

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

Prepared by Peter Huessy

President of GeoStrategic Analysis, Potomac, Maryland

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

Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy

Edition: Week of May 25th, 2026

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Senior Fellow, National Institute for Deterrence Studies
and Senior Fellow, Gold Institute for International Strategy

Summary

The ICBM EAR is longer than usual as we have posted most of the nuclear deterrent remarks of Under Secretary of War Elbridge Colby which he delivered at the National Defense University on May 19th. We also posted a review of his remarks from various sites. Also we posted the recent essay by Robert Peters from the Heritage Foundation on issues of NATO's Deterrence Architecture. We have a link also to the excellent presentation of James Howe to our LSU Triad Symposium on Russian strategy of theater nuclear forces especially with respect to the April 1999 Yeltsin decree on battlefield nuclear weapons. We also have 4 upcoming breakfast seminars with General Lutton, Frank Rose, Admiral Weeks and Uzi Rubin, all in person at the Capitol Hill Club from 745-9am.

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Matthew Whitaker: "We stand with our NATO Ally Romania and condemn this reckless incursion on its territory. Our thoughts are with the injured in Galati. We will defend every inch of NATO territory."

Northrop: "Faster B-21 production allows Air Force to consider a bigger fleet."

Under Secretary Elbridge Colby: *Under the conditions we face, our military strategy cannot sensibly be based on aspirations for total victory, unconditional surrender, or the comprehensive destruction of the opposing state.*

Under Secretary Elbridge Colby: *Nor can it rest on the assumption that the balance of resolve will necessarily favor the United States. Indeed, in many plausible contingencies, the opposite may be true.*

Under Secretary Elbridge Colby: *Strategy is very important, but it is a framework, not a how-to guide. It will therefore fall to you to determine how to make denial work in practice; how to prepare to manage escalation under extraordinarily dangerous conditions; how to strengthen coalitions under severe pressure; and how to ensure that American military power remains firmly connected to the concrete interests of the American people.*

From the Archives

President John F. Kennedy: "We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of a worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth – but neither shall we shrink from that risk any time it must be faced."

Events of the Week

June 3: General Lutton speaks at the Capitol Hill Club over breakfast, 745-900am.

June 5: Frank Rose speaks about missile defense, Golden Dome and US Security over breakfast at the Capitol Hill Club at 745-9am.

June 25th: Admiral Weeks of SSBN office will speak at the Capitol Hill Club at 745-9am on the Columbia class submarine force and US national security

July 25th: Dr. Uzi Rubin will discuss at the breakfast seminar at the Capitol Hill Club 745-900 and status of missile threats in the Middle East and Ukraine theater as well as allied and Israel missile defense capabilities within the context of international national security.

James Howe assessment of Russia and Escalate to Win. Presentation to the June 18th LSUS-NIDS-BFR Nuclear Deterrent Symposium



Huessy--NSNW--TRI
AD Symposium--18 Ji

Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Competition

Under Secretary of War Elbridge Colby Major Statement of Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Competition

In his May 19, 2026 remarks at the National War College, Under Secretary of War for Policy **Elbridge Colby** framed the current U.S. security environment as one of **major power rivalry under the nuclear shadow**, a reality he said is more pressing than at any time since the Cold War www.war.gov. He emphasized that the military's core mission — fighting and winning wars — must now be pursued in a world with **real strategic constraints** and genuine competition from other powers.

Colby noted that the U.S. has moved beyond the post–Cold War era of assumed escalation dominance and military superiority. While the U.S. remains the world's strongest state, it now faces **interstate strategic competition** and must think in “rigorous and realistic” terms about how to apply military power to defend American interests www.war.gov. This context directly shapes nuclear deterrence policy: the U.S. must maintain credible, flexible capabilities that can deter adversaries without provoking escalation.

His remarks align with the **2026 National Defense Strategy** and the administration's “flexible realism” approach, which balances strategic assertiveness with alliance cooperation. In earlier diplomatic engagements — such as his Seoul speech — Colby linked nuclear posture to broader alliance deterrence, underscoring that credible deterrence requires not just U.S. capabilities but also trusted partners like South Korea, which is developing nuclear-powered submarines and deepening integrated deterrence with the U.S. Defense.info+1.

While the full transcript of his National War College speech (posted below) does not explicitly name nuclear weapons in detail, the framing of “major power rivalry” and “strategic constraints” implies that **nuclear deterrence remains a central pillar of U.S. defense planning**. Colby's emphasis on realistic, practical deterrence suggests a focus on maintaining second-strike capabilities, credible threat signaling, and alliance-based deterrence to counter both conventional and nuclear threats.

In sum, Colby's message is that **nuclear deterrence must be central to U.S. military planning in a competitive, constrained strategic environment**, integrated with conventional readiness and strong alliance partnerships to ensure stability and prevent escalation.

From the Archives

Herman Kahn and WOV

Dear Friends: In discussions with some of our top military commanders, there is serious concern with the adoption by Russia of a 1999 decree signed by Yeltsin which called for the development of battlefield nuclear weapons, highly accurate, low yield and able to “win”. Here are two links from ACA and NTI that had news stories on the meeting, as well a short writeup/summary of what Gen Hyten and Brad Roberts called Escalate to Win strategy or escalate to de-escalate. There is further evidence that China as well has adopted the idea that a limited use of such battlefield or tactical or theater nuclear weapons can be used in a conflict to give China the upper hand in allowing its aggression to go unchecked, the idea being the USA does not enter such a conventional conflict for fear that China would escalate to the use of such battlefield nuclear weapons to make the US stand down given its current lack of theater capability. Comments welcome. Here are two links to the 1999 April Russian Decree.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999-04/yeltsin-signs-decree-tactical-nuclear-weapons>

<https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/april-1999-russian-federation-security-council-meeting-nuclear-weapons/>

Yeltsin’s 1999 Nuclear Decree and April 29 Meeting

On **April 29, 1999**, Russian President **Boris Yeltsin** signed a decree outlining a concept for the **development and deployment of tactical nuclear weapons** during a **closed-door session of the Russian Security Council Arms Control Association**. The meeting, which lasted about an hour and a half, was so secretive that even the heads of the Strategic Rocket Forces, Air Force, and Navy were excluded from most of it [The Nuclear Threat Initiative](#).

Context and Purpose

The decree was part of a broader Security Council agenda to review the status and prospects of Russia’s nuclear deterrence forces. According to reports, the meeting adopted **three main documents**:

1. A plan for the development and security of the nuclear weapons R&D and production complex.
2. A concept for the use of nuclear weapons, including tactical nuclear weapons.
3. A third, highly classified document whose title was not disclosed [The Nuclear Threat Initiative](#).

Defense Minister Igor Sergeev and Minister of Atomic Energy Yevgeniy Adamov presented reports, while Security Council Secretary Vladimir Putin later said the meeting reaffirmed Russia’s commitment to arms control obligations [The Nuclear Threat Initiative](#).

Strategic Implications

- **Tactical nuclear weapons focus:** The decree formalized suggestions from some Russian officials to increase reliance on tactical nuclear weapons to compensate for the weakening of conventional forces [Arms Control Association](#).
- **Kosovo crisis backdrop:** The meeting was held just a month after NATO began air strikes in Kosovo. While Yeltsin and Putin denied the crisis directly influenced the decision, some analysts speculated that the evolving situation may have prompted adjustments to planned nuclear posture decisions [The Nuclear Threat Initiative](#).
- **Arms control context:** The U.S. was monitoring Russia’s dismantlement of tactical nuclear weapons under the 1991 reciprocal unilateral initiatives. The Clinton administration had agreed at the March 1997 Helsinki summit to explore confidence-building measures, but negotiations on START III were stalled [Arms Control Association](#).

Reactions and Concerns

- **U.S. skepticism:** Assistant Secretary of Energy for non-proliferation and national security Rose Gottemoeller doubted Russia could undertake a major refurbishment of its tactical nuclear forces due to financial constraints [Arms Control Association](#).
- **Security Council Secretary Putin** emphasized that Russia would continue to abide by its arms control commitments, despite the tactical nuclear focus [The Nuclear Threat Initiative](#).

Summary

The April 29, 1999 decree marked a **formalization of a shift toward greater emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons** in Russia's security strategy. It occurred amid heightened tensions in the Balkans and within the broader context of post-Cold War arms control negotiations, raising concerns in Washington about potential erosion of disarmament progress.

From NTI (link above):

Nikolai Sokov

Senior Fellow, The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies

On 29 April 1999, the Security Council of the Russian Federation conducted a closed meeting to discuss the status and prospects of the nuclear deterrence forces. According to reports, the meeting lasted for an hour and a half and was so secret that even the chiefs of the Strategic Rocket Forces, the Air Force, and the Navy, who are formally not members of the Security Council, were excluded from all but the introductory session. Reports were made by Defense Minister Igor Sergeev and Minister of Atomic Energy Yevgeniy Adamov.

At a subsequent briefing, Security Council Secretary Vladimir Putin reported that the meeting adopted three documents. One of them covers the development and the security of the nuclear weapons research and development and production complex, another is a concept for the use of nuclear weapons, including tactical nuclear weapons; the third document, said Putin, was so secret that even its title could not be disclosed. He stressed that Russia would continue "to abide by all obligations it had undertaken" in the area of arms control and international security.[1]

The secrecy generated widely divergent reports in Russian media. Whereas some sources treated it as a continuation of earlier efforts to streamline and optimize Russia's nuclear posture, others tended to view it through the prism of the ongoing Kosovo crisis. All sources, however, underscored that the meeting represented yet another step in the process of enhancement of the role of nuclear weapons in the country's security policy.

It is unclear whether and how the Kosovo crisis, which was one month old at the time, affected the Security Council's decisions. Yeltsin's introductory statement and Putin's briefing put the meeting into a broader context of a series of decisions pertaining to Russia's nuclear arsenal, beginning with the Security Council's decisions of July 1998, which determined the shape of Russia's strategic posture, and the new concept of the country's nuclear deterrence policy, adopted in December 1998. It is possible, however, as many reports suggested, that the evolving Kosovo crisis necessitated various adjustments to the previously planned decisions; the fact that the meeting was postponed for several days [2] might indicate that last-minute changes were made in the prepared documents.

According to press reports, the decisions adopted at the Security Council meeting concentrated in three main areas: nuclear weapons development, adjustments in the strategic posture, and – the least clear of all – the future of tactical nuclear weapons.

The problems of the "nuclear weapons complex," i.e., "research and production infrastructure, disposal, and social infrastructure," were the main topic of discussion at the meeting, according to Vladimir Putin.[1] The decisions that were adopted apparently closed several "gaps" in the financing of the nuclear industry and provided for an expanded program of nuclear testing within the limitations of CTBT. According to *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, this program would include "'imitation' experiments outside test sites, hydronuclear experiments at test sites, and the development of domestic high-speed computers that will increase the reliability of the Russian strategic arsenal." [4] A few days later, Minister of Atomic Energy Yevgeniy Adamov announced that by the end of

May a decision would be made to conduct a series of "explosion-free" (probably hydronuclear) experiments with nuclear weapons on Novaya Zemlya.[5]

Significant attention was devoted to the safety and security of facilities comprising Russia's nuclear complex, including the "problem of [Russia's] international contacts" in that area (probably, the future of the CTR program), [6] as well as "social security" (i.e., salaries and other forms of support) of scientists in the nuclear weapons industry.

Administration Developments

National Nuclear Security Administration announced in a press release that it has completed ahead of schedule the first unit of the Mark (Mk) 4B reentry body for the W76 nuclear warhead, which is designed for submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams wrote: "NNSA is making good on our commitment to accelerate production for the nation's nuclear deterrent and delivering the first W76/Mk4B to the Navy ahead of schedule. As a former nuclear submarine officer, I have a special appreciation for the sea leg of our triad, which is essential to our assured second-strike capability. Great work by the entire Nuclear Weapons Enterprise."

"Northrop increasing B-21 production rate from 10 to 12, Air Force [Chief of Staff Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach] says," according to a post from *Inside Defense*.

International Developments

MOSCOW -- Russia on Thursday delivered nuclear munitions to field facilities in Belarus and showcased elements of its strategic nuclear forces, as tensions with European NATO members rose over the Ukraine war and drone activity in the Baltic.

Moscow is conducting some of its biggest nuclear exercises in years, involving 64,000 people to drill its forces in "the preparation and use of nuclear forces in the event of aggression".

As part of the drills, Russia displayed a Borei-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, Il-38 anti-submarine aircraft, a MiG-31 armed with a Kinzhal hypersonic missile and RS-24 Yars intercontinental ballistic missiles.

"As part of the nuclear forces exercise, nuclear munitions were delivered to the field storage facilities of the missile brigade's position area in the Republic of Belarus," the Russian defence ministry said.

The exercises involve Strategic Missile Forces, the Northern and Pacific fleets, long-range aviation and units from the Leningrad and Central military districts.

The Russian Defense Ministry on Thursday said that a *Borei*-class ballistic missile submarine, RS-24 Yars ICBMs units, and a MiG-31 armed with a Kinzhal hypersonic missile are taking part in the country's ongoing nuclear exercises,

China and ICBM Deployments:

The fact that China is building a "sprawling web of launch pads, bunkers and communications nodes" near its nuclear silos in the northwestern Xinjiang region and Gansu province, according to security experts and satellite images does not necessarily "signal a significant upgrade in Beijing's efforts to ensure second-strike capability [amid] intensifying nuclear competition with the United States." As one senior nuclear expert wrote to me: "China is doing both improving survivability but also improving its pre-emptive first strike capability, which is what one would expect. The new silos no matter how hard they are, are less survivable than mobile ICBMs in the Underground Great Wall. Silos are better for a first strike because of better communications and greater assurance of a coordinated strike time."

Congressional Developments

On Capitol Hill, Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told the House Armed Services Committee that the AGM-181 Long Range Stand-off Weapon (LRSO) program is performing “very well” in both cost and schedule

CNO Details New Ohio SSBN Extension Strategy

DEFENSEDAILY.COM, MAY 19 | RICH ABBOTT

The Navy’s top officer Tuesday outlined updates in the service’s strategy to extend the service life of several nuclear-armed Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) that could result in quicker turnarounds as they look to make up for delays in the new Columbia-class boats.

“We were looking at a number between four and five of these PIRAs, as we call them, these Post-Inactivation, Restricted Availabilities. And now the plans changed a bit, and we’re going to do one for sure, and we have confidence now because of the work we’ve done to look hard at the Ohio-class, that what we will learn during that one will allow us to target any additional ones we need to do without necessarily having to do the PIRA,” Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle told senators during an Armed Services Committee (SASC) hearing.

He said the Navy will learn from the first PIRA event with one Ohio-class boat and then scale that knowledge across however many SSBN extensions they decide they need to ensure “we have a clean ‘make before break’ transition between Ohio and Columbia.”

Make before break refers to an electrical switching option that establishes a new circuit connection before it disconnects the original one.

In 2023, a Navy official said the service planned to extend up to five Ohio-class submarines starting in FY 2029 with USS Alaska (SSBN-732) and each boat would be extended by three years following an 18-month long PIRA.

More recently, in March, Adm. Richard Correll, commander of the U.S. Strategic Command told SASC the Navy has high confidence in its ability and plans to extend Ohio-class SSBNs as a bridge to make up for the gap in Columbia-class delays.

Lead Columbia Sub

Caudle also confirmed the first new Columbia-class SSBN, the future USS District of Columbia (SSBN-826), is 18 months off its plans and they are “working hard to get it delivered in ‘28, that’s our goal.”

He noted all the super modules of SSBN-826 are in place at prime contractor General Dynamics Electric Boat’s facility in Quonset Point, R.I., “so we’re now in the final stages of putting those super modules together, and so we’re trying to knock down barriers that have historically prevented us from getting that done.”

Caudle said the Navy and Electric Boat are trying to add new technologies including doing non-destructive testing in the off hours, adding more robotic welding, improving artificial intelligence utilization to improve workflows and management of actual technical work documents.

“So, there’s a lot going on up at EB. Hiring is a big initiative to make sure the workforce is in place and the development of that workforce to make sure we have no chinks in the armor to keeping those shifts rolling as we move forward on that delivery timeline,” Caudle said.

Last month, Vice Adm. Rob Gaucher, Submarine Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager (DRPM), said the 2028 delivery schedule “is going to be a heavy lift. We’ve got to do better and so we have got to think, act and operate differently in order to get that ship deployed and out there operating.”

In February, Rear Adm. Todd Weeks said SSBN-826 was 65 to 66 percent complete and a nine month acceleration plan was in place to meet the 2028 delivery schedule so the boat gets into the water in 2027.

NATO

Flexible Response 2.0: Rebuilding NATO's Deterrence Architecture
HERITAGE FOUNDATION, MAY 20 | ROBERT PETERS AND LEO KEAY

SUMMARY

European allies should assume primary responsibility for deterring high-intensity conventional conflict while the United States ensures that NATO maintains a credible and flexible theater nuclear deterrent that is capable of managing escalation if deterrence fails. At the top of the escalation ladder sits the Alliance's ultimate guarantee: the strategic nuclear forces of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. NATO 3.0 therefore requires a modernized doctrine of Flexible Response 2.0.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. The NATO 3.0 debate emphasizes Europe's responsibility for conventional defense, but the Alliance must also rebuild its nuclear-level escalation architecture.**
- 2. A stronger U.S. theater nuclear posture in Europe would both stabilize deterrence against Russia and reduce the risk of Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.**
- 3. Flexible Response 2.0 is not about increasing reliance on nuclear weapons. It is about ensuring that nuclear coercion fails as a strategy.**

For 75 years, NATO has relied on American conventional power to defend Europe. That era is ending. [1] As the United States increasingly prioritizes deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, European allies will need to assume primary responsibility for defending the continent. Yet America's contribution to European deterrence remains both indispensable and unique. NATO's security has always rested not only on conventional strength, but also on the credibility of its nuclear deterrent—and that responsibility will continue to fall primarily on the United States.

By the middle of the Cold War, NATO deterrence strategy was known as Flexible Response: an integrated escalation architecture that combined conventional forces, theater nuclear weapons, and strategic nuclear deterrent capabilities. [2] While NATO still has Flexible Response as one of its deterrent options, that architecture's capability has eroded.

Russia possesses the world's largest arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons (most of which are in its Western Military District, which abuts NATO states) and openly integrates nuclear escalation into its regional war planning. Moreover, Moscow has nearly completed the modernization of its strategic arsenal and, with the collapse of arms control constraints, faces few if any limits on its nuclear posture. [3] By contrast, NATO retains a minimalist theater nuclear posture developed in the 1990s and centered on a small number of Cold War-era gravity bombs delivered by dual-capable fighter-bombers. [4] At the same time, the United States today must deter two nuclear peers simultaneously, stretching a nuclear force structure originally designed for a single adversary. [5]

A new division of deterrence labor is therefore required. European allies should assume primary responsibility for deterring high-intensity conventional conflict while the United States ensures that the Alliance maintains a credible and flexible theater nuclear deterrent that is capable of managing escalation if deterrence fails. At the top of the escalation ladder sits the Alliance's ultimate guarantee: the strategic nuclear forces of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. NATO 3.0 therefore requires a modernized doctrine of Flexible Response 2.0.

THE CONVENTIONAL GAP OF THE LATE 2020S

The most immediate danger facing NATO is a conventional offensive in a narrow window before the Alliance's rearmament—begun following Russia's invasion in 2022—is complete. Russia's battlefield losses in Ukraine have significantly degraded its conventional forces, but the Kremlin has already accelerated wartime mobilization of its defense industrial base and has begun to rebuild key combat formations, especially its ground and missile forces of particular utility for an invasion of one of its NATO neighbors. [6] Western intelligence assessments increasingly suggest that Russian force reconstitution could occur within three to seven years. [7]

The expansion of NATO's conventional capability will take much longer to mature. Many European armies must reconstitute brigade-level and division-level formations after decades of downsizing. [8] Defense industrial capacities—particularly for munitions, armor, and air defense interceptors—must expand radically so that European nations can provide the ships, planes, munitions, and platforms that are needed to arm modern militaries. [9] Even where funding has increased, it will take the better part of a decade for European states to translate resources into deployable combat power.

These efforts are necessary and will take time. Even moving with purpose, European states are unlikely to make meaningful progress on these issues before the end of the 2020s. Until they do so, there will be a potential deterrence gap in the late 2020s during which Russia will regain offensive capability before NATO's conventional buildup is complete. [10]

In this context, Moscow would not need to achieve conventional superiority over all NATO forces deployed across Europe to succeed. It would need only to achieve localized conventional superiority within a narrow area to convince NATO that further resistance risks uncontrolled escalation—thereby shifting the burden of decision from the conventional battlefield to the nuclear domain. [11]

RUSSIA'S THEATER NUCLEAR ADVANTAGE

Russia's theater nuclear posture is designed precisely to enable this form of coercion. Moscow's advantage is not simply numerical: It is structural. The Kremlin fields roughly 2,000 non-strategic nuclear weapons across a wide range of delivery systems, including cruise missiles, short-range ballistic missiles, naval platforms, and dual-capable aircraft. [12] These capabilities are integrated into operational planning, giving Russian leaders multiple options to calibrate escalation at the regional level.

This creates a form of escalation density that gives Russian leaders optionality while creating targeting and escalation dilemmas for NATO leaders. Russia is therefore able to escalate at a time and intensity of its choosing. [13] NATO, on the other hand, has far fewer credible nuclear options at the theater level. The result is an asymmetry in both capabilities and doctrine that leaves NATO exceptionally vulnerable to Russian nuclear coercion at the theater level.

NATO'S MISSING RUNGS

NATO does not simply lack nuclear weapons; it lacks usable options. The Alliance's theater nuclear posture remains centered on gravity bombs that are delivered by dual-capable aircraft from a limited number of forward bases. [14] This structure presents three key weaknesses.

- The bases that host these systems are vulnerable to preemption. Known airbases can be targeted by conventional missile strikes, cyber disruption, or sabotage in the early stages of a conflict.
- NATO's existing nuclear posture offers limited escalation flexibility. With few intermediate options, NATO faces a stark transition between conventional operations and mutually destructive strategic nuclear exchanges because of its paucity of low-yield non-strategic options and therefore reliance on high-yield strategic nuclear capabilities.

- The Alliance is increasingly challenged by modern air defense systems that complicate the penetration missions required for gravity bomb delivery, particularly given the need for aerial refueling of nuclear-capable fighter-bombers.

The result is a short and fragile escalation ladder—one that risks leaving NATO without credible responses at the very point that escalation becomes most dangerous. [15]

FLEXIBLE RESPONSE 2.0

If NATO is to deny Russia the ability to coerce through limited nuclear escalation, it must rebuild the escalation architecture it has allowed to atrophy. This requires a modernized doctrine of Flexible Response—Flexible Response 2.0—structured around three pillars: European conventional deterrence, U.S. control of theater nuclear escalation, and strategic deterrence provided by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.

Pillar I: European Conventional Deterrence. Europe must assume primary responsibility for forward conventional defense, particularly along NATO's northeastern flank. A credible conventional posture requires not only increased spending, but also the generation of deployable, integrated forces that are capable of denying a rapid Russian breakthrough. [16]

One practical step would be the establishment of a multinational corps of approximately 40,000 conventional troops deployed in the Baltic region. This force should be structured as a credible warfighting formation—not merely as a tripwire—that is capable of denying a rapid Russian breakthrough and imposing immediate operational costs. Such a deployment is politically and militarily feasible: Recent “coalition of the willing” proposals envisioned a comparable European force for Ukraine, demonstrating that both the scale and the willingness that are required already exist within the Alliance.

However, Europe's conventional buildup must avoid the trap of preparing to fight the last war. The conflict in Ukraine has often devolved into attritional positional warfare, but this reflects the specific conditions of that battlefield. A future NATO–Russia conflict is more likely to involve large-scale maneuver under persistent long-range precision strike.

European force development must therefore combine mass with mobility. Armored formations must be capable of rapid maneuver, supported by deep fires, air defense, and resilient logistics. Europe must become not only the Alliance's conventional shield, but also a shield that is capable of operating in a dynamic, high-intensity battlefield environment. [17]

Pillar II: U.S. Theater Nuclear Deterrence. If Europe provides conventional denial, the United States must ensure credible control of escalation. The objective is less to fight a nuclear war than it is to deny Russia any advantage from limited nuclear use. This will require the expansion and diversification of NATO's theater nuclear capabilities.

The United States should therefore consider deploying an additional 100–150 non-strategic nuclear weapons in the European theater, forward deployed to bases potentially in Poland and Finland to ensure a credible deterrence posture and operational relevance. [18] Such deployments would help to restore escalation ladder density and reinforce deterrence credibility across both theaters.

In the near term, the United States should prioritize adapting existing delivery systems to provide credible theater nuclear options. This would include the integration of nuclear warheads—such as W80 variants—onto platforms like the Joint Air-to Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM), Tomahawk (TLAM), and emerging systems such as Dark Eagle. Such adaptations would provide rapid, flexible strike options without requiring entirely new force structures, restoring escalation ladder density on timelines relevant to the late-2020s deterrence gap. [19]

At the same time, NATO should modernize its delivery systems. The transition to the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II offers an opportunity to move beyond gravity bombs toward nuclear standoff weapons. [20] A

miniaturized nuclear-capable cruise missile designed to fit within the F-35's internal weapons bay would significantly improve both survivability and flexibility.

Sea-based systems also play a critical role. A sea-launched nuclear cruise missile (SLCM-N) deployed on Virginia-class submarine platforms would provide a survivable, flexible option that is capable of threatening key targets such as the Kola Peninsula and elements of Russia's Northern Fleet infrastructure. [21] Other basing modes would offer more limited reach against these critical assets.

Finally, NATO should reconsider ground-launched intermediate-range systems analogous to the Pershing II and BGM-109G Gryphon deployed during the Cold War. [22] Such systems would enhance signaling, reduce response times, and reintroduce bargaining leverage into arms control dynamics.

Pillar III: Strategic Deterrence (U.S.–U.K.–France). At the top of the escalation ladder sits the Alliance's ultimate guarantee: the strategic nuclear forces of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. These forces ensure that no adversary can escalate to the strategic level without facing unacceptable consequences.

Maintaining this strategic guarantee requires sustained modernization of the U.S. nuclear triad and its supporting command, control, and missile defense architecture. [23] The United States is recapitalizing all three legs of its deterrent, but these programs must be delivered quickly and at scale to ensure credible deterrence against two nuclear peers. Russia, by contrast, has nearly completed the modernization of its strategic forces and continues to develop novel systems such as the nuclear-powered Burevestnik cruise missile. [24] In this context, emerging missile defense initiatives—often framed as a “Golden Dome”—should be understood not as a quest for invulnerability, but as a form of damage limitation that strengthens deterrence by complicating adversary attack planning and reinforcing the survivability of the U.S. and allied deterrent. [25]

France's renewed interest in “dissuasion avancée” (forward deterrence) should be welcomed as a political signal of European commitment. [26] However, the French deterrent remains strategic in both doctrine and capability, France's relatively limited arsenal constrains both its ability to provide extended deterrence at the theater level and its ability to generate forward-deployed options without eroding the survivability required for a credible second strike.

The United Kingdom's contribution to NATO's strategic deterrent also warrants careful attention. Britain's continuous at-sea deterrent currently relies on a single ballistic missile submarine on patrol at any given time, placing significant weight on a limited force structure. As the U.K. transitions to the Dreadnought-class SSBNs and modestly expands its warhead ceiling, maintaining credibility will require greater operational resilience—including consideration of a second boat at sea to enhance second strike survivability. [27]

French and British forces therefore strengthen NATO's strategic deterrent at the highest level of escalation, but they cannot substitute for the flexible, theater-level nuclear capabilities that only the United States currently provides.

CONCLUSION: NATO 3.0 REQUIRES FLEXIBLE RESPONSE 2.0

The NATO 3.0 debate rightly emphasizes European responsibility for conventional defense, but conventional burden-sharing alone will not stabilize deterrence in Europe. The Alliance must also rebuild its escalation architecture at the nuclear level. This will require a new division of labor by which Europe provides the conventional shield; the United States provides theater nuclear escalation control; and the United States, the United Kingdom, and France together provide the Alliance's ultimate strategic guarantee.

In addition to stabilizing deterrence against Russia, a stronger U.S. theater nuclear posture in Europe would reduce the risk of Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. Reducing the need for large-scale U.S. conventional deployments to counter a nuclear-backed offensive in Europe would free American forces to concentrate on the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, it would demonstrate both the capability and the willingness to respond to limited nuclear

use at the theater level. China would continue to expand its own theater nuclear arsenal, but it would be less likely to conclude that it could replicate a Russian-style strategy of nuclear coercion to achieve a rapid fait accompli.

Flexible Response 2.0 is not about increasing reliance on nuclear weapons. It is about ensuring that nuclear coercion fails as a strategy. In a world of multiple nuclear powers, deterrence cannot be managed one region at a time. Rebuilding NATO's escalation ladder is therefore not only a European requirement: It is a global requirement.

--Robert Peters is Senior Research Fellow in and Assistant Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for National Security at The Heritage Foundation; Leo A. Keay is a PhD candidate in the Department of Defence Studies at King's College London.

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Remarks by Elbridge Colby, Under Secretary of War for Policy

May 19, 2026: National Defense University, Washington, DC. Key excerpts.

Secretary Hegseth has rightly tasked the nation's military to refocus on its core and most essential function – fighting and winning our nation's wars. This is the heart of his direction for restoring the war fighting ethos, and it carries important implications for institutions like the National War College.

In these halls, America's military officers and civilian officials have an opportunity – and indeed an obligation – to step back and think seriously about how we apply military power in defense of Americans' concrete, practical interests. **Put another way: to think in rigorous and realistic terms about how to prepare for and fight our nation's wars in ways that make sense for ordinary Americans.**

That responsibility has always been important. But it is probably more pressing now than at any point since the height of the Cold War, because we once again find ourselves grappling with major power rivalry under the nuclear shadow.

This has been some time coming, of course.

As President Trump's 2018 National Defense Strategy recognized, "Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy... **Interstate strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.**" That assessment reflected underlying structural trends in the international system that were already apparent then and have only become clearer since. **For roughly a generation after the Cold War, the United States enjoyed a level of geopolitical and military predominance unprecedented in modern history. Americans became accustomed to thinking of military power as effectively unconstrained. We assumed escalation dominance and outright military superiority, and many believed achieving desired political outcomes was simply a matter of applying sufficient resolve to exercise our overwhelming military strength. The era in which such assumptions possessed credibility has, however, passed.**

That is why institutions like the National War College are so important. It is here that those entrusted with defending our nation are able to work through these problems in a rigorous fashion. As you do, it is essential to think realistically, to draw carefully on history, to dispense with shibboleths that no longer make sense, and above all to ensure that our military strategy – the way in which our nation prepares for and determines whether to wage war – keeps the costs and risks we ask Americans to bear in rational correlation to their concrete interests.

This is not as straightforward as it may have seemed twenty years ago, when the United States possessed unchallenged military predominance. Today, the defining military-strategic challenge of our era is far more difficult: How to defend important – indeed potentially very important – but nevertheless not existential interests against nuclear-armed major powers.

Addressing this problem is core to the 2026 National Defense Strategy. Within the broader defense strategy it sets out, the NDS establishes the framework for America's military strategy – the specific way the Joint Force is expected to fight a war – that the Department should adopt. **But, while it defines the problem and provides a framework for that military strategy, it leaves substantial scope for the Department – and especially uniformed officers like you here – to develop and realize what exactly that entails. This is the great task I would like to inspire you and your colleagues to work on.**

And solving this is no simple matter.

Under the conditions we face, our military strategy cannot sensibly be based on aspirations for total victory, unconditional surrender, or the comprehensive destruction of the opposing state.

Nor can it rest on the assumption that the balance of resolve will necessarily favor the United States. Indeed, in many plausible contingencies, the opposite may be true.

This is because, especially in conflicts fought close to the adversary's territory and far from our own, the opponent may perceive the stakes as more immediate, more proximate, and more directly connected to prestige, legitimacy, security, and political survival than Americans do.

This creates the central strategic problem our military strategy must solve:

How can the United States effectively defend critical interests against strong and resolute major power adversaries while maintaining the costs and risks for Americans at levels rationally proportionate to their interests at stake?

This criterion must be our lodestar in approaching the problem.

That is, the military strategy our nation adopts and prepares to employ must always remain correlated to the American people's interests in the issue at hand. To put it in straightforward terms, the conduct of war must not become detached from the concrete interests of the American people.

Rather, it is our obligation to ensure that the military strategy we prepare for our armed forces to put into action keeps the costs and risks of conflict in rational correlation to what Americans actually have at stake.

This is a fundamental deduction of republican government itself, reflected in the Preamble to the Constitution: that the activities of the state must fundamentally serve the common good. Asking Americans to bear costs and risks grossly disproportionate to their interests at stake in a war would violate the very logic of our republic.

To put it in another way, common sense and America First must apply not only in broad political terms, but also in the specific way our military prepares to fight and the costs and risks that way of war entails.

As President Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy puts it, "A strategy must evaluate, sort, and prioritize...The purpose of foreign policy is the protection of core national interests; that is the sole focus of this strategy." Accordingly, as the 2026 National Defense Strategy states, "this Strategy is defined by a realistic, practical approach to clearly understanding the threats Americans face and how realistically and pragmatically those threats can be addressed in ways consistent with American interests."

This approach reflects an essential strategic truth expressed succinctly by Clausewitz. He not only famously argued that war must serve political purposes, but even more importantly that "the political view must be the object, war the means, and the means must always include the object in their conception."

This insight must remain foundational for us.

Consequently, strategy cannot rationally be an abstract exercise in maximizing destruction. Nor can it be a test of national will detached from compelling political purpose.

Instead, the right strategy for our country requires the disciplined alignment of military ends, ways, and means – always retaining the political object firmly in view, not merely in terms of overall goals, but also in how the war is actually fought. In other words, strategy is not only about defining ends, but about ensuring the political object – the rational advancement of Americans' interests – is reflected also through the ways and means used by our armed forces to achieve those ends.

These considerations have always mattered. But in an era defined by major powers equipped with survivable nuclear arsenals, they become absolutely central.

In any context, if the costs and risks imposed by a strategy are grossly disproportionate to the interests at stake, that strategy is unlikely to succeed. Not only will it be unlikely to sustain Americans' support, but in any case, it will not live up to the Constitution's admonition. Moreover, in the nuclear age, such an ill-suited strategy will court genuine catastrophe for our nation.

Yet let me stress that this is not an argument for passivity.

Nor can it be, if we are to defend Americans' interests properly.

This is because the United States possesses very important interests beyond mere survival. Most fundamentally, as the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy make clear, we have a compelling interest in preventing the emergence of concentrations of power so great that they could undermine the American way of life. As the National Security Strategy states, "The United States cannot allow any nation to become so dominant that it could threaten our interests. We will work with allies and partners to maintain global and regional balances of power to prevent the emergence of dominant adversaries."

Accordingly, we have a profound interest in maintaining favorable balances of power in the world's key regions, a point George Kennan made here at the National Defense University during his landmark lecture series at the dawn of the Cold War. And maintaining favorable balances of power requires coalitions of states sharing a common interest in preventing regional and by extension global domination.

By the same token, if the United States proves unable or unwilling to defend interests essential to sustaining such balances, then the geopolitical position upon which Americans' security, liberty, and prosperity depend will deteriorate, if not collapse.

The task of our military strategy, therefore, is to defend those interests by charting a course between passivity and recklessness. It is to calibrate the application of force, the acceptance of costs and risks, and the pursuit of compelling political objectives in a rational and proportionate way.

This may require restraint in some circumstances.

In others, however, it may require intense and sustained military action.

I stress this because I want to underline that the centrality of the political object does not mean simply a brake on military force. To the contrary, in some circumstances it may require aggressiveness and an acceptance of great risk. The point is, however, that the military approach should follow from a clear and logical conception of the political goals and tolerances.

In all circumstances, your advice – as well as your expertise and your excellence in your profession of arms – will be essential to counseling senior civilian decisionmakers as they consider these most weighty of decisions.

The essential point is to apply our disciplined and rigorous judgment in the development of a coherent military strategy aligning the use of force with the level of cost and risk Americans can reasonably sustain.

This challenge of defining such a military strategy is especially difficult because conflict between nuclear-armed powers presents a fundamentally novel problem in human history.

In earlier eras, states could aspire to total military victory because defeated powers lacked the ability to impose catastrophic consequences upon the victor.

Today, however, survivable nuclear arsenals impose profound limits on what rational states can seek to achieve through military force.

This is because even a defeated nuclear-armed major power retains the capacity to inflict devastation on the putative winner. As President Kennedy memorably warned, such a war would leave ashes in the mouth of the victor.

But let there be no misunderstanding: nuclear weapons do not eliminate war, nor the need to wage it.

They do, however, make unlimited war among major powers extraordinarily dangerous and almost inherently irrational. Very few conceivable interests justify the costs of nuclear holocaust.

As was observed early in the nuclear age, the purpose of military power increasingly became to deter and thus avert major war among nuclear-armed states rather than solely preparing to win it. Yet, at the same time, avoiding such a war requires a plausible and credible theory for how it would be fought if deterrence failed.

As President Kennedy observed, the paradox of the nuclear age is that we must guard against major war even as we manifestly and credibly prepare to fight one. As he put it in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, "We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of a worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth – but neither shall we shrink from that risk any time it must be faced."

Accordingly, the United States must retain the ability to use force – including force at very large scale – to defend Americans' interests in the world. But we require a way to do so, including against the most formidable opponents, that limits the costs and risks to levels Americans can reasonably bear.

To borrow Henry Kissinger's formulation, our task therefore is to find a rational military strategy somewhere between surrender and suicide.

As a result, the central military-strategic question in such a context becomes not how to destroy or subjugate a nuclear-armed major power opponent, **but rather how to achieve Americans' practical political objectives while maintaining costs and risks within acceptable bounds. This is the challenge of preparing for limited war under the nuclear shadow.**

And our highest purpose is to deter such conflict from occurring in the first place by demonstrating both evident strength and a credible theory for employing it.

The 2026 National Defense Strategy provides a military-strategic framework for addressing this difficult problem. This framework is composed of three core elements.

The first element is denial defense – specifically, denying an opponent the ability to seize and hold the key territory of a U.S. ally or partner, thereby preventing them from acquiring the leverage necessary to subordinate that state and overturn a favorable regional balance of power, in line with the National Security Strategy's geopolitical guidance.

The second element is favorable escalation management – placing the burden of escalation, or the costs and risks of initiating escalation, on the opponent, keeping it there, and making it progressively heavier through sustained denial and selective, strategically rigorous cost imposition.

The third element is a binding strategy – structuring the conflict so that the opponent's attempts to escalate out of frustration or failure strengthen coalition cohesion, deepen allied resolve, and reinforce the balancing coalition opposing aggression.

Together, these concepts form the framework for a military strategy with which the United States can preserve favorable balances of power even under the nuclear shadow – precisely in order to prevent having to employ this strategy at all because deterrence has worked.

I will address each component in turn.

First: denial defense.

The purpose of denial is not conquest nor occupation nor the destruction of an opposing society.

It is something much more scoped, practical, and achievable: to make aggression fail.

As the National Defense Strategy states, "we will make clear that any attempt at aggression against U.S. interests will fail and is therefore not worth attempting in the first place. That is the essence of deterrence by denial."

That formulation is critically important because it focuses attention not on abstract military supremacy but on the practical frustration of aggression. As Secretary Hegseth stated in his recent posture statement, our task is "ensuring none of our allies are vulnerable to sustained, successful military aggression... This approach requires focus, prioritization, and clarity of purpose."

To be clear, this approach differs fundamentally from its principal alternatives.

On the one hand, any attempt to conquer, dominate, or subjugate a nuclear-armed major power is unlikely to succeed and would carry enormous catastrophic risks. A nuclear-armed adversary may well perceive such efforts as existential threats and wreak the most grievous harm on Americans – for interests that are not existential for them.

On the other hand, strategies relying primarily on punishment or cost-imposition are also deeply problematic.

Such approaches often appear attractive because they promise asymmetric leverage at relatively low cost. But this is usually an illusion. In the first place, an imposition of cost does not prevent a resolute opponent from seizing territory, nor plausibly reverse it. But it can anger him, and nuclear-armed major powers possess substantial capacity to inflict pain on us as well. Thus, our imposition of cost on the adversary invites him to respond by applying pain to Americans – and the more painful our application is, the more painful it is likely to be for our citizens. Moreover, even leaving aside the grievous costs such strategies are likely to entail, they are not likely to work, as competitions in pain tolerance frequently advantage the side perceiving the conflict as more vital, which is likely to be our opponent in such a struggle.

Thus, a strategy relying primarily upon punishment risks imposing very high costs on Americans without providing a credible way to achieve our political objectives.

Denial defense provides a superior and credible alternative.

A denial defense focuses specifically on the military objectives necessary to achieve our political goals – no more and no less.

Operationally, this means frustrating the adversary's theory of victory, above all by denying the opponent the ability to seize and hold the key territory of a U.S. ally or partner, especially that which is material to upholding favorable regional balances of power.

This builds on the verity that most states do not willingly submit to conquest. Accordingly, partial coercive measures alone are unlikely to suffice to bring them to heel. Instead, to subordinate another state, an aggressor

will generally need to seize and hold its key territory. If the attacker can seize and hold that critical land, he is likely to be capable of generating sufficiently decisive leverage over the targeted state to get it to submit.

The purpose of denial is to prevent this outcome.

I would like to stress to this audience that, importantly, denial can operationally take many forms. Invading forces may be prevented from arriving. Lodgments may be contained and reduced. Logistics and sustainment may be disrupted until any remaining foothold collapses. There is wide and ample scope for different military approaches.

What matters for the overall strategy is the effect: that aggression fails to seize and hold the targeted state's key territory and thus fails to secure the attacker decisive political leverage.

This is no easy feat, however. **While a major power adversary is unlikely to seek unlimited war, given the risks and consequences, he is more likely to pursue a rapid and limited fait accompli strategy designed to achieve gains quickly while deterring effective response by implicitly or explicitly threatening escalation.**

Such strategies seek to exploit asymmetries of time, geography, and resolve. Their objective is to present the United States and its coalition with a painful dilemma: escalate at great cost and risk to reverse the aggression or acquiesce to a changed political reality.

A denial defense is specifically designed to defeat this logic.

Moreover, if a denial defense is successful and aggression fails, the political environment itself should increasingly shift against the aggressor. States that previously hesitated to balance become more willing to do so. Allies become more resolute. And the aggressor increasingly confronts not an isolated opponent but a broadening coalition. At the same time, he can accept defeat without compromising his own genuinely core and existential interests, such as national survival.

This is why denial is so strategically powerful.

If the aggressor fails to secure his objectives, then he confronts a very difficult choice with a palatable alternative: accept tolerable failure, perhaps framed internally as some sort of success, or attempt to escalate his way out of frustration.

The burden of escalation now rests on his shoulders.

This leads directly to the second core element of the strategy: favorable escalation management.

As Thomas Schelling famously argued, strategy under the nuclear shadow involves bargaining in war – violent bargaining, certainly, but bargaining, nonetheless.

In practice, of course, escalation among nuclear powers is unlikely to unfold through neat or mechanical ladders. **Rather, the limits of a conflict between two such states are likely to be changeable and actually subject to direct adaptation and influence. In other words, how a war is limited is itself subject to shaping. We saw this ourselves in Korea and Vietnam, and we now see it happening in Ukraine.**

Thus, the material question is whether those limits and the escalation dynamics they enable improve or worsen one's political position over the course of a conflict.

Accordingly, the objective of American military strategy in the case of a conflict with a nuclear-armed major power should not be some abstract escalation dominance, which is not realistically attainable at a credible level of cost and risk in such circumstances.

Rather, our goal should be favorable escalation management: in other words, structuring the limits and dynamics of the conflict so that our efforts are enabled and advantaged, while it is the opponent who bears the heavy and unpalatable burden of deciding whether and how to escalate out of that situation.

To be clear, this must practically begin with sustained and effective denial. So long as the aggressor cannot achieve his political objectives, it is he who must choose whether to accept failure or escalate further. It is he who will bear the burden of escalation.

Conversely, if denial fails, the burden of escalation shifts onto us. We would then confront the far more dangerous position of deciding whether to accept defeat or dangerously and unfavorably escalate to reverse it. That is a position we must strive never to place American leaders in.

Yet we must also reckon with the fact that even effective denial may not by itself compel conflict termination.

This is because a strong nuclear-armed opponent may continue fighting despite lacking any plausible path to succeeding in his military aggression. He will almost certainly have the ability to do so. The question is whether he will elect to.

In such circumstances, our political leaders may decide to let the conflict simply play out, without seeking to force an end to the war. But they also may look to us to provide military options to coerce the opponent to settle or terminate the conflict – coupled, of course, with diplomatic outreach and other instruments of national power.

In this context, selective and strategically disciplined cost-imposition becomes increasingly salient.

Here Schelling's insight that "the power to hurt is bargaining power" is very relevant.

Selective cost imposition, however, must reinforce, not undermine, denial of the original objective of the aggressor. It also must remain ever-conscious of the need to avoid catastrophic escalation, especially involving nuclear weapons at scale.

Thus, its purpose is not settling scores or destruction for its own sake.

Its purpose, rather, must be coercive diplomacy: persuading the opponent that continued escalation will progressively worsen his strategic position while improving neither his military prospects nor his political leverage.

This requires strategic discipline. It is here that Clausewitz' admonition to keep the political object in mind is so important: The military options in this context must advance the political goal within the plausible constraints our political leaders will set. These may be aggressive and painful or more restrained – but the options should be tailored to those political parameters.

If we can do this, even a major power nuclear-armed opponent will face the strongest set of incentives not only to conclude the conflict but also do so in ways that limit the costs to regular Americans. This is the acme of success for our military strategy.

Finally: a binding strategy.

As Secretary Hegseth wrote in his memorandum introducing the 2026 National Defense Strategy, the era of "cloud-castle abstraction" in American foreign and defense policy has passed. Accordingly, as the National Security Strategy sets out, American strategy must instead derive from a concrete, flexible realism characterized by strategic clarity and a focus on Americans' practical interests.

This logic applies directly and materially to our alliances and coalitions.

In line with those documents, the United States is not pursuing alliances as abstractions, ends in themselves, or moral ornaments. We are sustaining, adapting, and forming them because maintaining favorable balances of power in key regions is not feasible, sustainable, or fair for Americans to shoulder alone.

Fortunately, many of our allies and partners share our same interest in favorable balances of power for their own reasons. They too seek to prevent domination of the world's key regions by nuclear-armed major powers – an interest which is, naturally, usually far more direct and concrete for them.

This alignment of interest is sturdy ground for our own geopolitical and military efforts.

Potential conflicts will largely occur near allied territory, not our own. Allies and partners possess substantial capabilities, geographic advantages, access, basing, logistical support, and increasingly capable military forces of their own. Moreover, they have an exceptionally potent interest in building up their own defense capabilities to contribute to denial defense. **It is this common sense but neglected insight that has enabled so much progress over the last year with allies and partners dramatically increasing their efforts and spending on defense. The fact is that our allies can, should, and will do more for their own defense – we just had to act like it.**

American strategy is accordingly focused on incentivizing, enabling, and leveraging these contributions. This is what the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy call for in encouraging much more effective burden-sharing with our allies and partners. This is all to the good.

At the military level, allied contributions can significantly strengthen denial while reducing the burdens placed upon our military forces, including in the context of potential simultaneity.

Moreover, our military strategy can and should specifically seek to strengthen our coalitions and their military efficacy. This is feasible because attempts at escalation by a nuclear-armed major power adversary can strengthen rather than fracture our coalition's will and cohesion.

This is the essence of a binding strategy.

The objective is to structure conditions such that aggression itself or an opponent's efforts to escalate out of frustration or failure bring additional states into closer alignment against him and deepen the resolve of those already committed.

In this way, the opponent's own escalation reinforces the balancing coalition necessary to sustain favorable regional balances of power.

Let me close by observing that the National Defense Strategy speaks of achieving a "decent peace."

That phrase is very important. It emphasizes that the purpose of American strategy is not confrontation for its own sake, nor military maximalism detached from political purpose. Our purpose is to preserve a favorable, reasonable peace in which Americans can live in security, liberty, and prosperity.

But such a decent peace does not generate itself.

It rests, rather, upon favorable balances of power, military strength, political resolve, and the credible capacity to fight and win the nation's wars. And that creates the central paradox of strategy in the nuclear age: preserving peace requires being prepared for war – but prepared for it in ways that are disciplined, proportionate, and strategically sound.

If we fail to prepare seriously, we invite aggression by convincing opponents that they might be able to use force successfully against our important interests at acceptable cost.

But if we prepare unwisely – if we adopt strategies detached from Americans' interests or that impose costs and risks on them that are grossly disproportionate to what is at stake – then we risk catastrophe.

The task, therefore, is to develop and be prepared to successfully and credibly apply a military strategy that navigates between passivity and recklessness, between suicide and surrender – a strategy of the greatest but also of disciplined strength.

Ensuring our nation is ready for this falls upon those entrusted with defending our nation. Preparing our armed forces to meet this standard will therefore depend on the expertise, judgment, and creativity of the rising generation of military and Department leaders – in other words, it depends on you and your colleagues.

Strategy is very important, but it is a framework, not a how-to guide. It will therefore fall to you to determine how to make denial work in practice; how to prepare to manage escalation under extraordinarily dangerous conditions; how to strengthen coalitions under severe pressure; and how to ensure that American military power remains firmly connected to the concrete interests of the American people.

That is a profound and grave responsibility. But it is also a noble one, in keeping with the highest traditions of our great and storied armed forces.

Thank you very much.

About the ICBM EAR

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

Weekly ICBM EAR Report

Prepared by Peter Huessy

Edition: Week of May 25th, 2026

Contact: NIDS@ThinkDeterrence.com

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