

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

Prepared by Peter Huessy

President of GeoStrategic Analysis

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

Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy

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ICBM EAR Week of September 13th 2026

Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis, Senior Fellow, National Institute for Deterrence Studies, Senior Fellow, Gold Institute for International Strategy, and Weekly Nuclear Deterrent Guest, The John Batchelor Show.

NIDS Seminar: J8 Strategic Command

Transcript and Video of the Robert Taylor (J8 StrategicCommand) Nuclear Deterrent Seminar of September 11



NIDS_Robert_Taylor_
Seminar_Transcript_S

On behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS), thank you for joining us for the recent NIDS Seminar: ***Strategic Deterrence in a Multipolar Nuclear Environment with Mr. Robert Taylor*** hosted by Peter Huessy. We are delighted by the success of the event and grateful for the engaging discussions and thoughtful questions from attendees like you. Attached, you will find the event transcript. You can access the recorded seminar through the following link: <https://youtu.be/i3Cxj7KBsnE> We will house the video and transcript on our website under "past Seminars."

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

Agence France-Presse: "Poland and Ukraine denounced Russian strikes close to the Polish border, including on a Warsaw-bound train and near a frontier checkpoint, as an escalation in the war."

Finnish Defense Ministry: The country is joining France's nuclear deterrence initiative, a "natural step" that allies Norway, Sweden and Denmark have already taken.

Chinese Foreign Ministry: Beijing opposes "groundless suspicion and accusations" that Chinese entities supplied Iran with satellite images of a U.S. military base in Jordan before and after an Iranian missile strike in July that killed three American soldiers.

Finnish President Alexander Stubb: "The defense partnership between Finland and France is deepening. Our cooperation took a significant step forward this summer when France announced its contribution of troops to NATO's Forward Land Forces in Finland."

"China's military leadership is expected to outline its aims for global security when it hosts its annual defense forum this week amid churning tensions in its own neighborhood over Taiwan, the South China Sea and doubts about U.S. commitments to Asia. Strikes close to the Polish border, including on a Warsaw-bound train and near a frontier checkpoint, as an escalation in the war."

United Russia Party Chairman, Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev: Nuclear weapons could be used in certain cases, that's reality.

Russian Spokesman Press Secretary Peskov: Lithuanian authorities' plans to lift constitutional ban on nuclear arms deployment is another round of escalation.

Peskov: The Lithuanian authorities' readiness to remove a provision from the constitution prohibiting the deployment of nuclear weapons in Lithuania will be a serious round of escalation.

Peskov: If Lithuania hosts nuclear weapons aimed at Russia, the territory of this country will also be in the crosshairs of Russian nuclear weapons.

Parliament Speaker Juozas Olekas: Lithuania Plans to Remove Nuclear Weapons Ban From Constitution.

International Strategic Developments

North Korea: Fired multiple ballistic missiles over the weekend part of a coordinated attack drill involving drones and other weapons in a demonstration of “huge destructive power.”

Finland joined the French forward deterrence initiative. The Finnish government believes the initiative is first and foremost about strengthening European security. It reinforces Europe’s responsibility for its own defense and helps prevent escalation. The French initiative does not replace or overlap with NATO’s nuclear deterrence. Finland’s foremost priority is to act as part of NATO and the European Union. Finland does not intend to station nuclear weapons on its territory in peacetime.

China’s military leadership is expected to outline its aims for global security when it hosts its annual defense forum this week amid churning tensions in its own neighborhood over Taiwan, the South China Sea and doubts about U.S. commitments to Asia.

Lithuania and Nukes

The Seimas (parliament) of Lithuania: Plans to adopt a constitutional amendment in early 2027 to remove the provision prohibiting the deployment of nuclear weapons on the country’s territory, and to lift this ban early in 2027.

US and Middle Eastern officials: Iran has resumed production of ballistic missiles using stockpiled components and working in underground facilities.

Congressional Strategic Developments

Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-CA) said: “We’re seeing more warnings about the potentially catastrophic risks of AI from bioweapons to nuclear threats. That’s why I co-led the bipartisan ATOMIC Act with @RepMaloyUtah to prevent AI-related nuclear risks before they become real-world emergencies.”

DoW BUDGET: DoW Comptroller Jules Hurst: With reconciliation uncertain, Pentagon eyeing plan to retool FY27 priorities with Congress. If Congress does not pass the full \$350 billion reconciliation funding requested by the Pentagon, the department is prepared to work with lawmakers to figure out how to shuffle key priorities into the base budget.

Administration Strategic Developments

U.S. Pacific Command: “#Freedom Edge 2026 Wraps Up. Five days. Three nations. One mission — a free and open Indo-Pacific. From maritime maneuvers and air refueling to cyber coordination and medical drills, U.S., Japanese, and ROK forces trained side by side across air, sea, and cyber domains — sharpening the interoperability that keeps the region secure.”

NNSA Administrator Brandon Williams: “The Nuclear Security Enterprise is delivering critical capabilities at speed and strengthening the industrial capacity needed to stay ahead of evolving global threats. By executing our modernization programs ahead of schedule, we are strengthening America’s deterrent and supporting President Trump’s commitment to peace through strength.”

Maj. Gen. Ty Neuman, commander of Eighth Air Force, activated B-21 Integration Detachment 1 at Ellsworth Air Force Base this week, marking the “formal establishment of a commander-led enterprise dedicated to coordinating, synchronizing and executing the complex integration” of the next-generation bomber at its first main operating base.

The NNSA: The Y-12 National Security Complex completed production of the B61-13 Canned Subassemblies (CSAs) **approximately seven months ahead of schedule**, supporting the program’s final production-unit requirements.

ICBM #1 Essay of the Week

Excerpt/Summary:

What happened? Lewis thinks the U.S. ruined any chance for arms control by getting out of the ABM Treaty in 2002. It was only then that Russia and China decided to go forward with their own aggressive nuclear modernization plans. What’s wrong with this grievance theory of nuclear arms racing? First, while the U.S. did jettison the ABM Treaty in 2002, over the next decade the U.S. and Russia agreed to two strategic arms deals with Russia—the Moscow Treaty and New START which cut nuclear warheads from 6000 to roughly 2000, a big 67% reduction. Second, the U.S. decided in 2010, some 16 years ago, in a bi-partisan agreement between the Obama administration and the U.S. Congress, to proceed with the nuclear modernization effort we are now undertaking. Third, the U.S. is not engaging in any arms race or contemplating entering such a race as the modernization effort only replaces our legacy nuclear systems that are between 42-70 years old. And that replacement would leave the U.S. with a nuclear deterrent force at exactly the level agreed to under the New START agreement of 2010. Fourth, the decisions have been made to undertake this modernization effort as the only alternative would have been to gradually disarm through ongoing obsolescence. And fifth, the current U.S. policy is hardly a reversal of 2010’s decision. It is in fact a continuation of the 2010 non-partisan agreement to bolster our nuclear deterrent for what now appears to be an even more difficult and tough future nuclear environment.

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2026/09/11/always_blame_america_1205493.html

ICBM Essay #2 of the Week

Douglas Feith in the *Washington Post* writes that an essential lesson of the September 11 attacks is that perils grow when enemies conclude that America lacks the will, capability, or staying power to defend itself. To preserve an open society at home, Americans had to act strongly abroad to prevent follow-on attacks.

ICBM EAR Essay #3: From the Epoch Times

Is China Weakening as the US Gains Strength? Food for thought in this interesting essay.

Commentary

When Chinese Communist Party leader Xi Jinping warned President Donald Trump about the “Thucydides Trap,” he was talking about the risk of war with China, presumed to be a rising power, threatening the United States, presumed to be the declining power.

Xi invoked [the concept](#) during his May 2026 meeting with Trump in Beijing.

But is that a realistic assumption?

What Is the Thucydides Trap?

The term comes from ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who wrote about the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta.

Trump Says China ‘Relatively Inactive’ on Iran as Xi, Pezeshkian Hold Brief Talks

Harvard political scientist Graham Allison later popularized the phrase the “[Thucydides Trap](#).” His argument was that when a rising power threatens to displace an established power, fear and miscalculation can make military conflict more likely.

The message behind Xi’s warning seems unmistakable. **China and America should avoid falling into a cycle in which one country’s rise automatically produces fear and confrontation in the other. Xi also made the point that China was the rising power in this scenario while the United States is characterized as the declining power.**

Is US Decline Real, Inevitable, and Imminent?

Xi Jinping’s claim that America is declining isn’t new, nor is it unfounded. The United States certainly has some serious economic problems. Over the past 40 years, manufacturing moved to China and elsewhere. The national debt is over \$40 trillion, and the income gap is at 30-year highs. What’s more, interest rates remain high, as do oil prices and inflation overall. Furthermore, the bond market is flagging and consumer confidence has fallen. The middle class is shrinking and housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable. Home ownership among Gen Z is a fraction of what it was to the equivalent generation in 1990. These are just a few of the economic challenges facing the United States.

China’s Rise to Global Economic Powerhouse

There’s no doubt that China is an enormous economic force in the world, and that it occurred at the expense of the U.S. and other Western economies. **Its vast and cheap workforce transformed the global economy over the past two decades. Today, its GDP is second only to America’s.** China’s not only the world’s manufacturing leader, but it is also the world’s biggest importer of energy, food and commodities, providing an enormous market for other nations. **Additionally, China is the leader in rare earth elements, and is a major player in foreign investment, although Beijing has lessened those in recent years. Ut sheer economic size and dominance in certain markets aren’t the same thing as economic momentum or sustainability. That distinction is critical.**

China’s Economic Rise May Have Peaked

China officially reported 5 percent GDP growth in 2025. The [IMF](#) projects growth of about 4.5 percent in 2026 and, most importantly, expects growth to slow further over the medium term.

There are several structural and policy reasons for this, such as an aging population, a [shrinking labor force](#), declining returns on investment, and weaker productivity growth.

China does not have to enter an outright recession to face [a structural decline](#).

If GDP grows 4 percent while the population and workforce shrink, productivity slows and debt rises, China can become a weaker economic competitor even while its headline GDP continues to increase. Perhaps just as important, the economic figures Beijing actually puts out are most likely inflated to justify the Chinese Communist

Party's continued existence. The real issue is therefore not whether China's GDP is already falling. It is whether the economic model that powered China's extraordinary rise can continue producing the same results.

Xi Diverting Attention From China's Big Problems?

But is a perceived declining United States the only possible explanation for Xi's warning, or could there be another motivation behind it? The reality is that the leader of the Chinese Communist Party could have been talking about something else entirely. In fact, things may be the exact opposite of how Xi portrayed them. The truth is that China's economic rise is losing momentum in several key metrics, amounting to what has been called a structural slowdown. For example, domestic demand is at its weakest in years. The property sector, once a third of China's GDP, is still in crisis, still cratering. What's more, China's once vaunted labor force is shrinking, and yet youth unemployment remains persistently high at 16 percent or more. As a result, China is becoming increasingly dependent on exports to compensate for weakness at home. Those are structural changes, not just temporary conditions. Globally, direct foreign investment into China is also cratering, down 99 percent from just a few years ago, and international sentiment has turned against China due to its adversarial trade policies. Nations are no longer willing to accept China's artificially low-priced products that destroy their manufacturing base, and the massive intellectual property theft that comes with trading with China. China's rise may have already peaked—and Xi is using the language of great-power rivalry to distract attention from an increasingly difficult economic and social reality.

Is China Wary of a Resurgent US?

A good case can be made that Beijing sees its advantages rapidly shifting away from itself and toward the United States. For example, global manufacturers are fleeing China. Many will be relocating to the United States under Trump's new trade deals he's made over the past couple of years. Those deals represent an estimated \$15 trillion in new factories, potentially millions of new jobs, and a higher GDP. This manufacturing renaissance is only starting to materialize and will have a significantly positive impact on the U.S. economy going forward. Additionally, individual and business taxes and regulations have been cut and domestic energy production is at an all-time high. But again, the growth effect of those factors will be seen over time. On the global stage, the United States has cut China's access to cheap energy through its actions in Venezuela and Iran. Those same actions have served to diminish Beijing's influence around the world.

The Thucydides Trap Paradox

Of course, reality is complex. In some areas, China is undoubtedly a rising power confronting American power. It's a global leader in AI, robotics, bio-tech, hypersonic weapons, and other critical areas. But its internal structural weaknesses and adversarial trade policies, both created and driven by the Chinese Communist Party, pose bigger threats to China's economy than America's economic resurgence. The paradox of the Thucydides Trap is that China, having already peaked, may be seeing its window to compete against the United States closing, and therefore may see aggression as the only way to prevent its own decline. It's worth recalling that China isn't the first communist regime to predict the decline of the United States. The Marxists in the old Soviet Union said the same thing 60 years ago and today resides in the dustbin of history.

ICBM Ear Essay #4

"A Ship's a Fool to Fight a Fort": Chokepoints, Coastal Firepower, and the New Contest for the Maritime Commons, By Adm. James O. Ellis Jr. via *Strategika*

"Naval forces can no longer assume uncontested access to the world's chokepoints," Distinguished Visiting Fellow James O. Ellis Jr. writes for *Strategika*. "That is the strategic fact of our era, and it demands answers," the career naval officer argues. Traditional sea powers must adapt on two fronts, Ellis says: preventing chokepoint closures through deterrence by denial and mitigating them through resilience by design. The first task means "convincing any adversary that an attempt to close a chokepoint will fail—or cost far more than it gains." Ellis lays out six priorities for achieving such deterrence. The second layer rests on an acknowledgment that "deterrence can fail, and honest strategy plans for it." Ellis says strategic reserves of energy, as well as plans to bypass chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, offer ways to stay in the fight when deterrence breaks down.

ICBM Essay #5

Nuclear Insurance You Can Bank On*

By Peter Huessy

The Congressional Budget Office is charged by Congress to carefully examine the spending implications of government funded programs including those in the Department of War. Some decades ago, CBO assessed the cost of the nation's nuclear deterrent particularly the Triad of strategic bombers, submarines and the sea launched ballistic missiles they carried and the land based ICBMs in silos. The CBO also estimated the cost of the warhead and nuclear laboratories maintained by the Department of Energy (now the National Nuclear Security Administration within DOE) and the cost of our nuclear command and control or NC3. One early report garnered a lot of national attention because CBO headlined its report with the startling estimate that the nation's nuclear deterrent was going to cost \$1 trillion. Even in Washington, D.C., that was a lot of money.

But CBO played a few clever tricks to get to that number. First, CBO said this was the cost of "nuclear modernization" or the new nuclear weapons systems. It was that but a lot more. All the current legacy and very old system costs were also included, systems that now are from 40-70 years old, hardly what one would include under the rubric of "modernization." Second, CBO also included all 100 strategic B21 bombers although only 20 of the bombers were going to be in the deployed nuclear arsenal. Third, CBO arbitrarily decided that the estimated costs would be for three decades, triple the length or duration of budgets usually presented by an administration in February of each year when the Federal budget proposals are required to be submitted to the US Congress. And fourth and finally, CBO decided to add a 3% inflation kicker over the three decades which mathematically more than doubled the actual costs of the nuclear modernization enterprise.

So, in their 2013 report, for example, CBO trumpeted that nuclear forces would cost \$1 trillion (over the next 30 years), generating headlines across the news media, engendering the shock and awe they wanted to create, hoping strong opposition in Congress would develop that would cut back significantly on the modernization effort. And just so Congress would get the message, another favorite regular past time of CBO was to do a regular excursion of killing the land based silo ballistic missiles to examine what force alternatives would provide what kind of budget savings.

CBO was strongly criticized for these sleight of hand magic tricks and eventually CBO made two key adjustments---they estimated the bomber costs at the 20 not 100 to be in the force. And CBO admitted that modernization should not include the ongoing sustainment and maintenance of the current legacy force.

Nonetheless CBO as one senior USAF general told me got its "bumper sticker and press release headline" and made nuclear investments look out of line with the rest of government requirements. The nuclear abolition enthusiasts took the number and ran with it and even came up with their own estimates near the \$2 trillion mark by making the same mistakes that CBO was making but also adding even more of their own.

Senator John Hoeven of North Dakota (R-ND) put things in perspective two years ago when he explained that as a member of the defense appropriations subcommittee in the Senate, he had a front row seat when examining the nuclear portion of the defense budget. And yes, the Senator supports in his state two elements of the US nuclear Triad---150 Minuteman missile silos and B52 strategic bombers, the only state with two parts of the nuclear Triad. Senator Hoeven laid out in late 2024 that the entirety of the nuclear Triad modernization cost for FY2025 for the nation was \$18.6 billion annually for the B21 bombers, the Columbia-class submarines and companion upgraded D-5 missile and the Sentinel ICBM. One could add the costs of the associated NC3 and warheads, but whether or not the US modernized the Triad these other elements would have had to be acquired irrespective of whether for the legacy or modernized force.

Now to be fair those Triad costs are now upwards of \$26 billion as the country moves toward full annual production of each of the Triad elements. As acquisition costs increase, research and development costs decline. Also, sustainment and maintenance of our legacy forces continues, with some of those costs rising as much as 17% annually. What is remarkable is that despite being 55 years in service, the 20th USAF commanders have been able to sustain the Minuteman III force at a 98% alert rate, an extraordinary achievement, and a tribute to the leadership of 20th USAF that has recently changed hands with the retirement of USAF Maj Gen Stacy Huser. [And hats off to our Ohio-class sub and B52/B2 bomber folks as well.]

CBO largely misses any acknowledgement of such challenges to sustaining the US legacy nuclear force. After the collapse of the USSR, CBO went on many alternative defense budget excursions that had at their core an assumption (often reflecting the tenor of some Congressional initiatives) that US restraint and minimum investments in defense including nuclear forces was the way to proceed. This included a parallel and nearly zero attention to the looming threat of China as a possible nuclear peer competitor. [Although the US-China Economic

and Security Commission regularly and fairly examined the national security dangers facing the US due to China's rapid and accelerating defense and technology investments.]

In looking into the future, CBO also largely missed another aspect of the entirety of the budget requirements for the nation's nuclear deterrent. The Columbia class submarine and the Sentinel ICBM forces will both remain in the force through 2080-5. That means these two elements of the nuclear Triad will have to be replaced, under currently projected conditions, but not for half a century or more. Using the current estimates for the research, development, and acquisition costs of Sentinel (\$140 billion) and Columbia (\$138 billion), plus \$15 billion for the required new and life extended warheads, the costs now to the US taxpayers for each of the next 30 years comes to roughly \$9.76 billion a year, which is more than what Americans spend for food on the 4th of July (\$7 billion) and 1/122nd of what Americans spend on insurance each year. And for 80 years that nuclear insurance policy called deterrence has never had to cash out.

*This essay will be posted on RealClearDefense September 18th. Peter Huessy is President and Founder of Geostrategic Analysis.

Gatestone Institute

Gatestone and Special Kinds of Victims and Human Rights

- The human rights industry's favorite kind of victim is the politically useful one: the victim whose suffering can be attached to an adversary — a designated "villain" preferably one that Western activists already know how to hate, pressure and organize against.
- That is why Palestinian victims, when Israel can be cast as an alleged perpetrator of wrongs, generate an extraordinary machinery of outrage, while Sudanese victims of genocide, Afghan women under the Taliban, Iranian protesters murdered by their own regime, or persecuted Christians in Nigeria largely do not.
- The hierarchy is not determined by the severity of the suffering; it is determined by the political usefulness of the victim and, even more importantly, by the identity of the "villain" supposedly committing these wrongs.
- A United Nations fact-finding mission concluded in February 2026 that the mass executions, gang rapes and engineered starvation... in Sudan bore the hallmarks of genocide, and that genocidal intent was the only reasonable inference the evidence allowed.
- The finding produced -- communiqués! No American campus has been covered with Sudanese encampments. No international campaign demands that corporations prove their innocence regarding Khartoum....
- No permanent encampment stands outside Harvard demanding freedom for Afghan women, no divestment movement has become fashionable, no symbol has reached a red carpet. UN Women warns that the repression is being normalized.... The women remain where they were; the audience has left.
- The West's response to Iran's January massacre took the form of diaspora rallies and a condemnation signed by 800 film professionals. The industry that produced five thousand signatures against Israeli film festivals produced eight hundred against a government that had just shot thousands of its own citizens in 48 hours, and its own trade press said so.
- The American students who occupied buildings for Gaza risked nothing worse than a disciplinary hearing and offered the Iranian protesters nothing.
- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which has spent seventeen years asking Washington to treat Nigeria as a country of particular concern, counts nearly 53,000 civilians killed there in targeted violence since 2009.

- [A] successful cause needs more than victims. The favorite victim is not the one who suffers most, but the one whose suffering can be put to political use. A successful cause needs a *usable* "villain," ideally one already circulating in the narrative. Israel serves that purpose almost perfectly. It is Western-aligned, democratic, backed by Washington and permanently accessible to journalists. Its politicians answer questions, its courts rule against its government, and all of it can be pressured.
- Western outrage has acquired a political economy: a successful cause needs more than victims. It needs a usable villain, ideally one already circulating in the narrative. Israel serves that purpose almost perfectly. It is Western-aligned, democratic, backed by Washington and permanently accessible to journalists. Its politicians answer questions, its courts rule against its government, and all of it can be pressured.
- Nothing comparable can be organized against the Taliban.
- Dictatorships make poor targets for performative activism because dictators are immune to performance. Attacking Israel connects an activist to an apparatus of campus groups, NGOs and networks assembled over decades, with the slogans pre-written and the vocabulary standardized. A 19-year-old needs to know nothing about the Middle East to take part. He needs a placard.
- Sudan requires homework, and knowing about Iran's regime would require him to concede that the enemies of American power are frequently worse than what they oppose.
- Consistency is the one thing the machinery fails to supply. A movement that really meant what it says about universal rights would mobilize for captives whose slaveholders, such as Qatar, enjoy vast assets. It would protest child trafficking and organ harvesting and defend Afghan women and Iranian dissidents. Palestinian civilians would be defended as civilians rather than as evidence. Such a movement would be difficult to manipulate, impossible to monetize and useless to every exploiting faction, which explains well enough why nobody has built one.

We have just passed the 25th Anniversary of the attacks of 9-11. In the Commission report on the attack, Iran was determined to have provided logistical help, training and sanctuary for the attackers. In a case decided in the Federal Southern District Court of the United States, it was determined by Judge Daniels that Iran, especially the IRGC commander Soleimani, was responsible for the attacks along with Al Qaeda and both Osama Bin Laden and Khalid Sheik Muhammed. The Commission report made two recommendations---create a different intelligence gathering and analysis structure and provide funds for "disaffected youth" in the Arab, Islamic and Middle Eastern world. Here is an analysis of the US response to 9-11 and the 9-11 Commission report.

America 25 Years After 9/11

by Amir Taheri

September 13, 2026

- The commission asked why it was that terrorists especially hated America but provided no answer. The answer could be found in hundreds of books, articles and sermons that make the rounds across the globe, including in the United States itself. In fact, though you might find it odd, the bulk of what the global anti-American industry produces comes from the US itself. The US is an "evil animal" because it can bite back when bitten. The 9/11 Commission failed in its mission.
- The culture war between the MAGA camp and the wokeist coalition of crypto-communists and bleeding heart liberals shows that the failure has continued for a quarter of a century. The hate-America ailment has crept even into the commemoration ritual in New York.

This year, however, there was a small but significant change in the mise-en-scène of the annual commemoration of the September 11, 2001 attacks, as families of victims reportedly planned to shun Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who does not endorse the generally accepted narrative of what was the biggest terror attack in history. In other words, a tragedy that initially brought all Americans together in anger and grief may now forge into another fissure along partisan lines, at least in New York. Pictured: Mamdani arrives ahead of the ceremony at the National September 11 Memorial in New York on September 11, 2026.

On Friday morning, the great city of New York once again held a ritual ceremony that has become a fixed part of its annual agenda for a quarter of a century. The names of the 2,977 men, women and children who died in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center's twin towers on September 11 are read aloud while millions of Americans watch the commemoration on TV with a mixture of grief and anger.

This year, however, there was a small but significant change in the mise-en-scène of the annual event, as families of victims reportedly planned to shun Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who does not endorse the generally accepted narrative of what was the biggest terror attack in history. In other words, a tragedy that initially brought all Americans together in anger and grief may now forge into another fissure along partisan lines, at least in New York.

Reflecting on that issue, I decided to re-read the 570 pages of the 9/11 Commission Report and to my surprise, I found that even then partisan divisions had prevented a proper understanding of the tragedy and the lessons to be drawn from the start.

Reading "The Report" was like going through a French nouveau roman. It starts with the promise of uncovering an ingenious plot but offers nothing but reheated platitudes served with a pseudo-philosophical garnish. The reader ends up asking, "where's the beef?"

It all starts with what looks like a misunderstanding of the mission of the commission. The commissioners tell us that they had three aims:

- To offer "the most complete narrative" of the events. But what the report offers is a collage of numerous articles and books that have already covered the "event".
- To assemble as many personal testimonies as possible of the survivors of the attacks and their families. This, though, a laudable effort, is of little help in identifying the ideology and the machine that produced the killers in the first place.
- Making recommendations about ways and means of preventing similar attacks That should have been the "meat" of the report. It is not. It was, in fact, its Achilles heel. The reasons are not hard to imagine. The commissioners have a politico-technocratic mindset. They are the products of a political culture that assumes that all problems have technical and bureaucratic solutions. Such solutions are standard: create a new layer of bureaucracy and spend some more money.

The commission itself was a typical product of such thinking. So, it was not surprising that it came up with only two new proposals: one is to create a Cabinet post dealing with intelligence, a twin for the existing Homeland Security tsar. The other is a suggestion to spend money on "improving the lives of disaffected youths in Arab and other Muslim countries". I am not kidding! Less than 10 percent of the report, basically its Chapter II, was devoted to the key question: who were these terrorists, where did they come from, and what made them tick? The report said: "We learned about an enemy who is sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal. The enemy rallies broad support in the Arab and Muslim world by demanding redress for political grievances, but its hostility towards us and our values is limitless." Leaving aside the odd syntax -- obviously someone insisted that the last phrase be added - the paragraph quoted above shows how the commission got on the wrong track. The report assumes that there was a single, readily identifiable enemy. This is the routine way of political thinking, as shaped during the Cold War. Anyone with knowledge of the Arab countries and the Muslim world in general would know that this is not the case. The problem with the 25-year war on terror is precisely that the democracies, and those Muslims

who aspire after democracy, are faced with a multi-faceted threat that assumes numerous forms. This war has to be fought in numerous battlefields and against many enemies that, though united in their efforts to destroy democratic societies, first among them the US, use a bewilderingly wide range of weapons and tactics. The George W. Bush administration opened the military theater of this war by "liberating" Afghanistan and Iraq and seeking to destroy the terrorists nested there. But this is a war that must also be fought in diplomatic, cultural, religious, and, above all, political battlefields. In all those theaters the US needed, and could have found, allies, including among a majority of the Muslims who have been the first victims of terror. The commission made no suggestions about how to engage in those battlefields, who to choose as allies and whom to identify as neutrals or foes. Now, this enemy does not grow on trees. He is a citizen of a state, has bases and safe havens not in space, but in real countries, and uses all the facilities of the modern global system. It was astonishing that the 9/11 Commission chose to fly over all that. It discovered extensive contacts between al-Qaeda and 24 governments in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Tom Kean, the Commission's Republican chairman, came up with his own gem of a phrase. "Although we are safer today, we are not safe," he asserted. Well, how can you be safer if you are not safe in the first place? What he meant was that Americans are less unsafe now than they were on the eve of 9/11. **The commission asked why it was that terrorists especially hated America but provided no answer. The answer could be found in hundreds of books, articles and sermons that make the rounds across the globe, including in the United States itself. In fact, though you might find it odd, the bulk of what the global anti-American industry produces comes from the US itself. The US is an "evil animal" because it can bite back when bitten. The 9/11 Commission failed in its mission.**

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Amir Taheri was the executive editor-in-chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran from 1972 to 1979. He has worked at or written for innumerable publications, published eleven books, and has been a columnist for Asharq Al-Awsat since 1987. He graciously serves as Chairman of Gatestone Europe.

Gatestone Institute would like to thank the author for his kind permission to reprint this article in slightly different form from Asharq Al-Awsat.

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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Contact: NIDS@ThinkDeterrence.com

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