

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

Prepared by Peter Huessy

President of GeoStrategic Analysis, Potomac, Maryland

Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS)

Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy

Edition: Week of March 9, 2026

(C) Copyright GeoStrategic Analysis, 2026. All Rights Reserved.

**ICBM EAR Week of March 9, 2026, Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of GeoStrategic Analysis,
Senior Fellow, National Institute for Deterrence Studies
and Senior Fellow, & Gold Institute for International Strategy**

Quotes of the Week

Donald Trump (1990 Interview): "He would believe very strongly in extreme military strength. He wouldn't trust anyone. He wouldn't trust the Russians; he wouldn't trust our allies; he'd have a huge military arsenal, perfect it, understand it."

Rebecca Grant: The B-21 is literally the first stealth aircraft ever to run ahead of schedule. But the one main reason for the surge is clear: America's air force is desperately in need of more stealth bombers.

Maj Gen Colin Connel: Completion of the facility "represents ... the fact that this is for real," he said. "We are really modernizing intercontinental ballistic missiles."

Events of the Week

Frank Miller and Amb Eric Edelman will be speaking March 20th, Friday, from 10-11am and will provide an overview of how the United States is doing with respect to its nuclear deterrent.

Paige Glasser of LLNL provided a very extensive review of extended deterrence. Concluding that "business as usual" is no longer tenable, Gasser argues for a revised, strategy-driven division of labor with allies that preserves U.S. nuclear guarantees while encouraging greater allied contributions to deterrence and defense. The seminar closes with practical recommendations for alliance planning, interoperability, capability development, and strategic communication in a two-nuclear-peer world.

Here is a link to the video: https://youtu.be/SzgMrB1Xcb4?si=Vwfx_pXA9ebamTr and here is the transcript.



5HS Paige Gasser
transcript.pdf

International Security Developments

The UN Security Council passed including a 13-0 Arab nation vote defending the Israeli strikes against Hezbollah. China and Russia abstained. Another resolution called Iran #1 sponsor of terrorism and condemning Iran's indiscriminate attacks in the region, again supported unanimously by the Arab nations. Later in the week a vote approved snap back sanctions.

The Turkish Ministry of National Defence says that multiple ballistic missile fired from Iran had been [intercepted](#) after it entered Turkish airspace.

Israel expanded military strikes inside Iran by targeting energy installations across the country while coordinating with the United States, and reports indicated that Israeli attacks on oil infrastructure and refineries in Tehran produced large fires and imagery reminiscent of Gulf War oil facility bombardments.

Iran retaliated by launching strikes at Gulf states hosting United States military installations, including an attack on a government building in Kuwait City, while [Iran's leadership](#) also offered to halt attacks on neighboring Arab Gulf countries if they stopped hosting American strike operations.

Iran announced that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, would succeed his father as supreme leader, although Mojtaba was seriously injured and apparently not cognizant of any of the changes in Iran.

Military planners associated with United States Central Command prepared for a potential campaign lasting at least 100 days and possibly extending into September. An extensive and often critical assessment of the campaign is here and here.

Administration Security Developments / Sentinel News

19 is Not Enough: Inside the Air Force's Rush Order for New B-21 Stealth Bombers *Iran campaign proves full speed ahead on the B-21 is an operational necessity*

RealClearDefense.com, Mar. 13 | Rebecca Grant

America isn't running out of munitions for Operation Epic Fury. But the Air Force is short on stealth bombers.

"In just the last hour, U.S. B-2 bombers dropped dozens of 2000-lb penetrator bombs, targeting Iran's deeply buried ballistic missile launchers," Admiral Bradley Cooper briefed on Mar. 5 from his U.S. Central Command headquarters.

Operation Epic Fury has yet again shown that stealth bombers are a first-night necessity for American airpower. It started on night one. "American B-2 bombers, which, again, similar to Midnight Hammer, flew a 37-hour roundtrip sortie from the continental United States, dropping precision penetrating munitions on Iranian underground facilities across the southern flank and slightly deeper," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine said at the Pentagon on Mar. 2.

The success of the B-2 bombers with their stealth and precision is indispensable. The problem, of course, is that the entire B-2 fleet consists of just nineteen aircraft. 20% of the fleet was in action on the first night of Operation Epic Fury.

Fortunately, as fighters and tankers were flowing toward bases in the Middle East last week, the Air Force quietly accelerated production of the B-2's replacement, the new B-21 Raider stealth bomber, by a hefty 25%. The Feb. 23 rush order was an unusual move, made possible by a sophisticated production line and drama-free flight tests.

The future B-21s will be tasked with everything from nailing Chinese ships to upholding nuclear deterrence. The 25% rate increase also means the Air Force can field B-21 squadrons onto the flightline faster – and move up the timetable for the B-21 to carry nuclear weapons.

Here's how it works. Two B-21s have entered flight testing, and several more B-21s are in low-rate initial production at Northrop Grumman's gigantic final assembly plant in Palmdale, California.

The true number of B-21s produced each year is classified, but the 25% increase will likely boost annual production to approximately eight bombers per year. The increase in funding will "enable the ramp rate to be a little bit steeper than the current flow," as General Thomas Bussiere, who was Commander, Global Strike Command, explained in testimony last summer.

The first beneficiary will be in the flight test program itself. Right now, the first two B-21s, nicknamed "Cerberus" and "Spartan," are handling about two flights per week. For comparison, the early B-2 flight test program in the 1990s conducted about 3,600 hours of testing; the F-35 program, with three variants, eventually racked up 17,000 hours of flight testing. Producing B-21s faster will deliver more aircraft during the busy mid-phase when weapons integration tests begin. Expect the B-21 to carry the 540 nm AGM-158 extended-range Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM-ER) and other specialized ordnance, such as the QUICKSINK kit for 2,000 lb. and 500 lb. weapons.

The first B-21 will be delivered to Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota, in 2027. The B-2 squadrons have eight aircraft assigned; if the Raider keeps that format, accelerated production works out to one fresh new B-21 squadron per year. B-21s at Whiteman AFB in Missouri and Dyess AFB in Texas will arrive and be ready for action sooner.

Another benefit is that the B-21 can take up duty in the Nuclear Triad more rapidly as a result of this production acceleration. Preparing the B-21 for its nuclear mission is of prime importance. Nuclear weapons certification can commence earlier with more B-21s available for integration testing. The nuclear deterrence mission alone has increased in complexity since China began adding hundreds of nuclear weapons to its arsenal. The B-21 in the Triad will have to deter Russia, China, and any new proliferators.

The B-21 acceleration is also a bold move from Deputy Secretary of War Stephen Feinberg. Feinberg, who made billions in private equity, knows a good investment when he sees one. "This is what disciplined acquisition delivers," said General Dale R. White, director, Critical Major Weapon Systems, and direct reporting portfolio manager to the Deputy Secretary.

The B-21 program is unique. No stealth combat plane has ever done this well at the early production phase. Pentagon insiders remember the travails of the F-35, the F-22, and even the B-2. Time was when the first F-22s overran cost estimates, and the F-35C had to be redesigned to accommodate the tail hook for carrier landings. Even the B-2 suffered a production gap in the early 1990s. All have exemplary combat records, but the early phases were hair-raising.

Those days are gone. The B-21 is a cost-conscious bomber based on mature technologies. In 2025, B-21 costs fell from \$6.3 billion to \$5.3 billion for the enacted Fiscal Year 2025 budget. An Aviation Week report noted nearly 28% savings across the five-year defense plan. The cost-trimming, along with successful flight testing, paved the way for the B-21 acceleration.

To move the deal forward, Northrop Grumman put more skin in the game. CEO Kathy Warden said her company will invest \$2-\$3 billion of its own corporate funds in manufacturing infrastructure. The acceleration order for B-21s is also a much-needed direct stimulus to the aerospace industrial base. B-21 acceleration injects funding and purchase order stability into the supplier base for components and parts. Northrop Grumman's partners on the B-21 program include Pratt & Whitney, Janicki Industries, Collins Aerospace, GKN Aerospace, BAE Systems, and Spirit Aerosystems. Each of these Tier One suppliers is an industry leader in their own right, working on numerous defense programs. The additional B-21 business will benefit the skilled teams and echo across the defense sector.

The Air Force also needs to increase the overall buy number. The B-21 program of record still stands at 100 B-21s. U.S. Strategic Command leaders have spoken of 145 or more B-21s.

"Operation Epic Fury stands as a reminder of what the United States military uniquely delivers, the ability to project power on a global scale, with speed, surprise, precision, and overwhelming force," Caine said at the conclusion of his briefing. The tiny B-2 fleet has maintained global reach due to heroic operational performance and maintenance by the 509th Bomb Wing. However, America's stealth bomber force must never be allowed to run short.

--Dr. Rebecca Grant is a national security analyst based in Washington, DC specializing in defense and aerospace research and national security consulting.

Leaders Mark First Sentinel Milestone

CHEYENNE, Wyo. -- Air Force leaders described the Sentinel Missile modernization effort as a "once in a generation" project Wednesday during a ribbon cutting for its first completed facility at F.E. Warren Air Force Base. Sentinel Task Force Detachment 10 hosted a ribbon cutting, a symbolic celebration of seeing the Sentinel Missile Project move forward with the completion of the project's operations center. Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen was among those at the ribbon cutting and met privately afterward with generals working on the project.

The Sentinel Missile Project is being billed as a modernization of the nation's intercontinental ballistic missile system, replacing the Minuteman III with new LGM-35 Sentinel ICBMs.

Northrop Grumman is leading the design and production of the new missile, which Northrop says will be viable through 2075. Many echoed a statement by Maj. Gen. Colin Connor, director of ICBM modernization at Air Force Global Strike Command, that demonstrated the excitement of the teams working on the missile project celebrating the completion of the building. The facility will serve as the operations center for the Sentinel Missile Project as work proceeds in the field.

Completion of the facility "represents ... the fact that this is for real," he said. "We are really modernizing intercontinental ballistic missiles." Connor reflected on the ICBM system's significance as one of the legs of the triad of the nation's strategic deterrence system, and on the personal significance of the project that he called "the largest military effort we've ever had."

Thirty years earlier, he said, he had been among those operating the Minuteman III system, "which I thought was cutting edge." At that time, he said, operators of the Rapid Execution and Combat Targeting System knew that system to be brand new and first class. Connor said, "The walls and the roof that you're sitting in now will be the nerve center for everything that occurs both on base and in Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado, and the missile field in the 90th Missile Wing will be because of this building right here. ... They'll write history out of what happens in this building."

Brig. Gen. William Rogers explained that operators, SATAF teams, civil engineers and others will work from the facility in support of the activation and integration efforts for modernizing the U.S.'s ICBM force including updated command and control features. During tours of the facility on Wednesday, SATAF leaders outlined how work at F.E. Warren AFB will serve as the model for similar projects at Malmstrom and Minot Air Force bases. As the project progresses, lessons learned and information gathered in the early stages of the project will allow improvements at the other two bases.

Tour leaders touched on the significant measures taken at the facility to protect the nation's military system, from sourcing of construction materials to security measures that include soundproofed rooms lined with foil and doors outfitted with copper to prevent access from radio frequency technology, and methods used to prevent the acquisition of data containing the nation's top military secrets. On the surface, it looks like a typical office site, with "hot desks" — desks that aren't assigned to one specific person — available, offices for the various partners on the project and conference rooms that bear the names of the missile systems used throughout U.S. history, such as Sentinel, Apache and Nike.

Currently, the Sentinel missile modernization's cost is estimated at \$141 billion to \$160 billion. It's the most significant modernization of the missile alert system since the U.S. established it in the 1950s during the Cold War. According to a project overview on the U.S. Air Force Global Strike Command website, all 45 missile alert facilities will be demolished and each of the 450 missile launch sites will be reconditioned. The project will also involve the removal, decommissioning and disposal of the current MMIII weapon system. That just touches on the size of the project, which will entail the construction of infrastructure, such as laying fiber optic cables and more, as the project updates command, control and communications capabilities.

The administration followed the recommendation of many by not producing a new Nuclear Posture Review but declared that the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review still stands as US strategy.

Essays and Reports of the Week

Congressional Security Developments

Williams of CSIS Nuclear Architecture

https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2026-03/260313_Williams_Nuclear_Architecture.pdf?VersionId=xpeygzjoZICOTR.sKU9HBKnKCGAgU9dY

Excerpt: In a 1990 interview, when asked how he would handle nuclear issues if he were president, Trump replied in the third person: “He would believe very strongly in extreme military strength. He wouldn’t trust anyone. He wouldn’t trust the Russians; he wouldn’t trust our allies; he’d have a huge military arsenal, perfect it, understand it.” Trump’s earlier impulse may have some value today, when the actions of U.S. adversaries have degraded trust and exacerbated the need for a flexible nuclear arsenal capable of deterring in-theater aggression. While not necessarily needing to grow vastly in size, the U.S. nuclear arsenal would benefit from tailored measures to strengthen the enterprise and adapt capabilities to the current threat environment. Additionally, improved capabilities must be complemented by risk-reduction measures that simultaneously secure U.S. and allied interests and advance global peace and security. Together, the paired ambitions of military strength and nuclear arms control could protect the United States, its allies, and the world at a time of rising global instability.

Iran and US Security Memo Prepared by GeoStrategic Analysis

Look at this Iran campaign as in multiple phases and the US may be operating at any one time in parts of each phase.

First, take down nuclear capability —known unknown is nuclear fuel stored from previous enrichment but this has always been an issue.

Second, eliminate Iran’s conventional military capability that is used to coerce and blackmail other nations from even trying to take down nuclear capability.

Third, secure oil and gas transit through Hormuz

We are now in phase 3 and cleaning up #2 but #1 remains re the removed enriched stuff. But moving toward completion except #3 in process.

Now what’s just beginning and which is the most unknown?

Four, foster internal Iranian resistance and regime change which the USA cannot do on its own or direct. We can assist. That’s the beginning which some officials have made reference. This is not amenable to some well laid out plan as it’s almost entirely up to Iranian resistance groups which might include the armed Kurdish incursion into Iran. No USA boots on the ground can change that.

Fifth, determine where the 450 kilos of enriched uranium is stored and how to secure it or destroy it. That’s not fully knowable. The Iran FM says the material is under the “rubble” from the June 2025 strikes. But the FM doesn’t deny its exists but says all of its was under the control of the UN’s IAEA when asked by a network reporter who controlled the material and where was it. But this admission is Iran is making nuclear fuel far beyond any peaceful use for such material, while also not telling the truth about the material which was diverted from any control from IAEA.

Sixth, does regime change get more doable the more we degrade the mullahs capability to kill and terrorize? Some analysts say yes, that’s why Israel continues to take out key IRGC assets. But is there a guarantee? No. The Israelis have a word for what may have to be done: “mow the grass”. It may just be that the Israelis and the United States are trying to uproot the soil this time.

Seventh, is there historical precedent for what the US and Israel are trying to accomplish? In WWII, we ended the military campaign in April and August 1945, respectively, with Germany and Japan. Then we started or initiated a new campaign of building a new government and this was just the beginning. We lucked out with Adenauer and

Germany's past democratic government and with Japan we lucked out with McArthur. And his brilliant tactical embrace of the emperor' authority and vice versa.

I studied at Yonsei University and International Christian University in 1969-70 in Japan and ROK. Most of our professors explained that McArthur's genius was not planned or predetermined by Roosevelt or Truman. Truman thought the embrace of the emperor was wrong headed but DM persuaded folks that only the blessing of the emperor would make all Japanese go along with what McArthur proposed---a parliamentary system, women voting, and land reform. The key: folks knew who was calling the shots although the emperor was approving. My professors remained in awe of what happened.

LEBANON'S FAILURE TO DISARM HEZBOLLAH COMES WITH A PRICE

[David Schenker](#) • March 16, 2026 • [Al Majalla](#)

Lebanese army troops deployed to the streets of Beirut during anti-government protests in 2019. (Photo: Paul Doyle)

For the past 16 months, the Lebanese government and military have chosen not to choose—and risked their country's future. Lebanon, a weak and divided state, committed in its 2024 ceasefire agreement with Israel to disarm Hezbollah—but Beirut has sidestepped its obligations rather than shouldering them. That could squander the opportunity provided by Israel's 2024 pounding of Hezbollah. Rather than take on Hezbollah and risk intercommunal violence, Lebanon effectively chose war with Israel.

Taking a step back helps reveal the enormity of this blunder. March 14 will mark the anniversary of the “Cedar Revolution,” the brave 2005 popular uprising that ended the decades-long Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Yet decades later, Lebanon remains both an occupied country and a failed state. Iran continues to use Hezbollah to dominate the country, dictating policy and matters of war and peace.

Last week, Hezbollah fired missiles into Israel, ending a tenuous 15-month ceasefire. Beirut had tried to insulate Lebanon from the contagion of the Iran war, but Israel's killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini on the first day of the war was a red line for Hezbollah. For the second time in less than three years, the group has dragged Lebanon into war with Israel. But Hezbollah doesn't bear *sole* responsibility for the conflict. The government of Lebanon also shares the blame.

Lebanese governments have a long, ignominious tradition of deferring difficult decisions. I hoped this might change when Beirut committed to disarming Hezbollah in its November 2024 ceasefire agreement with Israel. Hezbollah had emerged from the war battered, its leadership decimated, and its military capabilities degraded. Seizing the moment, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun pledged during his January 2025 inaugural speech to take away Hezbollah's weapons. Unfortunately, fearing “civil war”—i.e., Hezbollah violence—Aoun deferred disarmament in favour of dialogue with the militia.

It took more than seven months—until the Fall of 2025—for Beirut to finally task the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with confiscating Hezbollah's arms. Licking its wounds after its mauling by Israel, Hezbollah consented to its neutering in south Lebanon and coordinated with the LAF as it appropriated thousands of rockets and hundreds of missiles along the border with Israel. But the LAF was not proactive. Instead, Lebanese troops reacted selectively to intelligence provided by Israel to a US-led cell based in Lebanon, avoiding sites Hezbollah deemed sensitive.

LACKLUSTRE LAF PERFORMANCE

Israel described the LAF's initial disarmament efforts as “encouraging” but insufficient. Despite Israel's scepticism, in early January the LAF declared “mission accomplished” in south Lebanon, announcing that it had completed phase one of Hezbollah disarmament. Only a month later, US Central Command announced that the LAF had uncovered a “massive underground tunnel” used to store missiles and attack drones in the south. Over the past week, Israel has hit dozens of targets in south Lebanon, including missile- and rocket-launch sites and a drone-manufacturing facility.

The LAF's lacklustre performance in the south belies the army's priorities. Rather than targeting Hezbollah weapons, the LAF has focused on avoiding conflict with the group. Hezbollah tolerated some weapons collection in the south but vowed to attack the state if LAF operations continued north. The LAF blinked, and the Lebanese government said nothing, allowing the fiction of disarmament to continue.

Many Lebanese are furious at Hezbollah today for launching yet another war in the service of Iran. For good reason. Israel's renewed campaign promises to be calamitous for Lebanon. Beirut remains mired in a financial crisis and still has not started to clear and rebuild the destruction from the last round.

Beirut is also apparently annoyed—not with Hezbollah's refusal to disarm but with its decision to launch another war with Israel. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has since prohibited "all of Hezbollah's military activities," calling them illegal and demanding that the militia "hand over its weapons." He also banned Hezbollah's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps masters from the country and ordered their deportation.

HAYKAL UNDER FIRE

The Salam government's reaffirmation of its decision to disarm Hezbollah is welcome but unlikely to be effective. One problem is that LAF Commander Rodolphe Haykal isn't on board. He says national unity is Lebanon's priority and issued a statement suggesting the army isn't answerable to the government.

During the cabinet vote about the policy, according to the Lebanese daily Nida al Watan, Salam argued with Haykal. "We have several options," Haykal reportedly said. "Let's start with the option of coordinating with Hezbollah." To his credit, Salam responded, "Enough already! There's no such thing as security by consensus anymore."

Haykal says he needs more money for the LAF before deploying against Hezbollah. The LAF is indeed broke and insufficiently equipped for such a difficult mission. But the LAF's main problem isn't lack of capability; it's lack of will. Until recently, the Lebanese government has largely hedged on giving its political backing to the mission, and instead of defending the state's sovereignty against Hezbollah's predations, LAF leaders have tried to protect the Lebanese army from a confrontation with Hezbollah.

Predictably, Beirut is now calling for direct negotiations with Israel—not to produce peace but a resumption of the ceasefire. Israel *should* talk with Beirut. But Lebanon will have no peace and no enduring ceasefire until it moves to disarm Hezbollah and end the Iranian occupation of the state. As US Special Envoy Tom Barrack said, "Stop with the bullsh—t" on disarming Hezbollah. "If it's not real action... there's no point."

Criticism of Sentinel: Déjà vu All Over Again

The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) has published its nuclear notebook with a lengthy description of the US nuclear arsenal. The US am entire stockpile of 3700 warheads with 1770 actually deployed in the field at the same level as a year earlier. As they have for decades, the notebook complains the current ICBM modernization program is not needed, repeating a litany of old criticisms that never change whether assessing the SICBM, the Peacekeeper, the MMIII SLEP or Sentinel. Here is the FAS summary of the assessment. *To see all previous Nuclear Notebook columns in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists dating back to 1987, go to <https://thebulletin.org/nuclear-notebook/>.*

Non-governmental experts, including those conducting Department of Defense-sponsored research, have questioned the Pentagon's procurement process and lack of transparency regarding its decision to pursue the Sentinel option over other potential deployment and basing options (Dalton et al. 2022, 4). Moreover, it is unclear why an enhancement of ICBM capabilities would be necessary for the United States. For instance, any such enhancements would not mitigate the inherent challenges associated with launch-on-warning, risky territorial overflights, or silo vulnerabilities to environmental catastrophes or conventional counterforce strikes (Korda 2021). Additionally, even if adversarial missile defenses improved significantly, the ability to evade missile defenses lies with the payload—not the missile itself. By the time an adversary's interceptor would be able to engage a US ICBM in its midcourse phase of flight, the ICBM would already have shed its boosters, deployed its penetration aids, and be guided solely by its reentry vehicle—which can be independently upgraded as necessary. For this reason, it is not readily apparent why the US Air Force would require its ICBMs to have capabilities beyond the current generation of Minuteman III missiles.

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

Edition: Week of March 9, 2026

Contact: NIDS@ThinkDeterrence.com

Subscribe: GeoStrategicAnalysis.substack.com

(C) Copyright GeoStrategic Analysis, 2026. All Rights Reserved.