

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

Prepared by Peter Huessy

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Edition: Week of July 6, 2026

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ICBM EAR Week of July 6, 2026

Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis and Senior Fellow at both the National Institute for Deterrence Studies and the Gold Institute for International Strategy

Maj.Gen. Stacy Huser, USAF ret

We had the privilege of attending the retirement of Maj Gen Stacy Huser from Command of the 20th USAF, consisting of the US ICBM force at FE Warren, Minot and Malstrom USAF bases in Wyoming, North Dakota, and Montana. The retirement ceremony was attended by her family, friends and base supporters at the Lincoln Theater in downtown Cheyenne, Wyoming including the Commander of the USAF Global Strike Command, General Davis. The Maj Gen with her remarkable missileers kept the 66 year old Minuteman III missile at a reported 99.8% alert rate. The Maj Gen previously served at the NNSA and was head of the nuclear weapons division where she oversaw an extraordinary number of bases, depots, labs, and facilities that were the guts of our nuclear deterrent. The attendees showed their love of the General with repeated rousing shows of support. We wish her all the best as she retires from this chapter in her life and heads for Michigan. You are the best, General Stacy!!

Report from the 2026 Nuclear Triad Symposium, June 18th, LSU

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U.S. increasing pace of nuclear modernization to deter threats from China, Russia

By Matt Vines July 06, 2026 – “Fortune favors the prepared.”

Those were the words of Dr. Plamen Doynov in relation specifically to the U.S. power grid and other civilian infrastructure in case of an electromagnetic pulse attack.

But that sentiment described the entire Nuclear Triad Symposium in which military and industry experts assessed threats from adversaries like China and Russia and how the U.S. is prepared to respond.

BRF Defense, with the National Institute for Nuclear Deterrence Studies, and LSU Shreveport, hosted the fifth annual symposium on June 18, offering a nonclassified setting for Air Force Global Strike Command (headquartered at Barksdale Air Force Base) and noted experts in the nuclear enterprise, academia, and the defense community.

The AFGSC commands two-thirds of the United States’ nuclear triad – nuclear Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles that can be launched from land-based missile fields and nuclear cruise missiles that can be launched from stealth bombers.

The Navy controls the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad with its submarine-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with nuclear warheads.

Each leg of the Nuclear Triad was represented as military personnel and defense industry experts engaged in detailed presentations and exchanges about how to keep America’s strategic nuclear deterrent credible and reliable.

“Barksdale Air Force Base and the Nuclear Triad are so central to protect the values and way of life that we have enjoyed as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of this country,” said Shreveport mayor Tom Arceneaux. “The work you’re doing isn’t just important to your companies and units, it’s important to our community, to the nation, and to the world. “Thank you for what you do in protecting us and our way of life.”

THE THREAT

While Iran and its near weapons-grade nuclear material may be front and center in the headlines, China and Russia are foremost on the minds of nuclear experts.

If nuclear missiles were to ever be used, symposium experts predict they’d start in the form of a theater war and not necessarily launched directly at the American mainland.

China has signaled more aggressively its desire to bring Taiwan, and its production of 90 percent of the world's most advanced semiconductor chips, officially back under Chinese control.

What could begin as a conventional war invites the temptation of nuclear missile use.

"China is engaging in the fastest buildup of nuclear weapons this century," said Gordon Chang, a Gatestone Institute senior fellow who is an East Asia expert. "From all indications, its specialists are detonating fissile material in secret tests.

"Beijing won't talk to us about arms control. I believe the Chinese are planning to make nuclear threats to prevent us from coming to the aid of its intended victims. It's possible they could even start a war with a nuclear detonation."

Russian expert Stephen Blank says that country operates under a "first strike doctrine" and is behaving as if war with the West has already started.

While no Chinese official military personnel has measurable combat experience, Russia has significant experience in its war in Ukraine, particularly in drone warfare.

Heavy casualties and limited territorial gain throughout its four-year conflict with a Ukrainian force armed with some Western weapons and a homegrown drone industry has the world questioning Russia's conventional military capability and strategy.

But Russia does hold the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, and China is gaining on the U.S. for the second largest.

"We, and our allies in Europe and Asia, are under attack ... and this war is escalating," said Blank, a non-resident senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Eurasia Program. "It's not kinetic – there are no bombs falling in Louisiana, or New York City or Washington D.C.

"But anybody who studies Russia knows that they are obsessed with being a great power, which means empire. Empire entails the dissolution of other states' sovereignty and territorial integrity. Without nuclear weapons, Russia is not a great power in its own mind."

Nuclear weapons are the great equalizer between militaries that might not stack up in conventional warfare.

The U.S. showcased its conventional long-range strike capability with attacks against Iranian nuclear facilities in 2025 and again in 2026 against key Iranian military sites in Operation Epic Fury.

MODERNIZING THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT

Make no mistake – the U.S. military remains unmatched in conventional weapons and tactics.

Although China and other adversaries are making gains in conventional capabilities, the world knows that China is not likely to win a strictly conventional war if it started today.

"We have relied on our military overmatch for quite some time, certainly since the fall of the Soviet Union," said Lt. Gen Jason Armagost, deputy commander of the Air Force Global Strike Command. "Our conventional overmatch has an end date on it unless we reinvigorate and re-understand and re-engage in our force design structure, starting with our strategic forces.

"It's not easy to do."

Much of the manufacturing infrastructure that undergirded the American military and its advancement atrophied, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union.

But that hasn't stopped the Air Force from having the largest deployed bomber force currently since World War II, even if some of that force is flying retrofitted B-52 Stratofortress bombers that first came online in 1955 with design beginning in 1946.

This venerable platform has undergone significant renovation with its most recent upgrades including new engines, radar and avionics. The B-52 Stratofortress platform has been extended to fly until 2050.

While manufacturing atrophy causes issues and delays in the production of new models and maintenance of current ones, the B-21 Raider program is expanding its production capacity after Northrop Grumman Corp. delivered aircraft ahead of schedule.

The latest stealth bomber platform has completed 11 of 26 scheduled developmental test flights.

The land-based leg of the Triad is on the grueling path to modernization as the Sentinel program is underway to replace the aging Minuteman III ICBMs, the missile silos, infrastructure and facilities.

The program hit a major milestone this past October when the first Minuteman III launch facility was deactivated.

“There is a massive shift underway to modernize programs, and the Air Force Global Strike Command has the largest modernization portfolio in the Department of War,” said Air Force Gen. Stephen L. Davis, commander of the AFGSC. “Today’s strategic environment is more complex than it was in the Cold War, but we are well-positioned to respond and deter.”

The Navy has procured two of the planned 12 Columbia class submarines with a third expected this year. The goal is for all 12 boats to be in action by 2035.

For the first time since the 1970s, the Navy is developing new nuclear warheads for its ballistic and cruise missiles.

In all three legs of the Triad, a renewed focus and emphasis on speed of modernization was a topic that stretched across many of the seven panels.

“We’ve been asked to deliver as soon as possible ... and we are maintaining the reliability and sustainability of the sea leg of the nuclear triad,” said Kelly Lee, executive director of the Navy Nuclear Weapons Programs.

Lt. Gen. Mark Pye, the deputy director of critical major weapon systems, added there’s a “unified focus on speed” across the Triad.

Organizational restructuring across the Triad began earlier this year with the aim of shortening command chains and reducing bureaucratic processes that slow down decision-making.

“We must align with urgency and decision velocity while still maintaining high standards and technical rigor,” Pye said. “With the high velocity of change in threats, we must get on a wartime footing to prevent one.”

THE PURPOSE

The U.S. advances and maintains its stockpile of both nuclear and conventional weapons and delivery systems as a means of deterrence with the aim of preventing direct conflict.

Christopher Yeaw, assistant secretary of state for Arms Control, Deterrence, and Stability, said the government seeks to craft and sign agreements designed to reduce the risk of nuclear war while advancing security for itself and its allies.

“The main reason the U.S. engages in arms control is that when arms control is calibrated to a specific strategic environment, it can provide real, measurable security benefits,” said Yeaw, who’s appeared at multiple previous symposiums as a nuclear weapons expert. “Agreements can open lines of communications which can contribute to some level of weapons verification and at times has provided valuable insight.

“We prioritize verification to make sure that the U.S. isn’t unilaterally disadvantaged by an agreement.”

Yeaw added that while the new START treaty with Russia has expired due in part of to Russia’s noncompliance, the most concerning development in the nuclear world is China’s rapid nuclear build up, none of which has ever been monitored or captured by a treaty.

Both Russia and China are developing and testing new weapons.

Yeaw added that there’s “undeniable evidence” of Chinese yield-producing nuclear tests, and that the Chinese have been “obfuscating nuclear explosions.”

China, with the help of potential partners like Russia and North Korea, has the option to leverage this capability against U.S. allies in the region like Japan and South Korea.

The threat lies far beyond the Pacific as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization believes that Russia could fully reconstitute its military capabilities to launch an attack on Europe by 2029. The credibility of U.S. deterrence, both in the nuclear and conventional arenas, must be able to respond.

Upcoming Seminars: National Institute for Deterrence Studies

Attention: We are putting together our second half 2026 Nuclear Deterrent and Missile Defense Seminar Series. The first event is in person at the Capitol Hill Club, July 24th with Dr. Uzi Rubin at 7:30-9am. Here is the registration form for those interested in attending in person. [Dr. Uzi Rubin Live at the Capitol Hill Club - Former Head of Office of Missile Defense. – Fill out form](#). The NIDS is also planning an early November Post Election review of the US nuclear and missile defense deterrent, inviting a number of top experts who have previously held high civilian and military positions to speak. Stay tuned and please let us know of sponsor interest.

Comments and Quotes of the Week

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: “The progress on the B61-13 program demonstrates the Nuclear Security Enterprise’s ability to respond to evolving geopolitical requirements with speed and precision. Completing the 2026 baseline deliverables ahead of schedule is a clear indicator of discipline and operational focus.”

Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and Nonproliferation Christopher Yeaw: “It was a pleasure to visit Gen. SL Davis at Air Force Global Strike Command, discuss strategic stability and forces in depth with his staff, and speak at the 2026 [NIDS, BFR and LSUS] Nuclear Triad Symposium. Arms control and strategic deterrence must go hand in hand to ensure the safety and security of the United States and its allies.”

Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control and Nonproliferation Christopher Yeaw: “It was an honor to sit down with STRATCOM’s Commander, ADM Correll ... one of the most insightful officers with whom I’ve ever had the pleasure of discussing strategic deterrence. State and STRATCOM’s missions remain intertwined to protect and promote the strategic security of the United States!”

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND): “I’ve really enjoyed working with Col. Lamarand over the last two years. He’s led what I believe to be the most important bomber wing in the world with professionalism, steady leadership, and a real commitment to the mission. I look forward to working with Col. Burrell to support our airmen and their families and ensure @TeamMinot remains at the center of America’s nuclear deterrence for years to come.”

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte: “In Ankara, NATO Allies reaffirmed their ironclad commitment to collective defense under article 5. Our unity, solidarity and collective strength remain the foundation of peace, security & prosperity.

The State Department: “China’s rapid and opaque nuclear weapons buildup is of great concern to the region and the world” and urged Beijing to “engage in meaningful arms control discussions” and commit to a “regularized notification arrangement” for all its ICBM and space launches.

President Xi Jinping: The ruling [Chinese Communist Party](#) must strengthen and further modernize its military forces and continue to embrace Marxist ideology. We must advance the modernization of national defense and the armed forces.”

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Sen. Jim Risch (R-ID): “China tested a new ICBM in the Pacific just days after deploying its coast guard near Taiwan. China is clearly not committed to ‘strategic stability.’

President Trump: To [Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#), “Yeah, [Joe] Biden wouldn’t let you hit anything. That’s kind of dangerous going in there [Russia]. It’s a provocation but go ahead. Go hit stuff like you’re doing with your drones.

Jim Risch: “The U.S. will always stand by allies like Japan and the Philippines who have stepped up to push back against China’s actions.”

President Trump: The ceasefire with Iran is now “over” but would let talks continue.

International Strategic Developments of Note

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer insists Europe must fill the US vacuum. “Stepping up to Nato leadership, Europe will need to confront some existential questions about industrial capacity and C-UAS capabilities.” According to reports from the summit some leaders believe the US administration is weakening the military alliance through isolationism, [trade war](#), undermining Ukraine and [threats](#) against allied territory, forcing Europe to retreat from its enduring reliance on the country’s military and technology. Here are some comments:

The Belgian Minister of Defense points to transatlantic distrust ahead of the Nato Summit in Ankara. “Every empire falls when you don’t have allies,” he warned as the superpower turns its back on the European theatre. “We need to have trust,” he counselled as he unpicked the transatlantic divide, which he ascribed to America’s indefensible policies toward Europe and the resultant backlash among countries on the continent. “While the US remains our key ally, I have been clear that in order to sustain Nato.... European nations must take primary responsibility for their own defense.”

Of course, Nato spending provides a sense of the wherewithal states are willing to expend for collective defense and security. In this case, the Nato Secretary General’s Annual Report for 2025 shows a gradually increasing trend. Defense spending as a percentage of GDP for Canada and Europe (collectively) has risen noticeably from 1.62% in 2022 to 2.33% last year. Which translates into an additional \$54 billion a year. However, some countries, such as the UK, register a [reduced commitment](#) according to alliance figures. **Hans Rutte, the current head of the alliance, however, also noted that because of the US Administration strong push for enhanced NATO defense support, overall spending has increased by a remarkable \$1 trillion additional support [over a decade] for NATO, and this from the non-USA part of the alliance.**

But top-line percentages do not fully capture leadership potential. Other tangible factors such as industrial strength and defense market focus help to determine true military and strategic readiness. There are different forms of deterrence. Foremost among them is a commitment to industrial capacity. The ability to sustain the production of defense systems at the point of need projects a strong defense posture to adversaries. The consumption of advanced stand-off missiles during the US and Israeli war against Iran demonstrated this clearly [after only seven days](#) of the conflict.

Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte [reiterated](#) the same point on 10 June, commenting: “when you, all of you, produce more, our deterrence and defense posture is stronger, and we are all safer.”

Another effective form of deterrence is shutting down any opportunity for adversaries to exploit weaknesses.

In this regard, Russia is probing Europe’s civil infrastructure in every domain, from subsea internet cables to satellites for banking transactions. Yet Europe has been slow to deploy a credible response to these so-called “grey-zone” attacks.

Some emerging technologies such as directed energy laser weapons are effective and cheap counter-uncrewed aerial system (C-UAS) systems but these have yet to be rolled out at mass. In the meantime, however, there have been glimmers of hope.

Although the UK was slow to respond to Iranian strikes against RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus earlier this year, the solutions it deployed have proven relatively successful. First among them was the use of Thales’ Martlet missiles from Wildcat helicopters.

This prompted the UK Government to finance the production of [hundreds more](#) low-cost missiles.

A more innovative solution is the development of [Rapid Sentry](#), a short-range air defense system with a range of up to eight kilometers. The system combines Saab’s Giraffe 1X radar with a launcher for Martlet missiles.

Elsewhere, **European defense companies** are undertaking fast development cycles for interceptors, from Frankenburg’s [Mark I mini missile](#) (~2km range) to Cambridge Aerospace’s [Skyhammer](#) drone interceptor (~30km).

However, for a more balanced or alternative view of the European-US relationship, these (2) remarks from Victor Davis Hanson put things in perspective: [View Article](#) [View Article](#)

Re **China**, there are also a number of developments.

China’s Navy test-launched a long-range ballistic missile armed with a dummy warhead from a nuclear submarine in the Pacific Ocean as it advances its arsenal for delivering nuclear warheads.

The foreign ministers of Japan, the United States and South Korea shared concern over this recent launch of a ballistic missile by a nuclear-powered Chinese navy submarine at a meeting in Ankara, Turkey.

China's military has also recently constructed two new multiple missile launch systems that may be capable of firing "massive numbers" of ballistic and cruise missiles at Taiwan or against U.S. and allied forces in the region.

Administration Strategic Developments

Air Force confirmed that the B-21 Raider will officially operate with a two-pilot crew, with some pilot positions filled by former weapon systems and combat systems officers.

"U.S. Central Command forces have begun launching a series of powerful strikes against Iran to impose heavy costs for targeting and attacking commercial shipping crewed by innocent civilians in an international waterway. The U.S. strikes are in response to Iranian attacks on three commercial vessels that were transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's demonstrated aggression was unwarranted, dangerous, and a clear violation of the ceasefire."

The National Nuclear Security Administration: Completed "diamond stamping" of all canned subassemblies for the B61-13 nuclear gravity bomb planned for the current fiscal year three months ahead of schedule at the Y-12 National Security Complex.

Congressional Developments of Interest

Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) passed away suddenly this Saturday. He was a top member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Prayers for him and his family.

Essay includes Senators **Sanders, Warner, Markey et al** proposal to unilaterally reduce US nuclear forces from 700 missiles and bombers or SNDVs to 214: <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/22687/china-launches-icbm>; other Democratic candidates and the platform of the DSA call for "defunding the military" as well as lifting sanctions on Iran, complaining that Iran is being punished for not following US dictates.

The House Select Committee on China: "China's long-range ballistic missile launch wasn't just a routine drill. It was yet another act of CCP aggression toward our allies and like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific. As China races to have 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030, we must have a defense industrial base that supports deterrence against China and helps our allies and partners defend themselves."

ICBM EAR Weekly Note of Interest

Is Russia Going to Use Nuclear Weapons?

Related to these NATO developments are reports that Russian President Putin is being urged by his senior colleagues to use nuclear weapons to turn the tide of developments in Ukraine

New developments in Ukraine point to the possible use of nuclear weapons by Russian President Putin. This possibility has long been a topic of US military discussions, primarily as US military and civilian leaders have described such action as an "escalate to win" or "escalate to escalate" strategy. Many nuclear observers believe that any use of nuclear weapons will escalate to all-out use and continue to assume US strategic deterrent policy relies on such a threat as mutual assured destruction. A year ago, the EAR addressed this matter: "Mutual assured destruction or MAD is not an American **doctrine** or **military strategy**. Those who believe MAD is how America deters nuclear armed adversaries assume that any use of nuclear weapons by the United States will be massive. **And that any alternative such as the limited initial use of nuclear force**, will quickly escalate to a full scale nuclear conflict with both attacker and retaliatory nation being destroyed. Given such assumptions, it is considered logical to assume U.S. deterrent strategy is fixed on massive retaliation and destroying most of the industry and population of our adversaries as that is the only possible use of such weapons." This issue was discussed by Peter Huessy at a recent broadcast of the John Batchelor show where Huessy is now a regularly scheduled weekly guest to discuss nuclear deterrent matters. President Kennedy once explained that in a confrontation between two nuclear armed adversaries, one does not want the choice to be either Armageddon or surrender. An off-ramp, for example or an alternative has to be on the table. In the Cuban missile crisis, the US

had just begin the deployment of the Minuteman I missile system in Malmstrom USAF in Montana. That missile could reach Moscow. The USSR did not have that capability re the US mainland. However, this enabled Kennedy to agree in a secret deal to remove US nuclear armed missiles from Turkey, deployed on the periphery of the USSR absent CONUS based missiles capable of reaching the USSR. Thus, it was the deployment of the Minuteman I ICBM that may well have saved the world from nuclear Armageddon.

Here is the full essay: https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/08/29/mutual_assured_destruction_doesnt_deter_escalate_to_win_1131692.html#google_vignette

ICBM EAR Second Note of the Week

Do nuclear numbers matter? Does nuclear deterrence work? In the past few months, these questions have risen to be frequently discussed by serious nuclear experts. The negotiator of New START for example has noted that Ukraine appears unfazed by Russian nuclear threats, as does Iran and its proxy terror group when it comes to Israel. Does nuclear deterrence work in these instances? Related to that question is to what extent do numbers matter, especially at a time when the US is projected to face two, peer nuclear armed powers, with deployed warheads circa 2035 exceeding 4500-6000 and maybe as high as 10,000, depending upon the assumptions made of the current build up of Russia and China. [Charts on these numbers are in this link here from James Howe.]



Huetsy--Chinese and
Russian SNF & TNF 2

A Historical Note and an update re IP Theft by China

On January 24th, the NDUF hosted General Keith Alexander, the Director of NSA, for a dinner at the US War College. The subject was cyber war and the internet. The General told the assembly of nearly 50 of the leaders of the major US Aerospace companies in the country that China was on an annual basis stealing \$500 billion in technology and intellectual property just from US industry. Here is an update: <https://www.amazon.com/Great-Heist-Campaign-Americas-Secrets/dp/0063451832> - David Shedd's book "The Great Heist" about China's massive IP theft.

Russia and Ukraine

As the Tide Turns Against Putin, Beware the Drowning Man

Like a struggling swimmer, he may take desperate measures to stay afloat. Here is an excerpt from a recent essay by Peter Frankopan of Oxford detailing Putin attacks on the West other than kinetic military.

JUNE 25, 2026, 4:16 PM

By [Peter Frankopan](#), a professor of global history at the University of Oxford.

EXCERPT: Putin no longer has an easy way out. The war is financially, demographically, and politically unaffordable, as reflected by rising domestic discontent. At the same time, the transformation of the economy into one that builds and fuels a war machine also means that cutting defense expenditure, not to mention agreeing to a settlement with Ukraine, would cause its own problem: Since military spending is just about the only thing powering growth, reducing that expenditure would lead to a sharp economic contraction, not to mention hit Putin's cronies getting rich off state procurement.

Although Putin regularly says he is willing to negotiate, he shows no sign of readiness to compromise. He has repeatedly rejected peace proposals from U.S. President Donald Trump, even though those proposals were more favorable to Russia than Ukraine. Putin's goal remains to subjugate all of Ukraine in one way or another, denying it the ability to act as a sovereign state.

Putin will do what it takes to stay in power—not least since the consequences of his stepping down or being forced to step down are unforeseeable; they could very well lead to his imprisonment or death. As conditions deteriorate, Putin will push the heads of others under the water until he meets proper resistance. Former British MI6 head Richard Moore recently [noted](#) that Putin is “keen to expand the battlefield” by approving sabotage, cyberattacks, and arson in Britain as a response to Russia's worsening military and economic position.

Finding ways to widen Russia's confrontation with the West are not without their risks. Over the last four years, Russia's cyberwarfare activities in Europe, including interference with water systems, energy grids, and healthcare systems, have proliferated. So far, they have been met with limited direct response. Some Russian officials are confident that there is no effective Western Defense; Vasily Nebenzya, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, [warned](#) Latvia that “NATO membership will not protect you.”

This summer looks like it will be painful for Russia as long-range drone attacks hurt the economy, mid-range strikes sever the vital land corridor from southern Russia to Crimea, and Russians become increasingly concerned that the war is not just going badly but was a bad mistake. As that reality bites, Putin will be tempted—and perhaps likely—to increase the threshold and frequency of Russian hybrid attacks and to turn the threats against the West that he is so fond of making into action.

If a quarter of a century has taught one thing about Putin, it is that he is a poor strategist and decision-maker. He is used to having his cake and eating it. He could have chosen different direction on many occasions in the past but remains stuck in a mindset of paranoia, distrust, and suspicion shaped by his formative years in the KGB. This will likely lead to decisions that make little sense for anyone outside the Kremlin.

When Russia's problems worsen this summer and Putin's options diminish, his temptation will be to escalate both at home and abroad. We would not be at this point had Putin not decided to invade Ukraine in 2014 and again in 2022. And yet here we are. Beware the drowning man: The coming months will likely be dangerous outside and inside Russia as Putin tries desperately to stay afloat.

Top Report of the Week from NIPP - Excerpt Here



IS 664.pdf

INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No.

664

July 7, 2026

Fundamental Deterrence Challenges and Tailoring

Dr. Keith B. Payne

Dr. Keith B. Payne is a co-founder of the National Institute for Public Policy, Professor Emeritus and former Department Head at the Graduate School of Defense and Strategic Studies, Missouri State University, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, and former Senior Advisor to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He is the author or co-author of over 230 published articles and 50 books and monographs on international security issues.

Introduction

The bipartisan endorsement of adapting, or “tailoring,” deterrence to the potentially unique characteristics of particular opponents and contexts is a milestone in the evolution of U.S. deterrence policy. It has tremendous implications for the character of the U.S. nuclear and non-nuclear force posture intended to support deterrence and extended deterrence to allies.

For example, the basic rationale for tailoring deterrence is recognition of the diversity of opponents’ interpretations of what constitutes “rational” or “reasonable” goals and behavior. An overarching deterrence policy requirement designed to enable the United States to tailor its deterrence strategies and redlines across the range of opponents and potential contingencies mandates a force posture that can adapt U.S. deterrence strategies to opponents’ divergent goals, value hierarchies, risk and cost tolerances, levels of determination, modes of communication, and perceptions of the United States—among the many factors that can shape enemy responses to U.S. deterrence threats and redlines.^[1]

In 1995, without using the term “tailoring,” two prominent scholars, Gordon Craig and Alexander George, presented the basic rationale for adapting deterrence strategies to the opponents’ particular characters: “Not all actors in international politics calculate utility in making decisions in the same way. Differences in values, culture, attitudes toward risk-taking, and so on vary greatly. There is no substitute for knowledge of the adversary’s mind-set and behavioral style....”^[2] Given this reality, tailoring is needed because, “...if one does not threaten the right target for the right reason, it may not matter how well one does it.”^[3]

A U.S. force posture consistent with a policy of tailoring deterrence to a variety of opponents and contingencies must be sufficiently diverse and flexible to hold at risk the potentially wide spectrum of assets that those opponents deem of highest value—potentially including numerous hardened, defended point targets. It also must be able to pose a credible deterrence threat to opponents who arise relatively quickly or are recognized belatedly. Consequently, tailoring mandates a larger and more diverse standing arsenal of forces supporting deterrence than is favored by those who advocate for what has been referred to as “minimum deterrence” or “easy deterrence.”^[4] It is this force posture implication of tailored deterrence regarding the number and diversity of U.S. nuclear forces that leads some who recognize the logic of tailoring deterrence, nevertheless, to reject it as policy guidance. They tend to place priority on facilitating lower U.S. force numbers over optimizing prospective deterrent effect.

^[1] See for example, Keith B. Payne, "Understanding Deterrence," in, Payne, ed., *Understanding Deterrence* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 3-37.

^[2] Gordon Craig and Alexander George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.188.

^[3] Peter Karsten, Peter Howell, and Artis Allen, *Military Threats* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. xii.

^[4] See for example, Keith B. Payne and James Schlesinger, *Minimum Deterrence: Examining the Evidence* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2013), pp. 3-8, 9-13.

About the ICBM EAR

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

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