

# Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

**Prepared by Peter Huessy**

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**Edition: Week of March 23, 2026**

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**ICBM EAR Week of March 23, 2026, Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis of Potomac, Maryland, Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, and Senior Fellow, Gold Institute for International Strategy**

**Summary**

**Quotes of the Week; extensive Congressional concern over the extent of the military threats facing the USA; Congress pushes for better integration of US security policy, strategy and budgets; essays on China threat and nuclear testing; excellent material from the Keystone Initiative; David Trachtenberg and the need for a better strategy document for the US especially with re to Europe and Extended Deterrence; international developments of concern; important NNSA developments; China threat re-evaluated.**

**Iran: Missile Defense. Missile threats and Nuclear Developments. Mark Thiessen discusses imminent threats in historical context; Carnegie commentary on China and arms control.**

**Quotes and Commentary of the Week**

**NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams:** No one can match NNSA's capabilities in nonproliferation, counterproliferation, counterterrorism, and emergency response. Our nuclear experts in these fields are our first and last lines of defense, often doing unseen, difficult, and vital work."

**Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE):** "The Air Force and our national security strategy need 145 B-21 Raider bombers. The Raider can penetrate any air defense and provides deterrence. The B-21 will replace the B-1 and B-2."

**USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Richard Correll:** "Russia's development of a space-based nuclear weapon is "very significant" and that it is something the U.S. military must account for "in terms of the architecture that we have and what we can do about it."

**Assistant Secretary of State DiNonno:** We're going to vigorously compete and modernize our deterrent [and] to try to roll back the Chinese stockpile."

**Roger Wicker, Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee:** The defense policy's tepid treatment of satellites and nuclear weapons might encourage Chinese and Russian ambitions.

**NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams:** "Under President @realDonaldTrump's and @SecretaryWright's leadership, NNSA/DOE is assuring peace through atomic strength.

**SASC Chair Roger Wicker:** It's no secret that I believe this NDS falls short in several areas. I am particularly concerned that the current strategy does not address space and nuclear threats with anywhere near the urgency they deserve."

**Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND):** "Always appreciate catching up with @US\_STRATCOM Commander Admiral Richard Correll, especially hearing how B-52s are supporting Operation Epic Fury, alongside updates on Minuteman III sustainment and Sentinel deployment. What's happening at Minot Air Force Base isn't abstract, it's a direct reflection of North Dakota's frontline role in keeping America secure."

**Senate Intel Chair: Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR):** "Russia, China, and North Korea's short range missiles seriously threaten our national security. We must quickly build a diversified set of low-yield non-strategic systems to counter this threat.

## International Strategic Developments

**North Korean leader Kim Jong Un** pledged to continue to consolidate the DPRK's "absolutely irreversible status as a nuclear power" and said that Pyongyang would treat South Korea as its "most hostile state."

**Three B-1B Lancers have arrived at RAF Fairford**, bringing the total number of B-1 and B-52 bombers stationed at the U.K. airbase to 21, one of the largest bomber deployments in recent history.

**Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif:** "Pakistan welcomes and fully supports ongoing efforts to pursue dialogue to end the WAR in Middle East, in the interest of peace and stability in region and beyond. Subject to concurrence by the US and Iran, Pakistan stands ready and honored to be the host to facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks for a comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict."

**U.S. Forces Korea has established a dedicated** unit to integrate American strategic assets into alliance military planning that is operating separately from the allies' joint command structure.

**IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi:** "Honored to meet @MFA\_China FM Wang Yi in Beijing. Important exchange on the critical role of multilateralism and the centrality of the United Nations in the context of current global challenges. I thank him for China's commitment to the @IAEAorg's mission and the non-proliferation regime and look forward to continuing our strong cooperation."

## Administration Strategic Developments of Interest

**The Administration explains its Iran military campaign has:** 1) Completely degrading Iranian Missile Capability, Launchers, and everything else pertaining to them. (2) Destroying Iran's Defense Industrial Base. (3) Eliminating their Navy and Air Force, including Anti-Aircraft Weaponry. (4) Never allowing Iran to get even close to Nuclear Capability and always being in a position where the U.S.A. can quickly and powerfully react to such a situation, should it take place. And (5) Protecting, at the highest level, our Middle Eastern Allies, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and others. The Hormuz Strait will have to be guarded and policed, as necessary.

**NNSA Administrator Williams** announced that: NSC Director for Counter Terrorism Sebastian Gorka visited the Nevada National Security Sites.

**Multiple waves" of at least a dozen drones** entered and exited airspace above Barksdale AFB the week of March 9, which underscored that the drones operated "over sensitive areas of the installation, including the flight line," and whoever was operating the UAS may have been testing the base's security responses.

**Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Thomas DiNanno** said that the United States is still assessing how to implement President Trump's order to potentially resume nuclear weapons testing, but he did not rule out a resumption of full-scale underground explosive tests.

**Gen. Dale R. White, the Pentagon's direct reporting portfolio manager** for critical major weapon systems, recently visited Minot AFB to assess mission requirements and ongoing preparations supporting the Sentinel ICBM system modernization efforts.

## **The Washington Times - Wednesday, March 25, 2026**

**What to know:** The U.S. plans to resume underground nuclear tests due to Chinese and Russian activities.

The United States is preparing to resume underground nuclear tests in response to significant covert Chinese and Russian nuclear testing, a senior State Department official disclosed this week. Thomas G. DiNanno, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, told Congress that Beijing and Moscow's nuclear tests created an unacceptable U.S. hindrance and a major advantage for those adversaries in developing nuclear warheads.

The Trump administration also is continuing to press China to join nuclear arms talks that Beijing is required to pursue under an international treaty but has refused, Mr. DiNanno testified Tuesday at a hearing of the Senate

Foreign Affairs Committee. On nuclear tests, Mr. DiNanno said President Trump has tasked the Energy and Defense departments to “test on an equal basis to that with our adversaries.”

Mr. DiNanno, the administration’s most senior arms official, said the context for renewed testing is that the Russians and the Chinese have been conducting tests “at yield” — a term describing underground blasts that produce a significant, self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction and release measurable amounts of explosive energy. Other types of testing, including those done by the United States, are called “subcritical” experiments that mimic nuclear yield tests but below that threshold. The last underground U.S. nuclear test took place in 1992.

Mr. DiNanno said assessments are being undertaken on resuming the tests but that no decision has yet been made to move ahead. “I think it’s extremely important to understand that the Russians and Chinese are testing at yield. That creates an intolerable disadvantage for the United States by not testing,” he said.

The undersecretary corrected Sen. Jackie Rosen, Nevada Democrat, who said she opposes resumed testing that would be carried out in the desert Nevada National Security Site near Las Vegas over fears winds would carry nuclear fallout as far east as Texas. “Hold on, I want to address it. I think it’s important. You’re talking about the wind. There is no discussion that I’ve been a part of that any atmospheric testing would take place,” Mr. DiNanno said.

Ms. Rosen said nuclear tests are not needed because the reliability of nuclear arms for years has been measured through technical and scientific means short of blasts. A global moratorium on nuclear explosive testing has been in place since the late 1990s. It is a norm set under the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty that China and the U.S. signed but did not ratify. Russia revoked its ratification of the pact in 2023. China and Russia have denied that yield tests were carried out.

China’s last declared underground test took place in 1996, and Russia said its last test took place in 1990. On China’s reluctance to join U.S. and Russia arms talks, Mr. DiNanno said Beijing, as a signatory of the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty, is obligated to engage in disarmament discussions. “They have refused to do that, so we continue to press them on that,” he said.

Mr. DiNanno said the Trump administration is continuing its modernization of the strategic nuclear arsenal that currently faces an asymmetric threat posed by a combined stockpile of more than 2,500 warheads — 1,500 Russian warheads and a projected 1,000 Chinese warheads — in the coming years. The current U.S. warhead stockpile is about 1,500 deployed warheads, with thousands more in storage.

## **Congressional Update**

### **Senators worry about ‘historically dangerous’ strategic threats *Armed Services hearing focuses on advances by Russia, China***

BY JOHN M. DONNELLY

*A Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Thursday laid bare concerns in both parties about alarming advances in Russian and Chinese missiles, nuclear weapons and antisatellite capabilities.*

**Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., the committee’s chairman, said at the hearing that these dangers are advancing by “leaps and bounds.” Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the committee’s top Democrat, said: “We are operating in a historically dangerous strategic environment.”**

The hearing’s purpose was to review the posture of U.S. space and nuclear forces. The witnesses were Space Force Gen. Stephen Whiting, the commander of U.S. Space Command, and Adm. Richard Correll, the commander of U.S. Strategic Command. Wicker reiterated Strategic Command’s 2023 finding that China now has more land-based intercontinental missile launchers than the United States, though America still has more submarine-launched ballistic missiles. **As for the nuclear warheads that those missiles can deliver, America is still far ahead, but China is advancing, building about 100 more per year,** the Pentagon has said. As of last year, China had about 600 warheads, versus more than 5,000 each for Russia and America,

And China’s missiles are in a launch-on-warning hair-trigger status, the Pentagon has said. Meanwhile, China has grown its constellations of satellites in orbit to 1,300, including 510 “intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance” satellites — **a 667 percent increase since 2015,** Whiting of Space Command testified. China recently conducted

an operational first in space: refueling a satellite more than 22,000 miles above the equator, potentially giving China a new capability to take adverse actions against U.S. satellites, Whiting said. ‘We need to be able to deliver our own maneuver capability,’ he said.

Russia, meanwhile, remains “a major strategic threat to the United States,” Wicker said. **Moscow has developed — but not yet launched — a nuclear-capable antisatellite weapon, which Whiting called “the single greatest threat” in space and a “very, very significant” development — not just for U.S. satellites but to all satellites in space,** commercial or military, regardless of national owner.

Wicker said Russia has also developed “new weapons unlike anything in the U.S. inventory,” including “nuclear-powered, trans-oceanic, autonomous torpedoes and intercontinental cruise missiles. “Russia possesses, too, a substantial arsenal of lower-yield nuclear weapons that could be used in a regional scenario, as opposed to striking the United States. Wicker said Russia has a 10-to-1 numerical advantage in these tactical nuclear weapons.

Looming over the separate risks from **Russia and China is the fact that they are increasingly coordinating their strategic efforts, including with joint bomber patrols off Alaska and in the Western Pacific, Reed said. The strategic security environment is perilous not just because of the growing technical capabilities of U.S. adversaries but also for other reasons, Reed and other Democrats said.**

The New START Treaty’s nuclear weapons limits expired in February, something Wicker said was needed to “reset the strategic balance.” China was not a party to that treaty, and efforts to create a follow-on pact involving Russia or China have proven fruitless. The upshot is that there is no verifiable agreement to cap nuclear arms for the first time since the early 1970s.

If America’s so-called extended deterrence umbrella is no longer considered reliable, it could trigger a wave of nuclear proliferation, potentially by such countries as Sweden, Germany, South Korea and Japan, some experts have said. **Correll of Strategic Command said, under questioning from Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., that he regularly emphasizes to his military counterparts in allied nations that U.S. deterrence remains solid.** Still, Reed said allies’ confidence in U.S. nuclear protection is “eroding,” and this has “profound implications for weapons proliferation.”

Democrats, including Reed and Sen. Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., expressed concerns about Trump’s recent proposal to resume U.S. nuclear weapons tests for the first time since 1992, as opposed to continuing to use simulations. The U.S. military responses to these threats are several. For one, the three legs of the U.S. nuclear triad are all being modernized. But two of those programs, the Columbia class of submarines and the Sentinel land-based missiles, are behind schedule and over budget. **The witnesses said the lives of the current generation of weapons — Ohio class subs and Minuteman missiles — are being successfully extended to account for the delays.** The replacement program for the third leg of the triad, the B-21 bomber initiative, appears to be performing relatively better than the other two on cost and schedule and is projected to enter service in 2027.

But Correll echoed his predecessor’s position that at least 145 B-21s are needed just for U.S. strategic requirements, not just the 100 in the current plan. At a cost of nearly \$700 million per B-21 just for acquisition, let alone operations, growing the inventory by 45 percent would add to the Air Force’s budget pressures. The B-21 program’s estimated acquisition cost is about \$92 billion in constant fiscal 2025 dollars. The comparable Columbia figure is \$126.5 billion and Sentinel is \$141 billion.

Those figures exclude not just support costs but also the price of developing and building the warheads, which is a National Nuclear Security Administration duty. **Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, said the Pentagon “needs to demonstrate it can deliver capabilities on time and on budget. Correll said the Pentagon is “laser focused” on the issue but added: “I acknowledge there have been some significant challenges there. “Another nuclear weapon in development is the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile, which Correll said would give the United States a way to counter lower-yield nuclear weapons in the Russian and Chinese arsenals.**

The Pentagon is bolstering its strategic defense as well as its offense. The president has called for deployment before his term is up of a Golden Dome antimissile shield for the U.S. homeland, an enhanced version of the

current set of interceptors in Alaska and California. It is not clear yet to key lawmakers what that system will entail, and the witnesses on Thursday did not offer more of an idea.

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### **Congressional Budget Developments**

**Analysis by the Editor:** Congress is dealing with 3 pathways to fund Homeland Security and each has its own challenges, pitfalls and possibilities. The first option is the current Senate passed spending bill which excludes any new spending for immigration enforcement or border activities. The Senate first step would require a second step using a reconciliation bill to fund ICE over and above the funding agreed to last June 2025. That bill would require only 51 votes to pass vs the current Senate rules which require 60 votes to curtail debate to allow both a bill to be considered on the floor of the Senate and passed.

The second option is the current House position which for the remainder of FY2026 passed an appropriations bill fully funding Homeland Security including ICE, and the Secret Service, the Coast Guard, TSA, Cyber activities and other elements.

The third option is being pushed by elements within the Administration and that is to abolish the 60 vote/filibuster rule and proceed with the appropriations bills and the voting reform and other immigration related changes which would then only require 218 House votes and 51 Senate votes. A key issue re reconciliation is whether the Senate Parliamentarian would rule that the provisions added to a reconciliation bill package would be "in order" and thus require only a 51 vote majority, as there are important restrictions in the reconciliation rules that have to be met.

### **Economic News of Interest**

The Fed damped down the idea that a rise in energy prices could lead to a self-fulfilling expectation of higher inflation. The Chairman noted this hasn't happened so far. His said inflation expectations remain "well-anchored." Indeed, in the latest University of Michigan consumer sentiment survey, the five-year expectation for inflation ticked down. One news outlet (Breitbart) got things right: "Similarly, the **decline in equity prices** that tends to accompany rising energy prices results in tighter financial conditions, which is itself a contractionary and deflationary force. So, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz directly puts downward pressure on growth and prices outside of the energy sector.

### **Events of Interest**

**NIDS: *ThinkDeterrence.com***

In person breakfast seminar upcoming with both SSBN's Admiral Todd Weeks and Vice Commander of USAF Global Strike Command Lt Gen Mike Lutton, May 15 and June 3, respectively. On Friday, April 3, from 10-11, the NIDS/Huessy seminar series will hear from Lt. Gen Armagost of USAF Global Strike Command.

### **The Challenges to Ensuring Nuclear Deterrence**

#### **Lt. Gen. Jason Armagost**

Deputy Commander of Air Force Global Strike Command  
and Deputy Commander of Air Forces Strategic-Air  
U.S. Strategic Command

#### **Friday, April 3, 2026**

10:00am - 11:00am Eastern

Virtual Event

Speaking points to follow



## New ICBM News

And the LGM-35A Sentinel ICBM program is “rapidly moving from digital design to tangible reality”, following the recent groundbreaking for a full-scale launch silo prototype in Promontory, Utah, according to an Air Force press release, which said the “milestone marks a key step in modernizing the land-based leg of the nation’s nuclear triad.”

## New Nuclear Essays of Note

David Trachtenberg. NIPP Essay conclusion: “In short, the NDS, like the NSS, is an aspirational document lacking important details regarding how the United States will meet the defense challenges of today and tomorrow. Its inventory of such challenges is notably incomplete. And it fails to adequately address the “ways, means, and ends” issue. The phrase “we will” appears 67 times in the 24-page document. Yet the question of *how* “we will” marshal the resources and capabilities necessary to do everything the strategy puts forward remains unanswered.

The document’s guiding principle is “Out with utopian idealism; in with hardnosed realism.”

However, a truly realistic appraisal of the national security challenges the nation faces would result in a qualitatively different strategy document than the one that has been produced and would consider how threats and U.S. responses to those threats in one region may affect the perceptions and actions of both friends and foes in other regions. While a defense strategy based on the notion of “peace through strength” is appropriate to today’s dynamic threats, it remains to be seen whether the resources necessary to implement the strategy will be forthcoming and how effectively they will be applied.

A key part of Trachtenberg’s assessment is here:

***“In addition, this “more limited” U.S. role in Europe’s defense may sow greater doubts about the future of the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to NATO. Indeed, the document does not even mention extended deterrence as part of U.S. defense strategy – something that every post-World War II administration has validated on a bipartisan basis. This reflects a significant departure from the tone of the Trump Administration’s 2018 NDS, which, while calling on U.S. allies to “to contribute an equitable share to our mutually beneficial collective security,” recognized the importance of alliances and advocated for partnerships built on “a foundation of mutual respect.”***

## Iran, Israel & Missile Defense Update

Iran launched a pair of missiles at Diego Garcia, a joint U.S.-U.K. military base about 2,500 miles (4000 kilometers) from the Middle Eastern country’s borders, raising questions that Iranian missiles are capable of reaching a greater range than previously thought. The two Iranian intermediate-range ballistic missiles — which both missed — were aimed at Diego Garcia. That target was located double the distance from Iran than the range Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi [claimed](#) the country’s missiles were intentionally limited to no more than 2000 kilometers. A point often reiterated by Moscow to deflect pressure to build missile defenses in Europe. Diego Garcia is an island in the Chagos Archipelago — a British territory just over a thousand miles off the coast of India — which has functioned as shared U.S.-U.K. base since the Cold War. News sources explain one of the two Iranian missiles failed mid-flight while the other was fired upon and intercepted by a U.S. warship. The Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control’s Iran Watch says Iran has missiles now capable of reaching Diego Garcia, despite Araghchi’s statement that the country deliberately limited their range to about half that. The Israel-based Alma Research and Education Center, meanwhile, asserted Iran’s missiles currently top out at a range of about 3,000 kilometers (1,900 miles), but acknowledged reports the Islamic theocracy just launched missiles with a range of near 4000 kilometers.

## Missile Defense Update II

One observer from Israel sent this comment to me: “I am very impressed with what they have done since I have a good understanding of where they started from in 2021. Yesterday’s kill tally was 100% cruise missiles killed, 93%

Shaheed drones at night, and 97% Shaheed drones in daylight - that is world class and like our best ever days in WW2.” [The Shaheed missiles have a 2000-2800 kilometer range.]

### **Are the Iranians Real Clever and Did They Snooker the USA & Israel?**

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (BAS) claims Iran moved its 400+ kilograms of 60% enriched uranium before the June Israeli and US military strikes against Iran’s nuclear satellites---by moving in broad daylight dozens of brightly blue painted containers filled with highly enriched uranium by trucks to a new site in Isfahan, easily identified by commercial satellites.

By [François Diaz-Maurin](#); March 29, 2026 “Working with a team of visual investigators that included the *Bulletin*, the French newspaper *Le Monde* has analyzed a previously unreported satellite image of the Iranian nuclear site at Isfahan, showing a large truck loaded with containers. In [a Le Monde article](#) published Saturday, experts said they could not be certain what the containers held. But the timing of the image, the type of load, and other indirect evidence suggest that Iran may have placed a significant quantity of highly enriched uranium—possibly all of its inventory—at the facility ahead of the June 2025 strikes by Israel and the United States against Iranian nuclear sites.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has mentioned the possible presence of highly enriched uranium at the Isfahan nuclear complex several times—a presence implicitly acknowledged by Iran’s own [recent declarations](#). The IAEA has made [multiple requests](#) but was unable to access the underground tunnel complex at Isfahan, which was spared during Israeli and American military strikes in June. The satellite image could be the first publicly available evidence of the presence of highly enriched uranium at Isfahan.

***Commentary by Mark Thiessen: Columnist for the Washington Post, remarks on Fox News. This statement is based on the editor’s notes and some additional information to make the commentary clearer.***

The biggest mistake American presidents have made for more than a century is we failed to take the words of the enemy seriously.

If you go back to the early 1900’s Vladimir Lenin publishes “what is to be done” and calls to build a communist empire and wage communist revolution across the world. No-one takes him seriously and the 1917 Russian revolution happens. Communism kills 100 million of their own people around the world.

In 1925 Adolf Hitler publishes a book called Mein Kampf and he declares his intention to build a regime to eradicate the Jews in Europe; but no one takes him seriously and the Nazi regime comes to power and kills 25 million people in the holocaust.

In 1996 Osama bin Laden publishes a pamphlet or Fatwa declaring war on America. He’s says he is going to bring war to the United States. No one pays attention to him. 9-11 happens. Thousands dead.

In 2011 Putin publishes and it’s still on the presidential website the Russian president essay explains that the Russian people are the same as the Ukrainian people are he is going to reunite them by force but no one takes him seriously; In 2014 he invades Ukraine; and over 1 million are now dead.

The Iranian regime since 1979 has been saying for decades “death to America and death to Israel”, and both will be destroyed as Iran pursues a nuclear weapon as Israel discovered in 2006.

Donald Trump is the first president who took the words of the enemy seriously and is acting to stop them before they kill millions of people.

I don’t know why people can’t understand this. The threat from Lenin, Hitler, Putin, Osama Bin Laden, should have been take seriously. It wasn’t.

Now Donald Trump takes this threat from the Iranian regime seriously as an Iranian nuclear bomb could kill

millions.

The Iranian regime are radicals who wish to bring about the apocalypse—their entire ideology, their entire religion wants to bring about the apocalypse. They get a nuclear weapon—they would use it to bring about the apocalypse.

Donald Trump is stopping them from ever doing that and history is going to reward him as the first president in over a century to take the words of the enemy seriously.

## China, Russia, and Nuclear Deterrence

### Commentary by Tong Zhao, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:

“There is little chance the US could bring China to the table on any nuclear arms control agreements in the short term, despite upcoming leaders’ meetings this year, experts said on Tuesday, as the Trump administration pushes for a trilateral deal including China after the previous US-Russia treaty expired last month. ... After [the expiration of New START], Trump floated an “improved” deal involving China. ... Beijing has little incentive to heed Washington’s requests, as international pressure on China declines with Trump’s recent aggression towards Venezuela, Iran and Greenland.

**THE KEYSTONE INITIATIVE AT THE HUDSON INSTITUTE PUT TOGETHER A SERIES OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE RELATED REMARKS.** GIVEN THIS WEEKLY REPORT WAS ALSO GOING TO POST EXCERPTS FROM SOME OF THESE REMARKS, AND HAS DONE SO PREVIOUSLY, THE EAR IS REPOSTING THE HUDSON MATERIAL AS IT WAS ORIGINALLY CREATED AND WANTS TO ESPECIALLY THANK REBECCA HEINRICH OF HUDSON FOR HER EXTRAORDINARY WORK IN DIRECTING THE KEYSTONE INITIATIVE AND HER OTHER NATIONAL SECURITY WORK.

By [Rebecca L. Heinrichs](#)

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) expired on February 5, 2026, following Russia’s suspension of compliance three years earlier. In [announcing](#) its [decision](#), President Vladimir Putin cited the “connection between strategic offensive weapons” and the “conflict in Ukraine” and what Moscow described as “other hostile Western actions.” Despite the substantial costs associated with Putin’s ongoing, unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin has continued to devote significant attention and resources to its nuclear program.

In November 2024, Putin released an [executive order](#) announcing revisions to Russia’s nuclear doctrine, signaling a potential shift in circumstances under which Moscow would consider the use of nuclear weapons.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Russian officials and figures close to Putin have issued repeated, not-so-veiled nuclear threats. These threats appear intended to deter the United States and other NATO military, economic, and diplomatic support for Ukraine.

Simultaneously, the People’s Republic of China is engaging in a historic expansion of its nuclear forces. Beijing is rapidly increasing the size of its nuclear arsenal while diversifying its delivery systems across land, sea, and air. According to US Department of Defense [estimates](#), China could possess up to 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035. In February 2026, US officials publicly acknowledged for the first time that China is conducting yield-producing nuclear tests.

For the first time in its history, the United States must confront the challenge of deterring two nuclear-armed peer competitors simultaneously. In October 2025, President Donald Trump announced that the United States would resume nuclear weapons testing “on an equal basis” with other nuclear-armed states. Subsequent official statements have reaffirmed the Trump administration’s commitment to modernizing the US nuclear deterrent.

In the post-New START environment, strategic threats continue to intensify, while US adversaries remain committed to weakening American resolve and undermining Washington’s commitment to its allies. To address this evolving security landscape, the United States should work closely with its allies to adapt deterrence strategies, strengthen credibility, and identify opportunities to mitigate risks posed by shared adversaries.

“A nuclear test like this, done in secret, is extremely dangerous and worrying to the United States. . . .What we’re concerned about, Stuart, is, again, it’s the size of the [Chinese] nuclear force in the midst of a strategic breakout. It’s the biggest, most rapid nuclear expansion in world history. And the Chinese, unlike the Soviet Union during the Cold War, [are] not communicating with the United States about intent. So, what the Trump administration is trying to do is to get both the Russians and the Chinese to talk to the United States, and to try to get some other diplomatic solution to stabilize the situation. Because otherwise, Stuart, the United States must adapt our nuclear force because it’s only designed to deter the Russians, not the Russians and the Chinese.”

— Rebecca L. Heinrichs, Director, Keystone Defense Initiative

## **The Expiration of New START**

[Marshall Billingslea](#) | Newsmax

“[The Chinese] clearly intend to achieve, or surpass us, in nuclear parity before they’re going to be willing to sit down at the table, and that should be very concerning. . . .We’re faced with two peer competitors with as many nuclear weapons, potentially, as we have. . . .When you look at the Russian numbers and you look at the New START treaty, that treaty limited about 40% of the Russian arsenal—they have thousands of weapons that are in the short and theater range (the ones they were menacing Ukraine with, for instance). It limited about 90% of all US nuclear weapons and 0% of the Chinese. . . .The US certainly doesn’t need to have double the arsenal that we have today to account for Russia and China, but we do urgently need to take steps to expand and diversify our nuclear arsenal to deal with the fact that the Chinese have now entered the scene in a very dangerous and disruptive way.”

## **New START**

[Rebecca L. Heinrichs](#) | *Strategic Simplicity*

“The ongoing hostilities between the United States and Russia and NATO just creates an environment in which we don’t have the required environment to be able to have some trust there to have these [nuclear] negotiations. . . .Until we understand our own deterrent needs and requirements, we’re not in a position to begin negotiating. . . .As it was negotiated the first time, [I] was looking forward to roping in some of these other things that were not included in the New START treaty, like theater nuclear weapons, and we’re nowhere near even beginning to do that. So, I think it would be prudent to let the New START treaty expire at this point. . . .I think extending New START would take away a lot of that optionality that you want to have for the president to make decisions, especially on something so important as our role as the nuclear guarantor for NATO.”

## **China's Nuclear Test**

**Aaron MacLean** | *School of War*

“They [the Chinese] have this advantage that they are testing, so they know what’s working and what doesn’t work in their systems. That contributes to their ability to deter. That contributes to their confidence that, should it come to an exchange, their stuff’s going to work. And that’s why, I guess, the [US] president has said he wants to test. . . .The real significance of the week is it punctuates, and emphasizes, trends that have been developing for years now. But, all of a sudden, we woke up last week and it’s all just real that we are in this new age of, at this moment, legally unconstrained nuclear competition with Russia and China—not to mention the North Koreans, and there’s other factors.”

## **The Next Era of Nuclear Arms Control**

**Marco Rubio** | United States Department of State

“Russia ceased implementing the New START treaty in 2023, after flouting its terms for years. A treaty requires at least two parties, and the choice before the United States was to bind itself unilaterally or to recognize that a new era requires a new approach. Not the same old START, but something new. A treaty that reflects that the United States could soon face not one, but two, nuclear peers in Russia and China. . . .We have made our standards clear, and we will not compromise them to achieve arms control for arms control’s sake. . . .Russia and China should not expect the United States to stand still while they shirk their obligations and expand their nuclear forces. We will maintain a robust, credible, and modernized nuclear deterrent.”

## **Statement to the Conference on Disarmament**

**Thomas G. DiNanno** | United States Department of State

“New START and its central limits have expired. The treaty allowed for a one-time, 5-year extension which was enacted in 2021. The treaty could not legally be further extended. . . .An arms control architecture designed nearly two decades ago for New START does not allow the United States to credibly uphold both our strategic deterrence commitments to the American people and our extended deterrence commitments to our allies. . . .China remains on track to have over 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030, and Russia is supporting this build-up by helping China develop the weapons-grade fissile material necessary for its expansion. . . .The US Government is aware that China has conducted nuclear explosive tests, including preparing for tests with designated yields in the hundreds of tons. The PLA sought to conceal testing by obfuscating the nuclear explosions because it recognized these tests violate test ban commitments. China has used decoupling—a method to decrease the effectiveness of seismic monitoring—to hide their activities from the world.”

## **FY27 Strategic Forces Posture Hearing**

**Admiral Richard Correll** | House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Strategic Forces

## **About the ICBM EAR**

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

### **Weekly ICBM EAR Report**

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