

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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Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis, Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies; Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy and Partner in the newly created Energy Forum at Cambridge University, UK, where we will be hosting weekly energy discussions.

Triad Symposium

June 18th Upcoming Triad Symposium at LSUS in Shreveport Louisiana

Hosted by NIDS, LSUS and BFR Defense.

Here is the agenda. To register please email phuessy@thindeterrence.com or geostrategicanalysis@verizon.net

Start		Session Title	Speakers (& Moderator)
7:30 AM		Registration/Breakfast	N/A
8:00 – 8:55 AM	S1	Session: Evolving Threat Environments	Rick Fisher & Gordon Chang <i>China: Overall Nuclear Threat & Implications</i> James Howe & Stephen Blank <i>Russia: Overall Nuclear Threat & Implications</i>
9:00 – 9:45 AM	S2	Session: NDS Response to threats (legacy and unconventional)	Tim Goeders , National Director for Logistics Resilience, Task Force on Homeland & National Security (Colorado) Daryl Haegley , Technical Director, DAF Cyber Resiliency Office for Control Systems (CROCS) Nick Diehl , Security Innovation and Technology, Littoral Dynamics
9:45 AM		Networking Break	N/A
10:00 – 10:55 AM	S3	Session: Challenges to Nuclear Readiness & Sustainability	Maj Gen Ty Neuman , Commander 8AF and Joint Global Strike Operations Ctr COL Greg Boschert , AFGSC Deputy A4 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, NGC Jermaine Sailsman , Senior Cybersecurity Engineer, JRC Integrated Systems (Moderator)
11:00 AM		Comfort Break	N/A
11:15 – 11:55 AM	S4	Session: Nuclear Extended Deterrence & Regional Strategy Roles	Lt Gen (Ret) James Kowalski former Commander, AFGSC Lt Gen (Ret) Tom Jones , former Deputy Commander, US Air Forces Europe Lt Gen (Ret) Tim Fay , Boeing Lt Gen (Ret) Bob Elder (moderator)

12:00 PM		Luncheon Keynote: Arms Control, Deterrence, and Stability,	The Honorable Christopher T. Yeaw , Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Deterrence, and Stability
1:00 – 1:55 PM	S5	Session: Nuclear Modernization Programs Update	Kelly Lee , Director, Plans and Programs at Strategic Systems Programs (SSP) Brig Gen Bonetti John Correia , Executive Director, ICBM Modernization (AFGSC/A10) Mike Beltrani , VP, Strategic Mission Systems, GDMS Eric Wollerman , DoE Kansas City National Security Campus Rob Gass , Strategic Development and Investment Manager, Boeing Nikki Kodama , Sector VP, B-21 Production, NGC
2:00 PM		Comfort Break	N/A
2:15 – 2:55 PM	S6	Session: Nuclear Forces in USN and USAF Force Design	Lt Gen Jason Armagost , Deputy Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command and Air Forces Strategic-Air Bradley Martin (USN, Ret), RAND Senior Policy Researcher Lt Gen (Ret) Bob Elder (Moderator)
3:00 PM		Networking Break	N/A
3:15 – 3:55 PM	S7	Session: Warfighting Acquisition System (Impacts on Triad Modernization).	Lt Gen Mark Pye , Deputy Dir, Critical Major Weapon Systems DRFM Scott Hardiman , PAE NC3 Dr. Don Snyder , RAND
4:00 – 4:10 PM		"The Watch" Television Series Update	Brig (Gen) Jon Ellis , Technical Advisor Jeff Bolton , Executive Producer
4:15 – 4:55 PM		Closing Keynote	Gen SL Davis , Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) and Air Forces Strategic – Air (AFSTRAT)
5:00 – 7:00 PM		Community Reception	C-100 & LSUS Alumni Association

Summary

Major study by General Flynn on PRC harmful activities against the USA; interview with Amb Pickering on Iran's nuclear program; excellent essay by Rebecca Heinrichs on NATO and European security; an ICBM EAR essay on the nuclear choices facing the US Congress, especially what elements of modernization the US should seek to pursue. House Budget Chairman seeking a constitutional amendment to require a Balanced Budget.

Quotes of the Week

U.S. Strategic Command: 'We use [Minuteman III] every single day.' ICBMs play an active role in America's defense, and Sentinel will deliver #StrategicAdvantage for decades to come.

U.S. Strategic Command: "The B-21 Raider is the future of the nation's flexible, lethal strategic bomber force"

USAF: There is a growing consensus among experts, lawmakers, and Pentagon leaders" that the service should buy more than the planned minimum of 100 B-21 bombers.

Pentagon: Pushes back on CBO's trillion-dollar Golden Dome estimate.

USSTRATCOM JEC Director Maj Gen AnnMarie Anthony: We really can't assume, as warfighters, that the electromagnetic spectrum is going to be a permissive environment. It is a critical warfighting maneuver space...it's actively contested by our adversaries.

An Iranian parliamentary spokesman: Tehran could enrich uranium up to 90% purity – a level considered weapons-grade – if Iran is attacked again.

President Trump: Early offer last week from Iran to end the war with the United States was "totally unacceptable."

Congressional Developments

USCENTCOM Commander Adm. Brad Cooper told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Operation Epic Fury has dealt a major blow to Iran's military and its defense industry, leaving Tehran with only a small or perhaps "very moderate" capability to strike its neighbors.

[A new piece published in Fortune](#) warns that Washington's addiction to deficit spending is pushing the country further down an unsustainable fiscal path, with the federal deficit already reaching \$955 billion just seven months into fiscal year 2026. They argue decades of failed budget enforcement efforts prove Congress is incapable of disciplining itself and make the case for a constitutional fiscal responsibility amendment through an Article V Convention.

Fortune writes:

The U.S. government is technically insolvent, with its liabilities far exceeding its assets, and its financial condition is deteriorating with each passing day. Washington seems to be addicted to deficit financing and the accumulation of an ever-increasing mountain of debt.

At present, 22.2% of their taxes are siphoned off to pay for interest on government debt—interest payments year-to-date are \$628 billion, nearly \$3 billion per day. If that's not bad enough, the CBO projects that a whopping 29.2% of Americans' taxes will be used to service the government's debt load in 2036.

It is clear that constitutional strictures are needed to eliminate the federal government's addiction to fiscal irresponsibility. As history has shown, nothing short of a constitutional constraint will firmly bind the hands of a Congress that has for half a century demonstrated that it cannot bind its own.

Under Article V, the Congress 'shall call' a convention to consider one or more amendments if two-thirds (34) of the states file applications. As it turns out, thirty-nine states had active applications on file for a constitutional convention that would consider a fiscal-responsibility amendment in 1979 and for many years thereafter. Yet, Congress failed to call a convention.

Members of Congress took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. Article V of the Constitution gives them the tool. It is time for Congress to do its job and call a limited Article V Convention to propose a fiscal responsibility amendment.

House Budget Chair Arrington wrote this about the Fortune report:

Washington's debt crisis is no longer a distant problem—it is a direct threat to America's economic future, national security, and prosperity. With deficits nearing \$2 trillion annually and interest payments consuming a growing share of taxpayer dollars, the status quo is unsustainable.

House Republicans have already taken historic steps to rein in federal spending through the One Big Beautiful Bill, which was the largest reduction in mandatory spending in U.S. history. But restoring fiscal sanity will require sustained action and structural reforms that force Washington to live within its means.

Chairman Arrington previously introduced [H.Con.Res. 15, calling for an Article V Convention](#) to address the nation's fiscal crisis, warning: "The sad, sobering, and stunning fact: despite the urgency of our fiscal crisis, Congress is paralyzed—unable to meet the urgency of the moment. So, if Washington won't act, then it's time to look beyond our nation's capital. The Founders gave us another path in Article V of the Constitution, empowering the states and the American people to step in and demand fiscal discipline."

Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs Lt. Gen. David H. Tabor told a HASC subcommittee the USAF will have a "more precise answer" next spring on how many B-21 Raiders it plans to procure over the life of the program

Administration Developments

Adm. Correll and @AFGlobalStrike's Gen. Davis visited a future Sentinel ICBM site to see progress and talk #ForceModernization."

The U.S. Navy confirmed that an Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine arrived in Gibraltar on Sunday and said the "port visit demonstrates U.S. capability, flexibility, and continuing commitment to its NATO allies."

AF officials tell Congress that B-52 modernization 'stabilized' after cost spikes, schedule delays.

President Trump said that "the clock is ticking" for Iran and warned that if Tehran does not propose a better offer to end the war, then the United States will hit them "much harder than before."

President Trump has not yet decided on whether to move forward with a major arms package for Taiwan after hearing concerns about it from Chinese President Xi Jinping.

President Trump said the U.S. ceasefire with Iran was “on life support” after he received what he called Tehran’s “garbage” response to the American proposal for ending the war.

Joint Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations Center Director Maj. Gen. AnnMarie Anthony, in an interview with Breaking Defense, discussed the recent Aurora Pulse tabletop exercise that she said was designed for senior leaders to evaluate at a strategic level what it is like to operate in a contested and congested electromagnetic spectrum.

A U.S.-mediated ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine appeared under serious strain on its second day, with both sides accusing the other of violating the deal via weekend attacks.”

International Developments

News reports conclude President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping claimed important progress in stabilizing U.S.-China relations even as “deep differences persist between the world’s two biggest powers on Iran, Taiwan and more”

From Stephen Blank: Secret document reveals Russia’s plans to aid Iran

Russia and Belarus on Monday began nuclear drills that will include training to simulate “the delivery of nuclear munitions and preparation of their use in cooperation with the Russian side.”

China

Report on China from Bill Gertz of the Washington Times

China has undertaken what U.S. military leaders have called the fastest and most extensive strategic nuclear weapons buildup since the Cold War. One four-star strategic forces commander called it a nuclear arms “break out” requiring an urgent U.S. response.

The central element of the buildup was discovered by U.S. intelligence in 2021 when an estimated 320 new silos for multiple-warhead intercontinental ballistic missiles were spotted in western China.

China’s nuclear stockpile has increased dramatically from about 250 warheads several years ago to 600 warheads today and is expected to grow to as many as 1,000 warheads by 2030 and eventually, 1,500.

In January, Mr. Trump said he hopes talks with Russia and China will lead to major power denuclearization.

The president also said he is willing to support bilateral nuclear talks with China but favors a three-way forum with officials from the U.S., China and Russia.

Mr. Trump also said he has spoken to Mr. Xi about joining talks on a replacement for the now-expired New START nuclear accord after the treaty lapsed in February.

On possible arms talks, the senior official said: “I can tell you that thus far in this administration, there’s been no progress, that China’s sort of public-facing remarks are the same as we’ve heard in our government-to-government channels, which is that they have no interest in sitting down and discussing any kind of nuclear arms control or anything along those lines at this point.”

Lt. Gen. Joel B. Vowell, the No. 2 leader at the U.S. Army Pacific, provided a blunt assessment of the PLA and its designs for taking control of neighboring countries and regions in the Pacific.

“Strategically, China is on an insidious, incremental, pernicious and malicious march across the region to be the big brother in the neighborhood — and not in a helpful big brother way, a bully,” Gen. Vowell said in a podcast for the Army War College.

Since the late 1980s, the PLA has built challenging capabilities ranging from space weapons to submarines, he said.

“We see this every day in the theater. They’re rubbing up against surface combatants. You see the airplanes that are doing interdictions. Our partners see this all the time when there’s challenges to sea features in the South China Sea, or East China Sea, or Japan and the Ryukyus,” he said.

The rapid buildup of PLA forces is focused on naval power and projecting that power through the first island chain stretching from Japan to the South [China](#) Sea. The threat also includes expanding missile and nuclear forces.

Arms Control

Report from the Atlantic Council on Arms Control Prospects

Atlantic Council experts [Matthew Kroenig](#) and [Alyxandra Marine](#), who acknowledge that it will be difficult for the United States to strike a trilateral arms control agreement with Russia and China in the foreseeable future. Even so, they argue, **there are imaginable arms control arrangements that would benefit US national security, and “[i]t is at least conceivable that talks could lead to an unexpected breakthrough that results in a new arms control agreement. Even if a near-term breakthrough proves impossible, negotiations would expose Chinese officials to arms control practices, and, over time, make them more comfortable with arms control agreements.”**

Essay

Essay #1 of the Week by The ICBM EAR

Nuclear Choices Ahead: What Road to Take?

By

Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis

With the expiration of the START series of arms control agreements, the US now faces serious choices particularly how to respond to the emergence of two peer nuclear adversaries. Especially when the current nuclear modernization program of record was agreed to in 2010 when the nuclear balance was far more benign. Projected into the future, people across the political spectrum see a nuclear environment with storm clouds ahead. However, there is a serious divide as to what the US should do. As a result, the US will soon have some difficult choices to make.

In 1981 the US faced a similar crossroad. Would détente continue along with a nuclear freeze of very large nuclear arsenals, modernized in the USSR but lacking in the US? Or alternatively, would the US and the West secure major nuclear reductions while modernizing, and adopt a peace through strength strategy as a pathway to dismantle the Soviet empire?

By 1991, the latter option won-out. Strategic long range nuclear forces were projected to come down by over 80% through a series of START arms agreements. Miraculously, the Soviet Union collapsed and all of Eastern Europe was freed. But despite this extraordinary victory, the US assumed it was the end of history, and all enemies were gone and would not emerge. And consequently, we took a subsequent interim forty year holiday from nuclear sustainment.

The US now faces the challenge of simultaneously sustaining and modernizing the entirety of the nuclear deterrent.

So, like 1981, the US and the West face another crossroads: either seek further nuclear reductions toward zero or abolition, while significantly curtailing nuclear modernization; or alternatively, accelerate and enhance both nuclear modernization and sustainment, while once again adopting a strategy of peace through strength but now to take down the hegemonic aspirations of the Chinese communist party.

Both options are relatively well spelled out by proponents, but they rely on very different assumptions. Like the advocates of the nuclear freeze, abolitionists think nuclear deterrence is bound to fail. And while nuclear deterrence has worked since the dawn of the nuclear age, it will not be useful if deterrence breaks down. A key assumption underlines this new belief: if one or even a few nuclear weapon are used in retaliation, the odds are

that nearly all other nuclear weapons will subsequently be used as escalation will take over. Thus, there is no capability to “use” nuclear weapons and survive.

Since the 2023 movie **Oppenheimer**, the abolition folks have brought forward a new twist on what is or is not possible for deterrence. As Annie Jacobsen in her book **Nuclear War: A Scenario** and the 2024 movie **A House of Dynamite** conclude, nuclear deterrence will someday not work and war will break out. And the assumption is that the US military will “jam up” the American President to retaliate “all in.” The only alternative is nuclear abolition.

To get there HASC members Representatives Mo Khanna and Jim Garamendi (both D-CA) and SASC members Senators Markey (D-MA) and Warren, (D-MA), have joined with Senator Sanders (I-VT) to propose a unilateral cut of US nuclear forces from 400 to 150 ICBMs, from 12 to 4 strategic submarines and from 60 to zero nuclear capable bombers. The implied force is between 300-500 strategic warheads compared to the New START allowed 1550-1850 warheads which is the current force of choice.

On the other hand, there is an option one might describe as “Record Plus.” In 2010 the US Congress strongly supported a modernized force of 12 submarines, 400 ICBMs, and 60 B2 and B52 strategic bombers for the US strategic nuclear force. Funding for such modernization has generally been approved and is projected to cost \$450 billion over the next decade. This was a force consistent with the limits of the 2010 New START nuclear treaty that expired earlier this year. What has yet to be decided is how much more nuclear capability the United States needs as generally recommended by the 2023 Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. The choices are relatively straight forward. The US needs theater or shortrange, nuclear forces such as sea and land-launched cruise missiles, and such development funding has now been approved. The US could add to the existing silo based and submarine based missiles we already have in the legacy nuclear forces or add to the planned new nuclear forces.

Each silo based ICBM can add upwards of two warheads. The upload process allows 3 missiles per ICBM wing per month or 44 months, while sub warheads can be added much faster. Other buildups could be an additional 3-4 submarines but that could probably only be done at the end of the current acquisition schedule, with such submarines being acquired 2041-4. The new B21 Raider is now undergoing flight testing and there is general consensus that the US needs not 100 but 175-200 more nuclear capable strategic bombers, with Northrop Grumman having committed to accelerate such new acquisition.

There is however a major new concern as the US moves forward on modernization. In April 1999 Russian President Yeltsin in a secret decree ordered the development of thousands of short-range, low-yield, “battlefield” nuclear weapons that Russia could use to win a nuclear conflict.” One recent study determined that Russian micro-testing of very low yield strategic long-range weapons could attack all 400 US silo based ICBMs and cause less than 10,000 casualties, making a US retaliatory response less than certain.

Now the current US retaliatory deterrent strategy is to destroy an enemies leadership and their supportive security forces along with their remaining nuclear weapons and industry support. The rationale is simple: threaten to take away those things the bad guys value. Mao Tse Tung once casually dismissed the consequences of nuclear war with the United States, declaring that Chinese women would in a generation make up for the loss of a few hundred million people. He hardly cared for his own people having killed some 65 million to sustain power. To abolitionists such a US strategy is illogical as they assume such a strategy is “warfighting” and not winnable. In the two movies and one book referenced earlier, some of the abolitionists are pushing to jettison current US nuclear deterrent strategy altogether as unworkable. But what does the US do for deterrent strategy on the long road toward nuclear abolition? How does one deter bad guys brandishing nuclear weapons prior to their hoped for abolition? How do you still deter on the way toward abolition?

Author Annie Jacobsen was asked just this question but she explained she would drop her explicit support for abolition but let other “experts” figure it out. The movie **Dynamite** took both deterrence by retaliation off the table and missile defense to intercept an attack in the first place. The movie assumed missile defense—even against a single warhead—would not work. And not knowing where the missile originated, the US had to guess— retaliate against everyone as one military officer proposed or do nothing.

Yeltsin’s 1999 decree is being implemented. And since the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Moscow has threatened to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine and its allies dozens of times. Many have assumed such nuclear strikes would involve the very battlefield nuclear forces called for in Yeltsin’s 1999 decree.

Critics of such weapons say there is no consequential difference between using a regional/theater/battlefield nuclear weapon with a minimal yield and a long-range strategic nuclear warhead of many hundreds of kilotons. Any such weapon use will result in Armageddon.

That may indeed be true.

But Moscow and Beijing may not believe so and thus would be reckless enough to use such weapons. That the US and its allies must defend against and deter such use. That may take a sea-launched nuclear armed cruise missile. And a robust missile defense such as Golden Dome. Or any number of new technologies and strategies. But probably not unilateral restraint that does not take such threats seriously in the first place.



Essay

Essay of the Week #2: National Review essay from Hudson Institute's Rebecca Heinrich

Many on the right have joined President Donald Trump's heated ridicule of the behavior of our European allies during Operation Epic Fury: their risk aversion, penchant for process over decision and action, and overall lack of preparedness and capability to confront the Iranian terror threat, while simultaneously criticizing the one ally with the will and capability to do so. The transatlantic alliance has in fact been unhealthy for some time, dating back to before the Obama administration conspired with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to reset relations with Russia and pursued policies, including the Paris Climate Accords, that weakened the West to the advantage of China. But there is much more to the story, and today both sides of the Atlantic should grapple with some hard truths and work to end the feuding. The United States needs NATO allies and is the indispensable leader of the alliance for the foreseeable future.

"I am not currently recommending any additional changes to our posture in Europe." That was the congressional testimony of General Alexis Grynkewich, commander of the U.S. European Command and the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, on March 18. Roughly six weeks later, the Department of Defense announced that it would withdraw 5,000 American troops from Germany. The announcement followed President Trump's Truth Social post suggesting that he was considering withdrawing troops after German Chancellor Friedrich Merz claimed that Iran was "humiliating" the United States.

The Department of Defense then sent a notice to Congress specifying that the planned deployment of a Long-Range Fires Battalion (LRFB) to Germany was also canceled. That deployment was possible only because Trump rightly withdrew the United States from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty during his first term, after Russia deployed prohibited systems in violation of it. He did so over intense opposition from Democrats. The Biden administration was later forced to grapple with the same acute Russian threat to Europe and, remarkably, initiated the deployment of the LRFB to strengthen deterrence and prevent Russia from expanding its war beyond Ukraine. The LRFB deployment could have been a masterful strategic accomplishment of Trump's second term. But it is now poised to be undone by his own war department — if Congress permits it. There is already bipartisan objection to the announcement.

In early March, Merz said that he and Trump were "on the same page in terms of getting this terrible regime in Tehran away." He was right. The Islamic Republic's terrorism exports and missile force have posed as great a threat to European security as they have to American and Israeli security. But the war is unpopular in Germany, and Merz's claim that the Iranians were "humiliating" the United States was aimed at a domestic audience. As bad as the comment was, removing U.S. troops from Germany isn't a reasonable punishment in part because, despite Merz's public kvetching, Germany has been quietly and steadily enabling Trump's ongoing war against Iran. General Grynkewich explained during those recent congressional hearings that, despite the initial and highly publicized British refusal to permit the United States to initiate bomber strikes against Iran from the joint base at Diego Garcia, and despite complaints from some European politicians, the reality is that European countries are helping, and more than passively so.

Merz's public insistence that "Germany is not a party to this war, and we do not want to become one" does not change the fact that Germany has been key to Operation Epic Fury. Ramstein Air Base is a central command-and-logistics hub for the military campaign, and there are no flight restrictions at German bases. Germany under Merz has also been receptive to the United States' urging that Europeans share more of the defense burden across NATO and shoulder more of the help for Ukraine. Germany is the largest European buyer of American weapons and the largest supplier of weapons to Ukraine. Under Merz, Germany has agreed with Trump's criticisms of previous German policies to dismantle nuclear power plants in favor of dependence on Russian gas. Friedrich Merz is no Angela Merkel.

In London, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's ghastly decision to prevent the United States from operating freely from Diego Garcia was reversed within days. The United States has since operated freely out of the joint base, as well as out of RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire and a network of other U.K. bases, including RAF Menwith Hill, RAF

Molesworth, RAF Croughton, and RAF Digby. And, despite Starmer's condemnations of the United States' war against the Iranian regime, the U.K. military is working closely with the Americans on providing intelligence. British politicians may have pandered to domestic audiences who oppose the war, but British air defenders have been busy intercepting hundreds of Iranian drones heading toward Gulf states where American forces are deployed, and the Royal Air Force is flying sorties in the Middle East to help counter Iranian attacks.

France's Emmanuel Macron has also aggravated Trump. At a dinner, Trump said Macron was willing to help with the Strait of Hormuz, but only after the war ended. Trump mocked the French president and derided NATO as a "paper tiger." But France is also playing an important role in support of Operation Epic Fury. The French are giving the United States access to sovereign French bases and granting overflight access to hundreds of sorties. They sent air-defense systems, including a SAMP/T and multiple helicopters, to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait. This is in addition to the dozens of Rafale fighters they have deployed to the UAE for air-to-air defense. The French armed forces have moved their sole aircraft carrier from the Baltic Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean, positioned eight frigates in the wider Northern Indian Ocean, and are currently routing two minesweepers to the region.

Among NATO's smaller members, public support from their governments has been clearer. Belgium's defense minister called the U.S. war "a righteous cause to try to decapitate the Ayatollah regime." All three Baltic states have expressed support for the United States. Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna of Estonia stated that Estonia backs the United States and Israel in "every action that curbs the Iranian regime's capabilities," and dozens of Estonian parliamentarians signed a statement of support. Lithuania's president put the matter bluntly: "We cannot say with one hand that the presence of U.S. troops on the territory of Lithuania is a matter of course and we simply accept it as a given, but when we are asked to contribute to international missions, we say that this is none of our business." No doubt if they weren't rightly prioritizing the acute threat from Russia, they would send whatever military forces they had.

Asign of the strange times is that some commentators, taking cues from President Trump's public haranguing of European allies, now suggest that the Gulf states are more helpful allies than old Europe. Sure, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE are cooperating with the United States and Israel by sharing intelligence and allowing logistical access. It represents a welcome change in the region. Still, this new and bolder support does not come close to the contributions the United States receives from European allies, whose integration with the U.S. military reflects decades of joint planning, earned trust, and military competencies forged through combat in the Middle East and coordinated war-gaming exercises as part of active deterrence against Russia.

Even so, Trump has threatened to punish Europeans for not doing enough or for their political leaders' public criticisms. Beyond removing troops from Germany, ideas have ranged from withdrawing troops from Spain — despite the indispensability of Naval Station Rota — to no longer recognizing the Falklands as British territory, a report mercifully dismissed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Redeploying U.S. forces may sometimes be necessary as threats change but removing troops as punishment from host nations that enable U.S. power projection amounts to cutting off America's nose to spite our face.

This does not mean that American frustrations with European allies aren't legitimate. Starmer's public criticisms of the war, antagonistic remarks about Israel, and initial refusal to grant full access to Diego Garcia earned anger not only from President Trump. Republican members of Congress who value NATO and the special relationship were dismayed by London. Spain was — and remains — the European ally most defiant of Trump and opposed to seeing the United States win Epic Fury. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez not only condemned the war; the socialist leader also lambasted Trump and has refused to permit United States strikes from Spanish bases. Spain has long been an obstinate NATO member and was the only ally to refuse Trump's call for defense spending at 5 percent of GDP, the alliance's stated standard.

The fact is, though, that while NATO's members share a national security interest in an American victory, Operation Epic Fury is not a NATO mission. The United States neither informed nor consulted allies, nor did it ask for assistance, before it and Israel went to war. There were sound reasons for acting this way, but it nonetheless makes it politically difficult for European leaders to express enthusiasm at the start of the war. Compounding matters, Trump initiated Epic Fury mere weeks after threatening to forcibly take control of Denmark's territory of Greenland and publicly humiliating ally leaders who opposed those threats.

Trump's focus on Greenland has shone a spotlight on the United States' profound national security interest in preventing Russia or China from taking control of the Arctic. But the threat to forcibly seize Greenland — even if one believes it was a Trumpian maximalist bluff — created a serious rupture of trust among allies who had been willing to bear with tariffs and public rebukes, and it collapsed goodwill among the most pro-American factions in European capitals, where favorable views of the U.S. dropped to an all-time low.

European conservatives from the U.K. to Germany to Poland who otherwise expressed solidarity with Trump and the American right on border security and immigration also condemned the Greenland gambit and did so forcefully. And there is no political support in the United States for seizing Greenland, which likely explains why the president dropped the issue and left it to Rubio and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte to pursue a diplomatic resolution with Denmark.

What made the episode especially breathtaking was its timing. Just months earlier, Trump had been praising Europe's willingness to invest more in conventional defense and shoulder a greater share of NATO's burden. The Greenland crisis also followed immediately after the highly successful U.S. raid to capture Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro. That achievement should have dominated the news cycle, allowing the administration to highlight its military competence and that the American campaign against the Iranian regime has served their interests, has made them safer, and merits support.

Security conditions in the Strait of Hormuz are sufficient for the mission to be underway, which is why the United States is more forcefully transiting the strait with U.S. Navy destroyers. Operation Epic Fury has eliminated most of Iran's defense-industrial base, including its ballistic missile arsenal, launchers, and long-range drones. Iran's navy has been largely neutralized after losing 150 warships and the bulk of its naval mine inventory. More than 250 senior Iranian officials have been killed and some 2,000 command-and-control structures struck.

Even so, the rump Iranian regime continues to try to attack U.S. ships, and it appears that Trump is prepared to resume military operations against Iran to further degrade the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' ability to terrorize the strait. European leaders should support the resumption of U.S. strikes and stand ready with a multinational armada as soon as the last wave of operations concludes. The more the United States can internationalize its efforts to restore and maintain a free and open maritime corridor through the strait, the faster — and more permanently — it can reopen a choke point that carries roughly 25 percent of global seaborne energy. The official position of the U.K. is that it is willing to help keep the strait open, and the French defense minister has said that the French, Belgians, and Dutch have a joint mine-clearing program that they could contribute. They're not the only potential partners. Bringing more allies into the campaign would help overwhelm whatever IRGC elements remain willing to harass shipping along the coast.

Although U.S. energy dominance enables the United States to absorb disruptions caused by Iranians terrorizing the strait, it remains politically desirable for Washington to end the war decisively — and as soon as possible — and to bring gasoline prices below \$3 per gallon. For U.S. allies and partners, reopening the strait is not merely desirable but imperative.

India, for example, sources nearly half of its crude oil through the strait, and the conflict is already inflicting costs on the population of this crucial U.S. partner. While only about 4 percent of European crude oil imports pass directly through Hormuz, Europe has reduced its dependence on Russian energy by sourcing roughly 8 percent of its liquefied natural gas import requirements from Qatar, shipments that must also pass through the strait. That shift followed pressure that began during the first Trump administration to end reliance on Russian energy, including sanctions implemented on the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline. To complete the picture, 75 percent of Europe's jet-fuel imports come from the Gulf region. For Japan, around 95 percent of oil imports pass through the strait; for South Korea, roughly 70 percent of crude imports do so.

It is intolerable for the United States or any of its allies to permit Iran to run an extortion racket by charging fees for safe passage. Doing so would concede unacceptable leverage to Tehran — and by extension, to China, Iran's most powerful backer — and set a dangerous precedent for Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea. Whether or not Trump says he needs allies and whether or not allies want this war to be their war, shared interests remain clear: The Islamic Republic must lose and the United States and Israel win.

Trump is at his best when he urges Europeans to be strong and to work with the United States. As Secretary Rubio said in his Munich speech, “We believe that Europe must survive, because the two great wars of the last century serve for us as history’s constant reminder that ultimately, our destiny is and will always be intertwined with yours. . . . We should be proud of what we achieved together in the last century, but now we must confront and embrace the opportunities of a new one — because yesterday is over, the future is inevitable, and our destiny together awaits.”

King Charles III recently concluded a warm state visit to the United States, which could not have been timelier. Trump and Charles got along very well, and Trump even lifted sanctions on Scottish whiskey as a favor to Charles — even after Charles delivered a speech to a joint session of Congress extolling Ukrainian bravery and underscoring the need to support NATO. The address elicited a bipartisan standing ovation and compliments from Trump. The visit gives Europeans something to build on. Repairing transatlantic relations is necessary, and Trump has shown he is willing to change course if it serves his interests. Trump’s direction to remove 5,000 American troops from Germany may be redeemed, if, for example, the president shifts them to NATO’s eastern front — Poland or Romania — and he can easily reverse the decision not to deploy the LRFB missile battalion. Poland has already publicly signaled it would be happy to host additional U.S. forces. The threat from Russia against Europe remains acute, and this move would go a long way to assure allies and Putin that the United States is committed to NATO.

We have often heard that “America First” does not mean America alone. But if the United States behaves like a bully toward its allies, we may find ourselves feeling increasingly lonelier than we’d like. Trump has initiated a war that American and Israeli forces have executed with the help of allies — privately — to the benefit of the entire world. Allies will be needed in a much more public way to help win the peace.

This article appears as “Fixing NATO” in the July 2026 print edition of National Review.

deter adversaries. Instead, Trump’s Greenland threats had a serious negative impact on U.S. influence and worked directly against his broader objectives, including rallying allies to help open up the Strait of Hormuz.

It is one thing to demand that allies rebuild and invest in their militaries and carry a greater share of the collective defense burden; it’s quite another to castigate them, let alone threaten their sovereignty. It should surprise no one that European democratic leaders now lack domestic political mandates to openly join the war. And yet, because of abiding shared interests, Europeans have been working with the United States to execute Epic Fury, if only quietly.

So, what now? Europeans are at least a decade or more from having the military capabilities to replace what the United States provides. They need the United States to remain the backbone of NATO for the foreseeable future. And the United States needs the collaboration of its European allies not only to help provide security against Russia but to project power into Africa and the Middle East from European bases. Again, Grynkewich explained this to Congress. He said, “To fly bombers from the United States, or even from locations in the theater, and project power into the Middle East requires a tanker bridge. That tanker bridge is projected from USEUCOM bases.” In plain English: we refuel, safely, from supportive and trustworthy European allies. To remove the infrastructure in Europe that gives U.S. forces communications, weapons-detection abilities, intelligence, and logistics would cost the United States dearly.

It’s time for the U.S. and Europe to cease the feuding.

The United States is winning against the Islamic Republic, but to turn military success in the campaign into a geopolitical masterstroke, Trump will need an international armada to escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz. And to get that, he will have to adjust his diplomatic approach — not toward our enemies but toward our allies. Rather than publicly berating allies, he should move the disagreements to private channels. It should go without saying, but there should be some formal acknowledgment on the U.S. side that there will be no more threats over Denmark’s territory. And on the other side of the Atlantic, European leaders should explain to their skeptical publics

Interview of the Week

The potential for a new Iran agreement and the future of nuclear arms control: Interview with Thomas Pickering, By Dan Drollette Jr | May 13, 2026 [Editor's Note: The wrong assumptions Amb Pickering brings to the Iranian table have been responsible in large part for bad US policy on Iran since 1979 as they are and have been shared by those officials unwilling to see the nature of the regime in Iran for what it is—a deadly, genocidal state sponsor of terror seeking to destroy the United States and its allies. Key material highlighted.]

Dan Drollette Jr: Did you see the recent *Bulletin* op-ed by Richard Nephew,[1] where he dove into what the *Wall Street Journal*[2] got wrong with its editorial about Iran—including its “skewed version of the history of nuclear diplomacy with Iran”?

Thomas Pickering: Yes, I read Nephew's piece and felt it was sensationally good.

Drollette: I thought so too—to the point where I hope this interview doesn't simply repeat what he said. Instead, I was hoping to get a sense of what a veteran diplomat thinks are the prospects for the bigger picture: the future for nuclear arms control. And find out more about what went on behind the scenes the first time the US was at loggerheads with Iran over its nuclear abilities, which led to the 2015 Iran agreement, aka the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action).

Pickering: Nuclear arms control continues to be extremely important. I've been agonizing over the flippant throwing around of nuclear threats that I've been seeing lately from this administration; they could lead to massive destruction, severe casualties, and grievous harm on an almost existential basis. I don't think that we, Iran, Israel, Russia, or China would ever want that.

Nuclear arms control, and disarmament, are some of the major tools we have to build a firewall to prevent that happening. While nothing's perfect, a good firewall would be extremely helpful.

Drollette: What other ways are there?

Pickering: Another way might be to work—with Iran—toward establishing a zone that is free of all weapons of mass destruction, for the whole Persian Gulf region. [Editor's note: This would require Israel to eliminate its nuclear force which would seriously harm security in the Middle East.] That would be a huge improvement on the current geopolitical situation, particularly at a time when we've elected a president who is very limited in his ability to control his instincts, ambitions, or personal aggrandizement.

And I don't say those things lightly. I've reached the advanced age of almost 95, and I've lived my life in diplomacy—where there's a reverence for the truth. And telling the truth is his limitation.

Drollette: In a previous *Bulletin* interview,[3] you mentioned how you were part of an informal team involved in back-channel diplomacy that led to the negotiating of the Iran deal. How did that come about then? And what are the prospects for something like it happening again?

Pickering: It all started with a friend of mine, William Luers,[4] who was in the US Foreign Service and had had a long career there—as well as at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. He was a polymath and also for 10 years the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. And Luers had the inspiration to nurture some informal contacts with the Iranians that we had each slowly developed over the years, that were too important to neglect. We were a self-constituted group, composed mainly, but not exclusively, of former US Foreign Service members—and who continued to be in touch with current US Foreign Service people.

I joined them, along with Stephen Heintz,[5] who's head of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. On the US side, there was also a physicist from MIT, along with some others—and we four-plus pursued the question of conversations with the Iranians.

We first had some meetings with Jawad Zarif,[6] who was Iran's foreign minister at the time and a really brilliant guy—a University of Denver graduate, absolutely fluent in English, and smart as a top.

Drollette: And he was your counterpart?

Pickering: Oh, no. He was way above us. He was the foreign minister of Iran at the time, and he used to come to New York City periodically—so we only saw him when he was available. But when he could meet, he was invaluable.

But we did continue to meet with others, such as Abbas Araghchi,[7] who was Zarif's deputy foreign minister and who I'd gotten to know as part of the effort. There was also a man by the name of Ravanchi,[8] who was also a

deputy of Zarif's. Over a period of time, we developed a few such Iranian contacts and held a number of conversations.

This was around the end of the year 2000, just after I'd officially retired. I and the others developed thoughts and ideas about what should be the basic elements of an Iran agreement. We also published a number of articles that are still around and communicated closely with the administrations of the time. And when it came time to negotiate, we stayed in close touch with the negotiators—and felt their pain at the long time it took to put together something.

So, we were extremely gratified, both when the 2015 JCPOA appeared and earlier, when the 2013 December agreement came about—which was kind of a short-term stepping-stone to the JCPOA, and involved a short-term cessation of activities.

And it was all due to Bill's inspiration, and by his ability to excite the rest of us. We were willing cohorts, but he took the lead.

Now, bear in mind that one of the things that helped us in this endeavor was that the Iranians had a religious edict in place—a *fatwa*—that declared that nuclear weapons were not to be developed because they were immoral and unethical. I don't want to overstate its influence, because some people in the Iranian government could be ... lenient ... in their interpretation of the application of a *fatwa*. But it exists, and it's been around for 25 years now.

Drollette: And once again, these were backchannel, unofficial...

Pickering: Right, the leadup to the 2015 JCPOA was all in an unofficial context, though we kept the US government continuously and regularly informed—which was a principal tenet of what we were doing, and which we told the Iranians up front that we were doing.

And I think they were unofficially informing their government as well.

Drollette: Because some of them were actually in the Iranian government, right?

Pickering: Right. It was what we would call an unofficial-to-official back channel: Some former government representatives and others speaking to currently serving representatives, at the time we did it.

Drollette: It sounds to me a lot like what I've read about, say, Jimmy Carter's influence as an ex-president: After leaving the White House, Carter could go to hotspots, monitor elections, and participate in things without getting the US formally involved. It was a way for the United States to feel things out without making any rigid commitments.

Pickering: It was a way of test-driving ideas—that left some room for negotiated solutions by governments.

Drollette: How do the facts on the ground now compare to then?

Pickering: Three aspects are obviously problems.

First, there's roughly 440 kilograms (roughly about 1,000 pounds) of uranium enriched to the 60-percent level—which, while really not at what I consider to be highly enriched uranium in the sense of being 90-percent enriched, is still at a level high enough to be a big problem. And there are certainly indications that it may be technically possible to make a fissionable device out of 60-percent enriched uranium, so we cannot dismiss it as something that is trivial and irrelevant. In other words, it's well on the way there, especially given the technical abilities of the Iranians, who could probably rapidly further upgrade it to 90 percent. None of that is anywhere beyond the realm of modern science.

And the other thing that we have to take into account is the likely survival of this enriched material deeply underground, because it was not reachable by the deep-penetrating blockbuster bombs that were dropped last June.

The third thing is there's likely to be some significant survival of the results of the cascades of high-speed centrifuges at Fordow. I don't know how much, and I am not sure about our intelligence now around that subject.

And extracting it all and flying it out of Iran—or destroying it—would involve a very difficult, prolonged Special Forces project. Even if they had some magic explosive that comes in very small volumes but has huge explosive power, they'd still have to fight their way in while dealing with the Iranian military and the Revolutionary Guards. This wouldn't be like Venezuela; there's no quick military solution.

Drollette: John Mearsheimer^[9] said that Iran is in the driver's seat now, and that the war is playing to their advantage. In his words: "They've figured out that they have leverage over the United States and over Israel. The fact [is] that they have all these ballistic missiles and all these drones and they're operating in a target-rich environment, they understand that they don't need to quit."

Pickering: Well, Iran does have very large numbers of missiles and low-cost *Shahed* drones.

But it may be overstating the case to say that Iran is in a better military position, and if so, solely because of their supply of missiles and drones. That advantage alone would not give Iran total control of the “war space,” so to speak. Although their supply of these materials is certainly aided and abetted by the fact that they have an advantageous position to launch them and, most importantly, control the Straits of Hormuz. They can attack there at any time and place, at their own choosing.

To counter that problem, I have read about how 6,000 US Marines plus 2,000 Airborne forces are being deployed to try to occupy the Iranian shore of the Strait of Hormuz.

But I don't think anybody believes that small contingent of troops is going to be sufficient to open up the Strait and the oil supply for the long term. In fact, I find it highly unlikely.

All of this takes us, quite quickly, to the view that Mearsheimer is correct in saying that given these conditions on land and sea, our greatest option for the future is to try, once again, to open the door to a diplomatic solution.

Safeguard inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (middle left and far right) with their Iranian counterparts at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant in 2014. Photo courtesy of V. Fournier/IAEA.

Drollette: And that would be?

Pickering: A solution needs to be a kind of “JCPOA-plus” and certainly is something that people are contemplating now.

The real problem I see is that any contemplation of a solution can be considered by the president and his staff as an attack on his decision to start the war to begin with. And this is at a time when the powers-that-be in the United States are too subservient to understand that they're aiding and abetting a process that is strategy-less, objective-less—and frankly mindless—in its decisions. Just the economic backlash is devastating. Because this administration doesn't embrace any effort at all to put together diplomatic proposals that might get us there.

[Steve] Witkoff^[10] does not seem to be able to absorb the language of other negotiators against this backdrop of total suspicion.

But we do have options, I believe. And I think the question is, do we have enough smart people working on those options in this administration?

Certainly, I'm involved now with others are taking a look at them. And I think the solution may lie in something like what is basically the JCPOA but with perhaps further enhancement of IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] inspections, along with maybe some missile limitations. And a nuclear weapons-free zone could be a starting point that might get us closer to something that this unpredictable president of ours could accept, because he knows that he's created an economic disaster for the United States—which can be seen by the continued diminution of his support.

Drollette: You've brought up the possibility of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East a few times. Is that a strong possibility?

Pickering: I think it would require a significant amount of backing among the Gulf allies we have left—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen—but they have an amputated hand.

However, all the possibilities involve difficulties. They're good ideas but not necessarily instantly implementable.

But they are good goals, that would probably keep us out of deploying to the Persian Gulf. And guess what? We haven't been doing it because it's too big an idea to contemplate.

Drollette: Do you think the United States is stuck with the prospect of having to do what is sometimes referred to by the military as “mowing the lawn”—in other words, the US would have to come back repeatedly to the same turf, to bomb whatever military capabilities Iran has built up in the meanwhile?

Pickering: I don't think we're there yet. We might end up there, but I don't think so. It is not a real solution, just a continued use of force.

What's more, I don't think it's a productive tactic. It may stave off something for the short term—or at least serve as an excuse for bombing the same target again a year later. But long term, all it does is avoid the bigger problem—at the cost of tragic killing.

“Mowing the lawn” bespeaks the necessity for diplomatic engagement.

Drollette: So, you see JCPOA-plus as ultimately the best off-ramp for the US and Iran?

Pickering: Well, the best for the medium-term. And by the phrase “JCPOA-plus,” I mean the full limitation of the centrifuge cascades to civilian uses, all confiscation of the 60-percent material, the blending-down of everything into fuel—all of that might be within the range of possibility. So that's what I mean by “JCPOA-plus”—something beyond what was achieved with Iran previously.

But I'd like to say that I see the *ultimate* goal as the complete abolition of nuclear weapons.

2020 Victory Day Parade in Moscow. Image from the website of the President of the Russian Federation, under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, www.kremlin.ru.

Drollette: It may be just a slip of the tongue, but a moment ago, I thought you said something to the effect that you are involved in something currently that could make JCPOA-plus a reality. Or am I misunderstanding?

Pickering: I am. I'm working with other people on ideas. And some of these ideas are currently—they're not my ideas, they're other people's ideas.^[11] I can't say more, they're not ready to publish.

But the main point is that there are off-ramps available. And when we're talking about JCPOA-plus, we're talking about the blending down of that 60-percent lightly enriched uranium into fuel for burning in a power plant for energy production, with IAEA oversight—in other words, legitimate uses that would get rid of the potential for nuclear weapons.

In that regard, I think that a Persian Gulf nuclear fuel consortium is a good idea. And people have suggested that time and time again—and I think it had even been kicked around before the start of this latest bombing air campaign.

And that would mean that others in the region would be involved, which is fine, because it gets you even further down the road to a WMD-free zone—because it's a monitoring and control device for enriched uranium that takes place in the Persian Gulf region, with really strict limitations under IEA supervision and monitoring, which are effectively all the elements of a deal.

Drollette: So, getting back to the thrust of this whole special issue—which is the future of nuclear arms control—the impression I get is that you feel that there is still room for nuclear arms control treaties?

Pickering: Put it this way: I think it is not yet time to have the funeral.

I think there is a tendency for people to deprecate nuclear arms control treaties and cast them aside.

But let me say that I think that if Trump were to have adopted the idea himself and made it a kind of prize of his own, then he might actually adhere to it, because he's so mercurial.

On the other hand, he seems to treat it as a negative, just as he treats all monitoring and control.

And he treats the Iranians who tend this way as if they were being totally untruthful on a constant and continuing basis—which is how he treats almost anybody in the world that he doesn't like.

The only person he has inordinate capacity to believe in is Putin.

About the only good thing I can think of about Putin is that at least Russia is not returning to a totally unleashed nuclear arms race and saying: "We alone will have 20,000 nuclear weapons all by ourselves." So far, people seem to be complying with what remains of the essentials of the old treaties and going for much smaller numbers of deliverable nuclear weapons—the goal was 1,550 each for the US and Russia—so that all the states in the whole world have avoided a nuclear arms race.

So far.

Endnotes

[1] "Revisionism at Fordow: Why the *WSJ* is wrong about the history—and future—of Iran's nuclear program" by Richard Nephew, published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* on March 18, 2026 and available at <https://thebulletin.org/2026/03/revisionism-at-fordow-why-the-wsj-is-wrong-about-the-history-and-future-of-irans-nuclear-program>

[2] See "The Real Nuclear History of Iran," published by the Editorial Board of the *Wall Street Journal* on March 15, 2026, at <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/the-real-nuclear-history-of-iran-6804f9f6>

[3] For more, see "Interview: Thomas Pickering on diplomacy, Iran, Korea, Russia, realpolitik, and the ethics of war" by Dan Drollette Jr., and published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* on June 30, 2015. Available at <https://thebulletin.org/2015/06/interview-thomas-pickering-on-diplomacy-iran-korea-russia-realpolitik-and-the-ethics-of-war/>

[4] Luers also directed the Iran Project, a nongovernmental organization that supported US negotiations with Iran. More about the many facets of William Luers can be found at his May 14, 2025 obituary in *The New York Times*, "William H. Luers, Diplomat Who Backed Czech Dissident Leader, Dies at 95," available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/11/us/william-h-luers-dead.html>

[5] Additional material on Stephen Heintz can be seen in this biography from the "People" section of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund website: <https://www.rbf.org/people/stephen-heintz>

[6] To learn more about Javad Zarif, see this September 27, 2013 Reuters article by Arshad Mohammed and Matt Spetalnick, “U.S., Iran voice optimism and caution after rare encounter” at <https://www.yahoo.com/news/u-iran-voice-optimism-caution-rare-encounter-002840696.html> and this biography in Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Javad_Zarif

[7] Now the Iranian foreign minister, Seyed Abbas Araghchi wrote this opinion piece for the December 30, 2025 issue of *The Guardian*, titled “You’ll never defeat us in Iran, President Trump: but with real talks, we can both win” and available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/dec/30/iran-donald-trump-real-talks-both-win>

[8] Majid Takht Ravanchi is an Iranian diplomat who has been the political deputy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran since September of 2024. Prior to that, he served as Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations. For more, see the April 8, 2019 *New York Times* article by Rick Gladstone “Iran Picks Former Nuclear Negotiator to Lead Its U.N. Mission” at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/world/middleeast/iran-united-nations-ambassador.html>. Like the other Iranian negotiators mentioned here, Ravanchi attended college in the United States—earning his Bachelors and master’s degrees in science from the University of Kansas, and a master of arts from Fordham University.

[9] John Mearsheimer is a scholar of international relations at the University of Chicago. His essay can be seen in full at <https://johnmenadue.com/post/2026/03/why-america-is-losing-the-war-with-iran/>

[10] Steve Witkoff is President Donald Trump’s Middle East envoy; he was previously a real estate developer as well as a real estate lawyer. See this Wikipedia entry https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Witkoff

[11] See this March 26, 2026 article by Frank Gardner of the BBC, titled “Are the US and Iran holding peace talks, and what do both sides want?” available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cm29l9r68j8o>

China Threat Report

This week General Mike Flynn released a major study this week on the 10 most harmful actions taken by the PRC against the United States in the past few years. From his report, here are excerpts from his findings.

1. **On October 3, 2023, the Department of Justice** [unsealed](#) eight indictments against China-based chemical manufacturing companies and their employees for the production and distribution of fentanyl precursors. The lead case named Hubei Amarvel Biotech Co., Ltd., along with executives Qingzhou Wang, Yiyi Chen, and a third defendant operating under the alias “Er Yang.” DEA Administrator Anne Milgram stated at the time that Chinese chemical companies are the source of the fentanyl crisis killing Americans. The Centers for Disease Control reported more than 107,000 overdose deaths in 2023, the overwhelming majority driven by synthetic opioids that begin as precursor chemicals shipped from Chinese laboratories to the cartels.
2. **On February 7, 2024, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency**, the National Security Agency, and the FBI jointly released [advisory AA24-038A](#), formally attributing a multi-year campaign to Chinese state-sponsored actors known as Volt Typhoon to pre-position offensive cyber capabilities inside American critical infrastructure. The advisory confirmed that Volt Typhoon had compromised IT networks in the communications, energy, transportation, and water and wastewater sectors across the continental United States and in our Pacific territory, Guam. CISA Director Jen Easterly stated that Volt Typhoon intrusions had been “found and eradicated” across multiple sectors, and that what had been found to date was “likely the tip of the iceberg.”
3. **In October 2024, U.S. officials confirmed** that a separate Chinese state-sponsored group designated [Salt Typhoon](#) had penetrated at least nine American telecommunications carriers, including AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, Lumen, Charter Communications, Consolidated Communications, and Windstream.
4. **On January 28, 2023, a Chinese high-altitude** surveillance platform entered American airspace over Alaska. It transited Canada and re-entered the continental United States on January 31, drifting eastward over Montana, where it loitered above Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile fields. The Department of Defense allowed the platform to complete its traverse of the American heartland before shooting it down on February 4, 2023, off the coast of South Carolina.

5. **On April 17, 2023, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York** unsealed an [indictment](#) charging Lu Jianwang and Chen Jinping with conspiring to act as illegal agents of the People's Republic of China. The two operated an unauthorized outpost of the Fuzhou Public Security Bureau on the fourth floor of a building in Manhattan's Chinatown, established in 2020 under the cover of a community nonprofit. The station served as a forward base for the CCP's "Operation Fox Hunt" and the harassment of Chinese dissidents living under the protection of our Constitution.
6. **In November 2021, the Chinese agribusiness conglomerate Fufeng Group** purchased approximately 370 acres of farmland in Grand Forks, North Dakota, twelve miles from Grand Forks Air Force Base, the home of sensitive U.S. drone and space communications operations. On January 27, 2023, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force Andrew Hunter [wrote](#) to Senators John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer stating that the project presented "a significant threat to national security with both near- and long-term risks of significant impacts to our operations in the area."
7. **The 2025 Defense Intelligence Agency Threat Assessment**, submitted to the House Armed Services Committee, confirmed that the People's Liberation Army Navy now fields approximately 395 battle force ships, the largest navy in the world by ship count, projected to grow to 435 by 2030. The United States Navy stands at roughly 292 ships, with current plans to maintain approximately 290 through the end of the decade.
8. **On January 31, 2024, FBI Director Christopher Wray testified** before the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party that China's hacking program is larger than that of every other major nation combined. Director Wray stated that the FBI is opening a new Chinese counterintelligence investigation roughly every 12 hours and that it currently runs more than 2,000 active CCP-related investigations across nearly every field office in the country. The estimated annual cost of CCP intellectual property theft to the American economy ranges from \$200 billion to more than \$600 billion, according to the Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property and successive FBI estimates.
9. **In October 2023, the Government Accountability Office** published a [report](#) GAO-24-106166 confirming that the majority of Confucius Institutes that had been closed at American universities, due to bipartisan national security concerns and the requirements of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, had reopened under new names with substantially the same Chinese funding, the same Chinese-supplied instructors, and the same CCP-aligned content. Of 118 Confucius Institutes that had operated in the United States, 104 had closed publicly, but at least 28 of the universities involved maintained similar partnerships with Chinese government-affiliated entities under different branding.
10. **On December 3, 2024, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced** an outright ban on exports to the United States of gallium, germanium, antimony, and certain superhard materials, all of which are critical inputs for American semiconductors, infrared optics, night vision, armor-piercing ammunition, and missile guidance systems. The ban was Beijing's direct retaliation against American export controls on advanced chips, and it was the first time in modern history that China explicitly weaponized its supply chain dominance against the United States by name.

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

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