

Weekly ICBM EAR Report



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

Prepared by Peter Huessy

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ICBM EAR Week of September 22-27, 2026

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

Event of the Week

October 2, 2026 - NIDS Deterrent Seminar

Deterring Two Nuclear Peers: America's Strategy for China, Russia, and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence

Dr. Matthew Kroenig

*Senior Fellow, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council
Senior Fellow, National Institute for Deterrence Studies*

Quotes of the Week

Air Force Global Strike Command: "Bomber power on display! Two #B1 Lancers from @DyessAFBase supported the arrival ceremony [on Wednesday] at Joint Base Andrews for People's Republic of China President Xi Jinping."

President Trump: Our decisions could "promote peace and prosperity for decades and decades to come."

Xi Jinping: Called on the US to "adhere to the correct position of opposing Taiwan independence."

NATO Top Commander US Air Force General Alexis Greynkewisch: NATO is stepping up intelligence-sharing in response to a wave of sabotage and other incidents apparently linked to Russia; remains "calm and confident" that it can handle any threat posed by Moscow.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-steps-up-intelligence-sharing-over-russia-threat-top-commander-says-2026-09-24/>

Denmark's defense intelligence service warned that a low but growing risk" that Moscow might launch a limited military attack against one or several NATO countries that border Russia.

ROK General Chun in Bun: [NIDS Seminar] North Korea says it will launch 9000 ton new navy ship in May 2027. Could be a boomer.

ROK General and NIDS Fellow, Chun In-Bum, discusses Korean developments in these two essays and in a September 25, 2026 NIDS Nuclear Deterrent Seminar.

<https://www.upi.com/Voices/2026/09/08/perspective-south-korea-deployment-strait-of-hormuz/661178885983/>;
<https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/opinion/columns/columnists/chuninbum/20260907/respect-responsibility-and-the-future-of-the-korea-us-alliance>

ICBM EAR Essay of the Week
NUCLEAR INSURANCE YOU CAN BANK ON:
SEPTEMBER 21, 2026 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, Control, and Communications (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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S.-China Economic

and Security Commission regularly and fairly examined the national security dangers facing the U.S. 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 U.S. 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.

Peter Huessy is President and Founder of Geostrategic Analysis.

International Strategic Developments

U.S. and Chinese officials have been holding talks centered on measures to reduce nuclear risks amid China's rapidly expanding strategic arsenal and U.S. concerns over Beijing's compliance with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghch: Iran Submitted a plan to the White House that could see the Strait of Hormuz reopen within a week and restart broader talks towards a resolution to the war.

French nuclear deterrence: modernization: Forward presence and support for Poland; <https://defence24.com/geopolitics/french-nuclear-deterrence-modernisation-forward-presence-and-support-for-poland>

The Danish Intelligence Service: Russia is likely to intensify a hybrid war — a term that covers a range of attacks below the level of a conventional military assault — against the West.

Russia conducts a successful Sarmat ICBM Test:



IS 670.pdf

Admiral Samuel Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command: Warns against the temptation to overlearn from Ukraine's success with drones. In a November 2024 interview, emphasized that the strategic and geographic realities of the Indo-Pacific theater are fundamentally different.¹⁰ The dense, permissive battlespace of Eastern Europe is not analogous to the vast, contested expanse of the Pacific. "You can't solve the Indo-Pacific with just drones," Admiral Paparo asserted, underscoring that drones may offer value at the margins, but maintaining sea and air superiority over thousands of miles is far more important. The logic of sea control, so central to Mahan's thinking, remains as relevant today as it was a century ago.

Administration Strategic Developments

The Department of Defense Wins Suit Against Anthropic AI Development

U.S. Navy's Portfolio Acquisition Executive Strategic Systems Programs: The W93/Mk7 nuclear warhead and reentry body program has entered the Engineering and Manufacturing Development phase after achieving Milestone B earlier this year, advancing the first new U.S. nuclear warhead and **reentry system initiated in nearly four decades toward production** for the submarine-launched ballistic missile fleet.

STRATCOM Commander visits Naval Lab in Indiana: https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/usstratcom-commander-visits-indiana-naval-lab-302879749.html?utm_source=naval%20surface%20warfare%20center%2C%20crane%20division

US Navy's W93/Mk7 nuclear warhead program enters new development phase; <https://interestingengineering.com/military/us-navy-w93-mk7-nuclear-weapons-program>

Business leader confidence in the USA economy is soaring and hit a 4 year high.

Bill Gates says AI will kill 1 BILLION people. But not kill all of mankind. [What a relief; I was really worried that all of humankind would be getting wiped out!]

Congressional Strategic Developments

Sen Sanders calls for 20 years in the slammer if you violate his AI regs. Representative Alexandria Cortez wants to ban AI but let China to develop it instead. His bill would ban even some existing AI work.

From the Archives

CSIS Commentary Golden Dome and Strategic Stability

Commentary by [Clayton Swope](#) and [Melissa Dalton](#)

Published October 23, 2025

Remote Visualization

Will the Golden Dome, the Trump administration's proposed national missile shield, start a new nuclear or outer space arms race, destabilize the balance between the major global powers, and exacerbate strategic instability? Beijing has asserted the initiative will weaken "global strategic balance and stability," as well as turn "space into a war zone," and Moscow has called it a "very destabilizing initiative" that would "[undermine] strategic stability at its core." Meanwhile, for years, Moscow and Beijing have been tilting the scales to their strategic advantage, expanding their nuclear and missile forces and strengthening their military space power. The United States cannot ignore this threat and should anchor U.S. security on superiority, rather than hope that China and Russia would suddenly end initiatives to improve and expand their strategic forces. While the administration should strive for greater transparency with Congress and the American people on significant questions regarding costs and plans, and pursue deeper coordination with international partners, the Golden Dome and strong missile defenses will provide the United States a valuable security edge, a new tool for strategic deterrence, and a path to preserve peace.

The challenge in refuting arguments about the impact of the Golden Dome on strategic stability and its potential to spark an arms race—a nuclear arms race or arms race in outer space—is that both "strategic stability" and "arms race" are terms without agreed-upon definitions and are impossible to objectively measure. If the litmus test for strategic stability was whether anyone was engaged in a full-scale nuclear war, then yes, the world is basking in a period of strategic stability. But if strategic stability is when nuclear-armed states neither feel compelled to use their nuclear weapons first nor feel the need to increase the size of their nuclear forces—this is a common definition of strategic stability—one arrives at a different conclusion. The United States must sensibly modernize its nuclear forces. By contrast, China and Russia are actively expanding their strategic arsenals with new and novel capabilities. Since 2020, China has tripled the size of its nuclear arsenal, improved the quality of its nuclear weapons, and expanded its military footprint in outer space. Russia is fielding new nuclear weapons systems, including hypersonic ones, a nuclear-powered cruise missile, and a nuclear-armed torpedo. But stability hinges on more than just nuclear weapons. Beyond nukes, China and Russia are also aggressively developing and expanding new tools in the space, cyber, information, and irregular warfare spaces, accelerated by AI, quantum,

and other emerging technologies, to undermine U.S. and allied interests and ability to achieve their operational objectives —there is no sign they seek balance.

This strategic landscape poses new threats to the United States and its allies. A 2023 report by a bipartisan congressionally appointed commission to look at U.S. strategic posture [noted](#) that “the risk of military conflict with either or both Russia and China, while not inevitable, has grown, and with it the risk of nuclear use, possibly against the U.S. homeland.” In combination with a modernized U.S. nuclear deterrent, the Golden Dome is a reasonable response to safeguard the United States and its people from both nuclear and nonnuclear missiles and other airborne threats. The Golden Dome, moreover, is an evolutionary and not revolutionary step forward, as it builds upon decades-long efforts, spanning administrations from both political parties, to improve national defenses against missile attacks. Coincidentally, Russia and China have the same idea and have been [steadily](#) building their own Golden Domes, seeking to fortify their frontiers with anti-access, area denial air defense weapon systems.

To concerns that the Golden Dome, specifically its proposed space-based missile interceptors, could provoke an arms race in outer space, however that is defined, consider what China and Russia are already doing—and have been doing so for decades, while hypocritically [calling for a treaty](#) to prohibit weapons and the use of force in space. The Soviet Union was the first nation to put a weapon in space, building satellites capable of [attacking other satellites](#) in the 1960s, and developing the [Fractional Orbital Bombardment System](#) (FOBS) designed to deliver a warhead from orbit. China, too, is developing space weapons, [testing](#) a FOBS in 2021, and [demonstrating](#) space technologies with military applications. With or without the Golden Dome—a system that could be designed to protect the homeland from FOBS and other space threats—there is every sign that China and Russia will continue to develop these types of capabilities. Some also [point out](#) that Beijing and Moscow will criticize space-based missile interceptors because they could be used for offensive and not only defensive purposes. But this is true of any missile defense technology—and any weapon at all. How a weapon is used mainly determines whether it is defensive or offensive. For new technologies, it raises the imperative for all parties to make intentions clear through public and private messaging and ideally through a commitment to strategic stability talks. But even without space-based interceptors, there is every reason to believe Beijing and Moscow would still object to U.S. efforts to build strong homeland missile defenses, arguing it undermines stability, as both [China](#) and [Russia](#) have consistently argued in the past.

While it is hard to imagine Beijing or Moscow deciding to launch a massive nuclear first strike in response to the decision to build the Golden Dome, China and Russia may [try to develop](#) weapons to counter the missile shield to improve the security of their second-strike capability. But this is not a good reason to oppose the Golden Dome. Historically, military innovations have led to cat-and-mouse developments, as one side attempts to blunt the advantages derived by the other and compel widespread adoption of new capabilities. In 1916, the British deployed the first tank in battle, but within two decades, all the major powers fielded them. The United States pioneered [stealth technology](#), but many nations now operate stealth aircraft. And there should be no doubt that China and Russia are trying to develop new weapons and technologies to defeat U.S. stealth fighters and bombers—but that does not mean the United States should give up on stealth. The United States should pursue asymmetric capabilities and concepts to gain advantages.

The main problem with the notion of strategic stability is that it assumes all sides want some type of balance or parity. There is no sign that Beijing is interested in balance—the People’s Republic of China (PRC) wants [economic and military dominance](#). China views itself as a rising power and not one comfortable with maintaining the status quo. Beijing has made its intentions for both Taiwan and the South China Sea plainly clear. Russia is also not happy with the global order. Moscow started a war in Ukraine to pursue its revanchist views of Russia’s place in Europe—Russia wants to upset whatever balance exists today. Because of this, the global geopolitical

landscape today looks like the early twentieth century, when the German Empire sought to challenge the global position of the British Empire, and the 1930s, as Japan expanded across the Indo-Pacific region at the expense of the Western powers. Like today, no amount of diplomacy or appeasement could conceal the fact that certain nations rejected balance, and that “stability” was an illusion.

In these circumstances, a facade of strategic balance or parity does not aid U.S. security. As General Earle Wheeler, who served as Army chief of staff from 1962 to 1964, [noted](#), “I know of no way to design parity of military power. It certainly is contrary to any military precept that I know of, because you try to design superiority.” In the case of the Golden Dome, that superiority would come from defense and not, as with China and Russia, offensive weapons. Ironically, it was Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in 1967 who argued that missile defense was more moral than offensive nuclear weapons, rhetorically [asking](#) which was “more conducive to peace, a country which based itself on offensive or defensive systems?” In combination with other modernized systems and capabilities, the Golden Dome would provide a level of superiority, based on a strong defense, and military edge over potential adversaries that will aid deterrence and add a new protection should anyone start shooting missiles at the U.S. homeland.

While strengthening homeland defenses against missile and other airborne threats is a good idea, some alterations could make the Golden Dome better. There is a need for more transparency about Golden Dome plans and investments with Congress and the U.S. public, given significant questions on forecasted costs and technical feasibility. For the Golden Dome to endure, it requires an [intergenerational commitment](#) and must survive repeated four-year political cycles. Transparency aims to broaden and strengthen support for the initiative, so that rather than being viewed as a partisan priority—a perception that has haunted missile defense in the past—the Golden Dome is viewed as a nonpartisan national priority, one shared by allies. To enable greater transparency, the U.S. administration should include a delineation of the role of the Golden Dome and the role of the U.S. nuclear deterrent in deterring and defending against PRC and Russian strategic threats in forthcoming U.S. defense strategy, missile defense, and nuclear posture review documents.

Coordination and consultation with allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region on Golden Dome and other strategic issues is critical in developing a harmonized approach to addressing adversarial threats—including burden-sharing opportunities for co-development and coproduction. Canada has a [clear stake](#) in the defense of North America and, building on nearly 70 years of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) operations, could be incentivized to contribute elements of Golden Dome’s development. Similarly, Japan and Israel could offer co-development and coproduction opportunities, deriving cost savings, boosting innovation, and enhancing collective security.

The Golden Dome should prompt opportunities to update and reinstate [arms control discussions](#) or reframe and [extend existing agreements](#) with Russia to match today’s strategic and geopolitical realities. There may also be a chance to develop a new dialogue with Russia and China on building crisis management mechanisms, like those [developed between](#) U.S. and Soviet leaders during the Cold War or start new dialogues that aim to develop an agreed-upon definition and approach for strategic stability, which could precede deeper arms control discussions. If new agreements are negotiated bilaterally with Russia and China, they should be coordinated with U.S. allies and undergo comprehensive whole-of-government assessments to properly assess their full impacts on U.S. national and economic security.

In a 1946 speech, Winston Churchill [spoke](#) about the perils of trusting a “quivering, precarious balance of power” as a guarantee for security, arguing that the United States and its allies “cannot afford, if we can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength.” Though publicly articulating worries about global peace and security, it’s more likely that China and Russia truly fear that the Golden Dome—just as the [demons fear](#) the

Golden Honmoon—would give the United States an edge. Accordingly, the Golden Dome has the potential to strengthen deterrence and widen the margins on which Churchill argued the democracies should base their security. The Golden Dome could end up helping to reduce the chances of nuclear war should it help restart arms control, strategic stability, and crisis management discussions between the United States, Russia, and China.

There are still important questions about the overall cost, scope, and scale of the Golden Dome, relative to other administration priorities, such as strengthening deterrence and homeland defense (e.g., nuclear modernization and shipbuilding), that should be addressed in partnership with Congress and international allies. And the technology to enable the full scope of Golden Dome's ambition, particularly space-based interceptors, will need to be proven out to justify the costs. However, strengthening missile defenses would give the United States an edge and help protect it from increasing missile threats. It might deter China or Russia from taking some hostile act against the United States or its allies, possibly preventing war. That the Golden Dome might be one more reason for Putin and Xi to [wake up and decide](#) that "today is not that day," preserving peace for yet another rotation of the Earth around the sun, is a strong reason to pursue its development.

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Japan: WWII History

Dropping Atomic Bombs on Japan: Some Lessons

Some 81 years ago, WWII ended with the use of two atomic bombs by the United States against Imperial Japan. Victor Davis Hanson has some important historical facts about the US decision to use two atomic weapons.

About a month ago, I talked about the anniversary of the [dropping of the atomic bombs](#) on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and I made the argument for why the United States did that, used those devastating weapons. Not that I was happy about it, of course, but we all were commemorating the date. [The US] dropped the bomb for three reasons, and the reasons were not those that the paleo right is alleging or the Left. We did not do it because we wanted to impress the Soviets. They got the bomb four years later, almost to the week. And they were in the process of assembling the information from espionage when we used the bomb. We knew they were going to get the bomb. Nor did we do it to justify the expense of the Manhattan Project, nor did we do it because we don't like so-called Asian people. We did it because we had just suffered 50,000 casualties on Okinawa, and we did not want to repeat that on the Japanese mainland, where there were up to 20 million militia, impressed civilians, and army personnel and 7,000 or 8,000 kamikazes. And if you do the math of the defenders on Okinawa versus the losses of 50,000 dead, wounded, and missing and apply that to Japan, we may have lost, as planners had feared, 1 million. One million. In addition, other people pointed out that the Japanese were killing somewhere between 15,000 and above Chinese, Asians in general, and Pacific Islanders per day. Of all the armies and militaries in World War II, as far as those who killed the most of their enemies and suffered the least doing it, the fewest, it was Japan. So, we did that to save American lives, to save Allied Asian lives, and to save Japanese lives. There

would've been 2 million or 3 million Japanese killed. Another thing to remember is the atomic bombs were not the most devastating weapons in World War II, nor are they necessary even today. They have the potential to be, but so does AI, so do enhanced gain-of-function viruses. There's a lot of ways, unfortunately, that people die through the use of dangerous weapons. The point I'm making is in World War II, the incendiary napalm attacks on the Japanese cities killed far more than the two bombs. And more importantly, with the acquisition of Okinawa and the end of World War II in Europe, Curtis LeMay was trying to shorten the war by increasing his bomber fleet with new bombers from the American factories, B-29s, and assembling a massive armada of, say, 6,000 or 7,000 bombers, both in the Marianas and the much shorter distance from Okinawa with B-17s and British Lancasters, as I said. The point is it would have been an inferno had those two bombs not been used to preclude further death and to shorten the war....**Donald Trump has said one thing continuously. He does not want to use nuclear weapons. He does not only not want to use nuclear weapons, but he also wants to have the major powers who own them and possess them agree to downgrade their arsenals. And he's very worried about the Chinese. He's very worried about North Korea. He's very worried about Iran. He's very worried about Russia. So, it's not so much the possession of a nuclear weapon. We're not worried about Britain, and we're not worried about France because these are democratic countries. We're worried about those countries under dictatorships. And Donald Trump is trying to both deter them with a preeminent American arsenal, but also, once that preeminence is established, to downgrade the use of them by limiting the size of our arsenals. Build up to build down. If that sounds ironic, it is. [Editor's Note: During the Regan administration, the phrase "build down" was frequently used to describe the strategy of modernizing our nuclear deterrent while also pursuing major reductions in total numbers, at which Reagan succeeded.]**

Draft Essay

NUCLEAR DETERRENT STRATEGY

DRAFT ESSAY/COMMENTARY, RESPONSES WELCOME

Nuclear weapons and the deterrent strategy accompanying their deployment are sometimes poorly understood. For the general public that is understandable given the complexities of preventing nuclear war. What is most worrisome are those "experts" who widely seek the abolition of nuclear weapons but are often confused about the real American nuclear deterrent necessary to prevent war.

For example, the most misunderstood idea is often referred to as MAD or mutual assured destruction. This is the assumption that US strategy relies on the idea that should the US be attacked with nuclear weapons, our only option would inevitably lead to the exchange of such overwhelming nuclear force as to destroy both our own country and the adversary nation. A second bad assumption is that since MAD if carried out would get us all killed, reductions toward zero nuclear weapons—abolition—should be our highest priority. And since it's still an all or nothing MAD strategy, prudence would jettison the idea of nuclear deterrence altogether. Including any call for any flexible or limited regional response capability.

Over sixty years ago, President Kennedy warned that having just two unpalatable choices-----risk MAD (all-out nuclear war) or surrender—was a prescription for more war. In two nuclear crises of his administration, in Berlin in 1981 and in Cuba in 1962, the US had both force flexibility (new SLBM & ICBM missiles) and just plain luck (Khrushchev wasn't completely reckless) that brought the crises to an end without war.

In August 1961, for example, Kennedy had previously told the Soviet leader that a threatened Russian attack on the American military garrison in Berlin meant nuclear war. We had significant (3900) battlefield nuclear forces in Germany. But we also had a new just deployed strategic sea-launched long range missile aboard submarines which Kennedy thought saved the day and which he later would personally thank the Lawrence Livermore team for developing. Thus, Khrushchev knew Kennedy meant business. Although the General Secretary eventually didn't attack, he went and built the Berlin Wall, an off ramp critical to standing down from nuclear war.

But the USSR leader wasn't done. A year later, October 1962, US intelligence determined the Soviets had placed nuclear armed missiles in Cuba. On that very day, coincidentally, the USAF had just deployed the very first Minuteman ICBMs in Montana. A key to the crisis resolution was a secret deal. Kennedy then knew Minuteman

meant the US no longer needed the US medium range missiles in Turkey---close enough to strike key targets in the Soviet Union. The new Minuteman missiles could also reach Moscow. Kennedy later declared that "Minuteman was my ace in the hole" as he secretly traded away the US missiles based in Turkey for the Soviets removing the close-in missiles in Cuba.

In both cases, the US avoided nuclear war. Deterrence held, albeit with some fortuitous help.

But could we continue to rely on just in time new technologies that saved the day or the good sense of our adversaries? How best to continue?

According to nuclear expert Frank Miller, since the very beginning of the Truman administration, it was American strategy to go after key overall Soviet military capabilities. Over time, as missile accuracy improved, US strategy was to go after Soviet military systems themselves such as missile silos. The key reason the US needed such flexible nuclear firepower was that President Eisenhower knew it would have bankrupted the USA to build the conventional force necessary to match the Soviet and Warsaw Pact conventional forces. The Kennedy administration emphasized the targeting of Soviet warmaking assets, despite Secretary of Defense McNamara later shielding the US move toward keeping at risk Soviet military assets by falsely claiming the US still operated under the strategy of MAD.

The US thus from the very early years of the nuclear age had response options other than simple massive retaliatory strikes on urban areas. Eventually the deterrent strategy the US adopted, in place now for decades, held at risk those elements of power of great importance to the leaders of the Soviet Union and China, for example and explicitly took off the table city busting. And after the 1957 Soviet launch of Sputnik, the US, in an extraordinary technological feat built both a submarine and a companion sea launched ballistic missile by 1960 and an ICBM silo based missile called Minuteman by 1962 to carry out just such a strategy as eventually adopted.

Why is this important? Without a US capability to target the military forces of the USSR or China, their war forces would be in a sanctuary from which they could attack the United States or its allies with impunity. Having only the capability to deliver MAD is not a credible deterrent as President Kennedy warned.

As Miller writes, such a flexible strategy has been US policy since at least the Truman administration when US policy was to destroy the capability of the USSR to "wage aggressive war," and destroy those elements of the Soviet military that would "halt aggression." Thus, 14 American Presidents from 20 administrations, over 75 years have used such a strategy to avoid direct military conflict between nuclear armed powers.

Now the US unilaterally got rid of over 90% of its theater nuclear weapons in 1991 as the Cold War was over, and as we thought at the time, a Russian led assault on Western Europe was no longer a threat. The US also reduced our strategic nuclear forces from roughly 10,000 to 1550, as we assume Russia did too in three landmark arms deals (START I, the Moscow deal and New START.)

At the time of the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiative, (PNI) the Europeans insisted the US have an insurance policy---leave behind, a small extended nuclear force in Western Europe. The US did so with a few hundred gravity bombs in Europe. This was not any plan to start or initiate a nuclear war, contrary to some recent muddled commentary. It was to give the President options other than the threatened all-out use of strategic long range nuclear forces to deter adversaries from attacking the US and Europe in the first place. It has turned out not to be enough.

The Russians in 1991 did not follow suit with a PNI of their own, and the Russians kept at least 2000 and as many as 4000 such "battlefield" nuclear forces.

Then on April 30, 1999, a new nuclear policy was crafted by a small group of top Russian officials. President Yeltsin in a secret meeting of the Politburo called for Russia to develop highly accurate and very low yield nuclear weapons able to be used on the conventional battlefield. Mr. Putin as President put the decree into force. The strategy has variously been described as "escalate to win" or "escalate to de-escalate," or the use of such battlefield nuclear forces to exercise blackmail, coercion or actual terror, and swiftly change the direction of conventional conflicts toward Russia's favor.

While the US does have a small number of theater nuclear forces now in Great Britain, the US needs more flexible forces to better hold at risk our adversary's military capability. Although it is not explicitly known, the lack of sufficient US and allied deterrent choices at the regional/battlefield level may have been a factor in the Russian decision in 2014 and 2012 to invade Ukraine, as well as previous aggression against Georgia and Moldova. Despite declaring that the independence of Ukraine is an existential issue, NATO has not sent its own forces to

fight the Russians but only some conventional weapons delivered to Ukraine. To many in Russia, that “inaction” by NATO means NATO is deterred especially as Putin and officials within the Russian Federation routinely threaten the use of such theater nuclear weapons against Ukraine and NATO forces should Ukraine or its allies deploy certain kinds of weapons or attack certain Russian targets.

The Strategic Posture Commission concluded in 2023 that the United States needed additional regional or theater nuclear forces that were survivable, mobile, and prompt to deter Russian from escalating a conventional conflict to the nuclear level. The support was both bipartisan and unanimous. The deployment of a Navy nuclear armed sea-launched cruise missile is an added theater capability that can deliver deterrence and help keep the peace. It is supported by the US Navy and funded by Congress. Such forces give the President options other than ending the world and have nothing to do with “starting” a nuclear war. True, the folks in Moscow and Peking see such theater/battlefield weapons as instruments of war that make aggression possible. But the US and its allies believe nuclear and conventional forces are to deter and prevent war. That is how US nuclear modernization and a flexible response capability will keep the nuclear peace.

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ICBM EAR's Energy Update

In a recent 48 hour period ending this weekend, the USA Navy has escorted 40 million barrels of oil through the Strait of Hormuz matching the level before the attacks on Iran in February. And Saudi oil exports are now back to the level prior to the war. World crude oil production including natural gas liquids (all of which go into refineries) is about 106 million barrels of which an average of 20 million bp/d goes through Hormuz. In 1980 production in the US was 2.5 million barrels per day and by 2000 was 1.7 million b/pd. These numbers tracked exactly the predictions of M. King Hubbert, who in 1957 predicted the peak US production would be around 1970—which indeed it appeared to be at the time. In my interview with Dr. Hubbert in 1976, he told me his numbers did not include new technologies or unconventional oil resources such as tar sands and other fuel which, at the time, were uneconomical or environmentally so damaging as to be not available. But then fracking was invented. By 2008 US crude oil production turned upward to where today it is over 14 million barrels, with some 65% of the increase in natural gas liquids, most of which are refinery and oil/gas industrial feedstocks that end up producing gasoline, kerosene, jet and aviation fuel, among the products that are the basis of the petrochemical industry which is 20% of the overall fossil fuel based industry in the USA. In the 12 years of the Obama and Biden administrations, the average price of crude oil, West Texas intermediate, was \$73/barrel. The average prices for the 5.5 years that Trump has been President, has been \$73/barrel. France is sending soldiers to protect Red Sea oil port vs the Houthis. USA and allies in the gulf just put together new fund of \$2 billion to build pipelines to bypass the straits

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

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