

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

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ICBM EAR February 5th, prepared by Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy and President of Geostrategic Analysis.

Summary

Speaker Johnson fulfilled his promise to get 11 of the 12 appropriations bills completed under regular order. The full year funding for Homeland Security has 10 days of debate before a final bill is completed. The New START agreement expired February 5, 2026, and the Ear examines some possible policy options. The Ear's new weekly essay examines the politics of nuclear coercion. A misguided critique of Golden Dome is examined, including the nature of missile defense and its contribution to deterrence. The NIDS nuclear seminars continue February 20; the next Triad Symposium will be June 23-24, 2026, with the first day **including a classified industry briefing on US strategic and theater conventional airpower** followed the next day by our classic nuclear Triad Symposium featuring invited senior members of the USAF Global Strike Command, the US Department of State and Department of War, top-level think tanks and industry, with a save the date letter coming to you this weekend. The Ear also includes a note from Rob Whitman, a senior member of the HASC; The EAR posts a history lesson re restoring constitutional law in Iran. And finally, we include a compendium of news stories on The End of START.

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

Dmitry Peskov: Russian Foreign Ministry: Today's expiration of New START is viewed "negatively," though Russia "will retain its responsible, thorough approach to stability when it comes to nuclear weapons."

Chinese Foreign Ministry: Beijing has no intention of participating "in nuclear disarmament negotiations at this stage."

Chinese Foreign Ministry: "China's nuclear capabilities are of a totally different scale as those of the United States and Russia."

Abbas Milani, Hoover Institute: On Iran, once a regime is "exposed as fragile ... it will not go on forever."

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR): "The United States faces a growing nuclear threat environment. I'm thankful we have a President who takes this seriously and is giving our military the tools they need to stay ahead of Russia and China."

Former STRATCOM boss: Pentagon must develop maneuvering hypersonic nukes.

Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE): "The U.S. must be able to deter our nuclear adversaries. Russia has blatantly ignored the New START Treaty, while China is expanding their nuclear arsenal breathtakingly fast. If we're the only country following outdated rules, we're not strengthening security—we're eroding deterrence."

NIDS Events of the Week

2/20/2026 - Laura McGill, Director of Sandia National Laboratories

2/27/2026 - Roundtable - *Nuclear Testing Explained: History, Risks, and the Road Ahead* with Dr. Don Cook, Dr. James Petrosky, Dr. Laura Hopkins, and Henry Sokolski

3/6/2026 - Sean McDonald - *The challenging trajectory of pit production: learning lessons from history to execute an accelerated production strategy*

3/13/2026 - Paige Gasser- *Toward a New Strategic Approach to U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence*

3/20/2026 - The Honorable Frank Miller and Amb Eric Edelmann – The State of Nuclear Deterrence

3/27/2026 - Michael White, *The Hypersonic Imperative: Restoring U.S. Advantage in a Contested Battlespace*

4/17/2026 - Maj. Gen. Stacy Jo Huser, *Sustaining Minuteman and 20th USAF, Preparing for Sentinel*

Admiral Johnny Wolfe—scheduling in process

Admiral Todd Weeks –scheduling in process.

General Armagost, USAF Global Strike Command & Deterrence and Diplomacy & Strategic Bombers—scheduling in process.

31st NIDS, LSUS and Geostrategic Analysis Nuclear Triad Symposium, June 23-24, LSUS Campus.

The NIDS, LSUS and Barksdale Forward in cooperation with the USAF Global Strike Command announces the 31st in a series of Triad Symposiums, to be held on the campus of Louisiana State University System, on the 23rd and 24th of June 2026. The Symposium will begin with an industry day review of conventional DCA and bomber capabilities and options that contribute to and are integrated with the US nuclear deterrent. Options to expand and readiness alert rates, add munitions, deploy systems overseas and other operational and logistic choices, will be examined in sessions including those classified, with heavy emphasis on industry participation.

The Triad Symposium on the 24th will highlight the central bedrock role that nuclear deterrence plays in all use of American military and diplomatic power and the urgency with which the nuclear deterrent enterprise must go forward. The Symposium will examine the impact of the end of New START; the emerging balance of power with China and Russia both being near peer nuclear armed enemies; the subsequent options the US has to expand and upgrade its TRIAD; remedies available for the US to deal with cyber and energy threats to our forces; and the contribution of the Golden Dome missile and air defense to conventional and nuclear deterrence.

International Strategic Developments

Separately, the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Department of Arms Control: On February 3, 2026, Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Bin and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov co-chaired China-Russia consultation on strategic stability in Beijing. The two sides exchanged views on current global strategic stability situation and multilateral arms control issues in an in-depth manner and reached a wide range of consensus.

“NATO officials warn that Russian nuclear-armed submarines operating in the Arctic and High North is a growing security challenge to Europe and the U.S. With Moscow's largest naval base located on the Kola Peninsula near Norway's border, access to the Atlantic is a critical concern.”

There is a growing consensus in Congress and within the Trump administration that any new talks and agreement on nuclear arsenals must cover limits on Russia's new types of nuclear weapons and China's rapidly expanding strategic arsenal.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on February 3rd, "The world will be in a more dangerous position than it has ever been before" with New START set to expire.

On February 4th, Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin reaffirmed their commitment to closer strategic coordination between Beijing and Moscow, framing cooperation in energy, civilian nuclear projects, and advanced technologies as part of a broader agenda to safeguard national sovereignty and security

U.S. and Iranian officials are set to hold talks in Oman on Friday, February 6th after Tehran requested a change of venue to limit negotiations to its nuclear program.

Administration Strategic Developments

Following the expiration of New START on Thursday, President Trump said in a social media post that he wants the United States to negotiate a “new, improved, and modernized” strategic arms treaty “that can last long into the future.”

Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Thomas DiNanno called for a new multilateral arms control agreement, saying that Washington believes “a bilateral treaty with only one nuclear power is simply inappropriate in 2026 and going forward.”

State Department deputy spokesperson Mignon Houston, in an interview reaffirmed Washington’s commitment to providing “extended nuclear deterrence” to South Korea.

President Trump has signed legislation on the appropriations to \$1.2 trillion in government spending. The legislation Trump signed funds agencies including the Department of War, the Department of State, the Treasury Department and others through the end of September and the end of the fiscal year” completing a process first announced by Speaker Johnson late last year when the first funding shutdown had been ended.

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth: The Pentagon is “more than prepared” to act if Iran refuses to negotiate with the U.S. over its nuclear program.

Congressional Strategic Developments

Statement of Representative Rob Whitman, the Vice Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, representing the 1st district of Virginia.

Today, the House voted to end the partial government shutdown by passing the *Senate amendments to H.R. 7148*. This funding measure brings five of the remaining six appropriations bills across the finish line, while extending funding for the Department of Homeland Security through February 13th. While this action reopens the government, it is not a permanent solution.

Government shutdowns are costly, ineffective, and threaten the livelihoods of hardworking Americans and their families. As we saw in October, families go without paychecks, and critical services are disrupted, creating uncertainty. I voted for this funding measure to prevent more harm from being done to the American people.

The House did its job by passing all twelve appropriations bills through regular order, something that hasn’t been accomplished since 1997. Washington’s actions have consequences, and the pattern of waiting until the last minute to finalize funding bills and then relying on short-term measures to keep the government running is ineffective and irresponsible. For years, I have called for a return to this process, and I have introduced legislation to hold Congress accountable. Passing all appropriations bills through regular order restores responsible governing and promotes transparency in the budget process.

I have consistently introduced legislation to hold Members of Congress accountable for the budget process:

- [No Budget, No Pay Act](#): Withholds members’ pay until a budget is passed.
- [Stay on Schedule Resolution](#): would require the House to stay in session through August instead of taking a month-long recess – if all government funding bills are not passed by the end of July.
- [Inaction Has Consequences Act](#): would withhold Member pay if all 12 government funding bills are not done by the end of the fiscal year.

I have also supported the bipartisan ***Pay Our Troops Act*** to ensure that members of the military are paid in the event of a government shutdown, as well as the bipartisan ***Shutdown Fairness Act***, which would require federal agencies to pay employees on time in the event of a shutdown.

Essays

Guest Essay #1 From the Archives **Restoring Constitutional Government in Iran: Again.** **By Peter Huessy**

In [mid-August 1953, in Iran](#) – at that time a constitutional [monarchy for half a century](#) – Prime Minister [Mohammad Mosaddeq](#), a pro-Soviet anti-democracy populist, suddenly moved to one-man rule, dismissed parliament and nationalized Iran's oil and gas reserves, then owned by the United Kingdom. Mosaddeq ruled by decree, bypassing parliament, all contrary to the [Iranian Constitution](#). Then he instigated a plan to assassinate [Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi](#) the one person under the Iran constitution that could legitimately fire Mossaddeq and restore constitutional rule. To avoid losing his life, Pahlavi and his family fled the country.

Four days later, order was restored per Iran's Constitution, with a modicum of belated but overt logistical and financial help from the U.S. and UK. The Shah returned and, as was his constitutional right, he cashiered Mosaddeq, [who got 3 years in prison followed by house arrest for life](#).

To take more credit than was deserved, and make up for being caught so flat-footed by Mosaddeq's surprise revolt, [Kermit Roosevelt, Jr.](#) of the Office of Strategic Services – and grandson of FDR-- claimed Pahlavi's "royal restoration" was all his doing.

For supporters of the current violent jihadist regime in Tehran, it has been an article of faith that the USA and UK illegitimately got rid of a popular and democratic ruler over a lust for oil and an unwarranted fear of communism and says the Associated Press "lit the fuse" for the 1979 Islamic revolution .

Thus, the restoration of constitutional law was forgotten and deep sixed and the fairy tale of covert-CIA action to put down a popular democratic revolutions was the new accepted narrative, especially among the media, academia, Hollywood and progressives everywhere.

By accepting the delusion that Iran's progress toward progressive democracy was hijacked by the CIA, wholesale excuses were made to explain away or ignore Iran's massive terrorism enterprise. But more importantly, the fictional "coup" gave an excuse for progressives in the West not to confront Iran's rogue behavior but claim it was understandable. After all, as former President Clinton explained in 2014, most Islamic terrorism would go away if the Palestinians were provided a state of their own.'

Such is the strength of the false 1953 narrative that Iran can be treated as a normal nation as it chairs a UN human rights committee, enters into a nuclear non-proliferation accord such as the NPT and JCPOA, engages in trade while shutting down western oriented commercial ocean freight traffic in the Red Sea and Suez, all while it routinely rains down thousands of rockets, missiles and drones on US and Israeli forces, openly using its terrorist proxies Hezbollah and Hamas.

The constitutional restoration and the successful 1953 return of Pahlavi to Iran was led by a domestic Loyalist-Royalist coalition, made up of members of the Iranian military, the Iranian theocracy, Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi's own supporters, and supporters of the Iranian Constitution. That was a *good* thing, subsequently distorted by anti-West revisionists into a very *bad* thing.

The ruling Iranian thugarcacy describes the US actions as "the great arrogance" for supposedly meddling in Iranian affairs, all the while the Tehran thugs terrorize Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and then blame the country's disastrous economy on "[foreign interests](#)."

The Iran oil and gas reserves at the time were part of a Middle East resource that made up some 80% of the known [conventional](#) oil and gas reserves in the world, control over which would have meant huge economic and diplomatic leverage. The vast fossil fuel reserves in Eastern Russia had not yet been discovered and Russia saw Iran as a key prize in the geostrategic energy sweepstakes.

As [daily headlines](#) make clear, Iran is now again seeking nuclear weapons –deliverable into Israel, Saudi Arabia and even the continental United States. Russia, China, and North Korea are all reportedly assisting Iran in that pursuit. As Iran's former big shot Rafsanjani explained, Israel is very much a "[one bomb country](#)." Even knowing

this, many US administrations have sought shaky deals with the mullahs, a legacy of [appeasement](#) that has not turned out well.

Throughout the 1970's, Iran's human rights record was demonized, with regular human rights marches up and down Connecticut avenue, appealing to the Carter administration's pledge to improve human rights in the third world by pushing the Shah out of power. The Carter administration declared that the exile Khomeini should return from France because after all he "was a man of the cloth" said the US President while his UN ambassador said Khomeini "Was a saint." Carter persuaded the French President to grant an exit visa to Khomeini and the rest as they say is history.

The consequence of adopting the 1953 fairy tale as reality could end with nuclear war. Israel had to bomb the nuclear reactor sites in Iraq and Syria to prevent the two terror sponsor country agents of the USSR from going nuclear. Then the U.S.-led First Coalition confiscated Saddam's nuclear-weapons gear, after the Gulf War of 1991. The UN's [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) reported soon thereafter that Iraq had been within *one year* of having a crude fission bomb, although Ambassadors Ekeus and Butler told Congress Saddam was within 6 months.

Iran was a latent nuclear weapon state able to manufacture nuclear weapons fuel, having serially violated the 1969 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Advanced Protocols adopted by the IAEA, and the 2015 JCPOA or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the latter being basically a gateway for Iran to get the bomb. Excusing Iran rogue behavior undermined deterrence making an end to Iran's quest for nuclear club status nearly impossible. Iran – since 1979 in the grip of Islamic Fundamentalists sworn to exterminate Israel and the USA —is now seriously weakened but still able to kill tens of thousands of its own people. The US administration is seeking a valid and verifiable deal ending the nuclear program in Iran, although helping the people of Iran demanding an end to the jihadi regime should also be high on a list of US objectives. Can that be done while we also seek a .deal to end Iran's nuclear pursuits?

Critics are quick to argue that US policy in the Middle East is "just about oil" and therefore somehow illegitimate. But despite all the claims of how a soon to be ended age of carbon will be achieved, the global demand for crude oil increased 25% since 2005 from 83 million barrels/d to 103 million barrels today. A conflagration in the Middle East among nuclear armed antagonists could quickly lead to Armageddon, or at the very least the cutoff of 30% of the world's crude oil daily supply, crashing the world into a quick and lasting global depression. Perhaps restoring Iran's constitutional form of government as the US helped achieve some 73 years ago should be done once again.

An Analysis: Missile Defense, SDI and Golden Dome

Nearly a half century after President Reagan announced the beginning of the Strategic Defense Initiative, the critics still have not figured out what missile defense can do for America's security. In another mistaken assessment appearing in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Igor Moric declares "[Trump doesn't need the Golden Dome in Greenland.](#) [Link: [Read more.](#)]

The former Shanghai and Peking space student gets at least four things wrong. First, added radars especially those augmenting the current Defense Support Program would add significantly capability to what will be a layered Golden Dome deployment of current and new systems; second, the Greenland adjunct to missile defense is not just to improve the existing missile defense in Alaska and California but to provide other options; third, the Golden Dome defense is not designed as Moric claims to shoot down all 2000 potential Russian warheads that could (but highly unlikely) be launched at the United States; and fourth, recent unscripted tests of US missile defenses have been 100% (not 50% as Moric claims) successful including against complicated targets with both multiple and maneuvering warheads.

As an important reference is in June 2025 Israel's missile and air defenses intercepted 99% of the drones fired by Iran and its terror proxies and near 90% of the 650 long range Iranian ballistic missiles, an incredible capability previously ridiculed as unattainable by missile defense opponents.

For the United States Golden Dome would similarly contribute (as an adjunct not replacement) to the deterrent protection of the United States here at home and overseas. For example, as former House member and missile defense expert Trent Franks noted at a recent Gold Institute defense forum, any use of a limited "escalate to win"

force could be dealt with by a layered Golden Dome combination of US air and missile defenses, including but not limited to those currently deployed systems such as THAAD, Aegis and the current mid-course system in Alaska.

If an US enemy would seek to overcome our defenses by going big, the likely consequences would be a US highly destructive counter-strike, making such an initial enemy strike suicidal. In short, a future small “escalate to win” strike, seeking to coerce the US to stand down, could be fully intercepted with new advanced missile defense technologies, but not necessarily stopped by our current deterrent. This strategic dilemma is why Congress has overwhelmingly supported enhancing both our deterrent through better regional and theater offensive capabilities and simultaneously pursuing Golden Dome to significantly adding to our current missile defenses.

Assessment: What to Do Post New START?

The New START nuclear weapons agreement expired February 5th, 2026 after having been extended for five years in 2021. In 2023, Russia suspended what Moscow called implementation of the treaty, which included stopping all verification and inspections. True to form, the abolitionists blamed the United States for the treaty's demise, largely based on the mistaken idea that Mr. Putin's proposed one additional year extension was valid.

For example, the Arms Control Association complained the Trump administration continued “to stiff arms control diplomacy” and was on the verge of increasing the warheads in the US strategic arsenal. This would force Russia and China to follow suit and even accelerate an already ongoing strategic nuclear buildup.

On the other hand, Putin has stopped complying with the treaty for at least the past three years while deploying actual strategic long range warheads in excess of the New START limits while China remains completely unburdened by any legal limits on any of its nuclear forces, as does Moscow with respect to its thousands of theater and regional nuclear forces.

But the actual nuclear forces in Russia and China not controlled by the New Start treaty even if still in force are a response to possible future nuclear force additions by the United States which have not yet been acquired or deployed. This is the new arms control fuzzy math: the US is responsible for forcing China and Russia to deploy existing nuclear weapons for what the US might deploy in the future if the US decides to do so. Such as what one might describe as anticipatory arms racing. Proliferation News, however, got things right, explaining China's “nuclear build-up, the world's fastest since the height of the cold war, is likely to prompt America to expand its arsenal, too.”

Nonetheless, the abolition folks at BAS proposed a number of anecdotes to the New START agreement going out of business. Largely ignored by the report is the President proposal back in 2017 that a new, better arms deal be completed with China and Russia and the USA as parties, but which was stiffed by China. Just this year the President again proposed a more comprehensive and longer lasting treaty be completed including again with Russia, China and the United States, a proposal that was again stiffed by China and Russia.

The nature of any future treaty on nuclear weapons has been fully formulated by the United States Senate when it previously agreed to New START in 2010. Any future treaty has to include China and include all nuclear weapons, both strategic and theater systems, as the United States is outmatched by anywhere up to 30 to 1 in theater or battlefield-type nuclear warheads.

Nonetheless, one abolition group--The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (BAS)--wanted to get a jump on things and proposed “new ideas.” One proposal was for the US adopt a treaty banning putting nuclear weapons in space. Well, that already exists except China isn't a party and has refused to join. Another idea was to adopt Mr. Putin's proposal that the US maintain the central limits of 700 SNDVs and 1550 warheads---only Russia did not adhere to such limits when New START was in force, has new nuclear weapons not captured by the treaty on top of which Moscow refused to include inspections or transparency measures.

Another idea put forward was to restrain worst case planning through new arms control. But when the 1983 intelligence assessment of the USSR's nuclear intentions projected the Soviets were building by 1994 to a 24,000 strategic nuclear arsenal under SALT II, the Reagan administration pushed even harder to take down the Soviet empire while seeking massive nuclear REDUCTIONS under INF, START I and START II.

A minimal deterrent plan was put forward by BAS which called for a “retaliatory capability without excess,” hardly helpful in that United States deterrence strategy requires adequate warheads to cover the selected targets. That works and anything else doesn't. Finally, one beneficial idea in the BAS collective was to require transparency of nuclear arsenals including inspections to which should be added portal monitoring.

From the Archives. ICBM EAR essay from July 2025.

Invest, Don't Spend. Peace Dividends

By Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow, National Institute for Deterrence Studies

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was assumed that the US no longer needed a robust defense budget. As a result, the US went on what Maj General Garret Harencak called a procurement holiday or “holiday from history.”

Many assumed it was indeed the end of history. After all, between 1987-1993, Washington and Moscow signed four notable arms control deals with Moscow— the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I & II), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Outer Space, and the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE).

Russian strategic nuclear weapons were scheduled [Editor: Under START I and II] to drop from over 10,000 - deployed or in the field - to 3,500 [Editor: countable] by the year 2000. INF range or SS-20 missiles were banned altogether. And all Warsaw Pact conventional forces in central Europe and Russia dropped precipitously.

President Reagan's economic war against Moscow was successful. It ended the Soviet empire by pushing Moscow to the brink of insolvency to where Russia could not financially maintain its formidable Cold War nuclear and conventional force levels.

Eight Year Reign of Continued Terror

However, from 1993-2001, the US did not enjoy the promised “end of history.” The terrorist or state sponsors of terrorism in Iran, Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq took the fight to the US, albeit in a different mode than threatening to send massive tank armies through the Fulda Gap into Western Europe.

- A warning sign of the coming terror attacks were the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks and the US embassy in Lebanon by Iran and Hezbollah.
- In December 1988, Syria and Libya blew up a commercial airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland.
- And despite the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the terror attacks accelerated.
- In February 1993, the World Trade Center was bombed and could have brought 20,000 people to their death if the garage had collapsed as the bombers had planned.
- Later that year when trying to bring food aid to Somalia, 18 American soldiers were killed in Mogadishu.
- On June 25, 1996, the Khobar Towers and resident American soldiers were bombed.
- The US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya were simultaneously bombed August 7, 1998.
- And then in October 2000, just before a US Presidential election, the USS Cole was bombed in Aden harbor in Yemen.
- The terror campaign against the United States culminated in the attacks of September 11, 2001. One mastermind was Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the uncle of Ramzi Yousef, the key terrorist convicted of the 1993 WTC bombing.
- Unfortunately, the US foreign policy establishment had convinced itself that terror was directly connected to the lack of a Palestinian state. As President Clinton would claim decades later in 2014, he believed most terrorism would disappear if the Palestinians were granted a state.
- And thus, for twenty years following the 2001 terrorist attacks, America underwent nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan. The initial quick campaigns that took down the Afghani and Iraqi governments were brilliant but did not lead to ultimate success.

Readiness and Modernization Shortfalls

While spending trillions on nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US Department of Defense (DoD) suffered from severe readiness and modernization shortfalls. The defense budget was roughly \$305 billion in 1991 when the USSR collapsed and almost exactly that in 2001 before 9/11. In the interim the budget had dropped to as low

as \$250 billion and was only after 1996 gradually increased back to \$300 billion because of the work of a Republican led Congress.

When examined from 1991-2011, the US defense budget of \$300 billion in 1991, outside of what was described as “overseas contingency operations,” would have reasonably been \$480 billion in 2011 with just very modest annual growth of 3 percent. But that was not to be. Using that as a benchmark, the shortfall in defense resources reached \$1.25 trillion just during the two decades after the collapse of the USSR.

What about the next two decades?

The base defense budget in 2011 was roughly \$500 billion, and at first glance equal to what a base force should have been out of a then defense budget of around \$656 billion including an annual \$160 billion for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But in the two decades from 2001-2021, the US DoD spent some \$1.56 trillion on nation building. Or at an annual average of \$80 billion.

In hindsight, over some three decades after the apparent end of the Cold War, the US did not invest in the recapitulation of our military. The three decade peace dividend of \$2.8 trillion was spent domestically and on nation building, and as a result, the modernization and recapitalization of our armed forces, especially the nuclear deterrent enterprise, was postponed, repeatedly kicked down the road .

By the end of the 1990s and a short decade after the reputed “end of the Cold War” and just prior to 9/11, the US nuclear forces had already been in the field since 1982 for the Ohio submarines, 1970 for the Minuteman III (MMIII) Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), 1961 for the B52s, 1993 for the B2 and 1990 for the D-5 missile. The nuclear force was therefore upwards of 40 years old. The nuclear budget of \$77 billion at the end of the Cold War had dropped to less than \$40 billion, with most of those funds simply maintaining the legacy nuclear force.

It was not until 2009-10 that the Administration and Congress agreed on a plan for upgrading and replacing the US nuclear force, 29 years after President Reagan rolled out the nuclear modernization and sustainment plans in late 1981. The new elements are now projected to be placed in the field starting in 2031 and completed by 2042-2050. The failure to make a timely plan for rebuilding the US nuclear deterrent left the US having to do all modernization simultaneously, including nuclear command and control, warhead development, and the building of all three legs of the nuclear triad.

Having left off the table nearly \$3 trillion in possible defense funds, Washington shortchanged the US military across the board. Not moving forward with nuclear modernization, while sustainment costs of the legacy nuclear forces mounted every year, led to some serious disconnects in the submarine and ICBM legs of the Triad.

Skilled Workforce Shortage

Most importantly, the US available work force for American efforts in the nuclear arena, space, missile defense and cyber is less than needed. Vendors associated with the 1982 Ohio class submarine and the MMIII ICBMs numbered in the hundreds which are now in many respects no longer in business. And manufacturing replacement parts in relatively small numbers is costly.

In the 1991-2010 period, the US also only produced 12 sea launched ballistic missiles each year, but in three of those years it did not produce any submarines. The resultant loss of 14,000 submarine industry workers alone was a monumental task to overcome.

As for ICBMs, with the shutdown of the Peacekeeper production line, the United States Air Force was left with a guidance and propulsion replacement program that over a period of more than a decade invested \$8 billion in making sure the 1970 MMIII ICBMs would stay in the force “through 2030” as the law required. But here as well, many hundreds of vendors no longer made ICBM parts or were in the ICBM business. And while the MM missiles are an extraordinary engineering feat, the cost of maintaining such a legacy force climbs every year.

Even worse is the current state of the available US workforce. China graduates more students with PhDs in the hard sciences from US universities than does the US itself. The US across the board has fewer workers in the

hard sciences than we need, although industry is now reaching into the schools to bring students along a planned program of education that leads them to careers in the aerospace business.

The Challenge Ahead

On top of which the Columbia class submarine force was delayed two years, increasing costs. And the herculean task of building 450 new ICBM silos armed with up to 400 alert ICBMs and the associated cabling and connecting communications technology will be costly. The US has never before had to maintain the current 400 missile deterrent while simultaneously deploying a new 400 missile deterrent. Even so, the Sentinel ICBM, a technological marvel, is progressing well towards production. Sentinel will be a highly capable, credible deterrent to 2075 and the Senate is calling for its initial deployment in 2033.

Chairmen Wicker and Rogers wrote recently that this year's reconciliation bill adds a defense investment of an additional \$150 billion of which new nuclear deterrent investment is \$14 billion. They conclude: "That is the cost of years of neglect. It will take several years of sustained investment and real growth beyond this down payment to keep pace with China's military advances...But to be clear: The cost of deterring war will always be dwarfed by the cost of fighting one."

To Be Posted on Real Clear Defense, February 9th, 2026

The Politics of Nuclear Coercion **By Peter Huessy**

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 a dangerous collaboration between adversaries.

In short, the nuclear landscape does not look good. For the 400 land-based 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 land-based 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 land-based ICBM WHs. The Bulava submarine-based sea launched '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 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. Hopefully, this means an end to the agency falling victim to China's ongoing 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 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 can largely evade current defenses and attack from any direction or altitude. 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 possible collaboration between Russia, China, and North Korea during a crisis or conflict.

Now let's look at the USA. The strategic modernization program of record consists of 400 ICBM Sentinel missiles to be deployed in silos through an estimated time frame out to or 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 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 could add upwards of 720 warheads for a hypothetical total of 3,456 strategic long-range warheads—although this may exceed the number of warheads available in our entire available stockpile and the USAF planned cruise missile acquisition.

Deploying such an expanded or uploaded warhead force would require at least an additional four years, according to nuclear Triad experts. When compared to a potential and projected Russian and Chinese deployed force of over 11,000 long-range strategic warheads, the USA could be 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.

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 although there is growing support for upwards of 150-200 such aircraft. 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 generally after 2040. The USA does have 50 additional ICBM silos (now empty) that could bolster its arsenal. Even so, this projected 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 assumptions, 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 warhead limits. That is the underlying basis for sound inspections and verifications, and for President Reagan laying down the key requirement—"Trust but verify." If warhead levels don't matter, why require verifiable limits in arms control deals? Why worry if no arms deals are in place?

History tells us that nuclear superiority 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 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 cuts of 4,500 each under the Moscow and New START agreements (down from 10,000 actual allowed warheads under START I), the decline under both deals was down to the neighborhood of as low as 1,700-1,800 deployed strategic warheads. This may indicate Russia wanted to limit USA-deployed nuclear forces to fewer than 2,000 warheads for about 24 years (2002-2026), while Russian nuclear modernization was eventually completed, and the post-Cold War economic decline in Russia 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 and leave the US with markedly lower strategic nuclear forces than our adversaries. 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. 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 blackmail and 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 which now goes beyond the previous program of record and adds important theater/tactical nuclear capability. These forces now and will serve as a critical firewall against the use of force directed at this nation. There is no substitute for this capability, regardless of how strongly abolition advocates may wish otherwise.

The End of START

Nuclear Arms Control Era Comes to End Amid Global Rush for New Weapons

New York Times Online, Feb. 5 | David E. Sanger and William J. Broad

The deadline has been looming over Washington and Moscow for years. On Thursday, the last nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia expired. For the first time since 1972, it leaves both superpowers with no limits on the size or structure of their arsenals, at the very moment both are planning new generations of nuclear weapons and newly evasive means of delivering the deadly warheads.

US and Russia Enter Uncertain Era as Key Nuclear Pact Expires

Bloomberg News, Feb. 4 | Tony Halpin

The last major arms-control agreement between the US and Russia expired Thursday, increasing the risk of a new arms race between the world's two largest nuclear powers amid growing global instability.

With New START Set to Expire, Experts Foresee a 'New Era' of Nuclear Policy

Air & Space Forces Magazine Online, Feb. 4 | Courtney Albon

Days before the New START Treaty is set to expire, experts, lawmakers, and former defense officials have varied perspectives on how President Donald Trump's administration should proceed as it considers future arms control agreements with nuclear weapon states.

Fears of a nuclear arms race rise as New START expires

DefenseOne.com, Feb. 5 | Patrick Tucker

The Feb. 5 expiration of the last key U.S.-Russia arms-control agreement, combined with uncertainty about the U.S. commitment to defend European allies, has U.S. lawmakers and former officials worried about the prospects of nuclear proliferation and a new arms race.

A key nuclear weapons treaty is ending. It's a sign of Russia's eroding superpower status

CNN.com (News Commentary), Feb. 4 | Matthew Chance

Since the collapse of the old Soviet Union, Russia has cut a substantially diminished figure on the international stage. The breakup, back in 1991, of what US President Ronald Reagan once dubbed an "evil empire" left the Kremlin with less territory, less financial muscle and less influence around the globe. But Russia retained its clout

in one crucial area. Its continued status as a nuclear superpower, on a roughly equal footing with the United States, guaranteed even a weakened Moscow a place at the top table of international diplomacy.

PM Støre fears Russia will deploy more nukes in the Arctic, as New START Treaty expires on February 5th
Barents Observer Online (Norway), Feb. 4 | Thomas Nilsen

Today marks the final day of the last remaining nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia. It is the end of an era that began in 1969, when Moscow and Washington D.C. first launched the SALT I negotiations.

Germany urges China to join arms control efforts
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 4 | Not Attributed

Germany's foreign minister urged China on Thursday to show "restraint" in weapons development after the expiry of the last US-Russian nuclear treaty.

NATO calls for 'restraint' as last US-Russia nuclear treaty expires
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 5 | Not Attributed

NATO on Thursday urged "responsibility and restraint" as the New START treaty between the United States and Russia imposing limits on their nuclear arsenals expired, raising fears of a new arms race.

Japan vows nuke disarmament push as survivors decry U.S.-Russia treaty end
Kyodo News (Japan), Feb. 5 | Not Attributed

The Japanese government said Thursday it will work with Washington and urge engagement from powers including China on nuclear arms control and disarmament after the last remaining nuclear weapons treaty between the United States and Russia expired.

UN chief calls New START expiration 'grave moment'
Reuters, Feb. 4 | David Brunnstrom

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday called the expiration of the New START Treaty a grave moment for international peace and security and urged Russia and the United States to negotiate a new nuclear arms control framework without delay.

Expiring nuclear pact makes 'every crisis more dangerous' – campaigners
Agence France-Presse, Feb. 4 | Not Attributed

Allowing the last US-Russian nuclear arms control deal to expire could unleash a new nuclear arms race, making all crises more dangerous, the ICAN campaign group warned Wednesday, calling for urgent new disarmament action

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

Prepared by Peter Huessy

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