

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 October 16th, 2026

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

NIDS Events of the Week

Here is the transcript from the Gen Harencak event and the video recording can be accessed here:

<https://youtu.be/M97sawJoLyyw>



The_Nuclear_Knowledge_Gap_Garrett_Harencak

Upcoming: October 30th:

The Three Admirals: The Navy and the US Underseas Nuclear Deterrent NIDS Nuclear Seminar Series Event

A New Seminar Series: After the Midterms (November 18, 19 and 20th)

LLNL John Warden: Theater Nuclear Deterrent Requirements 18th November

NIPP: Dr. Keith Payne: Germany, NATO and Theater Nuclear Requirements 19th November

James Howe (VCI-HSV): Implications of Russian/Chinese strategic employment of Low Yield Weapons 20th November

Quotes of the Week

EUCOM Commander Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich: NATO's new military plan to thwart a potential Russian assault along the alliance's eastern flank, a strategy to halt such an attack, while minimizing the risk of conventional or nuclear escalation.

North Korea's Kim showcases missile capable of reaching U.S. as Trump signals possible meeting.

U.S. Pacific Command: "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea launched two ballistic missiles on October 12, 2026 (KST). We are aware of the missile launches and are consulting closely with our allies and partners. Based on current assessments, this event does not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to our allies. The United States remains committed to the defense of the U.S. homeland and our allies in the region."

The War Zone posted: "B-52 to get stealthy AGM-158C Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles."

MI5 Director General Ken McCallum: Iran is seeking to target military sites in Britain and the suspected plot to attack RAF Fairford in September is "not unique."

Senior Trump administration officials: An Iranian nuclear electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack could devastate the U.S. power grid [Two Congressional studies of EMP concluded exactly that in the 2008 and 2017 reports, respectively, to Congress. Protection from EMP must be a priority.]

President Trump: "Massive Oil, Gas, and Mineral Exploration is getting ready to begin in our new and beautiful Greenland! There are Experts that are saying that the amount of easily available Oil is far greater than that of

almost any land, anywhere in the World and, even more importantly, from a Security Purpose in the Defense and Offense of both the United States of America, and Europe, is second to none.”

President Trump: “Any future attack on the United States will have to come across Greenland, where our Defense will routinely knock down drones, missiles, or any other form of weapon not yet even conceived. It gives us time, location, and sightline, like nowhere else in the World!”

The Straits Times: “Japan protests Chinese delegation visit to island held by Russia.”

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth: “[On Wednesday], I spoke alongside our service secretaries at AUSA about accelerating innovation and delivering advanced capabilities to our warfighters. The Joint Force is moving at SPEED to equip our warfighters and maintain America’s battlefield advantage.”

U.S. Strategic Command: “To effectively sustain our global #CombatReadyForce, we continually test & assess our warfighters & capabilities. Joint Force wargames like Home Game & engagements with interagency partners help USSTRATCOM gather decision-quality data to direct resources for maximum effect.”

Bulletin of Atomic Scientists: (BAS): A scenario like the one [writer] Annie Jacobsen presents, in which almost every variable takes its worst possible outcome, cannot tell us which threats are most plausible or where scarce resources should go. By BAS’s Filippa Lentzos, Yong-Bee Lim | Opinion | October 7, 2026 [Although applying to biological weapons, the comment is also true of Jacobsen’s 2023 book on nuclear dangers.]

International Strategic Developments

Houthi militants [terrorists] are attempting to produce their own advanced medium-range ballistic missiles using Chinese-delivered parts. The missile would have a range up to about 1,200 miles, putting all of Saudi Arabia and Israel within reach.

Communist China is continuing its longstanding practice of proliferating weapons of mass destruction and/or their delivery systems to the world’s most dangerous regimes. Over the years, the recipients have included North Korea, Pakistan and Iran. **The latest report** discloses covert shipments of Chinese parts for Houthi terrorists’ manufacture of an Iranian precision-guided medium-range ballistic missile. Given the Houthis’ ongoing attacks on Saudi Arabia, its vessels in the Red Sea and past demonstrated willingness to attack Israel, this behavior fits the profile of Xi Jinping’s practice of what amounts to “strategic arson. “President Trump is scheduled to meet the Chinese communist emperor once again next month. Notice must be served that there will be material costs to the Chinese Communist Party if it persists in what amounts to World War Xi against our interests and allies.

North Korea’s ‘Hunchback’ Submarine Makes First At-Sea Appearance For Missile Tests

Britains Plans for 10-year nuclear weapons factory rebuild

Gulf International Forum: Seven months into the war with Iran, the Strait of Hormuz remains a major point of contention. Goldman Sachs **estimates** that Gulf oil flows have recovered to roughly two-thirds of pre-war levels, but the oil moves under two distinct arrangements: dark tankers paying Iranian tolls of **up to \$2 million a ship** to use lanes that hug the **Iranian coast** past Larak Island, and convoys shepherded through by the U.S. Navy.

Eurasian Daily Monitor: Russian President Vladimir Putin’s busy early October schedule included the Valdai Discussion Club’s annual meeting, the Tsentr-2026 military exercise, the Commonwealth of Independent States summit in Turkmenistan, and a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump. This flurry of diplomatic and military activity produced few tangible gains as Russia confronted persistent economic and battlefield pressures. At Valdai, Putin warned that Russia would defend its Kaliningrad exclave with all available weapons, **implicitly including nuclear weapons**, in the event of an attack.

Russian forces have carried out 76 targeted strikes against Ukraine’s power grid and oil-and-gas infrastructure, Moscow has systematically expanded attacks on civil life-support networks rather than de-escalating,

demonstrating according to Ukraine that economic concessions and sanctions relief fail to curb the [Kremlin's](#) war effort.

Administration Developments

NATO's annual "Steadfast Noon" nuclear exercise is set to kick off in Italy.

An unarmed Mk21A reentry vehicle was tested Friday after being launched from Vandenberg SFB aboard a Minotaur I rocket, an in-flight environmental test supporting development of the reentry vehicle for the Air Force's next-generation ICBM.

The US AF Is Doubling B-1B Modification Spending As It Prepares The B-21 Raider

Vehicle By Greg Hadley: The Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center tested its new intercontinental ballistic missile reentry vehicle Oct. 9, launching the developmental vehicle atop a Minotaur I rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif.

Information on the US-KSA Nuclear Energy Agreement: https://www.nensc.org/newsarticles/ksa123-letter-congress-101626?ss_source=sscampaigns

President Putin has indicated a willingness to negotiate a short-term agreement to continue to stay below New START's deployment cap of 1,550 strategic warheads. President Trump should engage with him on this point, which could perhaps form a basis for an agreement to stabilize the current situation. Washington could then seek to get other nuclear states, particularly China, to commit not to exceed New START's warhead cap. Even though China is unlikely to exceed this limit for some years, that would be a notable step forward for strategic stability. From the BAS.

Congressional Strategic Developments

Chairman Arrington Statement on New White House Report Highlighting Strong Job Growth in American Industry

WASHINGTON, D.C. –The White House Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) published a new report highlighting robust job growth in the manufacturing sector due to Republicans' pro-growth policies. **House Budget Committee Chairman Jodey Arrington (R-Texas)** released the following statement:

200,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the final two years of the Biden Administration due to Democrats' burdensome regulatory regime, Green New Deal energy policies, and failure to enforce free and fair trade around the world. In stark contrast, President Trump's America First agenda and Republican policies are spurring a resurgence of American industry. In fact, we added 72,000 manufacturing jobs in 2026 alone and factory wages have increased by 7.9%. Together, we're ushering in the Golden Age of America.

Essays of the Week

Victor Davis Hanson

October 16, 2026

Our on-and-off relationship with our European allies and friends is in another low spot. There's a lot of developments that have been going on that I don't think they quite appreciate have created a loss of confidence in the United States about the reliability of [our NATO allies](#). And this transcends the earlier existential problem that all of our NATO allies, 32, had over 20 years promised but reified that and ratified it the last 15 years, they would spend 2% of GDP on defense. And as you remember, in 2016, after the election, and Donald Trump, remarked as he was going to enter office in 2017 that all but six of them had not met their requirements. And after all this bullying, all this acrimony, now almost all of them, I think with one exception, have made the 2%. But now we're into another series of crises. The former head of German intelligence was just found out in his retirement, I think he's 80, that he was a traitor, and that he had been selling or trafficking in secrets that involved German and NATO security to existential enemies like China and maybe Russia. That creates a lack of confidence in the security that we have with the Germans. And Britain, remember, we have a dual-use base, an RAF and a U.S. Air Force base in the United Kingdom, and the idea, of course, is forward deployment. So if we would get into a crisis with China, with Russia, over Ukraine, almost anywhere in the world, we would have maybe 11 of our \$320 million B-1 bombers that have capability to carry nuclear weapons and huge payloads, but they would be based and safe in this air base that was patrolled by our allies, the British.

Now we learn that some [terrorists had a dry run](#) where they got very close to this base and were in the process of filming it and doing reconnaissance work. And we learned two things from the British government, Prime Minister [Andy] Burnham. Number one, they were trained by or in the service to Iran, the greatest terrorist threat in the world. And number two, they were let out on bail. How can you say that—the most dangerous terrorists that we've seen in the U.K. that are actually scouting out ways to destroy an American bomber fleet is from Iran, or at least influenced by Iran or hired by Iran, but then let them out on bail? And then we get to the recent argument from our allies that they want nothing to do with the Iran war. They understand that the Strait of Hormuz and Iran's oil and the oil of the Gulf are critical to their oil needs, and they understand that the wealth of the Gulf States is essential for them to export commodities. And they understand the principle that Iran is a dangerous country. And for 50 years, they have said in a course with us that it should not and will not be nuclear, although neither they nor the American presidents, seven of them, have done anything about it. So, we go and try to stop that threat. France then immediately says that this was not an approved U.N. war, and they cannot use French airspace to use American assets, not NATO assets, American assets, in, over their airspace. The U.K. says you cannot use the Diego Garcia base, which is critical in the Indian Ocean, for operations in the Middle East, long-distance operation.

Italy says you cannot use your dual-use base with us in Sicily to land aircraft to go after Iran. Spain says you're not going to use our base. You're not even getting near our airspace. Switzerland and Austria are neutral, but they're pro-U.S., and if their push came to shove, they wouldn't be able to avoid a European continental war, and they would seek protection from whom? Probably us. They said nobody gets near our airspace. [None of these European countries said](#) we will help the U.S. Navy patrol the Strait of Hormuz to ensure that it's open and global commerce is uninterrupted. Okay. And of course, we have [our Canadian friends](#) who said last year we may or may not have met our 2%, but for the last 15 years, we won't spend 2%. But of course, we expect to be, under the nuclear umbrella of, as we have been, of the United States, and we expect if there was ever an existential threat to the North American continent, you would not distinguish Canadian from American interest, even though we're not armed and not capable with 79 45-year-old jets, given your 4,000 or 5,000. So, I could go on, but you get the impression that it's again a reminder that [it's a one-way street](#). Remember the argument that our European friends are using to us. They are saying, "You're a NATO power, and you're pledged to protect the North American, space." Of course, we've never... Only once after 9/11, and that was sort of symbolic. Some NATO planes helped us after 9/11 to make sure there were not terrorists in our skies. But generally, the threats that face Europe are not going to threaten the United States, and the threats that face the United States, we don't count on NATO partners, volunteering to go to Taiwan or to protect us from a Chinese missile. So, it's a one-way street. And so, we have made the argument that in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, which are the backyards of Europe, it's essential that Iran not get a nuclear weapon for their protection and ours, and we are willing to handle that problem. We're not asking NATO, we're not asking individual countries to bomb Iran or to send weapons. None of

that. All we ask is, "Can we use our NATO assets, the use of our bases, and your airspace to cut the travel time, the distance, from our bases, to Iran, and we don't have to come all the way from the United States?"

And they said, "No. You cannot do that." And so, we are saying, "Well, Ukraine is threatened by Russia, but Russia's army does not threaten us." There's no way in the world that the Russian army is ever going to run the United States. It is going to overrun Ukraine maybe, maybe the Baltic states, maybe some of the Scandinavian states, maybe the European states. But it's not going to ever endanger us. We have a strategic problem with Russia, and we handle that on our own with our nuclear deterrent: submarines, land base, and bombers. So, let's get this straight, Europe. You are saying to us that when we have a shared threat and it's in your neighborhood, and it's of interest to us that you will not help, but you're not going to go beyond that, but you will not even lend your airspace to help us. And at the same time, you're saying, as the NATO big guy in the alliance, that you expect us to guarantee your safety and to arm the Ukrainians to the teeth and to deter the Russians from invading further and closer into Europe, even though we know, according to your logic, they're not threatening us at all. Now, the truth of the matter is, if Ukraine is overrun and Russia goes into the Baltic states or Europe, we will probably come, as is our obligations under NATO. **But the Europeans are making that harder and harder to sell to the American people because it's a one-way street. When we need you to protect Europe, you better be there. When you need us not to protect us from a nuclear weapon from Iran, not to join us in battle, just to let us use your airspace, you can't even do that. And we had to be uncouth and crude and scream and yell to make you protect yourself with a meager 2% investment of GDP in defense. I know what you're going to say to us. We have open borders. We're overrun with immigrants. We made bad decisions about our green energy. We warred on fossil fuels. We have certain culture that has a 1.3 continental-wide fertility rate that's unsustainable. We have immigrant populations that do not want to assimilate. And we have a socialist paradigm that is not sustainable, so we can't help you. You can't help. At least you could say, "This is not working. This is not working, and we want to make reforms in our economy, our energy, our immigration, so we can free up capital to fulfill our partnership, and we want it 50/50. When you need us, we're there, and when we need you, you're there. And if it doesn't happen that way, then the NATO paradigm is not sustainable. It will not work for the Europeans to deny us just the use of the airspace to deal with a common threat and then expect us to risk our key cities in any potential nuclear standoff with Russia, because that's what would happen. To protect the integrity of Europe, if we couldn't do it with traditional forces, it would ultimately be a standoff to use American deterrence to protect Europe, and that would entail our danger to protect your continent. And so, yes, we can be crude. Yes, we can yell and scream, but ultimately, this remains an asymmetrical and thus unsustainable relationship.**

Peter Huessy Draft Veterans Day Remarks to the Hamilton Society

On November 11, we honor America's veterans. Many Americans are happy to do so, especially honoring the veterans of World War I, World War II and Korea.

But since Vietnam and particularly the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now with respect to the war against Iran, many Americans are reluctant to honor our veterans and see the military as too interested in endless wars and an American defense industry in which many veterans work as also too interested in profiting from such wars.

I have worked with the US military for nearly half a century—actually 46 years since the very beginning of the Reagan administration. And with the defense industry in which many veterans worked. This work centered on protecting the USA and its allies from nuclear war. From 1981-1991 we modernized the US nuclear arsenal, built the INF missiles in Europe, adopted a peace through strength strategy and ended the Soviet Union, effectively freeing from tyranny nearly a billion people worldwide.

Despite warnings from the military and veterans, the US took what General Garret Harencak described as a holiday from history, pretending that no threats were on the horizon and that conflicts such as the Cold War were over. We neglected our military big time, cut what turned out to be trillions of needed funds for sustainment and modernization of our services. And then spent trillions on indeed endless wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The military won those two wars in a few months. Your veterans toppled the Taliban and destroyed most of Al Qaeda. And took down the army of Saddam Hussein in a few weeks. They did their job, spectacularly.

In Afghanistan, 70 year old B52s with 25 year old pilots, dropped from 50,000 feet newly developed Joint Directed Air Munitions, on Taliban and AQ strong holds, identified by horse warriors from the Northern Alliance riding with our special forces. By December 2001, the Taliban and Al Qaeda were defeated, 3 months from 9-11. Do you

remember one Senator was upset during the war because he said the US was not being fair by winning from the air and not putting boots on the ground? And yes, for 20 years it was our political leadership that could not determine what our objectives were and gave our military tasks such as nation-building that no military can achieve.

In 2010 we finally got back on track. The Congress and the late Senator Jon Kyl and James Miller from OSD agreed to modernize an aging, legacy nuclear deterrent, without which the US and its allies would not be secure. The plan would not be completed until 2045, some 65 years after the Reagan administration modernized our nuclear deterrent at the height of the Cold War.

We are now in the 15th year of that modernization. The submarines come on board around 2030 and some 12-15 we be built by 2045. The ICBM Sentinel will be deployed early next decade and be completed by 2050. The B21 Raider is being flown, testing is being done, and we are planning to build 150 or more over the next decade. The Nc3 and warheads all also have to be rebuilt especially in the age of cyber, space and hypersonic capable weapons. Veterans in and out of government are building and directing such capability. The cost will be \$400 billion but the systems will last until 2080, 55 years from today, which works out to \$8 billion a year, a bargain under any assessment. The country spends \$9 billion a year driving to the movies.

Our veterans and military warned many years ago that while the USSR disintegrated, totalitarian powers would re-emerge. They would coordinate what China has described as “unrestricted warfare,” bringing together what I have described as the “crazy brothers mayhem.” North Korea, Russia, China and Iran. We faced a combination of totalitarian Communism and Jihadism, a threat unique in all US history. Our current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the retired commander of the US Strategic Command and the former commander of the USAF Global Strike Command, all tell me the same thing: in all of their professional life they have never seen such dangerous threats as the threats they see today.

On top of which just as these threats were emerging, and yes after 1991 and the end of the USSR, the United States and its allies dramatically curtailed military spending to the point where just before 9-11 US military was fully 40 to 45% below where it should’ve been. The modernization of its conventional and nuclear forces was kicked down the proverbial road until such time as we ran out of road. As Major general Garrett Harencak warned in 2004, the US was mistakenly taking a holiday from procurement, a holiday from history, and most seriously a holiday from even thinking intellectually about the need for deterrent and what the serious threats were to the United States.

In the military officers that I have worked with since 1981. I have never found a more ethical, honest, objective and patriotic group of people than these military officers within the army, the Navy, Air Force and the Marines. Were they both men and women, and from every ethnic or racial group one can find in America? Yes, and none of these things mattered. Their character is what mattered. A policy of peace strength under President Reagan, including a robust economic war against Moscow’s exchequer we brought the Soviet Union down in less than a decade and freed up nations around the world, especially in eastern Europe to pursue freedom and liberty as they saw it.

The single most important task of deterrent today is to prevent the use of nuclear weapons against America and her allies. To do so we have to be able to hold it risk those elements of power which are adversaries whole deer. That means their own lives and the machinery that holds them in power, the weapons with which they use to commit aggression. These are, indeed, the assets we hold at risk and have done so for much of the nuclear age going back to the mid Eisenhower administration and in particular during the Kennedy administration and its emphasis on flexible response. As President Kennedy remarked the Minuteman missile deployed in October 1962 was his “ace in the hole and” because they enabled the United States to hold it risk key Soviet targets which enabled him to blockade Cuba and demand that the Soviets remove their missiles. Fortuitously the United States could also secretly offer to remove our medium range missiles from Turkey because we could now reach key Soviet targets with our Minuteman missiles deployed in Montana, and as a result, Kennedy could offer Khrushchev an off ramp by removing the missiles from Turkey, although Kennedy did so secretly without informing Congress or the American people.

However, we are not always going to have the flexibility of a convenient offramp to offer adversaries that threaten us with nuclear weapons. The United States in 2014 refused to aid Ukraine and came close to the same position in 2022 when Russia took even more Ukraine territory. Key was that on the nuclear weapons otherwise known as Battlefield systems the Russians far outnumbered American forces some 4 to 5000 to 100 as in 1991 the United States unilaterally took down over 90% of our theater, nuclear weapons worldwide and left only 100 gravity bombs in Europe with which two balance thousands of Russian, the weapons still deployed in Russia and able to hit targets throughout all of Europe. In 1999, Mr. Yeltsin called for the development of highly accurate low yield and

numerous Battlefield nuclear weapons with which to use to change the outcome of a conventional battle which Russia might be losing that you have seen dozens of threats from Mr. Putin to use exactly these weapons if Ukraine or the United States or NATO engages Russia in the wrong way or two robustly in the eyes of the Kremlin

The American veterans which we honored today, not only have to deter the Russians in Ukraine, but also China with respect to Taiwan and the western Pacific. The United States has never faced a two peer nuclear armed adversary as we do with China and Russia combined the capability to do so can only be secured with a robust modernization of our nuclear triad, as well as the posture commission of the United States concluded in 2023 with the addition of theater nuclear capabilities, such as a sea launch cruise missile, but also add to the number of warheads carried by our D-5 Navy and MMIII USAF silo based missiles. As the Posture Commission recommended, the program of record for nuclear modernization is critical and necessary but not sufficient. More must be done.

And that brings me to Iran. We all remember the attacks of 9-11. Some think we deserved to be attacked. Remember Rev Wright just that week explaining that 9-11 was “Our chickens coming home to roost.”

But I think most of you think this attack was murder, pure and simple. But some serious facts need to be faced. It was Iran that trained armed and gave sanctuary to the 911 terrorists. Soleimani, taken down by President Trump in 2019, planned the operation. Iran did not stamp the passports of the 9-11 terrorists that trained in Iran—either when they entered or left-- as that would have prevented them from entering the USA. Osama bin Laden himself explained in his declaration of war against the United States how thankful he was for the sanctuary provided by Iran for his family and Al Qaeda. In a trial in the southern district of New York, Judge Daniels found Iran liable for at least \$65 billion in damages to the families that survived 9-11.

Our critical deterrent task we must undertake---after rebuilding our nuclear deterrent---is deterring Iran. They created Hezbollah (1982), then Hamas (1989), Islamic Jihad (1981) and the Houthis (2023) are the primary conductors of violence in the Middle East, and with the exception of Hamas are all Sunni. But all funded and armed by Iran.

The objective of Iran is to destroy Israel and the United States with nuclear bombs. In the meantime, attack both with tens of thousands of missiles, rockets, & drones; create mass disinformation; and design cyber-attacks against the West's energy grid and critical infrastructure.

Sometimes deterrence, if just retaliation, is not necessarily sufficient. Khomeini was asked wouldn't it be suicidal for Iran to attack Israel because Israel would retaliate and use nuclear weapons against Iran and destroy much of the country. To which Khomeini replied he did not care about Iran's survival; having attacked Israel with nuclear weapons “all the Jews would be dead” and Allah's command would be obeyed. Think of the value of missile defenses such as Golden Dome to deny the ability of such crazies to target not just Israel but an American city as well. Taking down the Iranian conventional military capability is designed to prevent Iran from using these forces to intimidate their neighbors. Taking down their nuclear capability is obviously preventing Iran from securing nuclear weapons—whether to be placed on the end of a missile or in the locker or hold of a ship. The Iranian eschatology calls upon the creation of Armageddon, and only then does the 12 Imam or Mahdi appear to rule all Muslims.

RealClearDefense Essay #1
In Pursuit of Nuclear Abolition

By Peter R. Huessy

We have had the last seven Presidents advocate for either major reductions in nuclear weapons or their near abolition, but almost no analysis has been forthcoming as to what reductions have secured for US security, and whether one should try practically to get to or toward abolition. When such an analysis is completed, the maze of contradictions in the arguments for complete abolition became apparent as does the troubling impact such abolition narratives have on the current nuclear strategic balance including arms reductions.

It is true that even before the use of atomic weapons against Japan ended World War II, there were those who wished nukes could be banned altogether. After August 1945, and absent abolition, there were calls for such weapons and all uranium mining and research to be controlled by a UN organization under what was known as

the 1946 Baruch Plan. All nations would allow inspections by a UN authority to ensure nuclear activity was peaceful. The US would unilaterally give up its nuclear capability while Russia promised they would do so some time in the future.

Baruch failed. After the 1961 Berlin and 1962 Cuban crises, although the US and USSR decided not to lob nuclear warheads at each other, luckily, off ramps were available and taken. But still the scent of Armageddon remained in the strategic environment. So, some 6 years later the Johnson administration proposed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT to at least prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons. Those having exploded a nuclear device were designated the permanent five members--China, the United States, Russia, France and Great Britain. Israel, Pakistan and India did not sign the deal. Six years later (1974) Israel was assumed to have nukes, and that same year India exploded its first nuclear weapon. Thirty years later in 1998 Pakistan followed suit.

NPT treaty language required the permanent five to reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons, promote non-proliferation and, in the view of some, seek abolition. And thus, here was the first contradiction. The US and NATO members would never have signed an agreement where they pledged to eliminate nuclear weapons in Europe, in the face of the huge Soviet conventional force advantage which was only balanced by the US extended nuclear deterrent. The US national security council wrote a Presidential memo to that effect. The fact: nuclear abolition is only pursued under conditions of general and complete conventional disarmament. Although the 1986 Conventional Forces-Europe (CFE) agreement and the collapse of the USSR markedly reduced former Warsaw Pact forces, military forces remained requiring US extended nuclear deterrence to remain in place.

Russia and China have built arsenals of highly accurate and very low yield, battlefield nuclear weapon. While it may indeed be fanciful to believe such use of nuclear weapons ---e.g., “escalate to win”—makes sense, unfortunately Moscow and Peking believe such warfare is workable and have deployed just such forces. If on the other hand one believes the threat to use such battlefield nuclear weapons is all bluff, then why does the West keep any nuclear extended deterrent in Europe? And if the bad guys won't escalate using theater nuclear weapons, why would they escalate and use central strategic systems? Its either all bluff or all real. Either the US needs a nuclear deterrent or we don't. Again, another contradiction.

Many abolitionists reject the option of nuclear deterrence at any level for fear that the retaliatory use of nuclear weapons will lead quickly to all out nuclear use and Armageddon. Many new books and Hollywood movies now have this message. Thus, for fear that without abolition nuclear war is inevitable, the abolitionists would unilaterally get rid of the very American nuclear deterrent that has kept the nuclear peace for 80 years. And thus, in still another contradiction, abolitionists make it more likely that our adversaries and enemies will use against us and our allies the very nuclear weapons whose elimination is being sought because the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable!

Another abolition narrative is that it is unfair for the nuclear “have” nations to bully other “have not” nuclear nations. Hans Blix, a Swedish diplomat and the former International Atomic Energy Administration (IAEA) Director-General told me at a Senate briefing there was no reason the US should have nuclear weapons but not any other country, such as Sweden for example. He declared the only fair solution was for everyone to have such weapons or no one. This again is a popular framing of the nuclear environment but nonetheless highly distorted, even dangerous. In the absence of abolition, Blix was advocating wholesale proliferation, a total contradiction of his mission at IAEA.

Furthermore, the US extended deterrent force is hardly for bullying, as it is totally defensive, and not coupled with a conventional force that can invade East in Europe or West in the Pacific. On the other hand, China and Russia have battlefield nuclear force precisely to commit aggression, such as against Ukraine and Taiwan. They do not have nuclear weapons with which to extend protection to their friends. Their proxy friends such as North Korea and Iran, routinely attack and murder their neighbors. Between 1965-73 for example, as ROK retired General Bun

In-Chun recently explained, North Korea regularly attacked ROK military bases, resulting in over 1000 North Korean terrorists killed or captured on ROK territory. Iran is the state in the world that engages in the most terror attacks including on their own people. Islamic Jihad, Hamas (the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood and Palestinians), Hezbollah and the Houthis undertake serial murder, rape and bombing campaigns, all at the direction of Iran, in the name of ridding the world of Jews, Christians and others standing in the way of spreading violent Islam everywhere, including planning and executing the attacks of 9-11. In yet another contradiction, ending US extended deterrent would let loose the adversary bullies now chanting “death to America.”

President Reagan pushed at Reykjavik for the elimination of nuclear weapons but as part of a strategy to first eliminate what Ambassador Ron Lehman told me were “fast flyers,” especially large, multiple warhead land based missiles. The very missiles banned under START II. And precisely why Gorbachev and then the Russian Duma later rejected START II. Again, Iceland was when Reagan sought to lessen the major coercive and blackmail power of nuclear armed missiles, the very core of Soviet military power. START II got rid of such missiles but that objective is now missing in abolition strategies today. Another contradiction.

Though abolition continues to be a project for the distant future in the rhetorical hopes of some, the serious business is eliminating the blackmail and coercive (albeit reckless) use of nuclear weapons. Our enemies seek not to deter war, but to secure the objectives of war itself whether invading Ukraine, taking over Taiwan, killing all Israelis or swallowing the Republic of Korea.

To ensure success, the Brothers Mayhem, (Russia, China, North Korea and Iran), are seeking their objectives through a cooperative “unrestricted warfare” against the US and the West. Nuclear weapons are the shield behind which they fight. Our job? To make sure we win, they lose.

Peter Huessy is President of Geostrategic Analysis and Senior Fellow at NIDS and the Gold Institute and is featured weekly on the John Batchelor Show.

RealClearDefense Essay #2

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2026/10/02/president_kennedy_mad_and_the_lessons_of_berlin_and_cuba_1209421.html

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 U.S. strategy relies on the idea that should the U.S. 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 U.S. 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 newly 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, U.S. 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 U.S. no longer needed the U.S. 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 U.S. missiles based in Turkey for the Soviets removing the close-in missiles in Cuba.

In both cases, the U.S. 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, U.S. strategy was to go after Soviet military systems themselves such as missile silos. The key reason the U.S. 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 U.S. move toward keeping at risk Soviet military assets by falsely claiming the U.S. still operated under the strategy of MAD.

The U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S., 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 U.S. 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 U.S. policy since at least the Truman administration when U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. have an insurance policy---leave behind, a small extended nuclear force in Western Europe. The U.S. 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 U.S. 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.

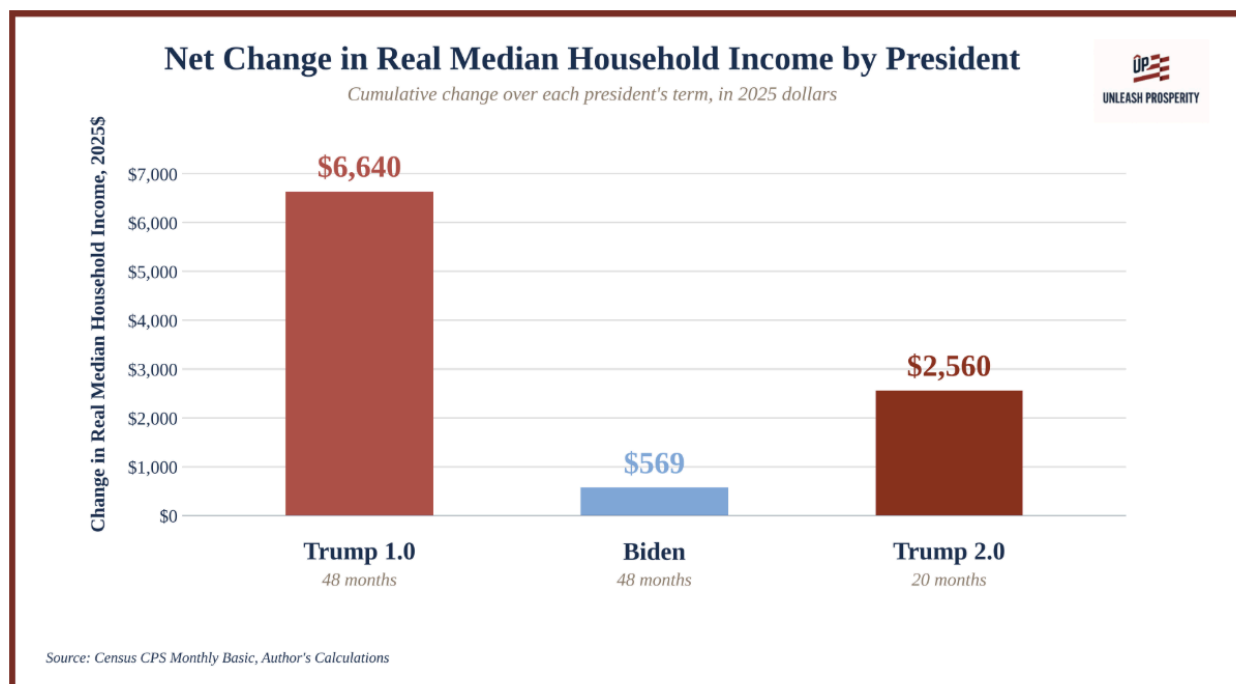
Then on April 30, 1999, a new nuclear policy was crafted by a small group of top Russian officials. President Yeltsin in a secret meeting of the Politburo called for Russia to develop highly accurate and very low yield nuclear weapons able to be used on the conventional battlefield. Mr. Putin as President 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 U.S. does have a small number of theater nuclear forces now in Great Britain, the U.S. needs more flexible forces to better hold at risk our adversary's military capability. Although it is not explicitly known, the lack of sufficient U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. and its allies believe nuclear and conventional forces are to deter and prevent war. That is how U.S. nuclear modernization and a flexible response capability will keep the nuclear peace.

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Economics



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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