

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

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ICBM EAR Week of April 27th-May 2, Prepared by Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow, National Institute of Deterrence Studies and the Gold Institute, and President of Geostrategic Analysis

Summary

Quotes of the Week; international, congressional and administration nuclear and related developments; Russian disinformation pushes to preserve Iran's nuclear option; China disinformation shields China's nuclear buildup from scrutiny; new ICBM EAR essay on always blaming America; ICBM Essay#2: Is Deterrence Necessary? The NIDS, LSUS and BFR Triad Symposium is June 18th, on the LSUS campus in Shreveport. Secretary Chris Yeaw, Ms. Kelly Lee, General (Ret) Kowalski, General Stephen Davis, Gordon Chang, Stephen Blank, Lt Gen Armagost, James Howe, Rick Fischer, among others will address the event. We also have speakers from major US Aerospace and security industries joining us, including panels on unconventional threats to the nuclear deterrent, as well as sessions on nuclear readiness, acquisition reform, sustainability, and modernization. Including top industry executives from Tech Source, JRC, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, SPA, Littoral Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics.

In Brief: Quotes and Commentary of the Week

The President of the USA: The United States has already delivered a decisive blow to Iran's military and leadership, but the conflict cannot end until Tehran is permanently blocked from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Iran's supreme leader said the Islamic Republic will protect its 'nuclear and missile capabilities' as a national asset.

Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE): "As Chair of the Electronic Warfare Caucus, I fully support the AF's decision to increase the EA-37 fleet from 12 to 22. I've advocated for this to address Combatant Commands' electronic warfare requirements."

Gen Stephen Davis, the commander of Air Force Global Strike and Air Forces Strategic-Air, U.S. Strategic Command, The strategic deterrence mission has never been more important than today.

News Clips: "Air Force starting to ramp up development of new NC3 aircraft."

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres: The "drivers" of nuclear weapons proliferation are accelerating and humanity was "one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation."

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth: Iran's strategy to build nuclear weapons had mirrored that of North Korea with the building of a "conventional shield" of missiles.

Secretary of State Rubio: The Strait of Hormuz is basically the equivalent of an economic nuclear weapon that Iran is trying to use against the world. They're bragging about holding the world's energy hostage. Imagine if those same people had access to a nuclear weapon."

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: "In an unprecedented era where we face two peer nuclear powers, keeping America safe cannot mean business as usual. Under President Trump's leadership, NNSA is returning to its Manhattan Project roots as an organization focused on weapons production to meet Department of War requirements."

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND): "Our Airmen at @TeamMinot operate in some of the toughest conditions anywhere and they still show up every day to keep America's nuclear deterrent strong."

Air Force: Plans to keep B-1s through 2037, fly B-2s longer."

Space Force names 12 companies to develop Golden Dome's space-based interceptors."

The U.S. Embassy in Morocco: As #AfricanLion26 launched Morocco's first JTAC qualification course, a U.S. B-52 and Moroccan F-16 flyover underscored growing allied interoperability.

Gen. Dagvin Anderson, Africom Commander: "Their visible presence over Morocco, operating alongside Royal Moroccan Air Force fighters, signals credible deterrence and reinforces the U.S. commitment to regional security."

International Strategic Developments

The U.S. Embassy in Morocco: Launched Morocco's first JTAC qualification course, a U.S. B-52 and Moroccan F-16 flyover underscored growing allied interoperability.

U.S. Forces Korea Commander Gen. Xavier Brunson: "Deterrence isn't a posture. It's demonstrated capability. When we train across domains with our allies and partners, **we make 'not today' the rational** answer for anyone weighing the alternative."

Iran has sent the United States a new proposal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and end the war, with nuclear negotiations postponed for a later stage.

Taiwan's defense ministry: Two Chinese warships are operating in waters near the Penghu islands in the Taiwan Strait, and we sent naval and air forces to keep watch.

North Korea's arsenal of nuclear weapons and ICBMs may be approaching a key "tipping point," with its growing size potentially enough to overwhelm the ground-based missile defenses the United States has spent billions developing over the past 30 years.

Congressional Strategic Developments

Don Bacon (R-NE) "As Chair of the Electronic Warfare Caucus, I fully support the AF's decision to increase the EA-37 fleet from 12 to 22. I've advocated for this to address Combatant Commands' electronic warfare requirements."

Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE) "With growing and emerging nuclear, hypersonic, and missile threats from Russia and China, we must strengthen our nuclear command and control. The Looking Glass 24-hour airborne alert mission ensured we maintained command of our nuclear forces under the threats of the Cold War. We need that capability again to maintain credible deterrence."

On Capitol Hill, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Pentagon's FY27 budget requests \$71 billion to modernize the U.S. nuclear triad and associated NC3 systems.

Secretary Hegseth: The War Department should consider buying "a lot more" B-21 Raiders, signaling expanding the official program of record for the bomber.

Administration Strategic Developments

AFGSC Commander Gen. Stephen L. Davis: The USAF is making "considerable progress" on the Sentinel ICBM system with advancements made related to the program's missile development, supply chain issues and design and construction approach.

War Department's \$1.5 Trillion Budget Proposal Includes Sizable Nuclear Triad Investment

The War Department aims to modernize the U.S. nuclear triad — including air, land and sea weapons — and the fiscal year 2027 budget proposal includes ample investment to make that happen.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told lawmakers April 30 that the Pentagon should consider buying "a lot more" B-21 Raider next-generation stealth bombers, signaling top-level interest in expanding the official program of record for the aircraft. The Air Force has said that it plans to buy "a minimum" of 100 B-21s. The last two heads of U.S. Strategic Command have both endorsed increasing the B-21 buy to 145 airframes.

The U.S. Department of State “Investments in the Sentinel program are about protecting the country and backing the people undertaking the mission. Getting these projects into the budget is a big step toward safer, long-term solutions on the ground.

A U.S. official rejects Iran’s recent proposal that would postpone discussions on Tehran’s nuclear program until the war is ended and disputes regarding the Strait of Hormuz are resolved.

Two U.S. B-52H Stratofortresses integrated with four Moroccan F-16 Fighting Falcons as part of the African Lion 26 exercise, marking the launch of Morocco’s first accredited joint terminal attack controller qualification course.

Special Report: Russian Nuclear Fairy Tales on Steroids

In a series of state-run media notes, Russia is playing the good steward of nuclear weapons, claiming to be ready to develop atomic energy cooperation with all NPT signatories including of course Iran. Putin says Russia, as a leader in atomic energy technologies, is ready to develop cooperation with all signatories to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Russia further claimed that as a responsible party and one of the depositaries of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it strictly adheres to the letter and spirit of the document. What Moscow seeks is to preserve for Iran its nuclear weapons option.

As for New START, Moscow suspended its participation in the New START Treaty as it has all the grounds to think that the United States’ policy was geared to undermine Russia’s national security but remains open to discussion on how to build disarmament-promoting atmosphere. And despite multiple dozens of explicit nuclear threats against Ukraine, Russia is supposedly open to discuss ways of building a disarmament-promoting atmosphere, involving both nuclear and non-nuclear states and rejects very possibility of using nuclear arms in Ukraine. In fact, the Moscow claims that is Ukraine President Zelensky that is provoking nuclear conflict and not seeking peace [read surrender]. Russian Ambassador at Large Andrey Belousov has rejected allegations about Russia’s potential plans to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine and that Ukraine’s Nuclear Blackmail will cause Western Europe to suffer.

China

China and America Are Courting Nuclear Catastrophe by Tong Zhao

China’s nuclear buildup is nothing to be concerned with writes Tong Zhao of the Carnegie Endowment. He frequently writes on China and nuclear issues and his new Foreign Affairs essay doesn’t disappoint. In this Foreign Affairs essay, he strings together consecutively 16 contradictory statements, concluding that US nuclear modernization is risking a nuclear confrontation with China.

US worry about China’s nuclear buildup is (1) unfounded re PRC theater nuclear systems (2) even though China isn’t transparent and indeed has (3) multiple dual use systems but (4) we don’t know whether they are nuclear because there is a lack of transparency but (5) which we cannot assume are nuclear capable because (6) PRC isn’t transparent but we can’t (7) assume if they were transparent the systems would be nuclear as (8) China firmly holds onto its no first use pledge but (9) which even though the US doesn’t believe such a pledge we have to assume (10) China’s dual use systems despite not being (11) transparent are not nuclear and therefore the US does (12) not have to worry and therefore the (13) US buildup is not necessary though (14) the PRC buildup is necessary because the (15) US declining conventional capability makes the (16) US use of nukes more likely.

Special Report to National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS)

Why Does Deterrence Matter?

By Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow, NIDS

General Larry Welch, head of the US Strategic Command and then USAF Chief of Staff, told me in 1983 that America's nuclear deterrent was designed to never let a crisis get out of hand, including the use of conventional force, as that was the most likely route to the calamitous use of nuclear weapons. He explained the "widow of vulnerability" eloquently and noted the Scowcroft Commission report of 1983 described US deterrent strategy as well as it ever had been explained. At that time and into the near future, the Soviet nuclear force especially of multiple thousands of highly capable ICBM warheads could take out America's most accurate silo-based ballistic missiles which were the land-based Minuteman ICBMs. One 1983 net assessment projected strategic Soviet nuclear forces of near 24,000 were, even under the SALT process, "allowed." Without a strong and determined response, the US could find itself coerced and blackmailed into major strategic concessions. The building of the Peacekeeper ICBM and its companion bombers, (B1, B52's B2, ALCM,) submarines, (Trident D-5 and Ohio) and enhanced NC3, were all critical to restoring the US deterrent, and in so doing, right the strategic balance and the correlation of forces, placing the United States on a path to forcing the eventual collapse of the Soviet empire.

Proliferation News and Concerns

Will South Korea or Japan develop a nuclear deterrent of their own?

South China Morning Post Online (Hong Kong), Apr. 26 | Park Chan-kyong

War on Iran has changed many things, not least of which is the tenor of nuclear debate in two of America's closest Asian allies: countries that have long defined themselves by the weapons they do not possess. For decades, the question of whether South Korea and Japan might one day build their own nuclear arsenal was treated as fringe speculation – the preserve of hawks and provocateurs. That is no longer the case. The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has sounded the alarm. Veteran Korea watchers speak of a "rationalization" of nuclear weapons discourse. And a majority of South Koreans tell pollsters they want the bomb.

As nuclear war risks rise, Japan must help push for disarmament

The Mainichi Online (Japan), Apr. 27 | Editorial

The danger of nuclear war is growing. The world's resolve to achieve a "planet free of nuclear weapons" is being tested again. With a series of global arms-control conferences now unfolding, governments must seize this moment and turn it into momentum for genuine disarmament.

Nuclear powers must meet pledge to work on arms reduction

Asahi Shimbun Online (Japan), Apr. 27 | Editorial

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is an international agreement continuing from 1970 to prevent the spread of nations possessing nuclear weapons and work toward arms reduction.

What Trump Owes the World

New York Times Online, Apr. 25 | W.J. Hennigan

If President Trump has maintained any consistency in his Iran policy over the years, it's his conviction that the theocratic regime in Tehran should never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon.

Iran's new leadership may see nuclear weapons as the only path to survival

The Hill Online, Apr. 24 | Charbel A. Antoun

The collapse of U.S.-Iran negotiations in Islamabad was widely described as another failed round of diplomacy. But the breakdown revealed something more consequential: a fundamental shift in how Iran's emerging leadership interprets security, pressure, and the role of nuclear capability in regime survival.

Iran didn't have a nuclear weapon before this war. But you can see why it would develop one now

The Guardian Online (UK), Apr. 26 | Simon Tisdall

With every bomb dropped, ship seized and blood-curdling threat of annihilation, Donald Trump increases Iran's incentive to reject his "grand bargain" peace deal and sprint instead to acquire nuclear weapons for future self-defense. Justifying his declaration of war on 28 February, Trump claimed that Iran – and primarily its nuclear programme – posed an "imminent threat". But Iran does not possess nukes. The US and Israel do.

War Won't Solve Iran's Nuclear Threat. This Could

Newsweek Online, Apr. 25 | Jonathan Granoff

As tensions escalate, the window to avoid spiraling conflict in the Middle East and beyond is narrowing. Concerns that Iran might develop nuclear weapons are unlikely to be resolved by war. **Any durable solution must come from treaties, diplomacy and enhanced verification—not force. The legal framework already exists but needs strengthening.**

The war on Iran is eroding nuclear non-proliferation

Al Jazeera (Qatar), Apr. 27 | Olamide Samuel

On April 27, states party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will gather in New York to begin their five-year review of its function. This year, the review conference opens under the shadow of the war that the US and Israel launched on Iran under the pretext that it was about to develop a nuclear weapon.

Note in the past week we have the above eight essays, news stories or editorials all claiming that as Newsweek put it: **"Any durable solution must come from treaties, diplomacy and enhanced verification—not force. The legal framework already exists but needs strengthening."** But then Don Feder of the Washington Times explains why Iran is not interested in a negotiation. Here is the key part of his new essay in the Washington Times which underscores why military force and economic pressure are the only diplomatic currency Iran understands. As I have often noted, Senator Malcom Wallop put it very well: Diplomacy without the threat of force is prayer. Or more elegantly as Henry Kissinger wrote: "The exercise of diplomacy without the threat of force is without effect."

'The Godfather' is key to understanding Iran's nuclear-weapons quest

Washington Times Online, Apr. 26 | Don Feder

In "The Godfather," after Virgil Sollozzo fails to kill the don at the hospital, Sonny Corleone, who is temporarily in charge of the family, says the drug kingpin now wants to negotiate a truce and "the deal is so good, we can't refuse." Michael Corleone, the don's youngest son, isn't convinced. A steely-eyed realist, Michael declares: "I don't care what Sollozzo says about a deal, he's gonna kill Pop. That's it. That's the key for him. Gotta get Sollozzo." This leads to the famous two-in-the-head scene in the Italian restaurant.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the key is getting nuclear weapons. It doesn't matter what the deal is, what the regime agrees to in negotiations. Nuclear weapons will remain the goal as long as the regime exists.

Critics of the administration are repeating the criticism of Ronald Reagan and America's Peace Through Strength strategy that Reagan adopted and Trump has sought to repeat. This new essay [posted soon in RealClearDefense] from the ICBM EAR explains why critics were wrong about Reagan, just as they are now wrong about Iran.

Blaming America First: Dangerous Waters Ahead

by

Peter Huessy

When Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick explained in 1984 that America's severest foreign policy critics "always blame America first" she identified a narrative that continues some four decades later. At the time, there was often what appeared to be a reflexive anti-American bias in the criticism of President Reagan's security policy. But critics had to sustain such a narrative as it enabled them to avoid a serious reflection on the security threats to the US, and wrongfully claim the threats were much of our own doing. **Today, the false campaign to blame Israel for the Iranian conflict is a tragic repeat of what the Ambassador warned us to avoid.**

Kirkpatrick knew the always blame America narrative was wrong and dangerous. With the dawn of the Reagan Presidency the United States faced major threats, all of which had grown significantly in the previous decade.

Let's review.

First was a reckless Soviet Union, often partnered with Communist China, engaging in major across-the-board arming of guerilla wars aimed at regime change. Although the Soviet conquest campaign centered in the third world started with the North Korean cross border invasion of 1950, it did not succeed. Thus, the switch to guerilla war in Indochina from 1959, Central America from 1958, and ironically culminating in the return to cross border invasion with Afghanistan in 1979.

Under Soviet direction, centers of state sponsorship of terrorism grew in Syria, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Iran, along with terror agents such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Hezbollah, the FMLN, FARC, the Red Brigades, and Bidar Meinhoff gangs.

And during the decade of détente, nearly two dozen American allied governments fell to or were attacked by communist subversion. After the 1980 election, the US turned the tables. The US went after Soviet terror states in Afghanistan, Grenada and Nicaragua and worked to defeat terror proxies in Columbia and El Salvador, as part of an economic war on Moscow that aimed to make the cost of the Soviet empire unsustainable. And for the first time since 1917, the free world took back territory from the communist empire with the liberation of Grenada in 1983.

The second major threat President Reagan faced was a massive Soviet theater nuclear buildup, including the deployment of thousands of nuclear armed SS 20 medium range ballistic missile in Europe and Asia, targeting both the Atlantic and Pacific allies of the United States.

The third major threat President Reagan faced was a parallel Soviet nuclear buildup of deployed strategic nuclear weapons from a few thousand in 1972 to over 10,000 by the 1980s, all under the SALT treaties of 1972 and 1979. Treaties that gave the good arms control housekeeping seal of approval to Moscow's buildup that had as its key purpose to coercively blackmail the United States and our allies to stand down in the face of Soviet aggression. Nuclear weapons were the umbrella under which Russian third world aggression would remain in a sanctuary.

Here is where we come back to Jean Kirkpatrick's 1984 remarks. How did the United States reverse the Soviet buildup of nuclear weapons and end the Soviet empire, including reversing its third world campaign of subversion? Kirkpatrick explained that too many critics of US policy blamed the United States for Soviet aggression and nuclear building. We supported dictators in Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cuba, so why was it a surprise guerilla campaigns emerged to change governments? The US funded NATO on the doorsteps of the USSR so why should we be surprised Moscow responded with the deployment of SS-20 missiles?

When the USSR empire came crashing down, there were three common explanations. One was that the Kennan policy of restrained "containment" practiced by nine successive American Presidents brought down the Soviets, but nothing special from the Reagan White House. The idea of containment of Soviet aggression was originated by State department official George Kennan who coined the term in a long telegram from Moscow and in a subsequent essay in Foreign Affairs signed by "X." But Kennan himself disliked the term containment and often declared it did not describe what Kennan had advocated after the end of World War II. He opposed Truman sending American troops to defend Korea, and repeatedly opposed most of Reagan's security agenda, most particularly the administration's nuclear and missile defense modernization agenda.

The second narrative was that the collapse of the Soviet empire was inevitable, and again nothing special from President Reagan had any serious effect on the outcome. Again, the common narrative was that nothing America did had much to do with the outcome of the Cold War.

The third narrative was much the same but with a twist. It was not America but the Soviets themselves that ended the Cold War. The reforms of General Secretary Gorbachev ended the Cold War and all **that Reagan did was as one recent President claimed was to allow those reforms to take place without trying to extend the Cold War.**

In fact, critics often complained the Soviet Union would have collapsed even faster if the United States had not been so aggressive. Reagan's political opponents held that his aggressive foreign policy harmed US security, particularly with respect to describing the USSR as an "evil empire, developing SDI and deploying MX missiles, arming the Contras and Mujahadeen Northern Alliance while saving Solidarity. To the blame American firsters, our adversaries had to take defensive actions to protect their own security. It was America that was at fault—having caused the outbreak of the Cold War and perpetuated its continuance.

This acute tendency to, as the Ambassador explained, always blame America was the key ingredient to carrying out an alternative strategy. If the United States and its supposed aggressive security policy was responsible for triggering bad Soviet behavior, then of course the removal of such US security policy and its architect (Reagan) would magically change Moscow security policy to one far more benign. In short, detente would work. The pillars of former Vice President Mondale's 1984 campaign were to stop SDI, freeze the deployment of America's Pershing and GLCM missiles in Europe, kill the MX missile, and end all military aid to the contras in Nicaragua and the government of El Salvador.

Hear the ironies are too delicious to ignore. A frequent object of leftist or progressive scorn during the decade of the 1970s was Henry Kissinger, who was in fact the author of the SALT nuclear agreement, the ABM treaty that eliminated missile defenses, the US withdrawal from Vietnam, and the entire edifice of the strategy of detente. All of which President Reagan would seriously oppose.

But as Kirkpatrick pointed out, for the progressive left, if the origin of Soviet behavior was intrinsic to the very nature of Russian culture, then of course a peaceful American security policy would be an invitation to the expansion of Soviet aggression, which is precisely what occurred during détente, from 1969 through the decade following. In reality, when a dozen and a half nations slipped behind the Iron Curtain in little more than a decade, it hardly makes sense to then pretend at the end of the subsequent decade the USA and its allies abject failure to actually "contain" the Soviets led somehow to victory ending the USSR empire.

It is true that in 1980 after the invasion of Afghanistan the Carter administration announced that it had misinterpreted the Soviet embrace of detente and indeed had been mistaken by claiming the US had to get rid of its inordinate fear of communism.

If simply changing US foreign policy back to détente and restraint would induce a benign Soviet subsequent conciliatory security policy, then of course, progressive critics of President Reagan could justify their opposition to peace through strength, SDI, the full up modernization of American nuclear forces, the arming of the resistance in Nicaragua and Afghanistan, the take down of Grenada, and the arming of our nation state allies in El Salvador the Republic of Korea and NATO.

Similarly if today the turmoil in the Middle East was caused by America's ally Israel, just as progressives assumed an aggressive USA policy caused the Cold War, then it's simply a matter of preventing Israel from securing arms necessary to carry on its apparent too aggressive security policy. Stop Israel, stop the war. Peace blossoms!

Senator Sanders (I-Vt) thus can blame Israel for "genocide" in Gaza and pretend Hamas and Hezbollah are on the side of the angels. And consequently, Sanders can offer an amendment in the Senate to stop all USA arms sales to Israel, that received 40 votes, 39 of which were from the 45 member democratic caucus.

How simple Middle East security policy could be if we all simply "blamed Israel first" for "tricking" us into war against Iran. Like the make believe Cold War and the Soviet empire, ending the Iranian nuclear program, stopping the deployment of long range missiles, keeping open Hormuz, and ending proxy terrorism can be simply a matter of changing US administrations. We can all be for "peace," need not take up arms against the genocidal regime in Tehran, because as critics claim, it is Israel and the USA that "chose this war" not an Iran that for nearly half a century has been at war with Western civilization.

National Institute for Deterrence Studies

New NIDS Seminars

5/8/2026 - Drew Walter - Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical, and Biological Defense Policy and Programs 10-11am

5/15/2026 - RDML Todd Weeks in person at the Capitol Hill Club 8-9am

6/3/2026 - Lt. Gen. Michael Lutton in person at the Capitol Hill Club 8-9am

6/5/2026 - Frank Rose - Missile Defense: Assessing the Effectiveness and Looking to the Future 10-11am

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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