Weekly ICBM EAR Report

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

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Edition: Week of February 15, 2026

ICBM EAR Week of February 15, Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis, Senior Fellow, National Institute for Deterrence Studies and Gold Institute for International Strategy

Events of the Week

NIDS Seminar with Laura McGill, Director, Sandia National Lab
https://youtu.be/t67iY6nD35A

Hudson Institute's Rebeccah Heinrichs Hosts Dr. Chris Yeaw of the US Department of State
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHEdJ5e539

Radio Liberty: Russian Perspectives on the end of New START
https://www.svoboda.org/a/pohorony-dogovora-snv-iii-estj-li-perspektivy-u-yadernogo-sderzhivaniya/33678197.html

Quotes of the Week

Christopher Yeaw, the State Department's Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Arms Control and Nonproliferation, presented seismic data that China conducted a secret low-yield underground nuclear test in 2020.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov: Neither China nor Russia have carried out any secret nuclear tests as alleged by Washington.

Admiral Richard Correll: "The deliberate progress being made on Sentinel ensures, that for decades to come, there will be no doubt in the minds of our adversaries about the credibility and readiness of our nation's nuclear deterrent."

NATO chief Mark Rutte: "I think every discussion in Europe making sure that collectively the nuclear deterrence is even stronger, fine, but nobody is arguing in Europe to do this as a sort of replacement of the nuclear umbrella of the United States."

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Ken Wilsbach: "A modernized, land-based, no fail nuclear force is critical to America. Sentinel will ensure our missileers, maintainers, & defenders are postured to deter and win."

Lindberg and Teague: The test for the Age of Trump is whether it ultimately will repeat past mistakes and abandon either principles or power (or both), or whether it will reconnect power to America's founding values and lay to rest the dangerous delusion that power is unnecessary or self-sustaining.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink: "Modernizing our nuclear deterrent is a critical priority! The Sentinel program is on a data-driven path to deliver this capability, replacing a 1970s-era system to guarantee Peace through Strength for decades to come."

Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND): "I held a meeting with ICBM Modernization Director MG Connor & Task Force 21 to discuss progress on nuclear modernization. Through the FY26 Defense Appropriations bill, we worked to secure key investments to reach critical milestones in updating our nuclear forces, including the B-52, LRSO, Sentinel and procurement of MH-139 Grey Wolf helicopters."

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR): "Important remarks from @UnderSecT and @StateACN exposing China's nuclear breakout. I look forward to hearing how @DeptofWar and [the NNSA] will implement President Trump's directive to resume U.S. testing on an equal basis to Russia and China."

Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi: "Japan-U.S. alliance vital amid growing global security concerns."

Jim Hanson: Is Iran pursuing a nuclear bomb? The revolution envisioned by Shia "Twelvers" requires an Armageddon like event to bring back the 12th Imam or Mahdi and what's more like that than a nuclear bomb?

Seminar Schedule

1/23/2026 - Rick Fisher - ***Is China Seeking Nuclear Superiority? Unpacking 2025 Developments***

1/30/2026 - Mark Schneider and Stephen Blank - ***Reflections on Russia's Nuclear Behavior: Doctrine vs. Reality***

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. David Trachtenberg, Dr. James Petrosky, Dr. Laura Hopkins, and Henry Sokolski**

3/6/2026 - Sean McDonald - Los Alamos National Laboratory, Program Director, Strategy & Planning Office - ***The challenging trajectory of pit production: learning lessons from history to execute an accelerated production strategy***

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

3/20/2026 - ***Nuclear Strategy at a Crossroads: A Conversation with The Honorable Frank Miller***

4/3/2026 - General Jason Armagost – ***Meeting the Challenges of Nuclear Deterrence***

4/10/2026 - Michael White, ***The Hypersonic Imperative: Restoring U.S. Advantage in a Contested Battlespace***

4/17/2026 - Maj. Gen. Stacy Jo Huser, ***MMIII and the ICBM Role in US Deterrent Strategy***

7/10/2026 - Uzi Rubin: ***Missiles and Missile Defenses in the Middle East: Live breakfast seminar at the Capitol Hill Club***

Voices from the Seminars & Forum: Audience and Speaker Feedback

Frank Miller, Principal, The Scowcroft Group: "You continue to be a rock for all of us in the nuclear community. "

Bob Friel, Investor: "Your presentation on nuclear deterrence was the most informative and interesting I have ever heard. I plan on buying your book on nuclear deterrence challenges."

USAF Officer: "You have for years brought us to understand the import of nuclear deterrent matters. Despite the polarization of US politics, you continue to bring us a wide cross section of the most relevant of nuclear matters especially bringing to us a sound analysis of those seeking a pathway to zero, which is indeed fanciful in current times."

Adm Ron Lang, Retired Thank you for the briefing on Russian nuke treats—a bang up job. You never disappoint and your Q&A could have gone on much longer.

Sandra Schultz: Host/Producer of NY City Public Television program. "Basically, these folks at the Wall Stret Journal are now telling Americans what you said in your many presentations some years ago---that China and Russia have established dominance in the Arctic above us on our north.

JHU Official: "I have attended many of your seminars over the years…thanks for what you have done and continue to do for our nation!"

Laura McGill, Director Sandia Labs: "I appreciate the professionalism of the NIDS forum. It's very nicely organized and conducted. Thanks for all of your help and coordination."

Laura McGill, Director, Sandia Labs: "I appreciate the opportunity to brief the NIDS audience. It was also a pleasure to work with Peter Huessy and have such well-worded questions to address.

USAF Col Robert Lindseth: “For more than four decades you have informed the nuclear community of the most important nuclear issues facing the country. Keep up the great work.”

Col Robert Lindseth: Great article! Short, to the point, has relevant numbers backing up statements and factual analysis. Really terrific.

Nuclear Reductions

Deep Nuclear Reductions - Lessons of the Cold War

The successful push by the Reagan and Bush (41) administrations for deep reductions in Soviet nuclear weapons was an extraordinary achievement, not just in ending the huge superiority the Soviets had re heavy accurate ICBMs, i.e., more than 3000 SS-18 warheads but how it ran straight into deep routed forces. In a new draft study, experts conclude: The implications of deep reductions in nuclear and conventional forces and formal acknowledgment by the Soviet leadership that they were deterred by the prospect of an unwinnable nuclear war profoundly affected Soviet society in general and the military role in that system in particular: (1)-The Soviet economy would be forced to undergo radical adjustments which few were able or willing to contemplate. –(2) Forty percent of the Soviet GDP was being spent on the military—the MoD was spending 20 billion rubles per year on personnel costs alone. [An impressive number considering that the Soviet Armed Forces were comprised of very-low-paid conscripts.] –(3) The role of the military in general probably would be diminished. –(4) The dominant position of the military as an institution would be threatened. .(5). Reduction in the size of nuclear and conventional forces would eliminate thousands of officer and general officer positions.

Editor’s Note: The criticisms of the current administration remind me of those severely critical of the Reagan administration, at the time pushing (1) adherence to SALT II, (2) a nuclear freeze on modernization and US INF deployments, (3) the elimination of the B2 and Peacekeeper, (4) opposition to the 1981 proposed zero-zero INF and the reductions proposed in START, and (5) sharply curtailing missile defense. These positions were largely rejected by Congress. Peter Huessy

Columbia SSBN Progress

News on the Columbia SSBN---First Columbia-class sub delivery expected in 2028. Navy officials note the first Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine, the District of Columbia, is 66% complete and is now expected to be delivered in 2028, according to a U.S. Navy official. The second, the Wisconsin, is 35% complete. The third, the Groton, is 10% complete. *Why it matters*: Columbia-class subs have long ranked as the service's No. 1 priority. They will be armed with nuclear weapons, like the aging Ohio-class they succeed.

Program Executive Officer for Strategic Subs Rear Adm. Todd Weeks provided an update on the boomers at the WEST naval conference in San Diego. “With Columbia, we've been on a steady ramp up to full-rate construction, and we will hit full-rate construction in 2031.This time last year, we sat down with our shipbuilding partners and we realized that we were not where we needed to be on the District of Columbia."

Sentinel Update

The Air Force's LGM-35A Sentinel program is set to complete a mandated restructuring this year, paving the way for the modernized ICBM to become operational early in the next decade. USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Richard Correll says the "deliberate progress being made on Sentinel ensures, that for decades to come, there will be no doubt in the minds of our adversaries about the credibility and readiness of our nation's nuclear deterrent."

The construction of new silos for the Air Force's future LGM-35A Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missiles means that security forces charged with defending them will have to update their tactics, techniques, and procedures, according to a new Government Accountability Office report.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink says "Modernizing our nuclear deterrent is a critical priority! The Sentinel program is on a data-driven path to deliver this capability, replacing a 1970s-era system to guarantee Peace through Strength for decades to come." The Secretary of War created a direct reporting portfolio manager (DPRM) to oversee Sentinel and other critical weapons systems, to deliver large-scale capability faster, while maintaining the careful oversight such missions demand.

Gen. Dale White, explains "The DRPM has the direct authority to make decisions, informed by integrated inputs across the enterprise and in alignment with the mission priorities set by the Secretary of War and the Secretary for the Air Force." "That construct allows us to resolve tradeoffs quickly and move with the speed required to deliver credible deterrence, while preserving the discipline this mission demands."

News reports confirm that as the Air Force moved forward, officials stressed that a renewed cost estimate would come as part of the Milestone B review. That will probably produce an independent assessment during Milestone B, and the USAF expects to deliver an initial capability in the early 2030s, requiring a streamlined acquisition process delivering a deterrent sooner and with better value.

The USAF sees Sentinel as a cornerstone of a broader strategy that pairs decisive leadership with rigorous oversight, ensuring America's nuclear force remains ready and reliable. Proponents insist that the program embodies a strategy consistent with a strong, principled defense posture, reinforcing deterrence while advancing new technology in a disciplined, cost-conscious way.

They argue that the result will be a more capable force able to respond decisively to any challenge, because peace through strength remains the safest path for the nation. The Sentinel effort, they say, is a test case in this philosophy, balancing speed with scrutiny to preserve America's strategic edge for decades to come.

The GAO releases a new report which concludes the USAF Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile program faces risks from software delays and other risks from an extended reliance on the aging Minuteman III system.

However, a January 2024 Nunn-McCurdy breach has opened a window to address longstanding issues and potentially improve outcomes, according to a Government Accountability Office snapshot released Feb. 18. The report highlights the challenges in replacing the 50-year-old Minuteman III, a cornerstone of the land-based leg of the U.S. nuclear triad, with the more advanced Sentinel system. The program, led by Northrop Grumman, is described as the Air Force's most complex infrastructure endeavor ever, involving the replacement of more than 600 facilities across five states, including missile silos and command centers.

The Sentinel program encountered a critical setback in 2024, when it triggered a Nunn-McCurdy unit cost breach, exceeding statutory thresholds for cost growth on major defense acquisitions. This led the undersecretary of defense for Acquisition and Sustainment to rescind Milestone B approval and associated baselines, forcing a restructuring effort as the service works toward a new Milestone B decision.

GAO emphasizes that restructuring allows the Air Force to address fundamental problems, including deficiencies in design tools, performance requirements and launch facility design. Program officials are evaluating redesign options for portions of the weapon system to reduce costs and minimize further schedule slips, as well as potential changes to acquisition strategy and system requirements.

Sentinel is expected to deliver a significantly more capable ICBM, with a modular design that enables adaptation to evolving threats and technologies. However, Sentinel delays may require Minuteman III to remain operational through 2050, 14 years beyond original plans, introducing sustainment and testing challenges for the aging fleet.

International Developments of Strategic Importance

The NY Times writes that in China, satellite imagery reveals the country's accelerating nuclear buildup, a force designed for a new age of superpower rivalry. In Sichuan Province, engineers have been building new bunkers and ramparts and a new complex to handle highly hazardous materials.

NATO chief Mark Rutte said Saturday no one in Europe was pushing to replace the United States' nuclear umbrella, after Germany said it was talking to France about its nuclear deterrence. "I think every discussion in Europe making sure that collectively the nuclear deterrence is even stronger, fine, but nobody is arguing in Europe to do this as a sort of replacement of the nuclear umbrella of the United States."

Iran fires live missiles into Strait of Hormuz in drill as a new round of nuclear talks begins.

The U.S. and Iran are holding their second round of talks about Iran's nuclear program Tuesday in Geneva as the United States ramps up its military presence in the Middle East and Iran holds large-scale maritime exercises.

The State Department's evidence that China conducted a yield-producing nuclear test in 2020 is reigniting debate in Washington over whether the United States can continue its decades-long moratorium on nuclear weapons testing.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS): China is building ballistic missile and attack submarines faster than the United States, threatening to negate a sea-power advantage that has long belonged to Washington.

Poland should look at developing its own nuclear weapons in light of the growing threat from Russia, President Karol Nawrocki said in an interview with Polsat News television."

UN & IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi: "Just completed in-depth technical discussions with Iran's Foreign Minister @araghchi in preparation for important negotiations scheduled for [Tuesday] in Geneva."

The UK is reportedly blocking U.S. use of Diego Garcia and RAF Fairford for a potential attack on Iran.

"The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) detected and tracked two Tu-95s, two Su-35s, and one A-50 operating in the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on Feb.19, 2026.

Saudi Arabia could be permitted to have some form of uranium enrichment within the kingdom under a proposed nuclear deal with the United States.

Bill Gertz of the Wash Times reports China detonated a secret underground nuclear blast in 2020 that was detected by a seismic station in Kazakhstan and was aimed at improving Beijing's nuclear war fighting, according to a senior State Department arms control official Dr. Chris Yeaw.

At a ceremony in Pyongyang, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un announced the deployment of 50 new launch vehicles for nuclear-capable short-range missiles.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Matthew Whitaker notes "To our European Allies: America isn't leaving. We stand with you. But this is a new era. Europe needs to take accountability for its conventional defense. Together, we must rebuild the collective strength, invest in our defense, and secure our shared future.

Administration Developments of Strategic Importance

Air Force Global Strike Command: Official **CSAF Gen. Wilsbach** recently flew an E-4B Nightwatch during a mission immersion flight from @Andrews_JBA, where he saw firsthand the many roles & servicemembers who make up the National Airborne Operations Center (NAOC) joint team - who are on alert 24/7/365."

President Trump set a deadline of 10 to 15 days for Iran to make a deal over its nuclear program, as the US military has amassed "an immense strike force in the Middle East."

The United States plans to deploy more high-tech missile systems to the Philippines to help deter aggression in the South China Sea, where the treaty allies on Tuesday condemned what they called China's "illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive activities."

The rapid buildup of U.S. forces in the Middle East has progressed to the point that President Trump has the option to take military action against Iran….The drive to assemble a military force capable of striking Iran's nuclear program, its ballistic missiles and accompanying launch sites has continued this week while indirect talks between the two nations continue.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Ken Wilsbach: "A modernized, land-based, no fail nuclear force is critical to America. Sentinel will ensure our missileers, maintainers, & defenders are postured to deter and win."

The USAF and Northrop nearing agreement to speed B-21 production."

Congressional Developments of Strategic Note

Dozens of lawmakers from the United States on Thursday urged Taiwan's political parties to support "significant" defense spending increases, warning that the threat from China "has never been greater."

Savannah River Site was honored to recently host U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson, R-S.C., and his staff for briefings and tours to view the progress happening across various mission areas of the site. The Congressman toured the Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility, a 400,000-square-foot manufacturing facility that will produce plutonium pits for the @NNSANews and the Savannah River Tritium Enterprise, which provides a unique capability to execute tritium missions.

Essays of the Week

#1 Essay of the Week: Arms Control Strategy

Editor's Note: There are calls for the United States to put together an executive agreement with Russia to extend adherence to New START for an additional 6-12 months as proposed by Mr. Putin of Russia. However, the offer by Russia refused to agree to further required inspections and verification that are in the treaty, taking it on faith that Moscow would agree to the major limits of 700-800 SNDVs and 1500 warheads. The EAR believes it would be useful in consideration of such an idea to review similar calls for President Reagan to adhere to SALT II even though the treaty was withdrawn from the Senate by then President Carter and thus never ratified by the US Senate.

The State Department Historian authored this essay [below] which we post. One top official in the DoD during that period cautioned that it was President Reagan's strong opposition to the SALT I and SALT II agreements that led to the Soviets/Russians taking seriously the proposed START I and START II reductions treaties that President Reagan put on the table. Here is the Wilson essay.

In March 1985, Reagan ordered a review of his policy, termed "Interim Restraint," because upcoming sea trials of a new Trident submarine meant he had to decide whether to retire an older Poseidon submarine to stay within

SALT limits. Kicking off this interagency review, National Security Advisor Robert "Bud" McFarlane made clear that the Soviets were cheating across the board.

As they grappled with options in a National Security Council meeting of June 3, 1985, Reagan's advisors concurred on the merits of sticking with SALT II until December 31—when the unratified treaty would have expired anyway—yet disagreed on next steps. In this meeting and elsewhere, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) underscored this point that the U.S. needed modernized forces—not just higher numbers of older ones.

"I am prepared to go the extra mile in the direction of trying to establish an interim framework of true, mutual restraint," read the National Security Decision Directive that Reagan signed. While committing to staying with SALT limits throughout the rest of 1985, the president also requested tailored options for how to respond to Soviet violations.

His advisors obliged. "We believe modernized strategic and conventional forces and vigorous SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] research present the strongest message to the Soviets in response to their treaty violations," Secretary of Defense Weinberger wrote Reagan on the eve of his November 19–20 meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva. After Reagan returned home, Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs James Watkins sent Secretary Weinberger options for tailored responses using older technologies with the caveat "that continued, balanced force modernization provides the most effective military response to Soviet noncompliance."

In a March 25, 1986, meeting of the National Security Council, President Reagan "suggested that we replace the interim restraint framework with our new START position and failing that the U.S. would undertake further programmatic options." With ongoing arms control negotiations in Geneva, a new Soviet leader, and momentum toward rebuilding U.S. strength across the board, Reagan contended that his administration was well positioned to sunset Interim Restraint.

That month 53 Senators wrote President Reagan asking him to maintain Interim Restraint through the end of 1986. When the NSC next gathered, JCS Chairman Admiral William Crowe reiterated: "The [SALT II] treaty does have flaws but not overriding ones. We are in a chess game between the Allies, the Soviets, etc. We want the President to be in the best position to get the money he needs on the Hill." The danger was that these 53 Senators would retaliate against Reagan by not funding MX.

Maneuvering around Shultz and Weinberger, NSC staffer Robert Linhard led the crafting of a National Security Decision Directive that extended Interim Restraint throughout that year. Reagan signed the directive. The United States would dismantle two Poseidon submarines before May—but not commit to dismantling more. Instead, Reagan announced this plan on May 27 which also included equipping the B-52 bomber with air-launched cruise missiles.

Following the whirlwind Reykjavik Summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in October, the NSC gathered for its final meeting about Interim Restraint on November 25, 1986. "I basically agree with Cap," George Shultz conceded. "SALT is behind us."

The top priority remained getting Congress to deliver on the administration's strategic modernization initiative—especially as the Senate was cutting defense spending even before the Democrats regained control of that body in the November elections.

The United States and Soviet Union entered 1987 without any strategic offensive arms limits. It proved to be a new beginning. Gorbachev relented his position at Reykjavik linking arms agreements to restrictions on Strategic Defense Initiative research and testing. On December 8, 1987, he and Reagan met at the White House to sign the INF Treaty.

President George H.W. Bush and Gorbachev signed START I on July 31, 1991. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union delayed its entry into force until December 5, 1994.

The potential for three nuclear peers makes the future more complex than it was in the past, when there were only two. Still, we have something that Cold Warriors lacked: a freely available, declassified historical record of successful nuclear agreements. Let us employ it.

--James Graham Wilson is the author of America's Cold Warrior: Paul Nitze and National Security from Roosevelt to Reagan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024) and The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014

Essay of the Week #2: The Age of Trump: A Sobering Return to Reality by Todd Lindberg and Corban Teague in Commentary

EXCERPT: But Trump's doings and undoing's are more than merely a reaction to the triumphalism of the period, including the notion that we had reached the "end of history." The objections extend back to the basic elements of the post–World War II liberal order itself. Though this order was largely American in origin and a product of the unprecedented global dominance of the United States across all measures of power in the aftermath of World War II, for many it has become a euphemism for a system that allowed our allies a free ride on our defense dollar and the entrenchment of trade rules that allowed foreign countries to place barriers to entry on American-made products while the United States opened itself up to a flood of imports grounded in cheap labor abroad.

Even after the Cold War, the United States maintained a disproportionate security burden, while NATO allies shirked defense commitments to boost their domestic welfare programs. American-led interventions in Kuwait and the former Yugoslavia went off smoothly in the earliest post–Cold War years, but the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan created a crisis of confidence and fueled debates about American military presence abroad.

Great power shifts are never easy. A major one is now underway, not between rival states, but between competing approaches to international order. Call it a clash of two operating systems. One view holds that the most pressing issues of the day can be addressed only through a framework of global and supranational institutions and multilateral rules. The other insists that the nation-state remains the foundation of legitimate authority and effective action, and that outcomes ultimately depend on the decisions, capacities, and accountability of individual states.

For much of the post–Cold War era, what one can call a "global first" approach dominated international thinking. Governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental actors shared the assumption that challenges to do with security, economic disruption, migration, pandemics, and climate change required global solutions. The collapse of the Soviet Union and China's accession to the World Trade Organization accelerated economic globalization, reinforcing the belief among leaders in the United States and elsewhere that global institutions were best suited to manage complexity and preserve peace. For decades, these institutions (and the governments and the phalanx of nongovernmental organizations that supported them) advanced a common creed: that only global bodies could tackle the defining problems of the age.

Yet the results of this global-first model have been uneven at best. Despite decades of negotiations, global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and no major economy is on track to meet the targets set by the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change. Record numbers of people have been displaced, migration has destabilized domestic politics in many countries, and armed conflicts are more numerous and protracted than at any point since the end of the Cold War. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed failures in global health governance, while progress toward the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals has fallen dramatically short of ambitions.

At the same time, China rose rapidly within this global order, accumulating economic, technological, and military power while selectively exploiting international rules and arrangements. Today, China is mounting the most serious strategic challenge the United States has faced since the end of the Cold War, discrediting the notion that deeper integration and multilateral engagement would produce a more cooperative and stable international system.

Instead of assessing why decades of global efforts have failed, many leaders dig in their heels. The current UN secretary-general, António Guterres, frequently laments that multilateralism is "under fire," warning that there is no path forward except through "collective, common-sense action for the common good." What this view leaves largely unexamined is the possibility that the fault lies in the limitations of the global-first approach itself.

In the 2010s, long-simmering doubts about the post–Cold War global order rose to the surface. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union in 2016, as well as mounting impatience in Europe and elsewhere with supranational institutions, had already begun to erode many of the assumptions that shaped the policies of Western governments after 1991. U.S. President Donald Trump accelerated this shift when he assumed office in 2017, but he did not start it.

In his second term, Trump argued in his September 2025 address to the United Nations that despite the organization's "tremendous, tremendous potential," it was not "coming close to living up to that potential." The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy states that "the world's fundamental political unit is and will remain the

nation-state." Trump's withdrawal from dozens of international organizations, his call in January for a "Board of Peace" that would bypass the UN Security Council, his cuts to international aid, and his challenges to trade and immigration orthodoxies have been widely denounced, but the president's actions reflect a broader rejection of global-first pieties. His clear priority, in places such as Iran and Venezuela, is to act on the basis of national interest and collective defense without first deferring to global bodies.

Beneath Trump's theatrics, however, lies a coherent claim: only states generate problems (their industries pollute), experience those problems (their citizens suffer), and hold the means to address problems (through revenues, infrastructure, and services). Only states acting to advance their own interests—whatever the implications for so-called international order and norms—can solve problems that global institutions and processes have so far failed to fix.

The global frame functions much like the passive voice in English: it conveniently detaches agency from problems and obscures true causes. It also produces elaborate organizational processes that impede real progress. Even advocates of global approaches acknowledge that international negotiations often entangle officials in dense webs of meetings, procedures, and rules. These layers of complexity slow action or prevent it altogether.

Disagreements over these competing operational approaches matter. They are straining alliances, complicating partnerships, and fueling accusations of isolationism, while leaving many of the world's most vulnerable populations no better off. By challenging failing global frameworks, a state-centric approach could produce truly positive change—and place states back at the center of practical action.

Essay #3: **THE GROWTH OF THE GLOBALIST DELUSION by Nadya Shadlow, The Hudson Institute**

The United States both shaped and was shaped by the rise of the global order in the twentieth century. The horrors of World War I, in which industrialized warfare killed an estimated 20 million people, severely undermined faith in the nation-state as the foundation of international order. The League of Nations emerged just afterward as the first major supranational experiment in collective security. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson described the league as a "community of power," arguing that states must yield freedom of action to a common council to preserve peace. The novelist H. G. Wells went further, arguing that "there can be no great alleviation of the evils that now blacken and threaten to ruin human life altogether, unless all the civilized and peace-seeking peoples of the world are pledged and locked together under a common law and a common world policy."

But the league failed to prevent the chaos of World War II, and it is doubtful that it would have succeeded even had the United States joined. After that war, countries again sought to build a more durable peace. The United States emerged as the principal architect of the post-1945 international system, using its unmatched economic and military power to forge new global institutions. It led to the creation of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which governed global trade for nearly five decades before the creation of the World Trade Organization.

Over time, member states ceded elements of their sovereignty—authorizing the UN Security Council to define threats to peace, empowering the WTO to adjudicate trade disputes and authorize retaliatory tariffs, and allowing the IMF to lend large sums to states with balance-of-payment problems—in exchange for the promise of a more stable world. State power would be constrained not only by domestic constitutions but also by international law and the rules of international institutions.

In Europe, where nationalism had fueled some of the twentieth century's most devastating conflicts, pressure grew to find alternatives to the power of the nation-state. The European Economic Community, founded in 1957 and later broadened into the European Union, rested on the belief that economic interdependence could tame conflict. By deepening integration and limiting national sovereignty, European leaders argued, war could be made not only undesirable but implausible.

Devotion to global process replaced attention to outcomes.

Over time, transnational and supranational efforts to move beyond the nation-state gained ground, and international institutions steadily widened their authority. The UN now encompasses dozens of funds, programs, and specialized agencies. The IMF evolved from a narrow focus on balance-of-payments support into a far broader role in macroeconomic surveillance, crisis lending, and structural reform, while the WTO grew into an expansive regime governing services, intellectual property, and dispute settlement. At the same time, many of these bodies became less accountable to states. Donor states are often frustrated that UN development agencies consider themselves to be autonomous from the governments that fund them, even when those governments ask for audits of how their money is spent. Member states exercise tenuous control over the World Bank. As staff, budgets, and mandates expanded, these institutions increasingly evolved from instruments of states into bodies with their own agendas.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War contributed to the widespread belief that a new international community was emerging and that the ascendancy of the United States as the sole superpower would usher in a system of collective security and an ever-growing democratic zone of peace. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, U.S. President George H. W. Bush hailed the arrival of a new era. Later, after the United Nations condemned Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, he observed that countries could now "seize the opportunity to fulfill the long-held promise of a new world order, where brutality will go unrewarded and aggression will meet collective resistance."

China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 rested on a similar set of assumptions. U.S. and European policymakers believed that integrating China into global markets and institutions would encourage the country's economic liberalization, expose Beijing to international rules and norms, and gradually temper its strategic ambitions. As China grew wealthier and more embedded in the global economy, many expected it to become a responsible stakeholder in the liberal international order. That did not happen; China instead used its access to the world economy to grow rich and threaten that order.

This global mindset was also reinforced by the rise of multinational corporations, increasingly treated as global actors. Although formally subject to national laws, their scale and reach often allow them to shape state behavior. Technology firms influence regulatory outcomes on taxation, privacy, and market access; energy companies negotiate directly with governments over investment, sanctions, and climate policy; and financial firms, whose assets often exceed the GDP of many countries, exert influence through capital allocation and engagement with regulators and central banks.

All the while, global group think deepened. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan popularized the idea of "problems without passports," arguing that many challenges were too diffuse for individual states to address alone. The UN's 2000 Millennium Declaration framed hunger, poverty, conflict, and social injustice, for example, as global problems, a vision embodied in its 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. Although the UN now concedes that many targets will not be met, it largely avoids questioning whether its original ambitions were realistic. Most recently, the organization has promoted global approaches to managing the risks of artificial intelligence.

A global mindset seized much of civil society and the commentariat. By the 1970s, an informal global governance movement had emerged alongside formal institutions, arguing that interdependence required stronger multilateral cooperation or "common management," the phrase employed by the Trilateral Commission, one of the transnational bodies established in that era. By the 1990s, such ideas had hardened into dogma. Influential commentators such as Thomas Friedman hailed globalization as the dominant force shaping domestic politics and foreign relations, and thousands of nongovernmental organizations became formally linked to the UN, embedding nonstate actors into global institutions.

The global frame has found its way into many U.S. and European initiatives. The Biden administration's Build Back Better World initiative was rooted in "a unified vision for global infrastructure development." The European Union's Global Gateway project aims to tackle the "most pressing global challenges," including climate change, pandemics, and the security of global supply chains. A powerful global architecture came to define the post–Cold War order. Yet this order turned out to be as fragile as it was ambitious.

THE LIMITS OF THE GLOBALIST DELUSION

More than 75 years since the post–World War II push toward global approaches, the optimism that animated support for these institutions has given way to a more sobering reality. The architecture of global governance

expanded, but that governance did not become more effective. The global order was supposed to generate collective strength: countries, working together, could do more and make resources go further. In practice, however, it created layers of bureaucracy that siphoned resources away from addressing the problems at hand. Devotion to process replaced attention to outcomes.

Tackling climate change has been approached primarily through global, multilateral frameworks for more than three decades under the auspices of the UN. Despite the constant warnings about the existential threat of climate change, global emissions of carbon dioxide had reached their highest level on record in 2025. All G-20 countries are off track to meet the 2015 Paris accords' goal of limiting global warming to below two degrees Celsius by the end of the century. The global approach to reducing carbon emissions is clearly not working.

In the realm of human rights, multilateral responses have too often proved ineffective or counterproductive. The willingness of international institutions, particularly the UN, to treat authoritarian regimes as legitimate participants has insulated these countries from reproach and censure. Nowhere is this failure more evident than in the UN Human Rights Council, which has been regularly co-opted by some of the world's worst human rights violators. While the council issues resolutions and hosts dialogues, Iran kills and imprisons civilians with impunity and China subjects Uyghur Muslims to a harsh regime of arbitrary detention and surveillance. Multilateral human rights mechanisms have often shielded perpetrators rather than constrained them.

In development, increasingly ambitious yet abstract agendas advanced by international institutions often overlook the socioeconomic conditions that determine whether aid truly works. Despite wide variation in state capacity and local circumstances, initiatives such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals rest on the premise that "all countries and all stakeholders" can deliver any number of outcomes, from ending the AIDS epidemic to eradicating extreme poverty by 2030.

Yet hundreds of millions of people still lack reliable access to electricity, food insecurity has worsened, and water stress continues to intensify across many regions. While the United Nations highlights the global decline in poverty between 1990 and 2015, it also concedes that a substantial share of the world's population will remain poor well beyond 2030. Similarly, the World Bank acknowledges that progress on poverty reduction has stalled and that, at current rates, lifting everybody above even a modest threshold of roughly six dollars per day would take more than a century. It is unclear how recommitting those same global processes, such as additional summits and greater international coordination, would produce better outcomes.

The remedy for the shortcomings of global institutions is the nation-state.

After the Cold War, it was widely assumed that free trade would alleviate global poverty. Liberal commerce would lift all boats, and a supranational rule setter, the WTO, would ensure an ever-rising tide. In practice, however, the WTO struggled to make trade genuinely free. Persistent distortions, such as China's subsidies and unfair trade practices and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (which shields European producers through subsidies and price supports), highlight the WTO's inability to curb entrenched protectionism. These weaknesses are compounded by the WTO's failure to clearly distinguish between state-owned and private firms, a flaw most evident in cases involving China, in which the line between state and market is blurred.

Migration has become a central flash point in the clash between global and national approaches. Migrants increasingly try to enter countries as asylum seekers even when their motivations are largely economic. This dynamic has strained asylum systems and roiled the politics of many receiving countries. Yet rather than confronting whether the system is working as intended, its defenders call for increased funding for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, reinforcing a model that expands humanitarian administration without resolving the underlying drivers of displacement.

In the realm of nonproliferation and direct threats to the United States and its allies, global approaches have repeatedly fallen short. For decades, the UN, other multilateral bodies, and ad hoc coalitions relied on diplomacy, inspections, and economic pressure to constrain the nuclear ambitions of states such as Iran and North Korea. In both cases, agreements and UN resolutions slowed aspects of these programs at times but failed to halt their underlying momentum.

In Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action temporarily constrained elements of the country's nuclear program without dismantling its enrichment capabilities or the infrastructure needed to resume progress. In North Korea, successive agreements, talks, and sanctions failed to prevent Pyongyang from advancing its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, allowing it to cross the nuclear threshold. In both cases, regimes used negotiations to

buy time, relief, or legitimacy while continuing to expand their capabilities. Meaningful disruption of Iran's nuclear trajectory occurred only through direct U.S. and Israeli military action—measures that invariably drew international condemnation—while the absence of comparable enforcement against North Korea allowed Pyongyang to emerge as a de facto nuclear-armed state. Together, these cases suggest that insisting on multilateral consensus and global approval has not prevented proliferation and has often enabled it by prioritizing process over outcomes.

Across these and other areas, many leaders confronted with today's cascading crises come to the same diagnosis: too little global cooperation. Instead of considering alternative approaches, supporters of the global frame insist that the clear remedy is to reinforce existing institutions by affording them more authority, funding, and effort.

In economic policy, a 2023 IMF report warned that geoeconomic fragmentation undermines shared goals and argued that restoring trust requires a "robust global financial safety net with a well-resourced IMF at its center." This logic, however, conflates coordination with institutional centralization, overlooking the limits of centralized authority. The same reflex appears in security, often at the expense of U.S. interests. As conflicts have multiplied, calls to revitalize collective security have focused on strengthening the UN Security Council, despite decades of paralysis caused by the politicized use of the veto and great-power rivalry. From Syria to Ukraine to Gaza, UN deadlock has neither deterred aggression nor protected U.S. allies, forcing Washington to rely on ad hoc coalitions and unilateral action. Global security mechanisms frequently fail to safeguard American interests, but many policymakers argue that they simply need to be empowered further.

A similar pattern characterizes climate policy. Missed targets have prompted demands for more ambitious pledges and financing instead of serious reassessment of whether consensus-driven frameworks can deliver results amid divergent national priorities. The pattern repeats in global health, where failures exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic led to demands for a stronger World Health Organization when scrutiny of the performance of centralized global processes in major crises was more warranted.
These cases point to a broader tendency: when global frameworks underperform, their advocates refuse to change course. Yet cooperation has often advanced more effectively through regional arrangements, bilateral agreements, and policies aligned with the capacities of particular states. The question is not whether cooperation is necessary—of course, it is—but whether reinforcing the same global approaches again and again protects vital interests or merely mistakes process for progress.

SOLID STATE

A new operating system is worth a try. The remedy for the shortcomings of global institutions is not greater deference to them but a return to square one: the nation-state. A state-anchored approach recognizes that it is states, not global institutions, that are directly accountable to citizens. In democracies, governments face political consequences when they fail, a chain of accountability weakened when authority is delegated to international organizations. States also possess the capabilities to solve problems. Although global bodies can convene debates and issue resolutions, the power to fund, regulate, and fight resides with sovereign governments. A state-first approach thus strengthens both accountability and effectiveness.

Effective cooperation is best pursued through coalitions of the willing, not through frameworks that diffuse authority across multilateral forums with divergent interests. Collective action works when participating states agree on means and ends. Insisting that decision-making include actors with conflicting objectives often produces paralysis, not progress. A state-based approach accepts that cooperation cannot be presumed, especially with rivals or adversaries, and that broad, consensus-driven arrangements are unlikely to deliver meaningful outcomes. Instead, it prioritizes practical collaboration among allies and partners through intelligence sharing, coordinated policy, and shared capacity, grounded in real power, compatible political systems, and aligned national interests.

A state-anchored approach also acknowledges that time is a decisive dimension of success in any policy domain. When countries become trapped in prolonged multilateral negotiations, time becomes a liability, delaying action while problems compound. Global processes move slowly, if at all. States offer a better chance of acting with speed and flexibility and of delivering results.

Global planning produces grand targets without mechanisms for delivery.

The actions of states could be more effective than those of global bodies in various areas. Consider climate policy. A state-anchored approach could better align climate objectives with the realities of countries' needs for energy security, growth, and technological development. Emerging energy options such as geothermal and nuclear fission and fusion will mature only when national governments provide the regulatory frameworks, financing, infrastructure, and policy commitments to support their advancement. The economic historian Daniel Yergin has written in these pages that the energy transition will unfold differently in different parts of the world, at different rates, with varied mixes of fuels and technologies, shaped by governments establishing their own paths. In practice, a state-anchored approach to climate change recognizes where responsibility, authority, and capacity truly reside.

In a similar vein, states should forge an international trading regime through their actions, not their submission to multilateral bodies. In a world of divergent economic systems, bilateral and regional trade agreements offer a more practical approach to trade governance and strategic interests than do institutions such as the WTO. Unlike multilateral frameworks that require consensus among dozens of countries, often with incompatible economic models, these agreements allow similar states to negotiate rules that are more likely to be implemented and enforced. Trade agreements among institutionally compatible partners will work better than universal regimes that attempt to impose common rules across fundamentally different systems. In an increasingly fragmented global economy, this model offers a realistic path forward: trade integration among willing, capable, and trustworthy partners instead of lowest-common-denominator rules that fail to discipline the most distortive practices.

In global health, one of Washington's most successful initiatives was the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, launched in 2003. Designed and driven by the United States, the state-centric program made hundreds of investments that resulted in major reductions in mortality and infection rates related to HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa. Its success demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted, data-driven assistance anchored in national leadership and accountability. Years later, the Obama administration implicitly recognized this reality with its Global Health Security Agenda, which emphasized concrete state commitments to strengthen national public health capacities, not new global rules. Its premise was that only strong and capable state institutions could handle pandemics. That initiative functioned as a corrective to WHO-led frameworks that had set obligations without producing sustained national improvements.

In defense, NATO offers a good example of the state-based approach. Although Article 5 in NATO's charter commits allies to common defense, it deliberately preserves national sovereignty: each state retains control over its forces and the authority to decide how and when they are employed. The alliance does not replace national militaries; it depends on them. Deterrence flows from state capacity: the quality, readiness, and credibility of national forces, combined with the political will behind them. A common defense organization works because it aligns state capabilities toward a common purpose.

Beyond formal alliances, smaller, purpose-built coalitions have often proved more effective than universal frameworks in addressing concrete threats. These include the AUKUS agreement among the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia to deter China in the Indo-Pacific, as well as bilateral cooperation between Japan and the United States. These agreements work because they have the backing and direction of the United States. Consider, for example, the fact that American assistance was vital in saving Ukraine from complete Russian conquest. Russia was not deterred from invading Ukraine by global institutions or universal norms, but it has been constrained by NATO's arms transfers and sustained military support for Kyiv. Global forums condemned the invasion, but it was NATO's material power, coordination, and credibility that limited the war's geographic spread and raised the costs of further escalation. Likewise, the territorial defeat of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) in Syria and Iraq in 2019 was achieved not through UN processes, but through U.S.-led coalitions of willing states combining intelligence sharing, targeted military force, and partner capacity building. Across these cases, security outcomes have depended less on global institutions than on coalitions of capable states acting decisively when interests align.

A similar logic applies in counterproliferation. The Proliferation Security Initiative, a voluntary counterproliferation framework launched by the George W. Bush administration in 2003, was not a treaty or supranational body but a practical mechanism designed to strengthen national authorities, share intelligence, and interdict shipments of illicit weapons—such as nuclear materials and missile components. It relied on coordinated national action, not formal supranational institutions, to fulfill its mission. This flexibility allowed the framework to adapt through regional initiatives, from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, and to remain effective as proliferation pathways evolved.

In development, a growing body of scholarship suggests that international efforts to support poorer economies cannot overcome the limitations of state capacity and ill-conceived domestic policy choices. Economists such as William Easterly and David Dollar have long argued that differences in economic policy among developing countries at the national level explain much of the variation in growth performance, especially among African countries, and that no amount of foreign aid can substitute for domestic reform. Top-down global planning produces grand targets without mechanisms for delivery.

Against this backdrop, Africa may be emerging as a testing ground for a different model that treats national governments as the primary drivers of reform, not mere implementers of global agendas. Despite decades of international spending, nearly half of sub-Saharan Africa's population lacks access to electricity. In January 2025, 12 African countries launched National Energy Compacts with country-specific targets, explicitly anchoring responsibility in national policy and institutions. Given the mixed record of global frameworks, this state-anchored approach offers a pragmatic test of whether national ownership can deliver results.

COURSE CORRECTION

The record of the past several decades should invite humility but not resignation. Across many arenas, the results delivered by so-called global solutions have been mixed at best, suggesting that an operating model defaulting to universal frameworks deserves reexamination. This does not mean abandoning international cooperation. Reorienting toward state-anchored approaches and an emphasis on outcomes reflects a belief that cooperation matters too much to accept arrangements that fail to deliver. It is a necessary correction to ensure that cooperation actually works.

A state-centric shift does not reject multilateral institutions. It calls for a more realistic appraisal of their limits and a clearer focus on what they do best: convening, sharing information, and enabling coordination when interests align. Too often, global bodies are asked to perform operational tasks for which they lack authority and capacity. Only states possess the political authority, citizen accountability, and implementation capacity to deliver durable results that large global frameworks have repeatedly failed to achieve.

This debate is no longer abstract. The divide between globally minded and state-centered policymakers has become a prominent fault line in contemporary geopolitics, shaping transatlantic debates in particular. In Washington, leaders are doubtful that existing global institutions are delivering concrete outcomes, while their European counterparts continue to stress the importance of these institutions in sustaining the postwar order. At its core, this debate reflects a shared concern: that democratic governance must adapt if it is to remain effective, credible, and capable of producing results in a more competitive world. Slow, consensus-bound systems have left democratic states less able to respond to emerging challenges, especially from China. Beijing, for instance, has exploited process-heavy governance by flouting international rules in subsidizing its steel and solar industries, knowing that by the time cases wind through the WTO, competitors have often already been wiped out.

A state-centric operating model starts from a simple but hopeful premise that democratic states, working with partners, remain capable of shaping outcomes. Global frameworks have proved insufficient for many of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century. Progress is more likely to come from persuasion, coalitions of the willing, and direct cooperation among governments. This concrete action will not just produce tangible and positive results; it will also uphold democratic values—and in a more convincing way than the lofty bureaucratic architecture of global institutions ever could. The United States and other democratic states must stop deferring to the sclerotic global order and find their own solutions to the major problems of the age.

Essay #4: George Kennan and Winston Churchill gave early warnings about conflicts to come.

Francis P. Sempa

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Eighty years ago this month, the Cold War was emerging into U.S. and Western consciousness, despite the work of those within our government and society who consciously or unconsciously advanced communist goals. Just five months after celebrating V-J Day and the end of the Second World War with our Soviet "allies," George F. Kennan, then a relatively unknown American diplomat assigned to our Moscow embassy, wrote a Long Telegram to his superiors in the State Department about the nature of the Soviet communist threat to the West. The classified telegram arrived in Washington on February 22, 1946. A few weeks later, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered a commencement address at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, and announced to President Harry S. Truman (who was in attendance) and the world that the Soviet Union had erected an "iron curtain" across central and eastern Europe.

The origins of the Cold War have been studied and endlessly debated by scholars since the late 1940s. The conventional view is that the Cold War began sometime in 1945–46, due to Soviet violations of wartime agreements signed at Yalta and Potsdam in the form of the forced communization of Poland and other central-eastern European nations; Soviet meddling in postwar Greece, Turkey, and Iran; Soviets' subtle pressures on West Berlin; and the slowly emerging revelations of Soviet espionage networks within the United States and other European countries. There were, to be sure, some influential revisionist historians, such as William Appleman Williams, Gar Alperowitz, and Gabriel Kolko, who laid as much, if not more, blame on the United States for the origins of the Cold War. There were also scholars, such as Melvyn Leffler in his magisterial *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*, who took a more nuanced view of the Cold War's origins based on the geopolitical perceptions of both sides. But most scholars—a good example is Hugh Thomas, whose book *Armed Truce: The Beginnings of the Cold War, 1946–1946* received widespread acclaim when it appeared shortly before the Cold War's end in 1987—while critical of some aspects of U.S. and Western postwar policies, placed most of the blame where it belonged, on Stalin and Soviet policies.

Perhaps the best historian of the Cold War is John Lewis Gaddis, whose works *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (1972), *Strategies of Containment* (1982), *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (1997), and *The Cold War: A New History* (2005) present a meticulous and evolutionary assessment of the origins of the conflict. Gaddis began this intellectual journey at a time in the late 1960s and early 1970s when many Americans were questioning the wisdom and morality of the country's anti-Soviet policies and completed the journey when the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent opening of Soviet archives revealed the soundness of those policies. Gaddis concluded this journey with his magnificent biography of George Kennan, which appeared in 2011.

Other Cold War observers, however, believed it was a mistake to pinpoint the conflict's origins in the mid- to late 1940s. The political philosopher, former Trotskyist, and onetime U.S. intelligence analyst and consultant James Burnham identified the beginning of the Cold War in November 1917, when Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. Burnham first publicly asserted this idea in a little-remembered article in *Partisan Review* in the summer of 1944 titled "The Sixth Turn of the Communist Screw." Burnham at the time was working for the Office of Strategic Services and had authored a classified paper that spring that claimed the Cold War had already begun even though the U.S. and Soviet Union were "allies" in the ongoing Second World War. In the article, Burnham set forth six phases (or "turns") of Soviet policy aimed at the extension of Soviet control throughout the world. Burnham's point was that the Cold War was part geopolitical and part ideological, and the true origins of the conflict were ideological. Burnham later wrote an influential Cold War trilogy—*The Struggle for the World* (1947), *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (1950), and *Containment or Liberation?* (1952)—about the nature of the Soviet threat and a U.S. and Western strategy to win the Cold War.

George Kennan and Winston Churchill also recognized the importance of the ideological aspects of the Cold War. Kennan served in the Soviet embassy in the 1930s, during the latter phase of the Soviet famine caused by the collectivization of the farms and during Stalin's purges (known as the Great Terror). Kennan at that time, like his boss Ambassador William Bullitt, understood that the Soviet state was leading an international communist enterprise that sought the overthrow of the capitalist world. In his Long Telegram, Kennan noted that the Soviet Union "lives in antagonistic 'capitalist encirclement' with which in the long run there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence." He cited a speech delivered by Stalin in 1927, in which the Soviet dictator proclaimed that the battle between socialism and capitalism "will decide the fate" of the "entire world." Kennan also noted that within the capitalist world the Soviet Union could count on the aid of "communist parties" and other "progressive" elements "whose reactions, aspirations and activities happen to be 'objectively' favorable to interests of [the] USSR."

In the Long Telegram, Kennan emphasized the importance of Marxist-Leninist "dogma" in Soviet affairs, which, combined with the traditional Russian sense of insecurity, meant that Soviet leaders acted on the belief that "there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*" with the United States. The Soviet worldview held that Soviet power could

only be secure, Kennan explained, when the “internal harmony of our society [is] disrupted, our traditional way of life [is] destroyed, [and] the international authority of our state [is] broken.” America’s response to this challenge, Kennan wrote, must combine “cohesion, firmness and vigor” because while the men in the Kremlin were “impervious to [the] logic of reason,” they were “highly sensitive to [the] logic of force.” Kennan would later expand on this recommendation in his pseudonymous article in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947 titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.”

Kennan’s Long Telegram, although a classified document unknown to the American public at large, created a sensation in official Washington. President Truman and his top national security advisers read it and acted on it, initiating what would become known as the policy of containment. Kennan would later be assigned to teach at the National War College and be appointed to head the State Department’s policy planning staff. Through Kennan’s Long Telegram, Washington policymakers became conscious of the beginnings of the Cold War.

Churchill had understood the ideological and geopolitical challenge of Soviet communism since its conquest of Russia in November 1917. In a series of speeches in the House of Commons and elsewhere after Lenin’s seizure of power in Russia, Churchill described the Bolsheviks as “a foul combination of criminality and animalism,” a “pestilence” that was the worst tyranny in all of human history. He recommended that Britian should “resist by every means at [its] disposal the advances of Bolshevist tyranny in every country in the world.” He predicted that the Soviet government would seek to conquer or subvert the nations of eastern Europe. The Bolsheviks, he said, are “fanatics who are the avowed enemies of the existing civilization of the world.”

At the time, Churchill was at the War Office and suggested that Britain provide aid to the “Whites” who were battling the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. Britain did so, but only half-heartedly, exhausted as it was by the strains and consequences of the recently concluded First World War. While it is true that Churchill during World War II became an ally of the Soviet Union, he did so out of geopolitical necessity, memorably stating after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union that Hitler’s regime was “indistinguishable from the worst features of Communism,” and that he would “unsay no words that I’ve spoken” about the Soviet regime. Toward the end of the war, Churchill attempted to persuade the physically exhausted and mentally fatigued President Franklin Roosevelt to wage war with a view to postwar trouble with Stalin’s regime, but to no avail.

At Westminster College on March 5, 1946, now out of power, Churchill, in a speech he titled “The Sinews of Peace,” warned the world, like Kennan had warned official Washington two weeks before, that the Soviet Union had “expansive and proselytizing tendencies;” that it had erected an “iron curtain” from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic Sea behind which it was communizing the nations of central and eastern Europe; that it was exerting pressure upon Turkey, Iran, and Berlin; that it was fomenting trouble in China and other parts of Asia; and that communist “fifth-columns” were posing a challenge to “Christian civilization.” The Soviets, he said, do not want war but the “fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines.” Like Kennan, Churchill called upon the United States and the West to confront the Soviets with “strength” and political cohesion. Recalling his days in the wilderness in the 1930s, Churchill lamented, “Last time I saw it all coming and cried aloud to my own fellow-countrymen and to the world, but no one paid any attention . . . and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. We surely must not let that happen again.”

Just as Kennan’s Long Telegram galvanized official Washington, so, too, did Churchill’s Iron Curtain speech galvanize the Western world for the “long twilight struggle” ahead. Eighty years ago, Kennan and Churchill, each in their own way, provided the intellectual foundation for the United States to wage Cold War until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

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.

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