

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 April 13, 2026

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**ICBM EAR Week of April 13th , Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis,
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Summary

Quotes of the Week, NEW Agenda for the TRIAD Symposium at LSUS, June 18th; Victor Hanson essay; Congress and the filibuster; Trachtenberg discusses MAD; Gen Armagost discusses conventional / nuclear integration; NIDS requests speaker interest; Keith Payne discusses key strategic deterrent issues.

Quotes of the Week

Justice Clarence Thomas: “I think if we don't stand up and take ownership of our country—and take responsibility for it—we are slowly letting others control how we think and what we think.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddqLhcmZ8Uk>

Hunter Stires US Navy strategist: The mafia calls it protection money. Iran calls it a toll. The result is the same: where free seas end, shakedowns begin.

USSPACECOM Commander Gen. Stephen Whiting: Russia's hypothetical use of its purported nuclear anti-satellite capability was the focus of U.S. Space Command's latest tabletop wargame.

General Stephen Davis: Air Refueling demonstration ensures we can deliver penetrating long-range strike anywhere in the world, at any time.”

Gen Michael Guetlein: The Golden Dome air defense system will be operational by summer 2028.

Assistant Secretary of War for Space Policy Marc Berkowitz: Nuclear deterrence, complemented by the Golden Dome, remains the cornerstone of U.S. deterrence strategy.”

Peter Huessy, Introducing Maj Gen Stacy Huser: US Minuteman III ICBMs have been on alert 192 million hours and not once have these missiles been launched despite criticism that the systems are on “hair trigger launch.”

Maj Gen Stacy Huser, Commander, 20th USAF: In a remarkable accomplishment, the Minuteman III missiles remain on 99% alert. Remarks at the NIDS Nuclear Seminar, April 17, 2026

International Nuclear Developments

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles: The world “may be at the foothills of a new nuclear arms race” as he announced Australia would boost its military spending.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte: Good session of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in Berlin [on Wednesday]. Vital military equipment from NATO Allies continues to flow into Ukraine, including through PURL and many countries stepped up with new contributions.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi, speaking to reporters in Seoul on Wednesday, warned that North Korea is showing a “very serious increase” in its ability to produce nuclear weapons.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un supervised strategic and anti-ship cruise missile tests from the DPRK's new destroyer over the weekend and pledged that Pyongyang would remain focused on the “limitless expansion” of its nuclear forces.

Speech by French President Macron: <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-26067-en.pdf>

US Administration Developments

DoW Report on China:



Chinese Perspectives
11 April 2026.pdf

NNSA has approved the Enhanced Fusion Yield Capability project, a move made possible by Secretary Wright's streamlining of permitting regulations. This initiative will boost the laser energy at the National Ignition Facility, enabling more pertinent assessments and modernization efforts for the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile.

Air Force Global Strike Command: "B-21 Raider aerial refueling demonstrates how critical capability is reaching the force faster. A key part of the nuclear triad, it strengthens deterrence & assures allies." B-21 Raider aerial refueling demonstrates how critical capability is reaching the force faster. A key part of the nuclear triad, it strengthens deterrence & assures allies.

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: "The mission of deterrence has never been more vital—and it runs straight through @NNSANevada. Every day, dedicated Americans carry out work that is essential to our nation's security and the preservation of our freedom. This mission is irreplaceable. And we're just getting started!"

AFGSC Deputy Commander Lt. Gen. Jason Armagost spoke to Australian Defense Magazine about the logistics of Bomber Task Force missions.

Key Events of Interest

April 17, 2026: Maj Gen Stacy Huser, Commander of the 20th USAF, Cheyenne, Wyoming, FE Warren USAF, spoke to the NIDS Nuclear Deterrent Seminar Series. Link to Video and Transcript Will be Available Soon

June 18th Agenda for the LSUS, NIDS and BFR Nuclear Triad Symposium

Triad Symposium June 18, 2026

Nuclear Triad: The Foundation for U.S. National Security

Start		Session Title	Speakers (& Moderator)
7:30 AM		Registration/Breakfast	
8:00 AM	S1	Session: Evolving Threat Environments	Gordon Chang & Rick Fisher <i>China: Nuclear Threat & Security Implications</i> Stephen Blank & James Howe <i>Russia: Nuclear Threat and Security Implications</i>
9:00 AM	S2	Session: Cyber, Grid, Infrastructure: Unconventional Threats to our Nuclear Deterrent	Tim Goeders , Director for Logistics Resilience, Task Force on Homeland & National Security (Colorado) Daryl Haegley , Technical Director, DAF Cyber Resiliency Office for Control Systems (CROCS) Jermaine Sailsman , Senior Cybersecurity Engineer, JRC Integrated Systems Nick Diehl , Security Innovation and Technology, Littoral Dynamics Jeff Hoffman , President & CEO, Cyber Intelligent Partners
9:45 AM		Networking Break	
10:00 AM	S3	Session: Challenges to Nuclear Readiness & Sustainability	Maj Gen Neuman RADM Wirth or RADM Nash Matt Miller , AFGSC A4 Executive Director (invited) Rodney L. Miller , Chief Architect, Strategic & Missile Defense Systems, LMCO Jeff Braun , Senior Director, Emerging Markets, SPA Jerry McBrearty , Sector VP, B-2 and Air Combat Systems, Northrop Grumman

11:00 AM		Comfort Break	
11:15 AM	S4	Session: Nuclear Extended Deterrence & Regional Strategy Roles	Chris Yeaw , Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Arms Control and Nonproliferation at the U.S. Department of State (invited) Lt Gen (Ret) Tom Jones Lt Gen (Ret) James Kowalski Lt Gen (Ret) Bob Elder (moderator)
12:00 PM		Lunch/Networking Break	
1:00 PM	S5	Session: Nuclear Modernization Programs Update	Kelly Lee , Director, Plans and Programs at Strategic Systems Programs (SSP) Maj Gen Colin Connor (invited) Brig Gen Bonetti (invited) Mike Beltrani , VP, Strategic Mission Systems, GDMS Nikki Kodama , Sector VP, B-21 Production. Northrop Grumman
2:00 PM		Comfort Break	
2:15 PM	S6	Session: Nuclear Forces in USN and USAF Force Design	Lt Gen Armagost , Deputy Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command, and Deputy Commander, Air Forces Strategic-Air, U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) Bradley Martin (USN-Ret, RAND) Lt Gen (Ret) Bob Elder , Moderator
3:00 PM		Networking Break	
3:15 PM	S7	Session: Warfighting Acquisition System (Impacts on Triad Modernization).	Lt Gen Mark Pye (invited) Maj Gen (Ret) John Edwards (invited)
4:00 PM		"The Watch" Television Series Update	Jon Ellis John Bolton Exec Producer
4:15 PM		Closing Keynote	Gen SL Davis , Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) and Commander, Air Forces Strategic - Air, U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM)
5:00 PM		Community Reception	C-100/LSUS Foundation

Commentary

In a review of media analysis of nuclear deterrence issues, it is common for MAD or Mutual Assured Destruction to be used as a description of US and general nuclear deterrent strategy. This question was directed at David Trachtneberg, one of our previous nuclear deterrent speakers. His response is here:

Despite this common belief, MAD has actually not been the “cornerstone of deterrence” for many decades. In the mid-1970s, U.S. policy shifted away from an emphasis on threatening catastrophic societal destruction to the development of more flexible nuclear options. This was a key element of National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM)-242 in 1974, the so-called “Schlesinger Doctrine,” which supported a flexible response policy enabled by limited nuclear options (“LNOs”). These more limited options were intended to dissuade the Soviet Union from believing it had an exploitable advantage at any level of nuclear conflict, thus strengthening deterrence. The desire for some kind of limited, flexible nuclear options that would avoid the need to respond to any nuclear attack, even a limited one, with a massively devastating societal response has been evident throughout subsequent administrations and remains U.S. policy to this day.

Congressional Developments

Defense Budget Presented to Congress. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/trump-budget-hikes-nuclear-warhead-030100506.html>

Senate and the Filibuster:

There is considerable concern that the Senate may eliminate the requirement for a 60 vote majority be required to consider legislation on the floor of the Senate and limit debate. One thing that is often missed is that the Senate is a continuing legislative body as only one third of its members are up for election every two years. Unlike the House, which is a new legislative session every two years. Generally, the Senate can adopt new rules every two years as the Senate majority and makeup will almost always change as at least 33 Senate seats are up for election. But the rules remain those of the previous session of the Senate, and those rules include the filibuster or a 60 vote majority. [Now if the Senate wanted to add the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands or Guam as new states, that can be done by a simple majority vote if there was no filibuster. But as a legislative resolution of both the House and Senate, it requires the President's signature and if vetoed can only overcome by a two-thirds majority. This is also if the Senate and House sought to add seats to the US Supreme Court. Would require an act of Congress and the signature of the President even should the filibuster not exist.

However, there is more to the issue. Under **Article I, Section 5** of the Constitution, each chamber has the authority to determine the Rules of its Proceedings. In theory, this allows a simple majority to set the rules. However, unlike the House, which must adopt new rules every two years, the Senate is a "continuing body" whose rules carry over from one session to the next, as we previously noted, but which almost all news organizations do not understand. .

The 60-Vote Reality

Because the rules carry over, any proposal to *change* them is subject to the existing rules, including the filibuster.

- **The Supermajority Requirement:** Under current standing rules, a vote of **two-thirds of senators present and voting** (typically 67 votes) is required to invoke cloture (end debate) on a proposal to amend the Standing Rules of the Senate. This does not apply to regular legislation as the 67-vote filibuster threshold was changed to 60 votes a number of decades ago when Michael Mansfield (D-MT) was majority leader.
- **Adopting an Organizing Resolution:** At the start of a new Congress, the Senate must pass an "organizing resolution" to set committee sizes and assignments. While this only requires a simple majority to pass, the **motion to proceed to it can be filibustered, effectively requiring 60 votes to move forward.**

The "Nuclear Option" Exception

Despite these high thresholds, a simple majority can effectively change the rules by establishing a **new precedent**:

- **How it Works:** A senator raises a point of order claiming a rule should be interpreted differently (e.g., that only a majority is needed for a specific vote). If the presiding officer disagrees, the majority can vote to overturn that ruling.
- **Majority Threshold:** This appeal only requires a **simple majority (51 votes)** and immediately sets a binding new precedent that bypasses the written supermajority requirements.
- **Historical Uses:** This "nuclear option" was used by Democrats in 2013 and Republicans in 2017 to lower the threshold for judicial and executive nominations to a simple majority.

Administration Nuclear Related Developments

Another top issue for Congress will be President Trump's request for a \$1.5 trillion military budget -- the largest increase in military spending since World War II. The request proposes that amount could be passed by a two-track process. \$1.1 trillion would be passed by the normal appropriations process, and the second process would be a \$350 billion reconciliation package that would allow Republicans to bypass a filibuster from Senate Democrats. The administration says it would fund that portion with a \$73 billion reduction in non-defense spending. Funds for nuclear modernization and deterrence have been increased significantly. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/trump-budget-hikes-nuclear-warhead-030100506.html>

Reports and Essays of Note

Keith Payne: Deterrent Questions Today, Lecture at the USAF Academy



IS 657.pdf

By Victor Davis Hanson: [Trump's Weeklong Strategy to Bleed Iran Dry](#)

Edited Remarks from Lt Gen Jason Armagost, Deputy Commander, USAF Global Strike Command:

And then but between those that often gets lost, I think, in the in the advocacy discussions as a warfighting component and clearly with dual capable systems, with modernization, Russia and China have both kind of aimed their force structure at that warfighting component of, of nuclear, force design and nuclear structure. And so that's there are some interesting questions. Arguably, I think much of the precision revolution has fully materialized.

So, there's, there's some interesting discussions to be had there. But clearly, if your adversaries are designing a force structure for nuclear war fighting that drives different questions for strategic deterrence as well. So, from that perspective, one of the arguably most interesting things I think we've done, over the last six years or so is bomber task force, we, are deployed on Bomber Task force around 40% of the year, to every theater worldwide, we have integrated with, I think, 64 nations now through Bomber Task force, through exercises, though shared air operations, through communications exercises, and through theater level exercises.

And so those are quite good at demonstrating to our partners and allies that we have a presence and an assurance for shared operations, shared interests, and also for, the ability to work together in a, in a military capacity. So, that's been quite exciting to see how that plays out as well. And arguably, there is a component that demonstrates to our partners and allies the extended deterrence and assurance piece, that is, they're they have high interest in. And then so probably one of the other more interesting things, if you, if you note, the verbiage of the Trump administration.

And there was a discussion that came up about Golden Dome, and it was very interesting discussion. But Senator Hoeven was quick to point out that America's ability to deter strategic attack, is foundational to, first and foremost, are ready and alert ICBM force, as the first leg of our ability to deter adversaries from making the kind of a mistake on any given day, that would drive them to make a strategic attack on us.

Yeah, I would say that is an element of dynamic approach as well. And so, from a military perspective. Right. There's all kinds of policy or doctrine discussions you could have. But from a military force structure perspective, I think the most important thing to look at there is, is there nuclear forces and what are those mean?

Again, that proliferation of precision that has now happened through weapons delivery capabilities has altered the field a little bit on potential nuclear weapon use. And certainly, from a theater perspective. And I think your point about Yeltsin is, he very clearly laid out that he wanted a war fighting nuclear force to that point.

It was as if, in the fall of the Soviet Union and then the former Soviet states, it was if the script had flipped where, you know, in the 80s, for example, we had theater nuclear forces in Europe to stop a massive invasion. And now with the dissolution of Warsaw Pact and the and the larger fielded conventional forces that Russia and the Soviet Union once possessed, the script had flipped a little bit and they, they had seen a large and looming and expanding NATO and wanted a militarily warfighting capability from the theater perspective to alter that calculus from a from NATO perspective for Russia. And so, again, I think the fielded forces piece of this is the most interesting question from a military perspective. In other words, you design a force to do what?

And if that force is to have precise capabilities, low fallout and low likely... That it has militarily targeting useful cases with lower levels of civilian casualties that becomes a much more dynamic and destabilizing force from a nuclear perspective, nuclear force structure perspective, because I think the point of your question is nuclear use can very quickly transition to strategic crisis.

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Seeking Speaker Guests

The NIDS Seminar series is always looking for interesting speakers that can better inform the public, media, Congress. Industry and the US government about nuclear deterrent and modernization matters. There are four areas of interest where we would be interested in securing additional speakers:

1. H-Bomb and Force Structure

I have read numerous assessments that the H-bomb test was critical to developing smaller-size warheads versus very large warheads that required heavy ICBMs or bombers. With smaller size but great explosive power, the U.S. could deploy many missiles—and warheads—on submarine-launched missiles, creating a highly survivable leg of the nuclear triad.

Comments from the panel, please.

2. Russia, Low-Yield Weapons, and “Escalate to Win”

In April 1999, President Yeltsin issued a decree directing Russia to develop low-yield, highly accurate, small battlefield nuclear weapons capable of winning a conflict. Was this not an answer to what one seeks to gain from under-the-radar testing—namely, enabling strategies such as “escalate to win,” as discussed by Brad Roberts and retired USAF General John Hyten?

Comments please, starting with Don Cook, then following the order of panel presentations.

3. Strategic Signaling

Is maintaining a credible test-readiness posture—without actually testing—an effective form of strategic signaling, or does it risk normalizing a return to explosive testing?

4. European Deterrence and Russian Threats

How should the U.S. counter the Kremlin’s hybrid and cognitive nuclear threats since February 24, 2022, which appear aimed at European fears and perceptions?

Would re-testing weapons such as the Sam Cohen Neutron Bomb or the Davy Crockett be useful for deterrence on NATO’s eastern flank—or would this backfire?

5. **North Korea and the Testing Norm**

With North Korea continuing to advance its nuclear capabilities and testing, how does this accelerate regional instability and undermine the international norm against nuclear testing?

6. **CTBT Enforcement**

Given the challenges of achieving universal ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), what diplomatic or technical measures are most effective in enforcing a “zero-yield” future?

7. **Value of Testing New Warheads**

If the U.S. were to test a truly new warhead, what value would we want to obtain from that test? Beyond stockpile stewardship goals, is there anything meaningful left to learn?

8. **China Testing Allegations**

How does one assess recent allegations that China has conducted an underground nuclear test?

9. **Scaled or Subcritical Testing**

What are the downsides of scaled nuclear underground testing to determine the viability of today’s weapons?

10. **China: Ambiguous Technical Signals**

Recent seismic analyses have raised questions about possible low-yield or evasive nuclear testing by China.

How should policymakers interpret ambiguous technical signals without either overreacting or underreacting in ways that undermine deterrence or alliance confidence?

11. **Cost and Timeline Claims**

Mark Schneider argues that without underground testing, timelines and costs for new or modified warheads (LEPs, ALTs) have grown substantially.

12. **Space-Based Deterrence**

What role, if any, could space- or orbit-based nuclear deterrence play?

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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