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

Edition: Week of July 4, 2026

The ICBM EAR Report for the week of July 4th prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geo-Strategic Analysis, Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy, and Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies.

A Note: Happy 250th Birthday to a great country and people. Why are we celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States of America? I am a first generation American, as my father and his parents fled Nazi Germany and its evil politics as soon as Hitler came to power in 1933. America to me represents freedom, liberty and equal protection of the law. Particularly important to our people is the exercise of our religious faith without interference, the sanctity of the American family and the pursuit of unity of a national culture and values. Eric Metaxas writes in "Revolution" to, as Hillsdale President Larry Arnn explains, remind us "not only of the principles we celebrate…but of the toil and sacrifice required to sustain them." Today we have the challenge of cleverly labelled but essentially totalitarian ideologies, both foreign and domestic, seeking to overthrow our constitutional bedrock. Freedom as President Reagan warned us is never more than one generation away from being destroyed. The enormous task all Americans must embrace is to repeatedly secure our freedoms and liberties and to recognize they are not the natural inclination of peoples. The gift we were given in 1776 was unique is all of human history. We may not be given such ever again. Protecting and preserving it is our calling.

Commentary and Quotes of the Week

Will America survive another 250 years: **Victor Davis Hanson**: I hope so. I'm confident it will. Churchill always was right. He said we always do the necessary thing last.

Mark Schneider: Unless the Chinese are deploying ICBMs without warheads, there is no way that there could have been a slowdown in Chinese nuclear weapons deployment. At a minimum, China is expanding its force of nuclear-armed ICBMs, nuclear-capable intermediate-range ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, air-launched ballistic missiles and Fractional Orbital Bombardment Systems.[35]

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda: Parliamentary parties had agreed on a plan to remove a constitutional provision prohibiting nuclear weapons on the country's soil.

USSTRACOM Commander Adm. Rich Correll: Malmstrom AFB 341st Missile Wing demonstrated that it is "the most resilient, best-trained and most combat-ready ICBM force in the world."

Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE): "As a Co-Chair of the House Electronic Warfare (EW) Caucus I've enjoyed advocating for improved EW capabilities. EW helps us hit targets more easily and saves our troops' lives in the process. We've made huge strides this past decade."

Secretary of the Air Force Troy E. Meink: "Minot AFB Airmen stand watch every day delivering combat capability that supports two-thirds of the nuclear triad. Such professionalism and commitment are the foundation of deterrence, and continued investment in nuclear modernization ensures we maintain what's needed to keep America safe."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD): "Honored to have Secretary of the Air Force Troy Meink, a Lemmon native, and General Dale White at Ellsworth AFB [on Tuesday]. Proud of the B-1 bomber team, and it's been exciting to see the transformation of the base ahead of the first B-21 Raider arriving next year."

U.S. Strategic Command: "The combat-proven versatility and long-range lethality of #USSTRATCOM's bomber force drives strategic integration across the Joint Force, delivering strategic options and asymmetric warfighting advantage."

Congressional Developments of Strategic Importance

The NIDS has the transcript of Rear Admiral Todd Weeks, our June 25 speaker at the Capitol Hill Club as part of the Huessy Nuclear Deterrent Seminar Series and when approved for posting we will send to our seminar attendees and the nuclear enterprise folks.

House Armed Services Committee Republicans: "Peace through strength requires credible deterrence. The #FY27NDAA strengthens America's nuclear deterrent by fully funding modernization, accelerating critical programs like SLCM-N, procuring the 4th Columbia-class submarine, and modernizing the ICBM fleet."

HASC Republicans: "The #FY27NDAA strengthens strategic deterrence by improving the DOE nuclear security enterprise, supporting @NNSANews modernization, and enhancing missile defense. This bill invests in the science, production, and defense capabilities needed to protect America from evolving threats."

Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND): "Thanks to @SecAFOfficial Troy Meink for visiting @TeamMinot to review our dual nuclear missions. We're reaching a critical stage in modernizing our nation's nuclear forces, and we're working to keep Sentinel construction, B-52 upgrades, LRSO development, and MH-139 procurement on track so Minot is ready to field the next generation of deterrence."

Administrative Strategic Developments of Interest

Pacific Air Forces announced that a B-2 bomber fired an AGM-158C Long Range Anti-Ship Missile during a recent live-fire sinking exercise in the Western Pacific.

Rear Adm. Robert E. Wirth relinquished command of Submarine Group Ten to Rear Adm. Bret Grabbe during a recent change of command ceremony at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay that was attended by USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Rich Correll.

SECAF Troy Meink said that the first B-21 Raider will bed down at Ellsworth AFB slightly ahead of the original schedule, but still in 2027, and the first bomber to arrive there is already flying test missions at Edwards AFB.

President Trump has decided to stick with diplomacy for now, telling aides that he is fine if negotiations with Tehran extend past an August 18 deadline for a nuclear deal.

The Navy said it is investigating a generator malfunction aboard the ballistic-missile submarine USS Nebraska that sickened dozens of sailors, according to Stars and Stripes, which noted that the incident occurred last week during a routine pier shift at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor.

USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Rich Correll visited Dyess Air Force Base, receiving mission briefs from the 7th Bomb Wing leadership, touring operational facilities and meeting with Airmen responsible for generating and sustaining bomber capabilities.

Strategic Developments of Interest

https://warontherocks.com/a-new-force-posture-concept-for-europeanizing-extended-nuclear-deterrence/

A Taiwan Crisis Is Coming — and Xi May Not Wait

Bloomberg Opinion, July 1 | Hal Brands: Something ominous is happening in the western Pacific, and the US isn't ready for it. Earlier this month, the Chinese Coast Guard contacted three ships in international waters near eastern Taiwan, demanding they identify their points of origin and destination. China didn't stop these vessels. But it was asserting a right to police maritime traffic near Taiwan — and, perhaps, previewing a major crisis that could be just a year or two away.

No, NATO Is Not Starting a New Arms Race--FortyFive.com, July 2 | Robert Peters and Neely Grantham: Some speculate that NATO should increase the number of weapons and states participating in NATO's nuclear mission. Finland's parliament recently voted to allow nuclear weapons on its soil, and Poland has repeatedly expressed interest in hosting American nuclear weapons and joining NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement.

Report and Analysis #1

US Navy plans Trident II missile successor, first nuclear warhead in 40 years
https://interestingengineering.com/military/us-trident-ii-nuclear-missile-warhead-upgrade

The sea-based leg of America's nuclear triad is entering its biggest modernization program in decades.

By Kaif Military Jun 29, 2026 08:29 AM EST

The Trident II D5 has remained in service for more than three decades through successive life-extension programs. Missile

The U.S. Navy is taking the next major step in modernizing the sea-based leg of America's nuclear triad, advancing a next-generation submarine-launched ballistic missile while developing the country's first new nuclear warhead in nearly 40 years.

According to the U.S. Navy's Portfolio Acquisition Executive Strategic Systems Programs (PAE SSP), the modernization effort centers on the Trident II D5 Life Extension 2 (D5LE2) missile and the W93/Mk7 warhead, which together are intended to sustain the Navy's strategic deterrent well into the second half of the century. The program comes as the service prepares to transition from the aging Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines to the new Columbia class. The modernization roadmap was outlined by PAE SSP in a June 25 update on its strategic deterrence programs.

Why does the Trident II need a successor

The current Trident II D5 first entered operational service aboard Ohio-class submarines in 1990 and remains one of the most reliable submarine-launched ballistic missiles ever fielded. A previous life-extension program upgraded critical electronics and guidance components, allowing the D5 Life Extension (D5LE) missile to remain operational through the 2040s.

However, Navy officials say additional upgrades are no longer sufficient to address long-term aging and obsolescence in components and the operational demands of the Columbia-class fleet. Instead, the service is developing D5LE2, a hybrid design that combines proven propulsion components with redesigned avionics, guidance systems, and system architecture to ensure continued reliability in the face of evolving threats.

The first new U.S. nuclear warhead in decades

Alongside the missile itself, the Navy is working with the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) to develop the W93/Mk7, the first new U.S. nuclear warhead program initiated in nearly four decades.

While few technical details have been released publicly, the W93 is expected to replace aging elements of the current stockpile and provide a modern warhead compatible with future submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

The program is also closely linked to the United Kingdom's next-generation Dreadnought-class ballistic missile submarines through longstanding U.S.-UK strategic cooperation.

Modernizing the nuclear triad

The effort forms part of the broader modernization of the U.S. nuclear triad, which consists of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, strategic bombers, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Of those three components, ballistic missile submarines are widely regarded as the most survivable because they remain hidden underwater for extended periods, making them significantly more difficult to detect or target. As the

Columbia-class replaces the Ohio-class over the coming decades, the Navy is also investing heavily in supporting infrastructure.

Recent upgrades include the Strategic Weapons Systems Ashore testing facility, which reached full operational capability in late 2024 to validate future upgrades to the Trident weapon system before fleet deployment.

Additional engineering facilities and production expansions are underway at strategic weapons sites in Florida, Georgia, and Washington to support the D5LE2 program and future submarine operations.

Preparing for the next generation

Beyond missile development, PAE SSP says it is adopting faster acquisition methods while expanding its responsibilities to include emerging strategic systems such as the Conventional Prompt Strike hypersonic weapon and the proposed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear (SLCM-N).

Rather than introducing an entirely new strategic concept, the D5LE2 program is designed to ensure the sea-based deterrent remains credible as existing Trident missiles reach the limits of practical modernization. For the Navy, the challenge is not replacing a failed system but sustaining one of the world's longest-serving and most reliable strategic weapons through the Columbia-class era and beyond.

Strategic Report #2

China's Nuclear Force

IS 663.pdf

The annual legally required Pentagon report on Chinese military power, while very good on many issues, has historically had a bad track record on accurately assessing the growth of Chinese nuclear weapons. In 2025, then-STRATCOM Commander General Anthony Cotton stated that, "I would also note that China has outpaced every previous estimate that we've made."[1] Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) has pointed out that regarding nuclear weapons, "…given the Pentagon's consistent underestimates in the past, it's fair to assume that China will move even faster."[2]

The December 2025 version of the Pentagon report was even more dire. For the first time in many years, it did not update its estimate of the current (2025) number of operational Chinese nuclear weapons. It only stated that:

> China's stockpile of nuclear warheads remained in the low 600s through 2024, reflecting a slower rate of production when compared to previous years. Despite this slowdown, the PLA [People's Liberation Army] has continued its massive nuclear expansion. While this report assessed in 2020 that China's nuclear warhead would double from a stockpile of the low 200s over the next decade, the PLA remains on track to have over 1,000 warheads by 2030.[3]

How is it possible to have a "massive nuclear expansion" resulting from "a slower rate of production when compared to previous years."? A reduction in the nuclear weapons production rate in China while it is expanding its nuclear delivery systems makes no sense. Indeed, in the same month the 2025 Pentagon China report was published, *The Washington Post* reported that, "China is rapidly overhauling a network of secret facilities used to manufacture warhead components as it expands its nuclear stockpile faster than any other country, according to an analysis of satellite imagery."[4] It reported sweeping upgrades at nuclear weapons facilities, including pit production (the core fissile material component of a nuclear weapon), since 2019.

A reduction in the Chinese production rate cannot be explained by a shortage of fissile material. A 2019 analysis by nuclear weapons expert James R. Howe estimated that China had enough fissile material for 3,878 nuclear warheads.[5] A 2021 estimate by Dr. John A. Swegle and Dr. Christopher Yeaw (now Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and Nonproliferation), both noted experts on nuclear weapons, estimated that China had enough plutonium for 860-1,300 nuclear weapons.[6] In 2021, Henry Sokolski, former Deputy for Nonproliferation Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, concluded that China could produce 1,270 warheads by 2030 and further noted that, "If Beijing instead chooses to develop single-stage nuclear weapons using boosting, highly

enriched uranium (HEU) or composite plutonium-HEU warhead designs, it could easily exceed this number by a factor of two or more."[7] Moreover, these estimates predate the evidence of Chinese efforts to increase delivery vehicles and to increase available fissile material.

The scope of the Chinese nuclear weapons buildup has now been generally recognized. In late 2023, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote, "The United States now confronts graver threats to its security than it has in decades, perhaps ever. Never before has it faced four allied antagonists at the same time—Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran—whose collective nuclear arsenal could within a few years be nearly double the size of its own."[8] Even the Biden Administration recognized this reality. In 2024, Pranay Vaddi, then-Special Assistant to then-President Biden, stated that, "Russia, the PRC and North Korea are all expanding and diversifying their nuclear arsenals at a breakneck pace—showing little or no interest in arms control."[9] Indeed, in August 2024, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Vipin Narang observed that, "We have begun exploring options to increase future launcher capacity or additional deployed warheads—on the land, sea, and air legs—that could offer national leadership increased flexibility if executed."[10] Because of the Chinese nuclear weapons buildup, the November 2024 Biden Administration nuclear weapons employment guidance report said "…it may be necessary to adapt current U.S. force capability, posture, composition, or size in order to be able to fulfill the three stated roles of nuclear weapons."[11]

In March 2025, General Cotton stated that: 1) "The CCP's nuclear modernization efforts continued throughout 2024"[12] and 2) "China, meanwhile, which used to be considered a lesser included case, is expanding its own arsenal at a breathtaking pace. China now has more ICBM launchers than the United States and is expected at least to triple its stockpile by 2035."[13]

In May 2025, Lieutenant General Andrew Gebara, Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration, stated that, "China is rapidly expanding its nuclear and conventional forces as part of a broader project to reshape the Indo-Pacific and to challenge U.S. interests."[14]

In his October 2025 address at Quantico to American Generals and Admirals, President Trump revealed that in "…five years they'll [the Chinese] be equal" in nuclear weapons.[15]

In 2026, Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote "… the United States could soon face not one, but two, nuclear peers in Russia and China."[16] Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Thomas DiNanno observed that China was "…undergoing a massive and deliberate buildup, as it pursues a nuclear arsenal close to that of the United States and Russia."[17] The Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and Proliferation Dr. Christopher Yeaw stated that, "Beijing rapidly builds up toward parity."[18] In a February 2026 address at the United Nations Conference on Disarmament, he stated:

> Despite its claims to the contrary, China has deliberately, and without constraint, massively expanded its nuclear arsenal. Without transparency or any indication of China's intent or endpoint—including in its most recent white paper—we believe China may achieve parity within the next four or five years.[19]

To date, no action has been taken to increase deployed U.S. nuclear weapons. While the Trump Administration has significantly improved funding for nuclear deterrence programs, the main effect appears to be to prevent further slippage of the availability date for the new nuclear deterrent systems under development to replace the very old ones that now exist. The one exception has been a substantial funding increase for more rapid production of the B-21 bomber. The Air Force has stated that "…agreement had been reached with Northrop Grumman to increase production capability by 25%" and that the program "…remains on track for aircraft on the ramp at Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, in 2027."[20] Note that the Air Force has not said that in 2027 the aircraft will be operational or nuclear capable but simply that the first B-21s will have been delivered to the first B-21 base.

Once again, the 2025 Pentagon report did not update the estimate in the 2022 edition of the report that China would have around 1,500 nuclear warheads in 2035.[21] Indeed, it did not even mention a warhead number for 2035. Its overall treatment of Chinese nuclear weapons capability was minimal.

In May 2025, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) issued a rare threat assessment that credited China with 700 ICBMs and at least 132 SLBMs by 2025.[22] This is more than the United States would have had under the Biden legacy program. Moreover, China expert Richard Fisher has projected a substantially larger Chinese strategic nuclear force in 2035.[23] In light of these assessments, the 2022 Pentagon report estimate of Chinese nuclear weapons numbers in 2035 is very low. The failure of the Pentagon report to update this number is inexplicable. Richard Fisher estimates that by 2035 China could have between 6,328 and 8,260 nuclear warheads,[24] many times larger than the projected U.S. strategic nuclear force.

The 2025 Pentagon report did say that, "The PLA has likely loaded more than 100 solid-propellant ICBM missile silos at its three silo fields with DF-31 class ICBMs, which are very likely intended to support EWCS [Early Warning Counter Strikes, or launch under attack]."[25] No number for armed silos had been released in the prior reports. The December 2025 report stated that China had 550 ICBM launchers and 400 missiles.[26] This suggests that "more than 100 solid-propellant ICBM missile silos" actually means closer to 150 ICBM armed launchers.

If the Pentagon 2025 China report is compared with the 2024 edition,[27] the number of Chinese ICBM launchers and missiles is the same. Indeed, the only increase in China's reported numbers is 50 more Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) launchers and IRBMs. Thus, the Pentagon bureaucracy wants us to believe that the Chinese are continuing to load missiles into their new silos without building any more ICBMs. In effect, the Pentagon report says that China is planning to achieve a 2027 "Strategic decisive victory" in "a Taiwan conflict with U.S. involvement"[28] by ending the expansion of their missile force with the exception of IRBMs.

The left of center Federation of American Scientists' (FAS) early 2025 annual China nuclear weapons report also credited it with "approximately 600 nuclear warheads" but estimated only 30 armed silos.[29] The difference between the early 2025 FAS estimate and the December 2025 Pentagon report number is just over 70 more armed ICBM launchers, which both reports say house DF-31 ICBMs rather than the much more capable DF-41s. At a minimum, the FAS report implies an increase of, at a minimum, more than 70 warheads on the silo-based ICBM force alone. Since previous Pentagon China reports had reported an increase of about 100 warheads a year on the entire Chinese strategic nuclear force, where is the slowdown?

The 2025 DIA's Golden Dome threat assessment also projected a large increase by 2035 in nuclear-capable boosted hypersonic missiles (from 600 to 4,000), land-attack cruise missiles (1,000 to 5,000), and nuclear Fractional Orbital Bombardment Systems (60 by 2035).[30] In addition, according to General Cotton, there is a version of the DF-31 that carries multiple independently targetable warheads (MIRVs).[31] China expert Richard Fisher writes that the silos are armed with the DF-31BJ.[32] A U.S. Army publication states that, "The DF-31BJ is expected to maintain or enhance this MIRV capability, potentially incorporating more advanced penetration aids and decoys to overcome missile defense systems."[33] Thus, if MIRVed DF-31BJs are being deployed in Chinese silos, the warhead increase could be up to five to eight times as great.[34] Unless the Chinese are deploying ICBMs without warheads, there is no way that there could have been a slowdown in Chinese nuclear weapons deployment. At a minimum, China is expanding its force of nuclear-armed ICBMs, nuclear-capable intermediate-range ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, air-launched ballistic missiles and Fractional Orbital Bombardment Systems.[35]

The 2025 Pentagon report does not mention nuclear-capable Chinese Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) despite the fact that they clearly exist.[36] There are many reports, including statements by senior U.S. generals, that China has nuclear-capable cruise missiles.[37] These are not included in any recent edition of the Pentagon report or the 2024 DIA report on *Nuclear Challenges.* Neither the 2025 Pentagon report nor the 2024 DIA *Nuclear Challenges* report mention Chinese possession of nuclear artillery which has been reported.[38] As far back as 1988, the Chinese tested an enhanced radiation warhead that had a yield of 1–5 kilotons.[39] According to a declassified CIA report, in 1995, China conducted a possible nuclear artillery shell nuclear test.[40]

In September 2025, Communist China staged a massive military parade that celebrated the Chinese victory in World II, a war that Mao's Communist forces largely did not fight by avoiding combat against the Japanese. During the parade, for the first time, China displayed the new large road-mobile DF-61 ICBM.[41] The missile is in the same size class as the DF-41 and, hence, could be heavily MIRVed.[42] It certainly would be more capable than the DF-41 even if it is just an improved version of this missile. The DF-61 is not even mentioned in the 2025 Pentagon report, which remarkably has only a passing reference to the DF-41.

One of the most important developments in China's expanding nuclear capability is the acquisition of low-yield nuclear weapons. The 2025 Pentagon China report said, "The PLA is probably pursuing nuclear weapons with yields below 10 kilotons."[43] Previous reports characterized these weapons as "low-yield." There are reports of Chinese nuclear weapons with much lower yields than 10-kilotons.[44]

The December 2025 Pentagon China report appears to be a classic example of what Captain James Fanell (Ret.), former Senior Intelligence Officer for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, told Congress: "For a generation, the IC [Intelligence Community] failed national security decision-makers, and the American people, regarding the growth of China's capabilities and intentions," systematically engaging in what he referred to as "threat deflation."[45] China has no interest today in full Western recognition of its nuclear buildup since the Trump Administration may take corrective action. It is certainly possible that the December 2025 Pentagon China report's assessment is the result of Chinese active measures. The Pentagon report's assessment of Chinese nuclear weapons production is so unreasonable that the only apparent explanation is that it is a direct result of Chinese disinformation, "deep state" type analysis, or perhaps both.

China has every reason to manipulate U.S. threat assessments to reduce the possibility that they could result in an increase in U.S. nuclear capabilities. Hard intelligence on China's nuclear weapons production rates is very difficult to obtain. Hence, China has the potential to manipulate U.S. perceptions by passing disinformation through double agents. This is facilitated by the deficiencies in U.S. counterintelligence. According to Michelle Van Cleave, the first statutory head of U.S. counterintelligence, "…hostile penetrations and foreign deception operations … have grown far bolder and deeper than the resources we have available to counter them…."[46]

The greatest danger of “threat deflation” is that China will take military action based upon its perception of the military balance, not that of the Pentagon bureaucracy. Threat deflation, if it impacts U.S. decisions on deterrence programs, can increase the risk of war and even Chinese nuclear escalation.

Report #3

From Admiral Blair, A Different View on China, Don’t Panic

The Mirage of China’s Military Edge
Panic Is Misguided—and Counterproductive
By Dennis Blair

“The reality today is that China is not capable of conquering Taiwan. Nor is it likely to gain this capability any time soon,” writes Dennis Blair, the former commander in chief of U.S. Pacific Command, in a new essay in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*. “China’s buildup once threatened to shift the military balance in Beijing’s favor, but trends in military technology now favor Taiwan and the United States, not China.”

These advantages should not breed complacency in Washington, Blair warns. Favorable trends “are not self-sustaining,” and “deterring the formidable but not superior Chinese military will require resources and commitment.” Yet the United States must also resist panicking over the prospect of an imminent Chinese victory. “As long as Taiwan and its defenders stay on their current paths, the gap between China’s aspirations and its ability to realize them will only increase in the coming years.”

Report #4

Peter Huessy, Real Clear Defense, July 3, 2026

In 1981 the U.S. 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 U.S.? Or alternatively, would the U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. now faces the challenge of simultaneously sustaining and modernizing the entirety of the nuclear deterrent.

So, like 1981, the U.S. 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 weapons 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 U.S. military will “jam up” the American President to retaliate “all in.” The only alternative is nuclear abolition.

To get there HASC members Representators 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 U.S. 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 U.S. Congress strongly supported a modernized force of 12 submarines, 400 ICBMs, and 60 B2 and B52 strategic bombers for the U.S. 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 U.S. needs theater or shortrange, nuclear forces such as sea and land-launched cruise missiles, and such development funding has now been approved. The U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. silo-based ICBMs and cause less than 10,000 casualties, making a U.S. retaliatory response less than certain.

Now the current U.S. retaliatory deterrent strategy is to destroy an enemy’s 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 U.S. 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 U.S. nuclear deterrent strategy altogether as unworkable. But what does the U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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.

Peter Huessy *is President of Geostrategic Analysis and a Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrent Studies & the Gold Institute for International Strategy.*

Gold Institute

250th Anniversary Tribute from Eli Gold, President of the Gold Institute

The Invention of Freedom: America at 250

Eli M. Gold, President

July 3, 2026

As we mark the 250th anniversary of the United States of America, we are not merely commemorating the founding of a nation, but the birth of an idea unlike any the world had ever seen. It is truly wondrous to reflect on how this great nation has evolved, from a bold experiment in governance to a global force shaping the course of history.

Looking back across the past millennium, it becomes increasingly clear that the greatest invention of the last 1,000 years was not a machine, a scientific breakthrough, or a technological marvel. It was the United States of America itself. The term "invention" is not used lightly. This nation was not formed out of precedent, but out of imagination. It was a deliberate creation, a Democratic Republic consciously forged through a fusion of Greek democracy and the Roman republic, grounded in Judeo-Christian values and moral philosophy.

Throughout history, many peoples have sought independence, sovereignty, and self-determination. Yet what distinguished the American founding was not simply the desire to break free, but the clarity of vision that followed. Our founders, with what can only be described as divinely inspired wisdom, established a nation where rights were not granted by rulers, but inherently possessed by the people, rights that "are endowed by their Creator."

This was a nation that did not wait for permission. It did not depend on approval, funding, or partnership from foreign powers, even from those sympathetic to its cause. It was built on conviction. It was an idea so powerful that it entrusted ordinary people, not government, with the responsibility of shaping their own destiny. In doing so, it altered the trajectory of human history.

As written in a 2 July 1776 letter from John Adams to his wife Abigail,

"The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore.

You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil, and blood, and treasure, that it will cost us to maintain this declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet, through all the gloom, I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means, and that posterity will triumph in that day's transaction, even although we should rue it, which I trust in God we shall not."

What Adams foresaw was not merely independence, but endurance, and more importantly, influence. It is without doubt that the invention of the United States catalyzed the modern age. The freedoms enshrined at its founding, freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry, freedom of expression, and freedom to create, unlocked human potential on a scale never before witnessed.

In the 250 years since its founding, the pace of technological and scientific advancement has not only accelerated, but it has also eclipsed the progress of the previous millennium. Innovations such as electricity, aviation, telecommunications, computing, and space exploration did not emerge in isolation. They flourished within a system that protected curiosity and rewarded ingenuity. The United States became the epicenter of this transformation, not by accident, but by design.

From the Industrial Revolution's expansion on American soil to the digital revolution of the 21st century, the environment of liberty allowed inventors, entrepreneurs, and thinkers to challenge limits and redefine possibility. The same principles that empowered a small group of colonists to defy an empire also empowered generations to push beyond the boundaries of science and technology.

Consider a simple illustration. For most of human history, travel was limited to the speed of a horse or a ship. Within less than two centuries of America's founding, humanity not only mastered powered flight but set foot on the moon. Similarly, communication evolved from handwritten letters carried over weeks or months to instantaneous global connectivity. These leaps were not merely technological, they were philosophical, rooted in the belief that individuals should be free to imagine, to question, and to build.

The American model demonstrated that when human freedom is protected, innovation becomes inevitable. It created a ripple effect felt across continents, inspiring democratic movements, economic systems, and technological ecosystems worldwide.

As we stand at this 250-year milestone, we are called not only to celebrate what has been achieved, but to recognize the responsibility that comes with such an inheritance. The same principles that gave birth to this nation, and fueled its unprecedented progress, must be preserved, strengthened, and renewed for generations to come.

For it was never just about independence. It was about possibility.

Eli M. Gold is the president of the Gold Institute for International Strategy, a Washington, DC based think-and-do tank.

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 July 4, 2026

Contact: NIDS@ThinkDeterrence.com

Subscribe: GeoStrategicAnalysis.substack.com