

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



Image: Illustration of the Sentinel next-generation ICBM. Credit: Northrop Grumman - Space News

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ICBM EAR Report, Week of January 20, 2026 Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis, and Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies.

NIDS Seminar Event of the Week

Rick Fisher Brief on China's Strategic Nuclear Forces: Threat and Purpose

<https://youtu.be/-zjyCiTwWpw?si=w20liTyBh7ASSaMI>;

January 30th NIDS will hear from **Mark Schneider and Stephen Blank on Russian nuclear modernization** and build as well as the objectives and purposes for which these nuclear forces are deployed.

Please email Kimberly at kcherington@thinkdeterrence.com to register and attend.

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

The WSJ: \$1.5 trillion military will cost much less than a war with China.

The SECAF in Cheyenne/20th USAF: “Super impressed” with the ‘Mighty Ninety Wranglers’, ready today with the Minuteman III to defend our national interests, while also modernizing towards Sentinel.”

NATO Secretary General Rutte: Credited Trump with forcing major European powers — including France, Italy, and Spain — to step up their defense commitments.

Secretary General Mark Rutte: Good to see Danish PM Mette Frederiksen [on Friday] morning in Brussels. We’re working together to ensure that the whole of NATO is safe & secure and will build on our cooperation to enhance deterrence & defence in the Arctic.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte: “I’m not popular with you now because I’m defending Donald Trump, but I really believe you can be happy that he is there because he has forced us in Europe to step up, to face the consequences that we have to take care of more of our own defense.”

Administration Strategic Developments

Secretary of the Air Force Troy Meink assessed the readiness, sustainment and modernization efforts supporting the land-based leg of the U.S. nuclear triad, in a visit to 20th USAF, now commanded by the great Maj Gen Stacy Huser.

President Trump reached the “framework” of a deal on Greenland, while underscoring that the proposed Golden Dome missile defense system was subject to further discussions related to the island.

President Trump: “Based upon a very productive meeting that I have had with the Secretary General of NATO, Mark Rutte, we have formed the framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland and, in fact, the entire Arctic Region.

The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps warned Israel and the U.S. against “miscalculations” in the wake of mass protests, saying his force had its “finger on the trigger.” .

A Recent Study: The broader implications of this U.S. buildup are already reshaping regional calculations. The repositioning of missile defenses from the Indo-Pacific theater to the Gulf signals a decisive prioritization of the Iranian threat, even as tensions persist in the South China Sea. With the Abraham Lincoln now operating within range of key Iranian targets, and with precision-strike and ISR platforms fully integrated into CENTCOM's battle network, the United States has restored a formidable deterrent—one that could rapidly transition to offensive operations should diplomatic options collapse

Mr. Robert Imig, senior advisor to the Deputy Secretary of @DeptOfWar, & Mr. Andrew Mapes, acting principal deputy chief digital & AI officer for DoW's CDAO, visited USSTRATCOM to discuss @SecWar priorities & the mission of our safe, secure, effective & credible nuclear forces.

International Strategic Developments

NATO Chief Tells World Leaders 'Trump Is Right' About Greenland explaining that forceful measures must be in place to protect the Arctic region is correct. "When it comes to the Arctic, I think President Trump is right," Rutte said in a video [posted to X](#). "Other leaders of NATO are right." Rutte further noted "We need to defend the Arctic. We know that the sea lanes are opening up. We know that China and Russia are increasingly active in the Arctic."

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung: North Korea is producing enough nuclear material that could allow the DPRK to add up to 20 nuclear weapons a year to its arsenal, adding that Pyongyang is also continuing to improve its long-range ballistic missile technology aimed at striking the U.S. mainland,

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov: Russia and the United States currently have no specific contacts regarding the imminent expiry of New START. **[Editor's note: Russia has only proposed to keep the major overall limits of 700-800 SNDVs but without any proposal for inspections and verification measures.]**

Russian Defense Ministry: The Tu-22M3 long-range strategic bombers carried out a scheduled patrol over neutral waters of the Baltic Sea.

Congressional Developments

Congressional Developments of Strategic Significance

Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE): "@POTUS is right not to use military force to achieve our objectives in Greenland. Its strategic location matters for our national security, and the right path forward is working with allies to reinforce our missile defenses so we can deter adversaries, safeguard our nation, and protect our partners."

House and Senate negotiators released a compromise FY26 spending measure that would provide \$839 billion for the Pentagon, the bill would fully fund the Air Force's LGM-35A Sentinel ICBM program, allocate \$1.9 billion for the B-21 Raider, and provide funding for building a Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine.

The House passed and sent to the Senate a compromise \$839 billion FY26 defense spending bill, paving the way for final passage through the Senate which has until January 30th to pass the final 4 appropriations bills.

Some Budget News

If not for some one time spending shifts, CBO says the deficit for December 2025 would have been \$27 billion less than the deficit in December 2024. The deficit in Dec 2024 was \$86 billion; so, the real deficit in December 2025 was \$59 billion, despite that outlays of SS, Medicare and Medicaid were UP \$67 billion compared to December 2024.

FY2026 NDAA Conference Report News and Views

Solid Rocket Motors

Congress in its NDAA Conference report concludes that insufficient resiliency in the solid rocket motor (SRM) industrial base represents a significant chokepoint in the Department of Defense's effort to expand munitions production capacity to meet the growing requirements for munitions. In addition to investments recently made into

the traditional SRM supply base, the Department must continue to promote alternative sources of SRM production.

Competition and innovation are key to addressing weakness in the SRM industrial base, and increasing manufacturability and affordability will prove critical as the Department seeks to aggressively ramp production. Therefore, the agreement provides \$500,000,000 only for the investment in modernization, expansion, or facilitation of the solid rocket motor industrial base, of which \$150,000,000 shall be available only for the qualification and testing of second source providers.

Required report in 90 days: (1) existing SRM suppliers of critical munitions; (2) potential second sources or plans to onramp a second source; (3) available SRM production capacity; (4) the quantity and percentage of motors delivered on time; (5) the quantity and percentage of motors rejected or returned for failures for the primary source and any secondary sources over the previous five years of delivery; and (6) a detailed timeline and associated funding investment required to increase capacity aligned with the increased production rates.

The NDAA also referenced the missile defense program. Golden Dome concluding:

On January 27, 2025, the President directed the development of a next-generation missile defense shield, Golden Dome for America. While the House and Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittees support the operational objectives of Golden Dome for national security, the agreement notes the Department of Defense's decision to date not to provide complete budgetary details and justification of the \$23,000,000,000 in mandatory funding as provided by Public Law 119-21, to include: a comprehensive master deployment schedule; cost, schedule, and performance metrics; and a finalized system architecture and its components.

Due to insufficient budgetary information, the House and Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittees were unable to effectively assess resources available to specific program elements and to conduct oversight of planned programs and projects for fiscal year 2026 Golden Dome efforts in consideration of the final agreement.

To that end, the Secretary of Defense is directed, in conjunction with the Director of Golden Dome, to provide a comprehensive spending plan for Golden Dome resourcing to the congressional defense committees, not later than 60 days after enactment of this Act. The spending plan shall detail planned obligations and expenditures by program, descriptions, justification, and the corresponding system architecture mission areas at the budget line item level for fiscal years 2025, 2026, and 2027 to include a detailed breakout of discretionary and mandatory funds.

The spending plan shall be predicated on the Golden Dome architecture. The agreement further directs the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) to submit a separate budget justification volume beginning in fiscal year 2028, and annually thereafter, detailing program descriptions, justifications, and requested funding associated with Golden Dome activities and requirements, including a crosswalk of funds requested from Golden Dome-related programs executed across the Department.

The budget justification volume shall also include an integrated master test plan documenting the Golden Dome program office's test program, including all test resourcing and events for flight, ground, and cyber testing capabilities. The agreement directs the Director of Golden Dome to provide quarterly updates to the congressional defense committees, not later than 30 days after the close of each quarter, detailing budget execution and the status of ongoing Golden Dome activities to achieve initial operational capability by 2028.

The reports required herein shall be submitted in unclassified form and may include a classified annex. This language replaces the language under the heading "Golden Dome" in House Report 119 162. The agreement retains the language under the heading "Air and Missile Defense" in Senate Report 119-52.

COLUMBIA CLASS SUBMARINE PROGRAM

The agreement provides the Columbia class submarine program with funding commensurate to the level of the fiscal year 2026 President's budget request. Regrettably, there is insufficient funding available to the House and Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittees in fiscal year 2026 to fully fund this and other Department priorities. The agreement intends the incremental funding to be a onetime occurrence.

The Navy did not demonstrate that incremental funding results in meaningful improvements to affordability or program stability to justify an extraordinary exception to key budget principles. The agreement directs the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of the Navy, to provide concurrently with submission of the President's budget request for fiscal year 2027, a list of proposed offsets to achieve full funding of future Columbia class submarines if the fiscal year 2027 President's budget request again assumes incremental funding for Columbia class submarines.

SENTINEL ICBM PROGRAM

The agreement maintains the direction House Report 119-162, under this heading, for the Secretary of the Air Force to provide quarterly briefings on the Sentinel program to the congressional defense committees. The agreement also modifies direction provided in Senate Report 119-52, under this heading, for the Secretary of the Air Force to include during the quarterly briefings a detailed breakout of efforts utilizing discretionary and mandatory funding in fiscal year 2026, and an updated spend plan that includes the entire requirement (discretionary and mandatory) for the Sentinel program in fiscal year 2026.

Russia and China

Russian Nuclear Threats: Analysis and Commentary: Two Viewpoints

George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment concludes that careful analysis shows that Russian leaders between February 2022 and the end of 2024 *did not* make 135 'nuclear threats' that deserved to be taken seriously, contrary to what Voice of America and other media might have suggested. Most so-called nuclear threats were frightening allusions to Russia's nuclear strength and the horror of nuclear war, or symbolic gestures unaccompanied by changes in the operational status of nuclear forces. But, at least once, in late September, through to early October 2022, public and secretly collected evidence indicated that Russian military leaders were setting the stage for possibly detonating non-strategic nuclear weapons to stop Ukrainian advances.

The ICBM Ear thinks Russia has embraced an escalate to win strategy that includes the possible use of limited nuclear force to compel the US and its allies to stand-down. At a forum recently with retired defense and intelligence officials and also at the Gold Institute, Mr. Huessy presented this view of Russian nuclear threats related to Moscow's war against Ukraine as an enduring characteristic of Russia's nuclear strategy.

Presentation of Peter R. Huessy: The Russian threat to use nuclear weapons. Serious threat, bluff or a little of both?

- I. Ukraine is indeed the linchpin to Russia rebuilding its empire. That is the Russian leadership perception, belief, whether we think it's crazy, reckless or dangerous. Putin believes this is necessary for Russia's destiny.
- II. Yeltsin in 1999 issued a decree to build battlefield capable, low yield, highly accurate nukes to use to win wars.
- III. Key Russian objective is to destroy NATO: keep USA out of NATO/Europe; keep Russia in as European Hegemon; and keep Europe docile and subservient to Russia;
- IV. Putin has completed 92+% of the nuke mods initiated by Yeltsin in 1999 decree as well as Russia's strategic deterrent upgrades and modernization.....
- V. Actual reckless nuke use possible but not necessary if intimidation coercion and blackmail work—the acme of war is to win without fighting —Lavrov and Karaganov think the West will eventually or more quickly stand down if we believe nukes might be used by Moscow....thus the serial threats now numbering 128 since February 2022....
- VI. Are they reckless enough to use such weapons if the Russian military/army or state economy is in danger of disintegrating/losing...respectively... .yes, more so.
- VII. As for the current on the ground situation, I believe the war is and will continue to be a meat grinding stalemate not unlike Verdun 1917 and WWI, a point made by Victor Davis Hanson. There are smart folks who believe Ukraine can push Russia out of the territory they have grabbed. That however is a scenario that might in fact lead to the use of theater nuclear weapons by Putin to reverse such losses.

Let me explain further:

- VIII. The USA stood down in 2008 re Georgia; then in 2014 re Ukraine and then again in 2022 re Ukraine. Obama said Ukraine was not important and not of security interest to the USA and that certain war mongers foolishly wanted the Cold War back.....instead reset with Russia was the proper path....
- IX. Obama & Biden explicitly took our deterrent off the table....
- X. If Ukraine if in NATO would compel the USA to go to war with Russia, why would Ukraine under attack even if not within NATO not also compel the USA to fight a war with Russia? Russian defeat or takeover of Ukraine undermines US security whether Ukraine is part of NATO or not. The US and NATO early on

decided to defend Ukraine only with weapons sales, but not to involve NATO troops and boots on the ground....

- XI. **However, Ukraine either is or is not critical to NATO's security. Its protection and defense either requires NATO force involvement or not. Need clear eyed assessment but hoping that things work out absent NATO forces is not a strategy. And taking NATO forces out of the fight encourages Russia to continue the war.**
- XII. **There is also mass disinformation re Russia's ambition and objectives. And too many have bought into Russian disinformation that they seek nothing more than being protected from NATO expansion.** Russia also is attacking and sabotaging other NATO nations through an across the spectrum set of activities.
- XIII. Remember the US elites bought into the foolish USA embrace of China & adopted the "peaceful rise" propaganda put out by the CCP itself; and adopted a narrative that if China trades with the West and becomes more of a consumer society and developed a "middle class", China will move toward democracy----Pillsbury 100 Year Marathon was a wakeup call....unless of course if we hit the snooze button.....
- XIV. So, here are Russia's options:
- XV. If the Russian military looks as if they will lose this war, get routed, or fail, Putin may very well decide to use a few theater/tactical nuclear weapons to completely change the situation on the ground by hoping to panic NATO and the US, and compel us to stand down and cease helping Ukraine;
- XVI. The alternative is that the Russian security forces---FSB---take Putin from office **and before the use of nuclear weapons and then shut down the war and seek a cease fire---**to avoid the catastrophe of the use of nuclear weapons—even just 1-2 and at the theater level. Will the security people find out Putin's plans before the fact? No guarantee on that score.
- XVII. After the use of such weapons may leave the FSB and other centers of Russian power with no alternatives but leaving Putin and his crazies in power. We would be in totally uncharted waters in that case.
- XVIII. That is why the NDAA passed by Congress contains significant funding for US/NATO extended deterrent forces such as the Sea Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear, a long range stand- off weapons for our DCA aircraft. That is also what the battleship idea is about....about changing the narrative. NATO has gravity bombs on aircraft as the sole extended nuclear deterrent; however, we will be adding a nuclear capability to the JSF-F-35 soonest and have developed a new gravity bomb for that role. Will these developments be in time? **When you kick the military can down the road you do not get to recapture the time you have lost. There are serious consequences from delay. We took as General Harencak said, "a holiday from history" thinking the bad guys would also stand down and go on vacation.**

For Russia and China: Do Nuclear Warhead Numbers Matter? By Peter Huessy, NIDS Senior Fellow

Last year, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) concluded that both Russia and China are increasingly dependent on nuclear weapons to achieve their national interests. Combined, they are projected to exceed the US strategic nuclear force in numbers, creating a multiple challenger problem for the US and raising the possibility of collaboration between adversaries. **Key is understanding the extent to which the leadership of Russia and China see such greater numbers as providing greater diplomatic and military leverage against the United States.**

If they do, the projected nuclear landscape does not look good. For the 400 ICBMs that DIA forecasts for Russia, 50 are Sarmats, each capable of carrying 20 high-yield warheads (WHs) (500 kilotons to 1 megaton each), for a total of 1,000 WHs. The remaining 350 ICBMs will be the Yars, carrying 4 (tested with 6) medium-yield WHs (300-500 kt) for a total of 1,400 WHs, giving a grand total of 2,400 ICBM WHs. The Bulava submarine's ballistic missile (SLBM) carries 6 WHs each, or 1,152 WHs, for a total of 3,552 ICBM/SLBM warheads. Russian strategic bombers can carry another approximately 1,000 WHs on various air-launch missiles. This implies a total Russian long-range strategic force of up to 4,552 WHs, exceeding the 2010 New START treaty limitations by nearly 300 percent.

For China, the newly projected 700 ICBM figure for 2035 was a shock, given DIA's historical underestimation of the growth in Chinese nuclear forces, and hopefully means an end to the agency falling victim to China's strategic deception. China is currently producing 50-75 ICBMs per year. China has 400 ICBMs, so another 300 ICBMs by 2035, at 30 ICBMs/year, is feasible. In terms of warheads, the Chinese DF-31A can carry 3 re-entry vehicles (RVs) and the DF-41 up to 10 WH's. Simple calculations indicate that China has the potential to deploy 2,100 to 7,000 ICBM warheads. Regarding Chinese SLBMs, the DIA forecast is for 132 SLBMs — 72 JL-3 SLBMs, each with 3 WHs, and 60 new SLBMs for the 3 new Type 096 SSBNs. Assuming the JL-3 carries 3 WHs, that gives China 216 SLBM warheads. Assuming the new SLBM carries at least 6 WHs, that gives China another 360 WHs,

bringing the grand total to 576 SLBM WHs, for a range of 2,616 to 7,616 nuclear warheads on 832 SLBMs and ICBMs.

The DIA also predicts that China will deploy 60 fractional-orbit bombardment systems (FOBS) by 2035, a force that grants China a new, more dangerous, and heightened qualitative capability. The FOBS are likely to attack the US early warning, C3, and leadership nodes, whose survivability is required to execute any US retaliatory response. Also, of great concern are the additional 4,000 Chinese hypersonic speed weapons, which may be able to evade current defenses and attack from multiple directions or altitudes. It is possible that some of these could be tipped with a nuclear warhead. Especially given that China has the materials and manufacturing processes to produce large numbers of M10-20 hypersonic vehicles and does so at far lower cost than the US.

North Korea, with some 50 DIA-predicted ICBMs, exacerbates the multiple challenger problem and increases the likelihood of collaboration between Russia, China, and North Korea during a crisis or conflict.

Now let's look at the USA. The strategic modernization program consists of 400 ICBM Sentinel missiles to be deployed (estimated) in silos through 2045, with 400 but possibly 800-1200 warheads. Add to that 12 Columbia-class submarines, each with 16 missiles, and each missile with a maximum of 8 warheads or 1,536 warheads. That gives the US a grand total of a maximum of 2,736 total fast-flying warheads if all systems are loaded at their maximum. America's strategic nuclear bomber force of 60 B-52 and B-21 bombers, each with between 8-12 cruise missiles or gravity bombs are in the mix and together adds upwards of 720 warheads for a hypothetical total of 3,456 strategic long-range warheads—although this may exceed the number of useable warheads available in our entire stockpile and exceeds the planned cruise missile acquisition.

Deploying such an expanded force would require at least an additional four years to upload the warheads, according to nuclear Triad experts. When compared to a potential Russian and Chinese deployed force circa 2030-5 of over 11,000 long-range strategic warheads, the USA is left with at least a 3-to-1 numerical disadvantage. **Of critical importance is to note that the USA's total deployed force described here is the maximum number the USA can build, as the Sentinel and D-5 missiles would be "maxed out" under the assumed numbers used in this hypothetical force.** Having a buildup option may in the future turn out to be important even if the United States doesn't need to match warhead for warhead the forces of China and Russia. **Two critical issues are at play here: (1) the USA needs warheads capable of carrying out the nation's deterrent strategy and as noted previously (2) whether the greater warhead numbers are translatable into more aggressive or reckless military force use by our adversaries.**

While the USA could add additional strategic bombers to our planned nuclear force, those bombers would probably be necessary for other conventional purposes, as the USA is the only country in the free world with such capability, and current planning is for 100 new B-21 strategic bombers. If additional ICBMs, submarines, or bombers are to be produced, current USA acquisition schedules would probably add such platforms, but at the end of the current build schedule or after 2040. The USA does have 50 additional ICBM silos (now empty) that could bolster its arsenal. **Even so, any new window of vulnerability may not close for decades.**

One could argue that relative levels of nuclear warheads don't have a strategic impact. Such an assumption may apply to possible USA strategic options, but not necessarily for our adversaries. Arms control deals from SALT in 1972 to New Start in 2010 began with the proposition that parties to these treaties would be operating under the same rules and limits. That is the underlying basis for sound inspections and verifications, and for President Reagan laying down the key requirement—"Trust but verify."

But nuclear superiority or capability may have significant value. President Kennedy believed superiority enabled the USA to stare down the Soviets during the Cuban missile crisis, declaring the newly deployed Minuteman ICBM force was "my ace in the hole." Not dissimilar to his previous belief that the newly deployed Polaris submarine force enabled the USA not to yield to Soviet blackmail over Berlin in 1961.

Having such superior military capability doesn't eliminate the need for sound diplomacy and strategy in the nuclear age. The USA must be mindful of Dr. Kissinger's explanation that while military force without a sound diplomatic framework is but bluster, diplomacy without the threat of force is without effect.

If the 2023 Strategic Posture Commission is correct that Russia and China are in the nuclear blackmail and coercion business, then the USA cannot assume Russia and China have the same strategic assumptions or altruistic goals regarding nuclear weapons numbers and arms control as the United States.

While the USA and Russia curbed nuclear warheads by some 8500 each under the Moscow and New START agreements (down from 10,000 under START I when bomber allowed weapons are taken into account), the decline under both deals was down to the neighborhood of 1,700-1,800 deployed strategic warheads although technically the Moscow agreement called for lower numbers when bomber counting rules are taken into account.

This indicates Russia may have wanted to limit USA-deployed nuclear forces to around 2,000 warheads for about 24 years (2002-2026), while Russian nuclear modernization was eventually completed, and the post-Cold War economic decline in the USSR could be overcome.

Superior nuclear weapons numbers for China and Russia could translate into tangible strategic leverage and altered international behavior. Meanwhile, recent proposals from nuclear abolition advocates urge the United States to unilaterally abandon its long-standing deterrence strategy, including extended deterrence. Such a move could signal a weakened U.S. commitment to its NATO and Indo-Pacific allies, undermining confidence in existing deterrence arrangements and potentially compelling allies to seriously consider developing their own nuclear capabilities.

This is highly ironic, as this very outcome was what many critics of the Trump administration assumed would happen when the administration pushed for more defense spending for non-USA NATO nations. In actuality, a stronger NATO, including the US as a NATO anchor, is better for everyone's security, especially a conventional buildup that encompasses all NATO members rather than most defense spending being primarily centered in the USA.

There is an adage that says the enemy always gets a vote. While the USA may wish for our adversaries to see nuclear forces as a deterrent against the use of force, the reality is starkly different. The enemy has voted. Escalate to win it is. For our enemies, nuclear force is an adjunct of military aggression as well as serving as a handmaiden to the unrestricted warfare the US now faces.

Because nuclear weapons underpin America's overall deterrent strength and provide the umbrella under which U.S. military and diplomatic power operates, it is urgent that the United States complete its planned nuclear deterrent modernization programs. These forces serve as a critical firewall against the use of force directed at the nation. There is no substitute for this capability, regardless of how strongly abolition and minimum deterrent advocates may wish otherwise.

US National Security Strategy

THE US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY RELEASED

NSS Jan 2026

<https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

Excerpts:

To prevent anyone, including China, from being able to dominate us or our allies—in essence, to set the military conditions required to achieve the NSS goal of a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific that allows all of us to enjoy a decent peace.

To that end, as the NSS directs, we will erect a strong denial defense along the First Island Chain (FIC). We will also urge and enable key regional allies and partners to do more for our collective defense. In doing so, we will reinforce deterrence by denial so that all nations recognize that their interests are best served through peace and restraint. This is how we will establish a position of military strength from which President Trump can negotiate favorable terms for our nation. We will be strong but not unnecessarily confrontational.

This is how we will help to turn President Trump's vision for peace through strength into reality in the vital Indo-Pacific. Yet it also acknowledges that even those that may feel distant—like the importance of maintaining U.S. access to the Indo-Pacific, the world's largest market area—still have exceptionally real—indeed, fundamental—implications for our nation's vital interests.

This matters for America's interests because, as the NSS recognizes, the Indo-Pacific will soon make up more than half of the global economy. The American people's security, freedom, and prosperity are therefore directly linked to our ability to trade and engage from a position of strength in the Indo-Pacific. Were China—or anyone else, for that matter—to dominate this broad and crucial region, it would be able to effectively veto Americans' access to the world's economic center of gravity, with enduring implications for our nation's economic prospects, including our ability to reindustrialize.

Russia has also shown that it has the national resolve required to sustain protracted war in its near abroad. In addition, although the Russian military threat is primarily focused on Eastern Europe, Russia also possesses the world's largest nuclear arsenal, which it continues to modernize and diversify, as well as undersea, space, and cyber capabilities that it could employ against the U.S. Homeland.

This is why burden-sharing is such an essential ingredient of this Strategy, even as DoW prioritizes growing the Joint Force and advocating defense spending topline to support such growth. America's alliances and partnerships form a defensive perimeter around Eurasia. Not only do these relationships offer favorable geography, but they also include many of the world's wealthiest nations. Taken together, our alliance network is far wealthier than all our potential adversaries combined.

As a result, if our allies and partners invest properly in their defenses, consistent with the new global standard set at the Hague Summit, together we can generate more than enough forces to deter potential opponents, including if they act concurrently.

Modernize and Adapt U.S. Nuclear Forces.

The United States requires a strong, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal adapted to the nation's overall and defense strategies. We will modernize and adapt our nuclear forces accordingly with focused attention on deterrence and escalation management amidst the changing global nuclear landscape. The United States should never—will never—be left vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. We will not lose sight, however, of President Trump's most important direction for the Department—peace through strength. Recognizing this, it is our essential responsibility at DoW to ensure that President Trump is always able to negotiate from a position of strength in order to sustain peace in the Indo-Pacific.

To that end, as the NSS directs, we will build, posture, and sustain a strong denial defense along the FIC. We will also work closely with our allies and partners in the region to incentivize and enable them to do more for our collective defense, especially in ways that are relevant to an effective denial defense. Through these efforts, we will make clear that any attempt at aggression against U.S. interests will fail and is therefore not worth attempting in the first place. That is the essence of deterrence by denial.

We know that wishing for a decent peace is not the same thing as bringing it about. Thus, if our potential opponents are unwise enough to reject our peaceful overtures and choose conflict instead, America's armed forces will stand ready to fight and win the nation's wars in ways that make sense for Americans. To ensure that is the case, this Strategy will ensure that we see things and the choices we need to make clearly. We will prioritize addressing the most consequential and grave threats to Americans' interests. We will revamp our network of allies and partners to meet the threats we face. And we will be ready, always carrying the sharpest and most formidable sword but prepared to offer the olive branch.

Additional News

Additional Nuclear Deterrent News

The new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a [dire warning](#) this week: The U.S. military currently is unable to deter China and other adversaries in a protracted conflict. Bill Gertz writes "[The comments from Gen. Caine, who was sworn into his post as the nation's top military officer last week, came in written responses to the Senate Armed Services Committee, which contain a remarkably blunt and somewhat pessimistic take on America's military stature right now. Wrote the chairman: "The U.S. does not have the throughput, responsiveness or agility needed to deter our adversaries."](#)" Gertz also explains that Adm. Sam Paparo, the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, [told](#) a Senate hearing that China is engaged in "unprecedented aggression" against Taiwan. A conflict over Taiwan could draw in U.S. forces. Adm. Paparo said U.S. forces can deter China and prevail in a conflict but [warned](#) that "the margin is eroding."

Additional Defense Budget and National Strategy News (from various news sources and reports including Bill Gertz analysis)

The President has proposed a \$1.5 trillion, 5% of GDP defense budget: "It's the right decision for a world of proliferating threats. For "the Good of our Country," especially in these very troubled and dangerous times, our Military Budget for the year 2027 should not be \$1 Trillion Dollars, but rather \$1.5 Trillion Dollars."

Yes, the U.S. already spends more on defense in dollars than other major powers. But the world is more dangerous than any time since Hitler and Tojo were marching through Europe and Asia. China and Russia are working together against the U.S. wherever they can. They're helping anti-American regimes in North Korea, Iran and Latin America.

Most ominous, new technologies are proliferating in ways that threaten the U.S homeland. These include hypersonic missiles, space and cyber weapons, drones, and as ever nuclear weapons. All of this is before AI is weaponized in multiple ways.

China is embarking on the largest military buildup since Germany in the 1930s. Its navy ship count is larger than America's, with an expanding network of bases around the world. It is building nuclear weapons fast, with the delivery systems to threaten American cities. A 2024 report by a blue-ribbon panel of defense experts makes for harrowing reading about our vulnerability in the next war.

Deterring these threats—and defeating them if war comes—requires more money than we are now spending. The U.S. is devoting about 3% of GDP to defense. That's roughly the same as during the height of Bill Clinton's peace dividend in 2000, and half what it was at the height of Ronald Reagan's defense buildup. An additional \$500 billion would get close to 5% of GDP and the NATO target.

But hasn't the U.S. military shown, in Iran and Venezuela, that it is unmatched? Yes, and brilliantly so, against small powers when we can dominate space and the skies and use our experience in combined arms operations. Going up against China, or a multiple front conflict, is far less certain.

Since Barack Obama's budget sequestration in 2013, the Pentagon has had to make ugly trade-offs with declining real resources. This was only briefly interrupted by one-time budget increases in President Trump's first term. The services raid force size and readiness to fund new equipment, which too often is then pared back or canceled to save more money. Replacing an aging nuclear triad is a generational expense and forget about a "Golden Dome" missile defense on current spending plans.

The U.S. military is too small to prevail decisively in a war with a peer, let alone deter another at the same time. A two-war standard has fallen out of fashion in both parties, but it's the realist position. A Taiwan crisis that ensnared the U.S. would be an opportunity for Vladimir Putin to snatch the Baltic states or North Korea to move on the South.

The active-duty Army is now roughly the size that Mr. Obama wanted for his come-home-America worldview (450,000). The U.S. Navy battle force is stuck at about 300 ships, despite the urgent need to grow. Tails in the Air Force fighter fleet? About half the Cold War inventory.

One can argue that the U.S. can compensate with technology, but Ukraine has exposed that wish. The billions of private capital flowing into defense tech will help, but the U.S. still isn't buying and operating unmanned platforms at scale.

Download the U.S. Navy's reports on accidents during a recent carrier strike group deployment to the Red Sea. The damage included shooting down one of our own fighter jets and a carrier fender bender with a civilian ship. The investigations reveal undermanned departments and under-trained sailors, who appear to have grown accustomed to operating that way.

Even the Caracas raid carries a warning. Those jets that suppressed enemy air defenses? The Biden Administration tried to retire a chunk of the Growler fleet, until Congress blocked that self-defeating penny pinching.

The opponents of spending more on defense make two main points: The Pentagon wastes too much of what it now spends, and the U.S. can't afford it. On the first point, we're all for making hard choices, and the Pentagon is making progress in reforming weapons production and purchasing. New contractors like Anduril will make a difference, especially if Congress prods the Pentagon to shape up.

As for affording it, defense is now less than 13% of the federal budget, though it is the most fundamental duty of government. A cradle-to-grave entitlement state won't look so comfortable if America has to fight another war, never mind loses one. The real choice today is between guns and runaway entitlements.

A \$1.5 trillion budget request will be a heavy political lift, and to sell it Mr. Trump will have to level with the public that the U.S. military isn't as dominant as he has claimed. He'll have allies on Capitol Hill if he makes the case. The best way to go down as a peacemaker is by **building a military no one wants to fight.**

Ploughshares

Ploughshares Contribution to the US Defense

Our Women Transforming Global Security (WTGS) initiative — launched in partnership with The Elders and Horizon 2045 — brings together leaders across nuclear policy, climate, health, and technology to design integrated, feminist approaches to global security. [From its annual 2025 Report].

About the ICBM EAR

Peter Huessy's ICBM EAR Report was originally prepared for the USAF in 1981 to help inform US nuclear deterrent policy professionals at the height of the Cold War. Eventually it was provided only to key elements of the Nuclear related Aerospace Industry. The objective: help build an informed political community on nuclear deterrent issues, especially the deployment of the US nuclear deterrent, especially the MX (Peacekeeper) missile. The report covered developments in the nuclear arena on a weekly basis, including developments in Congress, key events, threat assessments, remarks of top US officials, international activity key to US security interests, nuclear budget and program element issues, and arms control and proliferation matters as well.

Weekly ICBM EAR Report

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