this according to UN Ambassadors Butler and Ekeus, both of whom warned in 1999 that unless removed from power, Saddam Hussein would again seek to produce a nuclear weapons program.]

Special operations by Israel and Ukraine were immediate tactical successes. Their strategic impact will take more time to assess

In 2007, similarly, the Israelis perceived Syrians to be more advanced in their pursuit of nuclear weapons than they actually were. The US and Israeli intelligence agencies had not found a plutonium reprocessing facility and weaponization program—proof that Syria was indeed pursuing the bomb. Indeed, the CIA refused to say with high confidence that Syria’s al-Kibar reactor site was part of a nuclear weapons program. US President George W. Bush told Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that he could not order a military attack on the Syrian reactor “unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it’s a weapons program.” But unlike the United States, Israel was unwilling to wait for more evidence that the Bashar al-Assad regime was acquiring the bomb. For Israel, it was enough that Assad was building the al-Kibar reactor in secret, outside IAEA safeguards, with the help of North Korean scientists and engineers. The Israeli Air Force bombed and destroyed the reactor in September 2007 before it went operational. [Editor’s Note: Why if for peaceful purposes would Syria build a reactor with North Korean assistance and without the required IAEA oversight and supervision?]

High stakes warrant heightened skepticism. The costs of not asking questions about intelligence can be grave, especially when an ally with greater motivation for preventive attack is encouraging the use of military options. In 1963, Chiang Ching-kuo, the official who supervised Taiwan’s clandestine intelligence and paramilitary operations on mainland China, asked the United States for “transportation and technical assistance” in targeting Chinese

“missile sites and atomic installations.” Chiang tried to persuade McGeorge Bundy, the US national security advisor, that the attack should happen soon because “time is the key element.”

He also got an audience with President John F. Kennedy, who [explored with Chiang](#) the feasibility of infiltrating 300 to 500 men to attack Baotou, the site where the CIA believed China was housing a plutonium-producing reactor. Despite Chiang eagerly wanting to go ahead with the plan, Kennedy ended the meeting demanding “better intelligence” on the Chinese nuclear weapons program.

Kennedy’s instinct about the intelligence was right: US intelligence agencies had [misidentified a nuclear fuel component plant](#) at Baotou as a reactor. The actual reactor was in the Jiuquan prefecture and the Chinese were relying on uranium enrichment, not plutonium reprocessing, for their first bomb. Faulty intelligence could have plunged the United States into a costly war with China in 1963. It is, therefore, incumbent upon both the general public and the key decision-makers to be skeptical about intelligence reports when the stakes are so high. Intelligence should come with a statutory warning about its uncertainty and potential bias.

[\[Editor’s note: This works both ways. And the historical record is the IAEA and the US generally miss the development of nuclear weapons by our adversaries. For example: the US intelligence was surprised by the initial Russian nuclear weapons test, as well as the launch of Sputnik. The US also missed the India and Pakistan nuclear test explosions, and especially the connection of the Khan network in Pakistan with China’s 1982 secret decision to actively proliferate nuclear weapons technology as detailed by Tom Reed, the former Secretary of the US Air Force and Deputy National Security Adviser to the President.\]](#)

[The US also missed entirely the dimensions of the Iraqi nuclear program, assuming IAEA assurances of no nuclear weapons program as accurate. The US also didn’t realize the North Korean’s were enriching uranium while claiming the opposite. Similarly, the IAEA and most Western intelligence assured Americans there was no Iranian nuclear program with a military dimension, until deciding that the “non-existent” nuclear weapons program was suddenly stopped in 2003. Furthermore, the US also missed the nascent Libyan nuclear weapons program until discovered by interdicting a Khan network centrifuge shipment from Malaysia to Tripoli at sea.](#)

Guest Essay #2: A house of mistakes: what Kathryn Bigelow’s ‘A House of Dynamite’ gets radically right—and dangerously wrong—about nuclear war

By Scott D. Sagan, Shreya Lad | December 17, 2025

Inside the control room of the Global Operations Center of the US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska as depicted in *A House of Dynamite* by Kathryn Bigelow. (Credits: Eros Hoagland/Netflix © 2025.)

SPOILER ALERT: This is a nuclear posture review, not a movie review, of Kathryn Bigelow’s A House of Dynamite, and discusses in detail the realism or lack thereof of specific scenarios and plot lines in the film.

War movies can have unexpected political effects—and films about nuclear war are no exception. After watching the 1983 made-for-TV movie, *The Day After*, Ronald Reagan [wrote](#) in his diary: “Whether it will be of help to the ‘anti-nukes’ or not, I can’t say. My own reaction was one of our having to do all we can to have a deterrent & to see there is never a nuclear war. Reagan eventually signed major arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, but not until he spent \$30 billion on a fantastical “Star Wars” Strategic Defense Initiative that never deployed a single missile defense system.

Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*—the 1964 dark comedy about a deranged Air Force general ordering a nuclear attack on Russia because fluoride was damaging our “precious bodily fluids”—was even more impactful. The film encouraged the public to start worrying and not love the bomb, a fear that was [dramatically politicized](#) that summer by Lyndon Johnson presidential campaign’s “[daisy](#)” [ad](#), in which a young girl picked petals off a flower as a mushroom cloud appears reflected in her eyes. The LBJ voiceover did not even mention Republican candidate Barry Goldwater’s proposal to use tactical nuclear weapons in

Vietnam. LBJ simply said: “These are the stakes. To make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.” Johnson won a landslide victory.

What will be the political impact of Kathryn Bigelow’s *A House of Dynamite*? The movie was **number one** on global streaming charts for two weeks, and watched by over 22 million people in its first three days on Netflix. It is a cinematically stunning, and emotionally moving, study of human beings making heart-wrenching decisions as a single, unattributable, intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) appears to be headed for Chicago on a bright summer morning. Major reviews, including many by nuclear experts such as **Fred Kaplan, Mark Goodman, Ernest Moniz, Patricia Jaworek, and Isabelle Williams**, have hailed the film for its terrifying realism, treating it as a wake-up call for the American people. **[Editor’s Note: After deciding to try and intercept the single warhead heading toward Chicago, there is no decision for the national command authorities to make. No nation or terror group has been identified as having launched the missile, so there is no retaliatory mission to contemplate. In short, the film simply shows various national security officials running around apparently with little direction or purpose, most of which has nothing to do with the real world. The movie ends with no decision having been made at all, just relaying a feeling of dread among American nuclear officials, unable to do anything about the impending attack on Chicago. This is designed to undermine the deterrent the US now has to make it appear such a deterrent cannot prevent a nuclear attack.]**

But *A House of Dynamite* gets so many details wrong that the lessons viewers take from the film will likely be counterproductive, even dangerous. If it is a wake-up call, the audience will wake up on the wrong side of the bed. An average viewer is less likely to conclude that the United States should pursue a prudent mixture of deterrence and arms control than to decide that President Trump’s expensive fantasy of a perfect “Golden Dome” missile defense system is the only way to significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war. Viewers are also less likely to believe that the United States should follow international law, including the principles of proportionality and non-aggression, than to think, as do two major characters in the movie, that a massive indiscriminate US nuclear response to a single missile launched against an American city is somehow appropriate. **[Editor’s Note: This was a deliberate attempt in the movie to portray US military commanders as warmongers, ready to indiscriminately launch nuclear weapons, even against nations not determined to have attacked the United States. However, a number of military officers told me that they were so angry with this portrayal that they initially stopped watching the movie but were persuaded by staff that they should see all of the movie even with its myriad errors, false assumptions, bad policy ideas and unrealism. As Holman Jenkins wrote in the Wall Street Journal, the movie was not journalism but part of a propaganda campaign to undermine support for US nuclear deterrence and support the alternative of abolition.]**

What *A House* gets right. If an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) or submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) were fired toward the United States, government officials would have 30 minutes or less to decide of what to do, a horrible reality which Bigelow captures accurately. She also pins down the many all-too-human emotional reactions to the rising tension that would undoubtedly compete with efforts to maintain professionalism at the brink: some frazzled White House Situation Room staffers; a confused President scrambling to digest the startling information he receives; voices rising in anger in conference calls between officials in the Pentagon, the White House, and at the Strategic Command (STRATCOM) in Omaha, Nebraska. Screen writer Noah Oppenheim and Bigelow even portray the despondent Secretary of Defense taking his own life by walking off the roof of the Pentagon after realizing that his daughter would likely die in the feared imminent attack on Chicago. (This shocking contrivance seems more plausible if one knows that it is mirroring real-life a Cold War counterpart, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, **who resigned while suffering from severe depression** and then took his own life by jumping off the roof of the Bethesda Naval Hospital in 1949.)

Most important, Bigelow highlights an important truth that most government officials and many nuclear strategists hate to admit: Accidents happen, even in nuclear command and control systems designed to minimize their occurrence. The deputy national security adviser temporarily loses phone connectivity making his way down the National Mall to the White House Situation Room; the CIA’s North Korea specialist can’t hear what she is being asked about their submarines, because she is watching a battlefield reenactment with her son at Gettysburg.

The most important probable accident in the film, however, is not so clearly identified. In the first few minutes after receiving notification that there has been a missile launch from a submarine somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, only

one character in the film pauses to reflect on the possibility of this was an accidental or unauthorized launch of an SLBM by a nuclear-armed adversary. Or perhaps it was an adversary's unannounced missile test? Maybe this was a nuclear submarine commander who went crazy, or a missile test that somehow went astray? Such possibilities, however, are soon dismissed by others in the film, with the utterly implausible argument that the North Korea, Russia, or China was deliberately starting a major attack on the United States with a single missile launch against an American city. [Editor's note: How ironic that Sagan completely misses that in 1988, 1991 and 1992, Senator Sam Nunn, President George H. W. Bush and President Yeltsin, respectively, supported deploying missile defenses precisely to protect against unauthorized or accidental nuclear weapons launches with the Bush's GPALS (global protection against limited strikes), Nunn's ALPS, accidental launch protection system, and Yeltsin's United Nations joint US/Russian global missile defense and arms control proposal].

It is valuable that Bigelow at least raises the possibility of an accidental or unauthorized nuclear attack. Nuclear weapons accidents occurred with disturbing regularity during the Cold War. Nuclear gravity bombs were accidentally dropped in 1961 in South Carolina, in 1966 in Spain, and 1968 in Greenland. Minuteman ICBMs were put on alert during the Cuban Missile Crisis before their safety systems were installed. [Editor's Note: The first Minuteman missile was deployed on the very day the US discovered the Soviet missiles in Cuba, and the first on alert missiles at Malstrom USAF base in Montana were according to President John Kennedy his "ace in the hole" that gave him the leverage to secure the removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba and prevent a world nuclear conflict.] A Titan missile, with a 9 megaton H-bomb warhead, blew up in its silo in Damascus Arkansas in 1980. [Editor's note: None of these accidents would have led to any kind of nuclear war or conflict. And since 1980, no such "accidents have reoccurred, as the US Navy and USAF have demonstrated an unquestioned professionalism in protecting and securing our nuclear forces.]

Equally plausible are false warnings, such as the one received by the launch crew at NORAD on November 9, 1979, when an accidentally inserted test tape triggered a false alarm that momentarily led senior military officers to fear that a nuclear attack was underway. [Editor's note: This event was quickly identified as a test o drill and no US nuclear forces were launched. In fact, the issue never got to the US command authorities including the possible convening of a launch conference. The technology issue was fixed according to a 1980 Senate report from Senator Goldwater and Senator Hart, and has never occurred again, now some 46 years later.]

Or the Norwegian weather sounding rocket launch incident in January 1996 that was momentarily identified by Russian authorities as an American SLBM launch. [Editor's Note: This Norwegian rocket launch is no different than the hundreds of missile launches for commercial and scientific purposes that occur every year. Norway told the Russians that such a rocket launch would occur, as is required by international law and diplomatic agreements. Or the January 2018 incident in which a US emergency warning system operator mistakenly announced that a missile had been launched against Hawaii and told residents to seek shelter, adding that "this is not a drill."

What *A House of Dynamite* gets dangerously wrong. The first whopper of an error that *House* makes concerns US missile defenses. Bigelow and screenwriter Noah Oppenheim show nervous military officers at Fort Greely in Alaska launching two ground-based interceptor missiles against the incoming warhead; one of the interceptors fizzes in the atmosphere, and the other just misses the target. That is a plausible scenario.

Indeed, a phrase the audience hears several times over the course of the film, shooting down a missile warhead is "like hitting a bullet with a bullet." The success rate for a single interceptor destroying an incoming warhead, the film's secretary of defense is told, is 61 percent. Failing to destroy the warhead with two shots is realistic.

But it is not even remotely plausible that the military officers would stop there. In the film, an official says that they need to keep all the remaining interceptors to shoot at other missiles in the future. That is a totally bizarre suggestion. In such an emergency, US military officers, following training and procedures, would keep launching interceptors as quickly as they could to maximize the probability of success.

And what would be the probability of success? The Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency circulated a memo about the film to "address false assumptions, provide correct facts and a better understanding," claiming that that US interceptors "have displayed a 100% accuracy rate in testing for more than a decade."

That Pentagon claim is too optimistic, but not wildly off base, against a single warhead with multiple independent interceptors trying to shoot it down. Two interceptors, each with an independent success rate of 61 percent, would lead to the chance of successfully destroying the re-entry vehicle going up to 84.8 percent—not so much like hitting a bullet with a bullet. With three interceptors, the probability would be 94.1 percent. With four warheads the chance of successfully intercepting the ICBM would be 97.7 percent. (That seems to be the source for the Pentagon’s exaggerated estimate.)

[Editor’s note: the last four interceptor tests have all been successful. Sagan admits a realistic estimate is that 98% of the targets would be destroyed. But somehow 100% is “too optimistic” but 98% is not. Further and most importantly, the tests are not rigged or scripted, otherwise why would they not all be successful? Do we have test range for these tests? Yes, over the Pacific Ocean. And we notify commercial aviation and shipping of such a test for their protection. And we decide when to launch. Why? To accurately inform other nations the missile launch is a test, as is required by multiple international agreements and protocols.

{Editor’s Note: Nonetheless, the interceptor must under realistic conditions acquire and destroy a warhead travelling at 15000 miles an hour. A number of successful tests distinguished between real and dummy warheads. Another test took out multiple warheads. Overall, the US and its allies now deploy over one thousand missile defense interceptors of all kinds, from Patriot, THAAD, Aegis, Iron Dome, GBIs, Arrow, and David’s Sling, all of which was developed out of the SDI program inaugurated by President Ronald Reagan in March 1983 and all becoming part of an overall Golden Dome missile defense system.]

But remember that this is only against one missile warhead. And note that all the Missile Defense Agency interceptor tests, including the more successful recent tests, have been against single missile attacks, not a salvo attack of many warheads with sophisticated countermeasures. Against a large-scale, real-world missile attack, the US missile defenses would be overwhelmed. The United States has built and deployed, at the cost of \$63 billion, 44 ground-based interceptors, 40 stationed at Fort Greely Alaska, and four at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. The system was designed to protect the US from the small North Korean arsenal or from any accidental or unauthorized launch of a single missile. Simple math demonstrates why even highly effective missile defense is inadequate against large forces armed with nuclear weapons.

In the June 2025 “12-day War” against Iran, the Israeli “Iron Dome” and other defenses had an impressive 87 percent success rate against the hundreds of drones and 200 ballistic missiles armed with conventional warheads, launched by Tehran against Israel. Israel’s midcourse interceptors had a modest 10 percent success rate. And the 45 missiles that got through killed 28 Israelis (27 civilians and one soldier). A single Hiroshima-sized weapon detonated above Tel Aviv would kill 100,000 and injure 200,000. Had all the Iranian missiles and drones been armed with nuclear warheads, most of Israel would have been destroyed.

The math is impossible to ignore. Strategists call this “offense dominance.” The explosive power of a single nuclear warhead is so extraordinary that impossibly perfect defenses would be necessary to limit damage to acceptable levels against any large-scale missile attack. Against a single accidental launch, as in the film, successful missile defense is possible, perhaps even probable. Against the North Koreans, maybe. Against the Russians today, no. Against the Chinese, who are rapidly increasing the size of their arsenal, effective missile defense also is not possible.

Hitting one bullet with a bullet might be possible. But successfully hitting all the weapons in a barrage attack is not. Against a large attack of ICBM or SLBM warheads—say 1,000—even an 87 percent success rate, means 13 percent of the warheads (or 130 warheads) would hit American targets. Those 130 warheads, one each to an American city, could kill many, many tens of millions of innocent American citizens.

[Editor’s Note: This is where Sagan and missile defense opponents completely miss the purpose of missile defense and its required effectiveness. A limited strike with a few warheads can be defeated as Sagan admits. That seems not to be important as even a limited, workable shield is not endorsed by many missile defense critics. The effectiveness of an adversary’s launching a massive, disarming pre-emptive strike, which is what has most worried nuclear deterrence professionals for decades, can be hugely complicated even with no defenses, given the various ways in

which the United States can add survivability to its nuclear forces—make ICBMs mobile, or protect silos with defenses, place strategic aircraft on alert, and place more submarines at sea, on top of the survivable forces already deployed in the oceans.

As former Representative Trent Franks, the founder of the Missile Defense Caucus in Congress, put it at a Gold Institute conference this month on the US-ROK alliance, missile defense can markedly complicate any such massive attack making such an attack highly unlikely. Given Sagan admits the US can with the current deployed defenses successfully destroy a limited attack, missile defense further adds to the insurance of nuclear deterrence, including extended nuclear deterrence for our allies.

Israel shot down 90-95% of the 30,000 missiles, drones, and rockets engaged over a 2-year period according to Israel missile defense expert Uzi Rubin in remarks he made earlier this year at our NIDS nuclear deterrent seminar series. Missile defense forces an adversary to launch a much larger volume of missiles and rockets in any contemplated first strike, making it inevitable that a major retaliatory strike will also occur. Go big and everyone loses is the message. Go small and we can defeat you.

So, neither adversary capability works to coerce, blackmail or harm the US if we have a robust, multi-tiered missile defense system, which is now no longer hypothetical or fanciful but both technologically available and affordable according to Ambassador Hank Cooper and retired USAF Lt General Trey Obering, both of whom developed, tested and built myriad US and allied missile defense systems now deployed in some dozens of nations within NATO and in the Western Pacific and the Middle East. No perfect system is needed as missile defense is not replacing nuclear deterrence but actually adding to current deterrence with another layer of insurance.

There is a reason the CCP and China go ballistic when our Pacific allies and the US deploy missile defenses in the region---it markedly reduces the coercive and blackmail elements of the CCP's nuclear weapons deployments, a point made by the 2023 Strategic Posture Commission report that fully endorsed the deployment of a US and allies missile defense capability. US adversaries know that missile defense works. That is why they want our missile defense work to stop.]

President Trump seems enamored with the Israeli “Iron Dome” success story. But the Russians and Chinese can overwhelm any Golden Dome in the future and are already building exotic nuclear delivery systems today—like the Kinzhal and Zircon hypersonic missiles, the Poseidon nuclear torpedo, and the Burevestnik nuclear-propelled cruise missile—to defeat any advanced space and missile defense technology the US tries to develop and deploy. Given these realities, maintaining strong deterrent forces and pursuing arms control to limit adversaries’ arsenals makes much more strategic sense than funding the fantasy of a perfect Golden Dome, as called for in the December 2025 Trump National Security Strategy document.

Wait for information, not “suicide or surrender.” The second major mistake about nuclear weapons in *A House of Dynamite* concerns US nuclear strategy and limited retaliation options. In the movie, as Bigelow’s top military leaders switch gears from discussing the previous night’s ballgame to preparing retaliation options for the president, the most hawkish of them all, the commander of STRATCOM, urges a massive attack against Russia, China, and North Korea. The young lieutenant commander in possession of the nuclear “football”—the briefcase that permits the president to authorize a nuclear strike from wherever he is located—also advocates launching a major nuclear attack, what he gruesomely calls that “well-done” option, rather than a “rare” or “medium” nuclear attack plan.

General Anthony Brady: *We’ve already lost one American city, sir. How many more do you want to risk?*

POTUS: *What kind of fucking question is that? That’s insanity, okay?*

General Anthony Brady: *No, Mister President. That’s reality.*

Actually, it is insane to suggest that senior US military advisors would advocate massive retaliation when they don’t know what country launched the missile, or whether there is a nuclear warhead on board, whether the warhead will explode or fail, or whether the missile is “armed” with a test radio instead of a nuclear warhead. Here’s the reality:

Given those basic uncertainties, US leaders would have every incentive to wait and figure out who had launched the missile, and why, and then make a careful decision about what to do next. The height of insanity (and the height of immorality) would be a large-scale nuclear “retaliation” against nuclear armed states that had not attacked the United States or its allies—a nuclear attack that would certainly put many more American cities at risk of destruction. [Editor’s Note: Here Sagan stumbled on to the truth. The movie does echo the claim by former President Obama that US military advisers to the President would routinely “jam up” the President into choosing the most aggressive of military options.]

In the film, the deputy national security adviser incorrectly tells the president that his options are “suicide or surrender.” That is simply not true. The US government has developed a capability to “ride out” a limited nuclear attack, get more information, and decide on the appropriate response later. We **know from declassified documents** that many limited nuclear response options exist, and a response could be limited to using lower-yield nuclear weapons or even conventional weapons. Other options could aim nuclear weapons at military targets away from cities, following what targeting plans call “urban withholds.” What **we also know** from repeated statements in the Obama (2010), Trump (2018), and Biden (2022) Defense Department Nuclear Posture Reviews is that all US nuclear war plans seek to follow the law of armed conflict and conform to the principles of discrimination, precaution, and proportionality.

Instead of claiming the president had to choose between suicide and surrender, advisors would likely have presented options for waiting to determine who had attacked the United States and only then decide how best to respond.

Nuclear Effects? What effect will *A House of Dynamite* have on US public opinion regarding our nuclear future? It may well be, as many reviews have hoped, that the film provides a wake-up call for Americans, moving them to support prudent deterrence and arms control to help prevent a runaway arms race. **But it seems more likely to us that viewers will learn not to worry about the bomb, but to love President Trump’s yet to be revealed Golden Dome missile defense plan instead.** [Editor’s Note: **Sacre Bleu---the American people would support a deterrence and arms control & a robust missile defense? Yes!!**]

The public of course knows very little about nuclear weapons, and this is especially true of younger Americans. A 2023 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs **found** that 58 percent of the American people reported that they did not know enough about nuclear weapons to assess the risks and benefits for themselves. And 68 percent said they had not read or heard enough or anything at all about missile defense. So, *A House of Dynamite* paints its lessons on a nearly blank slate.

It is not the responsibility of film directors and screen writers to get all technical details right. But it is disturbing when they present clearly misleading scenarios that support controversial policies. We have seen this script before.

Bigelow’s goal with this new film, by her own admission, **was to re-sensitize a desensitized public to the dangers of nuclear proliferation** and nuclear war: “I feel like nuclear weapons, the prospect of their use, has become normalized. We don’t think about it, we don’t talk about it. And it’s an unthinkable situation. So, my hope was to maybe move it to the forefront of our lives.”

That is an admirable goal for a director. The role of experts is to correct the record and to increase the probability that when the public thinks about the unthinkable, they will think about the facts and know more about real challenges and opportunities that make nuclear weapons such a vexing problem.

[Editor’s Note: Air Force officers Lt Gen George Mohnahan and Lt Gen Jim Abrahamson both deserve enormous credit for developing the technologies such as Brilliant Pebbles we now have or will have under Golden Dome.]

<https://thebulletin.org/2025/12/a-house-of-mistakes-what-kathryn-bigelows-a-house-of-dynamite-gets-radically-right-and-dangerously-wrong-about-nuclear-war/>

Administration Developments of Note

The Secretary of the Navy: For the first time in generations, we will have a new leg in America's nuclear deterrence because the Trump-class battleship will carry the nuclear armed sea launch cruise missile.

NNSA finishes sub-assembly of new LRSO warhead 18 months ahead of schedule....congrats!

<https://interestingengineering.com/military/us-finishes-first-nuclear-warhead-subassembly>

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: "This marks a historic day for America — the first new battleship class since 1944. NNSA stands ready to deliver the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles in support of President Trump and the Department of War, defending our nation and preserving peace through strength."

President Donald Trump unveiled plans for a "Trump-class" battleship on Monday that will carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles — the first time a surface ship will be armed with such weapons since the Cold War.

Six intelligence sources indicate [U.S. intelligence reports](#) continued to warn that Putin has not abandoned what it called his aim of capturing all [Ukraine](#) and reclaiming parts of Europe once in the former Soviet bloc. This is consistent with the administration's national security strategy conclusion that a key objective for the US and NATO is to prevent a hegemon emerging who would dominate the European landmass.

International Developments of Note

China is likely to have loaded more than 100 intercontinental ballistic missiles across its latest three silo fields and has no desire for arms control talks, according to a draft Pentagon report which highlighted Beijing's growing military ambitions.

The assessment underscores Beijing's accelerating military buildup, with the report saying China is expanding and modernizing its nuclear forces faster than any other nuclear-armed power. Chinese officials have repeatedly dismissed such findings as attempts to "smear and defame China and deliberately mislead the international community."

A draft Pentagon report claimed China has likely loaded more than 100 ICBMs in silo fields.

Chinese military observers noted that the Pentagon's annual reports are full of speculation and aim to hype up the so-called China threat rhetoric.

China is expanding and modernizing its weapons stockpile faster than any other nuclear-armed power, according to even abolition advocates.

From Moscow: The state armaments program for 2027-2036 envisions the widespread integration of innovative technologies, including artificial intelligence. Key priority areas encompass strategic nuclear forces, space systems, air defense, communications, electronic warfare and command systems, unmanned and robotic platforms, and weapons based on fundamentally new technological principles.

The NATO chief Rutte said Russia's defense budget hit \$200 billion this year — ***about equivalent to all European NATO spending combined when adjusted for purchasing power.*** Russia has transformed into a wartime economy, Rutte argued, with nearly 40% of its budget dedicated to military spending and 70% of machine tools used for weapons production. Trump gets praised while demanding Europe pay up Here's where it gets interesting. Rutte heaped praise on President Donald Trump for working to end the Ukraine war. "President Trump wants to end the bloodshed now, and he's the only one who can get Putin to the negotiating table," Rutte told the crowd. "So, let's put Putin to the test, let's see if he really wants peace, or if he prefers the slaughter to continue."⁴

Israeli officials also are concerned that Iran is reconstituting nuclear enrichment sites the U.S. bombed in June, the sources said. But, they added, the officials view Iran's efforts to rebuild facilities where they produce the ballistic missiles and to repair its crippled air defense systems as more immediate concerns.

Russia Upset With US Assessments

Kremlin says US intelligence conclusions not true'

The Kremlin said on Monday that U.S. intelligence was wrong if it believed Russian President Vladimir Putin wanted to seize all of all Ukraine and parts of Europe that were once part of the former Soviet empire. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Moscow did not know how reliable the sources quoted by Reuters were, but that if the report was accurate then the U.S. intelligence conclusions were wrong. "This is absolutely not true," Peskov said of the intelligence conclusions.

Putin sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022, and Russian forces now control about a fifth of the country. Some European and Ukrainian leaders have accused Putin of having ambitions beyond Ukraine. The Russian president has never said in public that he wants to conquer the whole of Ukraine. But he has said [repeatedly](#) that Russian forces will take more of Ukraine if Kyiv does not agree to cede the remaining part of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine that Ukrainian forces still control. [Editor's Note: Hitler didn't really want more than the [Sudetenland, or Austria, or Czechoslovakia, or Poland, or Belgium, or Holland, or France, or Norway, or the USSR, or Rumania, or Bulgaria, or the Baltics, or Ukraine, or North Africa.](#)]

Many assessments believe Moscow sees the eastward enlargement of the NATO military alliance, which now includes states in eastern Europe that were part of the Soviet bloc after World War Two, as a threat to Russia. While Putin has said he does not seek to restore the Soviet Union or to attack a NATO member, he has said this month that [Russia did not want a war with Europe](#) but that if Europe started one, [which Moscow claims has been done by protecting Ukraine!] then Russia would be victorious.

A new report concludes:

Since retreating from Kyiv in April 2022, Russia has now failed in four of its five strategic objectives: [political subjugation](#), economic sustainability, [regime stability](#) and international standing. Only in territorial control does it hold a pyrrhic advantage. But a declining power is often more dangerous than a rising one. Facing an [economic spiral](#) and depleted [conventional](#) forces, Vladimir Putin is entering a window of maximum danger. We must prepare not for a *resurgent* Russia but for a *desperate* one: 2026 will be the year of hybrid escalation. Escalation, which the UK's Foreign Secretary, in December 2025, on the 100th anniversary of Locarno, boldly stated was already '[flagrantly visible](#)'.

A Compendium of News Stories re Russia Developments re Nuclear Issues

Russian deputy FM: I don't think we're on brink of new arms race; Russia and the United States are not on the brink of a new arms race, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said.

The West brings strategic stability to the brink of an abyss....The actions of the West have pushed strategic stability perilously close to the edge of an abyss - beyond which begins the risk of slipping into uncontrollable escalation and the potential for direct armed conflict between Russia and NATO, warned Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov during a discussion at the Valdai Discussion Club.

Still no response to Putin's initiative on New START Treaty – Ryabkov

The United States still has not responded to the Russian president's initiative on the New START, which is why the task of preparing for all possible developments in the strategic situation remains, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Monday.

Russia hopes to avoid negative scenarios after New START expiration – senior diplomat....Russia hopes to avoid negative developments in the strategic situation following the expiration of the Treaty between Russia and the United States on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the New START Treaty), Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said at a Valdai International Discussion Club debate themed "(Non-)Strategic Stability 2025: A Year in International Security."

Russia reserves right to act likewise if U.S. resumes full-scale explosive nuclear arms tests – Russian deputy FM
Russia reserves the right to do the same if the United States resumes full-scale explosive testing of nuclear weapons, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said.

Russia to respond tit-for-tat if US tests nuclear weapons – senior Russian diplomat has warned of Russia’s mirror-like response should the United States opt to resume nuclear tests.

Russia to define its response to West’s intermediate-range missile deployment Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.

Pentagon's 'military superiority' plan of action concerning – deputy foreign minister.....The Pentagon's strategic goal of establishing military superiority "over all adversaries" is a matter of concern, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said during a discussion of the Valdai International Discussion Club.

A Servant of Truth Who Knows America’s Enemies: A Review of Lee Smith’s *The China Matrix*

The *China Matrix* exposes how America’s China lobby enriched itself, empowered the CCP, and fought Trump’s bid to break a decades-long elite pact against the republic.

By Thaddeus G. McCotter

December 20, 2025

There is an oft-heard warning to “keep your friends close but keep your enemies closer.” Yet this advice is less than helpful if one does not hear and observe this lesser-stated but more urgent caution: “Know your enemy.”

Those familiar with his work at the Tablet and appearances in Real Clear Investigations and The Federalist are well aware how veteran journalist Lee Smith has been identifying the foreign and domestic enemies of the American Republic and our constitution—a duty abnegated by far too many of the people who have raised a hand and taken a solemn, public oath to do so.

In his bestselling books *The Plot Against the President: The True Story of How Congressman Devin Nunes Uncovered the Biggest Political Scandal in U.S. History* and *The Permanent Coup: How Enemies Foreign and Domestic Targeted the American President*, Mr. Smith went to Washington and called out many of these domestic enemies of the Constitution.

Now, in his latest exposé, *The China Matrix: The Epic Story of How Donald Trump Shattered a Deadly Pact*, Mr. Smith sounds a clarion alarm regarding America’s most formidable foreign enemy—the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and its ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—and the domestic cabal of elitists who enriched and empowered themselves by abetting the rise of this communist threat to Americans and all free peoples.

Mr. Smith sets the stage by introducing the protagonist, President Trump, who understands the dangers and the damage caused by the PRC and its supporters and stoutly stands against this China matrix. As Mr. Smith quotes the president:

“China has been ripping us off for many, many years and nobody ever did anything about it. Whether it was because they were intimidated, or whether it was for other reasons. China has taken advantage of us and we, through

corruption or incompetence, have allowed that to happen. We have been losing hundreds of billions and even trillions of dollars to China over a period of many years. A steady stream of \$500 billion a year and more in the trade deficit alone. *Our wealth has been shattered.*” [Emphasis mine.]

Enter the antagonist of the piece, Henry Kissinger, the architect of American engagement and appeasement of the PRC. Aligned and in lockstep with the legacy of the late Mr. Kissinger is the powerful lobby of domestic sellouts he created. Per Mr. Smith: “Far and away the most powerful asset deployed by the PRC is what I call the China Class, leaders from the political, corporate, cultural, academic, and media establishments that have gotten rich off making China rich.”

However mendaciously obfuscated behind noble aims, the real motives of Kissinger and the China Class constitute ancient, sordid sins:

“It was America’s political and corporate elite, the China Class, who largely through trade and financial instruments made this murderous regime what it is today, a peer adversary of the country they call home. And they did it to augment their own wealth, power, and prestige at the expense of impoverishing the American middle class.”

One might expect the public pushback on the China Class to be overwhelming, especially given the economic devastation it has wrought. But Mr. Smith also lays bare the extent of the China Class’s disinformation, misinformation, and lies of omission and commission to keep their PRC gravy train chugging from station to station and beyond:

“China’s depredations are typically ignored thanks to the efforts of a well-funded propaganda machine. Beijing pours money into various American intellectual institutions, including universities, think tanks, and media. It also pays US academics directly, as well as social media influencers on all major platforms, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, to smear America and dismiss reports of China’s human rights abuses of its own population, particularly minority groups, like Tibetans and Uyghurs.”

Even more disconcerting is the fact that the economic harm of the China matrix is combined with an often-overlooked political consequence—specifically, that the rain of riches between the PRC and the China Class has not resulted in that communist nation rejecting its totalitarian rulers and heinous ideology and practices. *Au contraire*: “The result, according to forecasts delivered by U.S. policymakers throughout the 1980s and 1990s, would be China’s eventual democratic evolution. Instead, Beijing’s techno-autocracy rubbed off on America’s elites.”

Mr. Smith trenchantly cites the China Class’s response to the PRC-caused COVID-19 pandemic:

“The pandemic dramatized just how profoundly the relationship had transformed [America’s] ruling class, now employing the same tactics as the CCP and mirroring its cruelty. Covid became an instrument to demoralize Americans and imprison them in their homes; lay waste to small business; leave them vulnerable to rioters free to steal, burn, and kill; keep their children from school and the dying from the last embrace of their loved ones; desecrate American history, culture, and society; and defame the country as *systemically racist* in order to furnish the predicate for why ordinary Americans *deserved* the hell that the elite’s private sector militias like the BLM and Antifa and the FBI and other intelligence services had prepared for them.” [Emphasis in original.]

Given the stakes are existential, President Trump and his America First policies face extreme opposition. “Because Trump’s mission was to break the spell Kissinger had cast, the forces from every sector of the political and corporate establishment that over two generations had coalesced around it fought back. They joined China’s long war against America.”

Yet, can President Trump and the new incarnation of an America First GOP and MAGA movement reaffirm liberty, prosperity, and human dignity in the face of the existential challenge posed by the PRC and its China lobby? Can

our free republic and constitution endure these enemies, both foreign and domestic? Only if the American people see the danger, support its defeat, and demand better at the ballot box.

While many Americans intuitively sense communist China is a strategic enemy and rival model of governance, fewer are as aware of the intimate connections and intricate deceptions the PRC and the China Class utilize to enrich themselves at the expense of our country. For this, Mr. Smith is owed a debt of gratitude for providing a must-read roadmap of our foreign and domestic enemies' ulterior motivations and aims. To read *The China Matrix* is to be truly forewarned and forearmed.

Lee Smith is what a true journalist should aspire to be. He is a servant of truth who knows America's enemies and has devoted his life to revealing them and providing his fellow citizens the opportunity to also recognize and confront them. It is an opportunity to know one's enemy that must be seized, lest our elitist China class remain in the driver's seat and keep steering America down the road to PRC serfdom.

An *American Greatness* contributor, the Hon. Thaddeus G. McCotter (M.C., Ret.) served Michigan's 11th Congressional District from 2003 to 2012. He served as Chair of the Republican House Policy Committee and as a member of the Financial Services, Joint Economic, Budget, Small Business, and International Relations Committees. Not a lobbyist, he is also a contributor to *Chronicles*, a frequent public speaker and moderator for public policy seminars, and a co-host of "John Batchelor: Eye on the World" on CBS radio, among sundry media appearances.

About Thaddeus G. McCotter

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Unless China is hiding hundreds of millions of twenty and thirty-somethings somewhere, they're in a demographic death spiral, and it follows that its capacity to cause harm diminishes by the day. This isn't to say that the country won't be dangerous for several more years. Its hubris about its place in the world will ensure that the engine continues to run. That and its borrowed (like everything else) blueprint of authoritarianism makes it more likely that it will start WWII before the clock runs out. A war over Taiwan would likely begin with a mass casualty event.

In the meantime, the shills will continue paving the way for China, likely mirroring its propaganda, while trying to avoid imitating its juvenile substance. They're eager to remain beneficiaries of the regime's largess to persuade Westerners, particularly Americans, to go back to the eighties and nineties mindset about China. But they only take the world's reserve currency for their services. The old China guard here and in other Western countries made their share of it, with many of them dead or discredited. But the effort continues, with lesser lights willing to sell out their countries.

This is a book that I look forward to reading as the review suggest that Lee Smith is calling out those responsible for the disastrous policies of the US elite Establishment that facilitated the rise of China. At the center is not only Kissinger, Clinton-Gore, but the core of the George W. Bush administration. I hope that Lee clearly identifies the role of Robert Zoellick, Goldman Sachs, McKinsey, "Big Finance" and the media such as the Wall Street Journal in selling out American manufacturing and the American Middle Class to the CCP.