

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

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ICBM EAR Week of August 30th

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

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

News on Britains Nuclear Modernization: The vast sums being spent on a new generation of nuclear weapons and submarines have attracted the attention of parliament.

Polish Deputy Defense Minister Pawel Zalewski: Poland wants to participate in NATO nuclear deterrence, but Warsaw “does not want to have nuclear warheads on its territory.”

South Korea's national security adviser Wi Sung-lac: ROK will work closely with the United States to ensure renewed dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang produces tangible progress on the North Korean nuclear issue.

Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby: “I had an exceedingly productive visit to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe on Wednesday. During the visit, I had the chance to hear directly from General Grynkeiwich and his alliance-wide staff on their perception of how to chart the transition to NATO 3.0. I came away confident in our strategic approach and even more convinced than before of the viability and promise of a Europe-led defense of the Continent.”

Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE): “As Chair of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, I know the critical role the men and women of STRATCOM at Offutt Air Force Base play in defending our nation. I appreciated @SecWar coming to Nebraska to see firsthand their hard work and dedication.”

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent: “President Trump has dismantled Iran's military capabilities, destroyed nearly 100 percent of its military factories, and buried its nuclear program. We are now entering the endgame. At dawn begins an economic D-Day — the single greatest financial offensive ever marshaled against an adversary. The Islamic Republic has subsisted by dressing extortion as security guarantees. It has drawn strength from a calculus that regards Iranian retaliation as certain and American enforcement as negotiable. Under President Trump, that era is over. And those who fear the danger of defying Tehran ought not to discount the cost of testing Washington. The President has created the conditions to leverage every agency, every authority and action many assumed we would never summon. Our objective is to sever every economic lifeline that sustains the tyrannical regime until Tehran stands alone.”

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND): The @Boeing MH-139 has officially achieved Initial Operational Capability, bringing @TeamMinot closer to replacing its Vietnam-era Hueys with the larger, faster, and more lethal Grey Wolf. I look forward to seeing these aircraft on the Minot Air Force Base ramp as soon as possible.

Admiral Sam Paparo, the head of the US Indo-Pacific Command wants 200 B-21 Raider Stealth Bombers.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te: “Peace can only be secured through strength and not even an inch of territory can be sacrificed.”

President Stubb of Finland: “I'm not saying ‘relax.’ One should always prepare for the worst in order to prevent it.”

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/finland-s-stubb-says-russia-unlikely-to-risk-attack-on-nato/4041511>

The Department of War: “Secretary visited the warriors of US STRATCOM. Their mission is clear: maintain an unmatched strategic advantage and ensure our adversaries never doubt America's resolve. This is real deterrence.”

Secretary Hegseth: Most Americans probably don't know what United States Strategic Command does...It's the absolute FOUNDATION OF OUR DETERRENCE. I talk a lot about reviving the warrior ethos, rebuilding the military, and reestablishing deterrence. DETERRENCE NEVER LEFT THIS PLACE—NEVER HAS.”

British Nuclear Deterrence

Update on British Nuclear Deterrent Investments:

When General Sir Richard Barrons was leading Britain's Joint Forces Command, he felt there was always what he described as a "tapeworm" eating his budget.

"Every year we'd think we'd saved a little for something we needed," he recalled of his time managing shared capabilities across the services. "It would always go to the Navy for submarines. "Since then, the problem has grown, with Britain's nuclear deterrent consuming a growing share of the defense budget just as the military is under pressure to re-arm for conventional war. The issue, Barrons told the FT, is that successive governments have postponed costly decisions about Britain's nuclear capabilities, leaving several enormous programmes which desperately need to be modernized at exactly the same time. **In June, the Commons' public accounts committee called for more detail to be provided on nuclear spending. Subsequently, the government announced the creation of a committee to scrutinize nuclear spending when parliament returns on September 1. Its evidence sessions will be secret, as will its conclusions, which will be sent directly to the prime minister and the defence secretary.**

Finland, Russia and NATO

Finland's Stubb says Russia unlikely to risk attack on NATO

President says Moscow wants Europeans to fear escalation, but argues NATO deterrence and Russia's battlefield losses make wider war unlikely

Finland's President Alexander Stubb stated that he does not believe Russia would risk attacking a NATO country, **dismissing warnings that Moscow could be ready to strike NATO territory by 2029.** Speaking to Germany's Bild newspaper on Saturday, Stubb said such forecasts were speculative and lacked supporting evidence. "If someone had such a crystal ball — wonderful. But I simply see neither evidence nor facts for that," he said. **"I do not believe that Russia would ever want to attack the most powerful military alliance in the world, NATO.** "He cautioned, however, that he was not advising allies to lower their guard. **"I'm not saying 'relax.' One should always prepare for the worst in order to prevent it.** Stubb said his assessment rested on two pillars. "First, I have intelligence insights. And second, **we have deterrence — and this deterrence is stronger than that of any other military power anywhere in the world."** That deterrence, he said, is based **"on conventional forces, on missiles and on nuclear weapons. It makes no sense for any power in the world to test the resolve of this alliance."** He also expressed skepticism about the prospect of a Russian nuclear strike in Ukraine. "This summer the Chinese foreign minister visited me, and I raised the topic. And he said: 'We will never allow that to happen.' And I believe that is a rather effective deterrence. "Stubb argued that Russia's information warfare aims to sow fear across Europe by forcing debate over whether Moscow might escalate, use nuclear weapons or attack NATO. In reality, he said, Russia's options remain limited. The only major escalation still available is a new mobilization, a step that could carry domestic political costs inside Russia. Stubb underlined the importance of diplomatic efforts to end the war. **He welcomed CIA Director John Ratcliffe's visit to Moscow last week, saying, "I think that's good. Really. I believe there must be dialogue."** Americans and Russians should remain in contact, he said. Despite Russia's hybrid attacks, Europe should also seek direct contact with the Kremlin, Stubb argued. "I believe someone in Europe needs to resume dialogue with Russia to understand what is going on there. We need to talk to one another at a political level." His main concern, he said, is that "illusions might arise" in Moscow about developments in Europe, leading the Kremlin to assume the emergence of new threats that do not exist in reality.

International Security Developments

Gallup Korea Poll: Nearly two-thirds of South Koreans support the idea of their country having its own nuclear weapons, 65% agreed and 30% opposed.

Germany: Considering providing financial support to Britain for its nuclear weapons program, as Berlin seeks to better integrate itself into the existing British and French nuclear deterrents rather than pursue its own bomb.

Russia is considering intensifying conventional ballistic missile attacks on Kyiv and infrastructure targets in other cities.

Growing number of Russian officials believe President Vladimir Putin could eventually opt to use tactical nuclear weapons as a last resort in the conflict. News reports cite “*chatter among* foreign policy hawks” in Moscow indicate the Russian government could potentially use nuclear weapons or intensify long-range missile and drone strikes as it sees the diplomatic path as pointless.

However, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov: Russia has no reason to escalate the Ukraine conflict because its forces are already advancing. A Bloomberg report published on Wednesday cited:

Peskov distinguished battlefield action from Moscow’s response to Kiev’s increasing efforts to cause [economic](#) damage with attacks deep inside Russia. *“Ukraine is trying to hit our economic infrastructure, our trading infrastructure, thus causing a response from our side, and this will be a heavy response. But if you’re speaking about military escalation, we simply don’t need it because we are advancing anyway.”*

Administration Strategic Developments

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth: Strategic Command is the “absolute foundation” of America’s deterrence with planned U.S. investments in nuclear command and control, the Columbia-class submarine, B-21 bomber and Sentinel ICBM system.

Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby: “We had a superb session at U.S. European Command [Tuesday] hearing from them and discussing the Europe Posture Review. Thank you to General Grynkeiwich and his team for their excellent partnership. The Review is designed to ensure our strategic posture in Europe advances and accelerates the NATO 3.0 of an Alliance rededicated to strains clarity, rigor, and readiness. We look forward to continuing to engage with key stakeholders as we do.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe: Warned Russian officials in Moscow not to escalate conflict with America’s NATO allies – in particular, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – and also urged Russia to reduce military and economic support for Iran.

Congressional Strategic Developments

Sen. Pete Ricketts (R-NE): “It was an honor to have U.S. Secretary of War @PeteHegseth in Nebraska on Monday. [Ed note: Also, Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE) hosted.] We showed him the incredible work being done at @Offutt_AFB and @US_STRATCOM to deter our adversaries and protect Americans. We are grateful for the brave women and men who continue to defend and support our nation.”

ICBM EAR #1 Issue of the Week

Does America Need More Nuclear Weapons?

Editor's Note: In a recent issue of the daily Foreign Affairs, the head of ICAN, Erin Dumbacher discusses whether the US deterrent requires more nuclear weapons than the number adopted in 2010 with the Senate approval of both the New START treaty with Russia and an agreed upon modernization of the US nuclear deterrent, numbering roughly between 1550-2100 deployed strategic or long-range nuclear warheads. She says quite correctly US nuclear weapons are designed to deter but also "defeat peer adversaries if deterrence fails." That implies that in a retaliatory nuclear strike the US can DEFEAT an adversary. However, later in her essay Dumbacher concludes that if nuclear weapons are used, nobody wins, implying defeat of one of the antagonists cannot be achieved. Many of those agreeing with Dumbacher that the US does not need more nuclear forces also often conclude that while good for deterrence, nuclear weapons are no good if deterrence fails, implying nuclear weapons would NOT be used even in a retaliatory mode because any use of nuclear weapons will lead to the all-out exchange of nuclear weapons and thus Armageddon and nuclear winter. That makes nuclear forces nothing more than a deterrent bluff.

However, does first or any use of nuclear weapons automatically lead to nuclear winter and mutual suicide or only true of the US retaliates with nuclear weapons? Do Russia and China have that view? What if the US does not respond with nuclear weapons? What then? If, however, a US retaliation is meant to DEFEAT an adversary that implies there are targets that if the US destroys them will cause the adversary to stand down and be "defeated." That requires deciding what targets have to be held at risk. That requires a certain number of retaliatory warheads being available and that is determined by what deployed USA nuclear systems survive an original Russian or Chinese strike. And those numbers of required warheads are not fixed as that depends on the targets in Russia and China, for example, that need to be held at risk or destroyed. And thus, to assert as Dumbacher does, that the current USA force is sufficient to either sustain deterrence or restore deterrence and "defeat" an adversary assumes our adversaries have a static nuclear force, which of course is obviously not the case. In short, our deterrent requirements will depend on both what China and Russia do now but also into the future. The EAR discussed this issue on the John Batchelor show on Friday August 28th and has written a draft commentary on the same issue which is posted here:

To Arms or Not to Arm: A Question of Numbers

By Peter Huessy

Erin Dumbacher begins her Foreign Affairs essay on a high note and then descends from there into major misconceptions and internal contradictions. Dumbacher correctly explains that US nuclear weapons are designed to deter. Then she correctly lays out the US plans: to "defeat peer adversaries if deterrence fails." Rarely does anyone on the pro-abolition, minimum deterrent part of the nuclear business use "nuclear weapons" and "defeat" in the same phrase. But Dumbacher got it exactly right. To be effective, if deterrence breaks down, the US deterrent strategy must hold at risk (target) what the bad guys value if a conflict (conventional or nuclear) emerges. The objective is not continue the war so everything is destroyed (MAD) but to end the conflict as quickly as possible at the lowest possible level of destruction.

However, from the movie Oppenheimer to Dynamite, a chorus of nuclear deterrent doubters has emerged and Dumbacher appears to join them later in the essay. The message: any retaliatory use of nuclear weapons will result in the all-out use of nuclear weapons by both parties, with the result that thousands of nuclear warheads will detonate across the planet with mutual assured destruction and Armageddon the result. It is not that critics of the US deterrent strategy suddenly decided to raise objections to the US deterrent posture. Since at least 1979, they have tried to change US strategy through the adoption of such ideas as a freeze on US nuclear modernization; the elimination of all our land-based silo ICBMs; the termination of strategic bomber production; and even taking off alert (de-alerting) all our submarines and land based missiles.

While the US has for decades taken our strategic bombers off alert, we have kept a nuclear Triad of forces, with our ICBMs on alert at 98% and around at least one-third of our submarines on continuous patrol in the Pacific and the Atlantic. The US strategy was to ensure that whatever attack might be waged against the US by the USSR, Russia or China, or in some combination of forces, the US would be able to retaliate with enough "assured" force

to take down those assets most valued by our adversary so as to prevent further war-making as our enemies would not have the tools with which to wage further aggression.

Here is where Dumbacher, like many of her likeminded analysts---seems to fall off the nuclear trolley. She assumes that in retaliation the US will strike at an adversary's cities. There are two mistakes in such an assumption. First the US has no policy of burning cities to the ground because cities do not launch missiles at the US and such city-busting strikes are immoral and unethical and violate all principles of law. The second error she makes is in assuming it appears that a Russian or Chinese first strike would be with everything nuclear they have, with no remaining nuclear or military targets for the US to strike in retaliation. Thus, by a process of elimination the US would either burn their cities to the ground or do nothing.

However, if Russia or China launch everything nuclear including the kitchen sink at the United States, or a full-out bolt out of the blue, they would first have to put all their forces on alert, action the US satellite system would readily assess. In addition, any such attack would be suicidal on their part as the US even after being struck would have sufficient retaliatory power to destroy much of China or Russia and their military industry, military weaponry, their leadership and the security forces that keep the leadership in power. In short, they would no longer have the capability to conduct further aggression. So, then what would have been the point of the initial strike? These governments may be evil but there are not suicidal.

In short, if a retaliatory strike by the United States is designed to defeat an adversary, it contradicts Dambacher's concluding thoughts which are that if nuclear weapons are used, nobody wins, implying defeat of one of the antagonists cannot be achieved. Thus, we have later in her essay the strange idea that nuclear forces, while good for deterrence, are no good if deterrence fails. The implication being that nuclear weapons used even in a retaliatory mode would inevitably lead to an all-out exchange of nuclear weapons and thus Armageddon and nuclear winter. That makes American nuclear forces nothing more than a deterrent bluff.

If in fact retaliation is meant to DEFEAT an adversary, that implies there are targets that if destroyed will cause an adversary to stand down and be "defeated." That requires the US to decide what targets have to be held at risk. That in turn requires a certain number of retaliatory warheads being available and that is determined in part by what USA nuclear systems survive an original Russian or Chinese strike. In short, those numbers of required warheads are not fixed or static, as their number depends on the targets that need to be held at risk. And thus, to assert as Dumbacher does that the current USA force is sufficient to either sustain deterrence or restore deterrence and "defeat" an adversary is nonsensical. It depends on what China and Russia do now and into the future which at this time is not known, but it is certainly probably not a future posture characterized by restraint.

The initial nuclear age had the US deploy very large missiles but with very poor accuracy---missing targets by many miles. The only targets we could count on hitting were cities and very large airfields. However, as better accuracy emerged in the US missiles, and beginning largely with President Kennedy, the US adopted a flexible response strategy that culminated in Secretary of Defense Schlesinger in 1974 codifying a strategy which held at risk those elements of Soviet power without which the USSR could not achieve its war objectives. While a US President might be persuaded to stand down in a conflict with Moscow if a few American cities were or might be burned to the ground, that is probably not the case with our communist enemies. As the Black Book of Communism explains, communist nations have killed 120 million of their OWN people to seize, secure and maintain power. This number it must be emphasized are those people in their own country they have willingly murdered to stay in power; to say nothing of the additional millions these communist forces have killed in other countries by their own military forces in war and terrorism carried out since 1917.

Today, the US faces not just two nuclear armed peer enemies, but enemies armed with strategic AND battlefield or regional nuclear forces. These weapons called for by an April 30, 1999 decree by Russian President Yeltsin. He called for the development of small scale, low yield, and highly accurate battlefield nuclear weapons that would give Moscow the capability of winning---with the use of nuclear weapons---on conventional battlefields of the future. The objective was to seek through blackmail and intimidation the collapse of resistance as the West would not seek to fight, especially given its near absence of such theater weapons in its own nuclear arsenal.

The US unilaterally took down 99% of its regional/theater nuclear forces in 1991, under the assumption that Russia was truthfully pledging to do the same. The US has remaining a few hundred plane deliverable gravity bombs. Although seeking to build a Navy based nuclear armed cruise missile and an air launched cruise missile, those elements may not be in the US inventory until after 2030.

The Russian nuclear strategy was identified by two top level defense officials---General John Hyten the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Dr. Brad Roberts of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The Russian strategy was deemed "escalate to win" or "escalate to de-escalate" and was fully revealed in 2024 as a significant change

in formal Russian strategy by the publication of secret Russian documents. Not only would Moscow escalate to the nuclear level but would do so quicker and with fewer barriers than previously adopted thresholds.

These combined developments were identified by the Strategic Posture Commission of the United States as causing a serious weakness in US deterrent capability and that current and projected future deterrent capability needed to be remedied. That does not require matching warhead for warhead the Russian and Chinese force expansion which is projected by some top analysts to reach 6000 *strategic warheads* a decade hence, but it requires a better balance to counter the thousands of theater or tactical nuclear weapons held by both China and Russia. This then does require the US to add to its assured capability in addition to the current Triad modernization programs adopted in 2010 and continuing today. That force level will require significantly greater warheads and not the 2010 adopted level, especially when it was then assumed by the 2012 Cartwright Nuclear Global Zero Commission, that "Russia and China are not enemies of the United States."

Commentary on other elements in the Dumbacher essay.

- Dumbacher says nuke deterrence is needed to prevent the crossing of the nuke threshold. Actually, it is also to prevent conventional conflict from which nuclear weapons might very well be subsequently used/
- Dumbacher then implies that only conventional weapons should be used to deter. But then why place nuclear weapons in Europe and the Pacific throughout the Cold War? And why does European and Asian allies loudly insist US extended nuclear deterrence be sustained, even enhanced?
- That balance is important otherwise why in 1991 did the US eliminate most unilaterally but still insist the Russians follow suit, implying that not doing so would upset the strategic balance even in the post 1991 world when the PNI was undertaken.
- Nuclear weapons especially extended nuclear deterrence anticipated the use of nuclear weapons to stop a Soviet conventional tank invasion of Western Europe—the B2 bomber for example.
- The reason the Europeans insisted we keep nuclear weapons in Europe after the 1991 PNI was precisely because they anticipated the need for theater nuclear forces to deter Russian bad behavior.
- As for the # of Russian strategic and theater nuclear weapons vs the US---in deployed systems the ratio may be 3500 to 1800 on the strategic level and at least 1900-200 at the theater level (or as high as a 4000-200 theater ratio.). There is no parity.
- Ms. Dumbacher says we don't have to match Russian capability at every level of conflict, including every rung of the escalation ladder because the steps of conflict will not necessarily increase rationally and step by step. That may be true, but to answer the use of a theater nuke by Russia with a strategic weapon definitely would probably trigger an immediate rush to a strategic exchange by Russia, risking a major, all-out nuclear conflict.
- Dumbacher says we have plenty of weapons within the 1550 under New START to provide extended deterrence to Europe. Then why do we have 200 gravity bombs (not counted under the New START 1550 limits) in Europe for exactly that purpose?
- And why would the Strategic Posture Commission unanimously recommend we build theater nuclear systems with the very characteristics of the SLCM-N which Dumbacher says we do not need?
- As for our current deterrent needing to be rebuilt, or we face self-disarmament, on that she is 1000% right.
- As for the delays in the submarine system and ICBMs, some delays were deliberately created by previous administrations.
- The ICBM Sentinel costs more than earlier assessed because we discovered that each of the missile silos had very different conditions, and thus dramatically raised the estimated cost of the military construction part of the system to replace or refurbish all 400 along with the miles of cables needed to replace Nc3.

- The Sentinel missile itself costs where the estimates were originally and recently the deployment timeline has moved to the left and cost estimates for the system may decline given the speed with which new vs refurbished silos can be built.
- The Navy has moved up the date at which the first Columbia class submarine will go into the water and the B21 Raider has improved its schedule and is right on budget.
- The NNSA has indeed determined that meeting the 80 pit goal will probably not be achieved, but why would that also eliminate other requirements such as the SLCM-N?

Here is Dumbacher's Foreign Affairs essay:

Expanding the Stockpile Could Weaken Deterrence

Erin D. Dumbacher

August 26, 2026

How many nuclear weapons is enough? The question has haunted policymakers and scholars for 80 years. Early in the Cold War, the United States expanded its nuclear arsenal rapidly in response to the Soviet threat. But beginning in the 1980s, as the two nuclear powers sought ways to reduce nuclear risks, arms treaties helped cut the size of those arsenals significantly, and stockpiles decreased by 80 percent. Now, circumstances are pushing the United States to consider the size of its nuclear arsenal once again. Over the past six years, China has nearly tripled the number of nuclear weapons it has, and according to the U.S. Defense Department, the country is on track to have over 1,000 by 2030. China is not yet a nuclear peer to Russia and the United States, which each deploy roughly 1,550 nuclear weapons in keeping with the limit set by the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, but parity may be Beijing's goal. Meanwhile, the last formal barrier to a U.S.-Russian arms race fell away when New START expired earlier this year.

Faced with these rising dangers, the Trump administration announced in March that it would conduct what it called a "nuclear strategy review." Some strategists recommend that the review include a call for a larger and more diverse nuclear arsenal. A larger arsenal, proponents of expansion argue, would provide the United States with a wider array of choices, especially for an in-kind response to low-yield theater nuclear attacks. Although Russia and the United States have nearly the same number of weapons, Russia possesses a greater number of theater nuclear weapons, which, unlike strategic nuclear forces, are designed for tactical use on the battlefield. China may also be developing more of these types of weapons. Advocates of expansion propose that if Washington can match any nuclear attack blow for blow, Beijing and Moscow will be less likely to initiate a nuclear exchange. According to Trump administration officials, the nuclear review will look at this "theater nuclear forces issue" to "identify where there may need to be changes or additions made."

The United States should take additions to its nuclear forces off the table. The country already has a vast and diverse enough supply of nuclear weapons to unleash devastation on an adversary in the case of a nuclear attack. **The purpose of nuclear deterrence is not to have an answer for every weapon in an adversary's arsenal, but to avoid crossing the nuclear threshold in the first place. Moreover, introducing new theater weapons could provoke an arms race for which the United States is ill equipped and invite risks of inadvertent escalation that would only make the country more vulnerable.** Rather than focus on expanding and diversifying the U.S. nuclear arsenal, **Washington's deterrence strategy should attend to the modernization of its existing strategic forces,** which is behind schedule, and of its conventional arms, which are not fit to deter the United States' greatest military threats, especially Chinese military aggression in the Western Pacific.

MAXED OUT

When the foundations of U.S. nuclear doctrine were laid early in the Cold War, escalation was understood as a ladder. When states encountered crises, their retaliatory actions would follow a vertical climb to more dangerous "rungs." But escalation is unlikely to follow such a neat path, as Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge

Colby argued in May; instead, as he said, there are ways that nuclear powers can shape “the limits of a conflict” and influence how their opponents respond. The goal for modern U.S. nuclear doctrine, therefore, should not be an abstract conception of superiority at all levels of the escalation ladder but practical options to constrain and deter the adversary. The proposal to introduce new theater nuclear forces in Asia or Europe follows the outdated logic that escalation will progress in a rational, orderly way with increasing levels of violence and harm. It does not follow modern reality.

Without arms controls in place, Washington does need to modernize its strategic nuclear forces—high-yield weapons whose purpose is to hold valuable targets at risk—to deter and defend against a nuclear attack on the American homeland or on U.S. allies’ territory. It has been trying to do so for years, since the U.S. Senate ratified New START in 2010, but with mixed results. As part of a deal to gain Senate support for the treaty, U.S. President Barack Obama approved a multidecade program to upgrade the existing nuclear arsenal and delivery systems that is now costing at least \$1 trillion. The decision paved the way for defense contractors and national laboratories to begin replacing bombers, ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarines, warheads, and military communications systems.

More than 15 years later, most of the United States’ nuclear modernization efforts are over budget and behind schedule, despite significant investments in workforce, infrastructure, and congressional appropriations that fulfill and sometimes exceed the funding the Pentagon has requested. In 2015, for example, Congress required that 80 plutonium components for nuclear weapons be built by 2030; Department of Energy officials have since deemed the task impossible. The Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile program was at least 81 percent over budget in 2024, and its first flight test has been delayed by about four years. The B-21 bomber program, which is on track, is the exception, not the rule. The United States is now at risk of nuclear disarmament by default. When the current systems reach end of life, replacements may not be ready. New work orders to build new weapons would only further stretch the nuclear enterprise’s capacity.

CROSSING THE RUBICON

Expanding the U.S. arsenal would not only distract from modernization efforts. It would also invite new risks. A U.S. buildup would likely trigger a steady arms race with other nuclear states—the very outcome that Democratic and Republican administrations worked for decades to avoid through negotiations and mutual arms reduction agreements with Russia. And given the slow pace of the current nuclear modernization drive and the heavy burdens already falling on the U.S. defense industrial base, the United States today is not well positioned to win such a race.

The danger would not stop there. The greater the number and diversity of nuclear weapons, the greater the number of possible miscalculations and signaling problems in a crisis. For example, it would be difficult to distinguish between a nuclear-armed cruise missile that is launched from a fighter jet or submarine and a conventional missile. If the United States builds these capabilities, the Chinese and Russian militaries could mistakenly believe that an incoming conventional U.S. munition is nuclear. And because of the uncertainty, the risk of nuclear use would rise exponentially.

As long as no U.S. leader wants to fight a nuclear war, additional nuclear options, including more low-yield weapons, will be extraneous. Nuclear weapons are not effective for coercing an adversary during a conflict. If Washington responded to a nuclear attack with a nuclear weapon, whether that weapon was of similar yield or caused comparable damage, its opponent would not likely back down. Damage assessments would be hazy. Leaders would be likely to take on more, not less, risk, becoming more inclined to widen the war and respond with more nuclear attacks, including on U.S. territory. Deterrence requires that an adversary perceive both that a U.S. leader will use force and that an alternative course of action is preferable. A more diverse U.S. nuclear arsenal complicates any attempts to reassure the adversary that there is a better way out of a crisis. Ultimately, the potential benefits of expanding the U.S. nuclear arsenal do not justify the costs.

This is not to discount the rising nuclear threats from China and Russia. In 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia would test dangerous new nuclear delivery systems that can loiter near the U.S. coast or maneuver at hypersonic speeds. China has built new silos in its western desert and has tested ballistic missiles in the Pacific. Neither U.S. nuclear weapons nor U.S. missile defense systems such as Golden Dome are likely to eliminate novel Russian systems or China’s nuclear expansion. Still, the United States’ 1,550 deployed bombs and warheads deter nuclear attacks from both China and Russia, provide counterstrike options to limit damage to the homeland if nuclear war does occur, and fulfill U.S. security commitments to allies and partners. Once China has nearly as many nuclear weapons as Russia and the United States, Washington may have new opportunities to pursue new arms control agreements with Beijing and Moscow.

THE NONNUCLEAR OPTION

The United States has long had good reason to place limits on its nuclear forces. In 1964, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara made the point that nuclear bombs would have diminishing returns once 400 strategic warheads—far fewer than Washington had at the time or has today—struck Soviet cities. Arms control agreements between Moscow and Washington since the 1970s have allowed the United States to avoid costly arms races. Dedicating funds to defense research and development enabled the U.S. military to achieve comparative advantages in conventional warfare capabilities, including advanced reconnaissance, combined arms, and precision strikes. Innovative conventional weapons still deliver options for U.S. presidents. [Editor's note: Why not the SLCM-N?]

The Trump administration should similarly be thinking about nuclear weapons in the context of the United States' broader military and deterrence strategy. Nuclear posture reviews have consistently affirmed, over the last four decades, that weapons in the U.S. arsenal are defensive, meant to deter aggression, and defeat peer adversaries if deterrence fails. In practice, the primary means of demonstrating the United States' resolve to deny and defeat its rivals is conventional. The U.S. bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities in 2025 and Ukrainian drone strikes on military and industrial facilities deep within Russia over the last two years were conventional operations that achieved their tactical objectives. It would be sensible practice to include nuclear reviews as part of the national defense strategy process.

ICBM EAR #2 Issue of the Week

The Status of the War Against Ukraine: The Bear Trap

In a report shared by Mark Schneider, **David Maxwell says the war against Ukraine is “increasingly a war of exhaustion, and the decisive variable is regeneration. The strategic question is not simply who possesses more forces today, but who can replace soldiers, weapons, energy infrastructure, industrial capacity, and financial resources faster than the adversary can destroy or exhaust them. Ukraine’s deepest vulnerability, sophisticated air defense, is potentially solvable by its partners. Russia’s demographic, fiscal, industrial, and economic problems are more structural. However, there is danger in assuming that structural weakness automatically produces strategic defeat. It does not. Russia can remain dangerous for years, and Putin may calculate that Western political endurance will break before Russia’s material capacity does. The contest is therefore between Russian strategic exhaustion and Western political exhaustion.” Here is a further analysis:**

Russia is not about to collapse. It still occupies a large part of Ukraine, continues to fire hundreds of drones and missiles at Ukrainian cities, and retains an enormous advantage in population and resources over its smaller neighbor. Yet four and a half years after Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion, the war is beginning to look less like a contest Russia merely needs to endure and more like a trap from which it has no obvious escape, with no path to victory. The problem for Moscow is not any one issue, whether a single battlefield defeat, a new round of sanctions, a budget or manpower shortfall. It is these factors that are beginning to work together, resulting in a slowly weakening hand. Russia needs more soldiers to maintain pressure on the front but recruiting them is becoming increasingly expensive. Its economy needs to sustain the enormous military expenditure, but it has continued to slow down. Oil revenue was long able to finance the state, but Ukrainian drones have increasingly struck refineries, ports, and pipelines, disrupting exports and even domestic supplies. The Reserve Bank has implemented high interest rates to contain inflation, but those same rates are squeezing businesses and increasing the cost of government financing. Finally, it needs to convince both Russians and the outside world that time remains on its side, even as some of its own senior economists are beginning to say otherwise. Now, the Kremlin is stuck in a bear trap. They remain powerful enough to be dangerous, but the harder it struggles to continue the war on its existing terms, the deeper some of its structural problems become, and the longer the tail of them will be into the future. Ukraine has problems of its own, and some are severe. Its manpower remains limited, and its cities are becoming increasingly vulnerable to Russian ballistic missiles. What has changed, however, is that Ukraine is increasingly able to impose costs on Russia far beyond the immediate front line. This means that it is increasingly becoming an industrial war, with the production of drones, missiles and counter-systems becoming the key determinant of immediate success. On that measure, Russia’s position looks considerably less comfortable than the Kremlin would like the world to believe.

A front that is finally moving both ways

For a significant period after the war began, the central assumption was that Russia was advancing slowly. At the same time, Ukraine’s difficulty in replacing troops and equipment meant that Moscow had the advantage of being able to wait out its adversary. That picture has changed. Russia continues to attack across the front and still threatens important Ukrainian positions in Donetsk. Moscow claimed further territorial gains during its summer campaign in August. Yet the pace of Russian advances has slowed substantially, while Ukrainian forces have begun recovering territory in several sectors. On August 12, President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukraine had retaken 745 km² in 2026. Ukrainian open-source mapping project DeepState independently showed a broadly similar pattern, recording 19 settlements returned to Ukrainian control and Russian forces pushed back around several others. This does not amount to a dramatic Ukrainian breakthrough. Russia is still pressing towards important cities in the east, and Ukraine continues to suffer from its own manpower shortages. But it has also damaged the assumption of a slowly advancing, if extremely costly, Russian push. More importantly, Ukraine has increasingly brought the fighting to Russia, far beyond conventional front lines. Over the past several months, Ukrainian forces have rapidly expanded what they call their “middle strike” capability, using drones and other systems to hit Russian air defenses, logistics, fuel supplies and military infrastructure hundreds, and increasingly more than a thousand, kilometers from Ukraine. That campaign has continued to expand. In August alone, Ukrainian drones have struck oil and petrochemical infrastructure in Bashkortostan, around 1,300 kilometers from the Ukrainian border, as well as targets around Saratov, Perm, Ryazan and elsewhere. The Orsk refinery, nearly 1,500 kilometers from Moscow, was forced to shut completely after an August strike. The regional governor warned that sanctions made it difficult to replace damaged imported equipment and that repairs could take six months, with Ukraine aiming to inflict maximum damage on Russian coffers, financing the war.



Ukrainian strikes on Russia from [SBS News](#)

This is important for reasons that extend well beyond the immediate damage. It represents a shift in the risk calculation for both of the actors. Russia spent much of the war benefiting from strategic depth. Factories, refineries, depots and transport networks remained hundreds of kilometers away behind Russian territory, meaning Moscow could rearm the front line while remaining protected. Increasingly, they are now vulnerable.

Kyiv's defense needs help

There is, however, another side to the story. Ukraine is becoming considerably better at striking Russia, while at the same time, it is becoming less capable of stopping Russia from striking Ukraine. The problem here is Patriot missiles, or lack thereof. Russian attacks have increasingly used ballistic missiles, which Ukraine now has very limited viable defences against. The primary means of intercepting these is the American-made PAC-3 missile used by the Patriot system. Ukraine says deliveries of missile interceptors during the first half of 2026 fell to roughly one-third of the year prior. The shortage is highly visible during recent Russian attacks on Kyiv, when Ukrainian Patriot launchers were effectively left without sufficient interceptors and ballistic missiles passed through the air-defence network unopposed. In July alone, Russia fired more than 450 missiles at Ukraine, more than half of them ballistic, according to the Ukrainian Air Force. Zelensky has since argued that receiving even 5% of the American Patriot interceptor stockpile would allow Ukraine to improve its protection through the winter substantially. He has also suggested that Ukraine could produce them under license. His blunt assessment in August was that Ukraine currently had access to around 1%.

Drone and missile strikes since July 1 2022

◆ Russian drone and missile strikes



Russian strikes on Ukraine from [Financial Times](#)

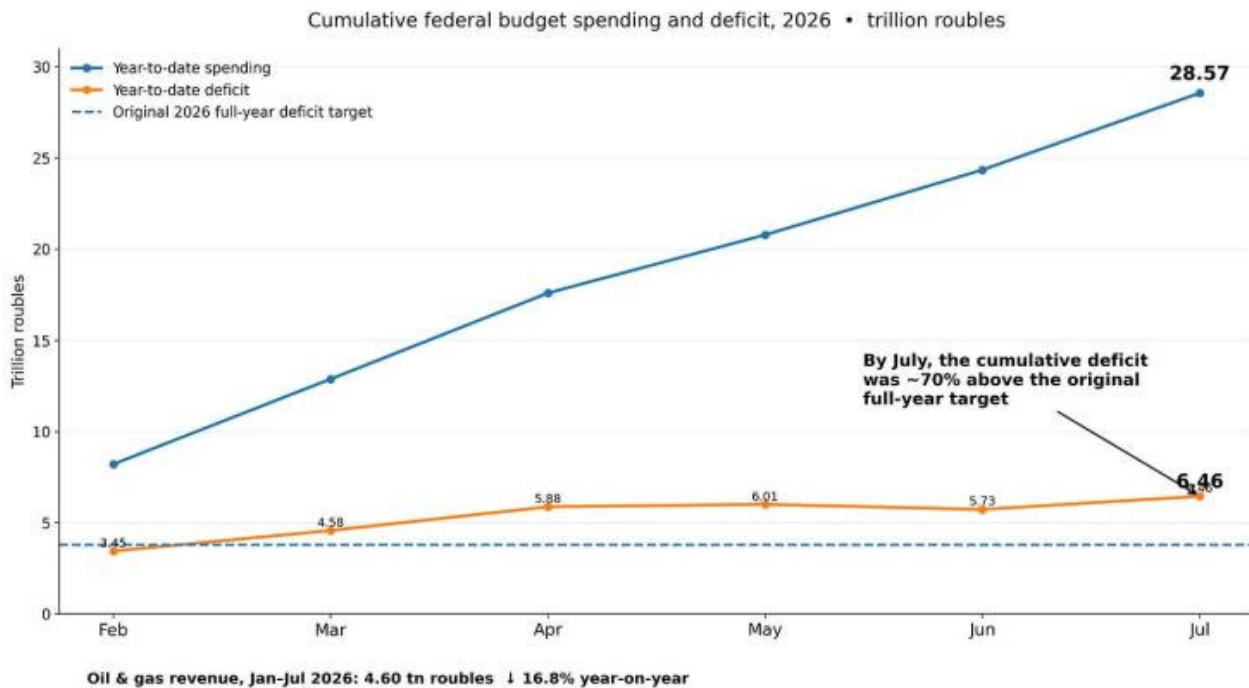
Some of this shortage is industrial. Patriot missiles are expensive, complicated, and currently produced in relatively small numbers. But the US's own [quagmire](#) has intervened. The war with Iran has consumed American weapons and air-defense interceptors while also focusing Washington's strategic attention on the Middle East. Patriot deliveries to Ukraine have dwindled as supplies were diverted elsewhere. The US also largely stepped away from the diplomatic process after its earlier (lackluster) attempts to broker negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow unraveled when the conflict in Iran escalated in February. Washington has not abandoned Ukraine entirely. American officials continue discussing arrangements under which Patriot components could eventually be manufactured in Ukraine or Europe, while European governments continue purchasing American weapons for Kyiv. But those are longer-term solutions to an immediate problem. For Ukraine, this creates a new strategic reality. It can finally start to strike refineries thousands of kilometers inside Russia, yet it is also becoming less able to intercept a ballistic missile heading towards Kyiv. That is perhaps the clearest illustration of where the war stands today. Ukraine's indigenous military capability is becoming more sophisticated, but its most important remaining weaknesses still depend on decisions made outside the country. And for now, it means that for both sides it is advantage attacker.

The war economy reaches its limits

Russia has a different problem. While they possess the resources to continue fighting, maintaining them is becoming increasingly expensive as inflation bites and the economic impacts strain the war machine. For several years, Russia's apparent economic resilience was one of the strongest arguments that sanctions had failed. Growth remained positive. Unemployment was extraordinarily low. Factories expanded production. Military wages

poured money into poorer Russian regions. But much of this was the product of an enormous fiscal stimulus created by the war itself. Russia effectively paid factories to manufacture missiles, artillery shells, tanks and drones which were subsequently destroyed, expended or damaged in Ukraine. The resulting activity still counts towards GDP, but it adds almost nothing to the country's net productive capacity or long-term wealth. Eventually, there are limits to how long an economy can operate this way. Russia's government has now cut its expected economic growth for 2026 from 1.3% to just 0.4%, after the economy contracted during the first quarter. The central bank still maintains a key interest rate of 14%, even after several reductions, while warning that fuel prices, fiscal expansion and inflation expectations continue to constrain its ability to cut further. Russia, therefore, faces an increasingly uncomfortable combination that has seemingly set into the economy. There is weak growth, expensive credit and extraordinarily high government spending, which means that the numbers are becoming harder to disguise. Russia originally planned for a federal budget deficit of around 3.8 trillion rubles this year. By the end of June, the deficit had already reached 5.73 trillion. By the end of July, it had grown to 6.46 trillion rubles, equivalent to roughly 2.8% of annual GDP, with five months of the year remaining. Government expenditure increased 14.5% year-on-year. Oil has helped, but considerably less than might be expected. The war in the Middle East sent global energy prices sharply higher, providing Moscow with an unexpected windfall. Yet Russian oil and gas revenues between January and July were still 16.8% lower than a year earlier, at 4.6 trillion rubles.

Russia's 2026 Budget Gap Keeps Widening



Sources: Russian Finance Ministry figures reported by IPrime/TASS/Interfax (Feb-Jul 2026). The Finance Ministry says the elevated early-year deficit partly reflects advance financing of expenditure.

This is where Ukraine's long-range campaign begins to interact with Russia's financial problems and further explains the strategy. Higher oil prices are extremely beneficial for Russia if it can sell the oil. If refineries are burning, ports are disrupted, pipelines are attacked, domestic fuel shortages occur and expensive equipment cannot be replaced due to sanctions, then this windfall evaporates. Ukraine has made the whole industry more expensive to operate. This has created secondary effects. Russian trucking companies reported fuel price increases of almost 20% over a single month following refinery strikes, increasing transport costs across the entire economy. The Ukrainian campaign has been highly effective at reducing output, reducing oil sales abroad, and creating visible shortages within. A relatively inexpensive drone can force Russia to deploy scarce air defenses hundreds of kilometers behind the front, disrupt production, raise domestic fuel prices, complicate logistics, reduce export revenue, and increase inflation. Ukraine has even sought advice from refining experts to determine the most irreplaceable, highest-impact sites at a refinery to hit, meaning they can be offline for extended periods. The other use of drones has been to hit Wildberries distribution centers across Russia. Their answer to Amazon is Wildberries, an online marketplace that Kyiv claims has been helping supply parts to sustain Russian missile production and has again made the costs of war much more visible in Russian everyday life. This

will not necessarily bring about immediate support for ending the war in a totalitarian regime like Russia; however, it does further erode the government's credibility and the effectiveness of its propaganda.

The man who said the quiet part aloud

Perhaps the most telling indication of the financial pressure being faced came from inside Russia's own financial establishment. On August 17, Russian state development bank VEB dismissed its chief economist Andrei Klepach, a former senior Economy Ministry official and one of the country's better-known macroeconomists. His apparent offense was pessimism. In remarks made earlier this year, Klepach argued that Russia was falling behind economically and technologically and warned that Moscow would not win a prolonged "war of attrition" based on the expectation that Ukraine would eventually collapse. Ukraine had not collapsed, he argued, while Russia's costs continued to accumulate. That assessment is particularly striking because it attacks one of the central assumptions underpinning Russian strategy. Putin does not necessarily need to conquer Ukraine militarily if he believes Russia can outlast it. Moscow can absorb casualties, maintain pressure, wait for Ukrainian society to become exhausted, and hope that Western governments eventually lose interest. For several years, that looked plausible, even the most likely outcome. Today, it looks considerably less certain. Ukraine remains heavily dependent on Europe and the United States for certain categories of weapons, particularly sophisticated air defense. But its economy is increasingly integrated into a much larger European economic system, while its defense industry has become one of the most innovative in the world. European governments can collectively mobilize financial resources that Russia cannot match indefinitely, even if political willingness remains uneven. Russia, by contrast, increasingly has to finance the war from within its own constrained economic system. That distinction becomes more important the longer the war continues.

The bear trap

None of this means Russia is about to run out of money. Countries rarely go bankrupt like companies. Governments can increase taxes, force banks to buy debt, cut civilian expenditure, weaken their currencies, tolerate higher inflation or print more money – especially in an authoritarian state like Russia. They still hold considerable natural resources, an industrial base, and a population accustomed to significantly greater economic hardship than most Europeans would tolerate. Read our Russian net assessment [here](#). Putin himself retains enormous personal power. Russia can therefore most definitely continue fighting. But the costs and long-term economic implications are beginning to stack up. The available solutions now all worsen other problems – it has become an economic game of whack-a-mole played with increasingly expensive hammers. Recruiting more soldiers has become more difficult, meaning wages and signing bonuses have continued to rise. Expanding military production has expanded labor shortages in more productive parts of the economy. Raising taxes breeds discontent and weakens civilian consumption and investment. They have tried borrowing more money, but this leads to rising debt-servicing costs. Cutting interest rates would be ideal, but that risks fueling already high inflation. Those same high rates constrain businesses' investment. Protecting refineries, ports, airbases and logistics hubs far from the front line means resources are dispersed. Military expenditure is straining regional and civilian budgets, while any reduction in military expenditure leads directly to pressure on the war front. This is the bear trap they now find themselves in. A bear trap does not kill the bear immediately. It immobilizes it. Russia can thrash around inside it, and a wounded bear remains extremely dangerous. Moscow is still destroying Ukrainian infrastructure, bombarding cities, and killing thousands of civilians. Its recent missile campaign demonstrates precisely why Ukraine's shortage of Patriot interceptors should worry Europe. But Russia is increasingly fighting a war in which its strategic objectives remain enormous while its room for maneuver is narrowing.

A game of endurance

That leaves the central question of the war increasingly straightforward. Not a balance of military equipment or any small changes on the frontlines. Rather, who can continue replacing what is being destroyed? Ukraine faces some very real constraints. It needs soldiers and has exhausted most recruiting methods. It needs Western financing, which has been slow but is now being provided. Most of all, it desperately needs air-defense missiles. Its energy infrastructure remains vulnerable, and its economy continues functioning under extraordinary wartime conditions. Russia possesses more of almost everything. But Russia also needs to sustain a vastly larger military machine, protect an enormous industrial and energy network, replace enormous battlefield losses, subsidies occupied territories, support defence companies, contain inflation, manage regional finances and convince its

population that the costs remain distant. The balance, therefore, looks more and more like a strange paradox. Ukraine appears more immediately vulnerable, but Russia increasingly looks more structurally trapped. Kyiv can be hurt badly by the absence of several hundred Patriot missiles. That is a very telling and frightening dependency. But it is also one that Ukraine's partners have the industrial and financial capacity to solve if they choose to do so. Russia's problems are harder to fix. Its demographic problems will be in tatters for at least a generation due to hundreds of thousands of casualties and the departure of working-age Russians since 2022. Inflation and stagnant investment continue to worsen irrespective of rate decisions. Temporary surges in oil prices have been offset by damaged refineries rendering them unable to sell it, with Russian western-port oil exports running around 15% below planned levels, largely due to disruptions at Novorossiysk. Even Moscow's reduced global footprint can be understood through this lens. Russian influence has not disappeared from Africa, Syria or elsewhere, but maintaining military commitments far from home becomes harder when the war in Ukraine consumes more money, equipment and attention.

Russia will likely continue fighting as this war is existential for Putin himself. The real question is then how long it can continue fighting like this, with the economic toll compounding and the time needed to rectify structural issues multiplying. The harm to the Russian economy and population will be seen for decades. For much of the war, Putin's greatest strategic asset was time. Russia was larger, Ukraine was dependent on outsiders, and Western attention could reasonably be expected to wander. Four and a half years later, time no longer obviously belongs to Moscow. Ukraine has not collapsed. Europe has not abandoned it. Ukrainian weapons are reaching deeper into Russia. Russian advances have slowed. Its energy infrastructure is increasingly exposed. The fiscal deficit is widening. Its own economists warn that the attritional contest may not end as the Kremlin assumes. Russia remains powerful. It remains dangerous. And it can still inflict enormous suffering on Ukraine. But that's not the same as being in a strong strategic position. The bear is still fighting. But the trap is only getting tighter.

Democratic Socialists of America

What Are the DSA Up To?

Peter Huessy Essay: Stooges

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/22785/democratic-socialists-of-america>

Russia and UK

Desperate Putin expected to ramp up nuclear threats against the UK

Increased threats over Russia's nuclear arsenal come in response to UK-made drones being used by Ukraine in the conflict

INEWS.CO.UK, AUG. 21 | JANE MERRICK.

Moscow is planning to ramp up its nuclear threats on the UK and Europe in a bid to break Nato's resolve, defence insiders and experts have warned. Russian state TV issued a chilling warning to Britain this week that Moscow could deploy its nuclear-armed autonomous "super torpedo," Poseidon, in retaliation for UK-made drones being used by Ukraine to strike Russia. Vladimir Putin's regime claims the missile can strike coastal cities underwater at 120mph and cause radioactive tsunamis that would wreak widespread devastation.

But Western military experts say the alarmist rhetoric is nothing more than verbal threats and Russia is not planning to carry them out because it would trigger an all-out nuclear war with Nato.

Instead, in the short term, Moscow is expected to send a message to the UK in response to the use of British-made drones by escalating its grey zone warfare or more overt activity – below the threshold of triggering Nato's Article 5. Such tactics could include expelling diplomats, firing warning shots near a UK-owned oil rig or even seizing a UK plane or ship. However, the ramped-up threats over Russia's nuclear arsenal appear to be part of a strategy designed to unnervе Britain and its European allies and attempt to destabilize Nato at a time when Donald Trump is already going cool on the alliance. This so-called "nuclear signalling" is becoming an increasingly used propaganda tool alongside its hybrid warfare of cyber-attacks and "shadow fleet" patrols of Nato waters. Putin is facing significant challenges in the Ukraine war having suffered heavy military losses, and the conflict placing strain on the economy. Recent Ukrainian attacks on oil infrastructure and Wildberries, Russia's version of Amazon, have also had an impact. Professor Katarzyna Zysk, professor of international relations and contemporary history at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, said: "Russia does not need every nuclear signal to be believed, but it needs the possibility of escalation to remain sufficiently credible to try to influence Nato. That residual uncertainty can still constrain Nato decision-making. "This week Russia claimed it had tested its newest sub, the Khabarovsk, which it says can carry Poseidon missiles, in the White Sea, and Putin has previously boasted that his military has carried out successful testing of the super torpedo weapon. Although there are major question marks over whether Poseidon really has the capabilities that Moscow claims, unlike the country's aerial missiles, which can be intercepted in flight, Nato has nothing in its arsenal to stop such a weapon.

Moscow 'trying to isolate Britain'

General Sir Richard Barrons, former British Joint Forces commander and co-author of the UK Strategic Defence Review, said Moscow wanted to try to isolate Britain by talking up its nuclear threats to our coastline. He [explained] that the changing nature of the relationship between the Trump administration and Moscow meant the US was no longer "in the face of President Putin on behalf of the West." Barrons added: "They have a different relationship, and the UK is regularly singled out as number one enemy for Russia. There's really nothing new in the fact that weapons the UK has provided or made are being fired into Russia. That's been happening for a long

time now. “What makes it new is this developing sense of the US cavalry not coming, so that makes it easy to talk up threats against big European players because you’re pretty confident that the US is going to keep out of it now. “Barrons said Russia is expected to “dial up” its activities just below the level of open warfare to irritate Europe “in the context where everyone can feel what’s happening in Ukraine coming to some sort of culmination.”

A provoked Europe would be more powerful than Russia

He added: “Russia likes to let the UK and the rest of Europe know that if it wanted to, it’s got the tools to really hurt, and it has the habit of saying those things in order to deter us from doing the things we’re doing, like supporting Ukraine. “But Europe is way more powerful than Russia ... Russia would be beyond crazy to attack Europe because a Europe stirred will be massively more powerful. And of course, the UK uniquely has an independent strategic nuclear deterrent, and so, it has an assurance that only France has in Europe. “Barrons said he did not think any western armed forces or intelligence had seen Poseidon, but added: “Russia have talked it up, and it has become clear that they [Moscow] at least believe they have it.” And it is a worrying thing because if you live on an island with lots of littoral [coastline], there is no way of stopping it. Anti-ballistic missiles don’t work with Poseidon, and so you would have a nuclear weapon slamming into a coastal city, such as New York. “I think there’s very little doubt it exists.”

He said that, like other strategic nuclear weapons, Poseidon’s primary value lies in deterrence and political messaging, since any use of it would almost certainly trigger a retaliatory nuclear response. “It is basically in the traditional basket of Russian threatening behavior.”

Threats give Putin more room for manoeuvre

Zysk said Russia’s use of the threat of nuclear weapons to influence or constrain the behavior of other countries, rather than actually using those weapons, would “widen the space in which the Kremlin believes it can operate below the threshold of direct Nato-Russia conflict.” Her theory is that Russia’s nuclear signaling can make Nato countries more risk-averse, creating more space for the Kremlin to carry out cyber hacks, sabotage, espionage and other grey-zone activities. “Russia’s nuclear arsenal provides a strategic backdrop against which Moscow conducts more aggressive non-military/hybrid operations, while at the same time trying to limit the risk of direct confrontation with Nato,” she said. “Reminding Nato about systems such as Poseidon and Burevestnik [a Russian nuclear cruise missile] aim to reinforce Russia’s broader coercive strategy [of using pressure and intimidation to influence other countries’ decisions], even when they do not constitute credible threats at this moment. “Zysk said while Russia overused its nuclear threats during the first year of its war with Ukraine, reducing its credibility, “a diminished credibility is not the same as irrelevance.” “Even though the public discourse on possible nuclear use has been less prominent, Russia has continued its aggressive nuclear-signaling campaign, nonetheless,” she added. “The Russian TV presenters referring to Poseidon and Burevestnik in the report on UK-made drones fits this pattern. While Russian state TV does not always take direct speaking notes from the Kremlin, it is still an important element of the information environment that can help to magnify signals directed at the public at home and abroad.”

Iran Corner

Commentary of Interest

Trump is winning the Iran war— stay the course

At this point, the two sides are in the final stages of staring each other down: Now is not the time for Washington to blink.

Iran's president says U.S. memorandum is best path out of stalled war

In a speech published by state-run IRNA early on Sunday, the President of Iran says members of Iran's Supreme National Security Council believed the memorandum represented the best possible agreement based on what he described as dignity, wisdom and the national interest.

U.S. conducting stealth operation to transport oil through Hormuz

The U.S. military has quietly established a shipping corridor in and out of the Strait of Hormuz to transport millions of barrels of oil each day — a notable success even as the broader war remains at a stalemate, two U.S. officials told Axios.

Traffic in Strait of Hormuz skyrockets nearly 400%, as analysts say Iran's grip on critical waterway weakens

Nearly 200 ships navigated the strait last week, up from 150 the previous week and just 40 two weeks earlier, according to data from the UK Maritime Trade Operations Center.

Iran hacks reveal weak spot on US, UK water, power grids as regime aims to maximize disruption: expert

When hackers linked with the regime went after water facilities in 12 states last month, they also shut down a UK power plant for four days in a first-of-its-kind attack around the same time, UK officials confirmed Saturday.

Iran Nuclear Update: The Secretary of the SNSC in Iran Calls for Building Nuclear Weapons

As some American analysts now believe that nuclear weapons no longer serve as an effective deterrent, Iran's top security official has suggested Tehran could reconsider its longstanding rejection of nuclear weapons, arguing that US attacks on Iran have strengthened the case for acquiring an atomic bomb as a deterrent. Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said Washington had demonstrated that adherence to the global nuclear non-proliferation system offered countries little protection from military attack. The whole world is saying, 'Wait a minute.' So, the NPT has no effect?' Rezaei said in an interview broadcast by Iranian state television. "When America is waging such a war, people naturally ask: Why shouldn't we pursue nuclear weapons ourselves? Rezaei, a former commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Guards, stopped short of saying Iran had decided to build a nuclear weapon. But his remarks were unusually explicit for one of the Islamic Republic's most senior security officials. Iran has long maintained that its nuclear program is peaceful and has rejected the development and use of atomic weapons. Rezaei argued that Iran had subjected itself to extensive international monitoring, joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and ultimately accepted the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the JCPOA. "The level of safeguards and inspections carried out in Iran over the past two decades has been unprecedented anywhere else in the world," he said. Yet Iran and its nuclear facilities were ultimately attacked, Rezaei said, arguing that this had changed the calculation around nuclear deterrence. "Why shouldn't

we develop a nuclear weapon so that nobody can attack us?” he said, describing the question he said countries were now asking. The comments come at an especially volatile moment in the US-Iran confrontation, with diplomacy following the war and subsequent ceasefire largely stalled and Washington shifting its focus towards intensified economic pressure. US officials have presented the pressure campaign as a way of forcing Tehran towards an agreement while reducing the need for another large-scale military offensive. **Iranian officials have rejected the threats, while maintaining that Tehran remains open to diplomacy.** The 60-day negotiating period associated with the US-Iran memorandum expired last week without a breakthrough, leaving the two sides at odds over sanctions, Iran’s nuclear program and the Strait of Hormuz. Rezaei, who recently took over as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, has adopted an increasingly confrontational posture, saying Iran would move towards a “fully offensive” military strategy if diplomacy failed. In the TV interview, he went further, explicitly contrasting the cost of a nuclear deterrent with conventional military power. “If a country possesses a nuclear weapon, it can be cheaper and more effective than having hundreds of F-35s and spending enormous amounts of money on other military capabilities,” he said. Rezaei blamed Trump for undermining the wider non-proliferation system. “Trump has made a mistake by attacking Iran ... **Many countries are now looking for ways to reconsider the international nuclear order.**” he said. **“Wasn’t that foolish?”**

Special Tribute

THANK YOU GENERAL [RET] MIKE FLYNN FOR DISTRIBUTING THIS ESSAY

Five Years at Abbey Gate: Remembering the Thirteen Who Gave Their Lives to Help Others

BY: ALEX OMHOFF

Today (Wednesday August 26th) marks five years since the bombing at Abbey Gate, one of the entrances to Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. On August 26, 2021, in the chaos of America's final withdrawal from Afghanistan, a suicide bomber affiliated with ISIS-K detonated explosives in the middle of a crowd desperate to escape the country. Thirteen U.S. service members were killed. So were more than 170 Afghan civilians, men, women and children who had spent days standing in sewage canals and crushing crowds for the smallest chance of a seat on a plane out.

It is easy, five years later, to let that day become a statistic, a line in a broader story about the end of a twenty year war. But at Abbey Gate there was nothing abstract about what happened. There were young Marines and a Navy corpsman and an Army soldier standing at the edge of an ocean of frightened people, pulling babies out of arms, checking documents, making split second decisions about who could pass through the gate and who could not. They were not standing behind walls. They were standing in the crowd, because that is what it took to search people, to keep the line moving, to try to save as many as they possibly could in the little time they had left.

Their names deserve to be spoken in full:

1. Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Darin T. Hoover
2. Marine Corps Sergeant Johanny Rosario Pichardo
3. Marine Corps Sergeant Nicole L. Gee
4. Marine Corps Corporal Hunter Lopez
5. Marine Corps Corporal Daegan W. Page
6. Marine Corps Corporal Humberto A. Sanchez
7. Marine Corps Lance Corporal David L. Espinoza
8. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Jared M. Schmitz
9. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Rylee J. McCollum
10. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Dylan R. Merola
11. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Kareem M. Nikoui
12. Army Staff Sergeant Ryan C. Knauss
13. Navy Hospital Corpsman Third Class Maxton W. Soviak

That is the part of this story that deserves to be said plainly and without flinching. Those thirteen did not die manning a checkpoint from a safe distance. They died with their hands on the shoulders of strangers they were trying to get to safety. They spent their final hours doing the most human thing imaginable in an inhuman situation, refusing to let fear stop them from reaching one more person, one more family, one more child. Nicole Gee had been photographed days before cradling an Afghan infant in her arms, a photo that would circulate the world within hours of her death. That image says more than any casualty count ever could. She was not there to process paperwork. She was there because a baby needed to be held.

And it was not only the Americans. Afghan interpreters, guards, and civilians working the gate that day were caught in the same blast, killed in the same instant, trying to help their own people reach the same gate to the same uncertain future. Their names are less known outside their own families, but their courage was no smaller.

Five years on, the debates about how the war ended, who bears responsibility, and what could have been done differently will continue, as they should. But debates about policy should never be allowed to crowd out the plain fact of what these people did in their last moments alive. They gave their lives to help others, not for themselves. In a withdrawal that so many remember as chaos and failure, it is worth holding onto the truth that some of the very last American service members in Afghanistan spent their final hours trying to save people who were not their own countrymen, simply because they were within reach and needed help.

That is worth remembering, not just today, but every year the calendar turns to August 26th

About the ICBM EAR

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

Weekly ICBM EAR Report

Prepared by Peter Huessy

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