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 November 16, 2026

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

NIDS Events of the Week

John Warden and James Howe on Extended Nuclear Deterrence



20261119 TNF in US Strategy - Warden.pdf

Link to video: https://youtu.be/gcbPkHx8QvU



NIDS_Russian_Non-Strategic_Nuclear_Deve

Quotes of the Week

Vice Admiral Rick Seif, Commander, Submarine Forces. "10 boats returned, all those boats are combat surge ready. Each availability completed represents a combat hull put back into the hands of fleet commanders to generate combat readiness."

Gerald C. Brown: To properly understand Beijing's approach to nuclear weapons and the drivers behind its recent nuclear expansion, analysts need to place developments within the context of China's overall military strategy.

Mikhail Troittskiy: Trump should press Xi and Putin to draw a clear boundary against nuclear coercion-testing Chinese restraint and demanding Russian accountability. [From the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists!]

Air Force Global Strike Command: Conducted a test launch of an unarmed Minuteman III ICBM from Vandenberg Space Force Base.

WSJ: Beijing's rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal is ushering in a potentially "unprecedented era of instability" in which the United States must simultaneously deter two major nuclear powers, China and Russia.

Adm. William Houston, director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program: "Speak softly and carry a big stick. 'Our ballistic missile submarines are the most survivable leg of our nation's nuclear triad; they are the ultimate guarantee that no adversary will ever miscalculate America's resolve.'

Sen. Jim Banks (R-IN): "I'm proud to have worked with @SECNAV to bring a 1-Star Admiral to @NAVSEACrane. This means we'll be able to more quickly field nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles and conventional hypersonic weapons. This is good for America and this is PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH in action."

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT): "The Trump-Xi-Putin trilateral meeting is a historic first-of-its-kind. Together, the U.S., Russia & China control over 90% of the world's nuclear arsenal. These relationships are too big to fail."

The Air Force and Secretary Troy E. Meink: The B-21 Raider successfully released a conventional weapon during a test flight earlier this month, demonstrating a key strike capability and reinforcing its planned role as the backbone of the U.S. bomber fleet and a central component of American deterrence.

CSAF Gen. Ken Wilsbach: "This weapons test proves the B-21 program is excelling. We are building an impressive fleet that will give our joint force credible, penetrating strike options for decades to come."

International Developments

The Danish Parliament Approves the Trump Deal on Greenland.

The U.S. intelligence community: Iran still has between 1,500 and 2,500 missiles in its arsenal, leaving Tehran with significant capability to attack U.S. and allied targets.

Russia deployed two Tu-95MS strategic bombers to Vietnam this week, the first such mission since the Soviet era and was a "pointed demonstration" of Moscow's "nuclear might and global reach." (NYT)

The objectives of China's nuclear strategy shifted the conflict China's nuclear strategy would operate in, making the United States its primary target. Thus, China's nuclear forces needed to deter U.S. nuclear attacks and coercion during a fight over Taiwan. (Full text of this essay is posted later in this report).

Trump Administration Developments

The leaders of the United States, China, and Russia agreed to a four-point peace declaration, stating that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, while pledging dialogue on reducing nuclear risks and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Congressional Developments

Iran Funding Vote

The Senate by a vote of 49-51 rejected a cutoff in defense spending on the War with Iran. Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), and Rand Paul (R-Ky.) joined most Democrats in support of the measure on Nov. 19. Sen. John Fetterman (D-Pa.) was the only Democrat to vote with Republicans against the resolution. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), who previously voted in favor of a war powers resolution, voted against the measure on Nov. 19. The War Powers Resolution of 1973, which is also known as the War Powers Act, is intended to limit the president's authority to order military actions beyond 60 days without the approval of Congress.

Democrat Spending Plan is $4 trillion over ten years

The House Budget Committee explained that the Democrats, after promising "affordability," are already planning how to spend trillions in taxpayer dollars, raising mortgage and inflationary costs, before they've even set foot in office. The Committee for a Responsible Budget (CRFB) released a new report analyzing House Democrats' plans to add over $4 trillion to our already $40 trillion national debt within the first 100 days of the 120th Congress. Democrats want to spend trillions right away on policies that grow government and put Washington bureaucrats in between Americans and health care. They'd also strip out the safeguards in the *One*

Big Beautiful Bill that prevent waste, fraud, and abuse; undo work requirements for able-bodied adults on welfare; and give Medicaid, ACA tax credits, and SNAP to illegal immigrants or other ineligible individuals. Without offsets, the national debt would climb from today's 100 percent of GDP to 135 percent by 2037, 10 points above what CBO already projects. That hits families in the wallet. More borrowing pushes interest rates up, adding about $300 billion just to service our existing debt and nearly $600 a year for a typical American's mortgage payment. It also fuels inflation, which could cost the average household an extra $1,500 to $5,900 over the next ten years. Democrat leadership will not support a defense spending bill that contains funds to support Israel or to support any military activity against Iran.

Defense Spending Review

Ahead of a December 11 congressional budget deadline to keep the federal government funded, Hoover Senior Fellow Michael J. Boskin and Roger Zakheim, director of the Reagan Institute, argue that legislators should ignore calls from the isolationist right and far left to reduce the proposed $1.5 trillion defense budget. They ground their argument in the history of the defense buildup conducted by the Reagan administration, which "pursued pro-growth tax, entitlement and regulatory reforms rather than cuts to our military in the 1980s." Boskin and Zakheim argue that the combination of a "transformational military buildup and economic recovery allowed America to win the Cold War and enjoy a generation of relative peace and prosperity, which extended through the 1990s." Examining the nation's fiscal position today, the authors suggest reining in mandatory Social Security and Medicare expenses rather than cutting defense. As Boskin and Zakheim note, those major social programs are projected to account for a far larger share of federal expenditures in the coming years than the defense budget, even as the nation once again faces "an increasingly dangerous world."

Reagan Institute

Roger Zakheim: Peace Through Strength: New Book of Interest

A new book by Roger Zakheim highlights Reagan's Speech through Strength strategy. Key insights from Zakheim's interview with the Hoover Institute are as follows: (1) Convincing citizens to support a peacetime military buildup is difficult in a democracy; Zakheim explains that there were a lot of opponents of President Reagan's [pursuit of a peacetime military buildup….If you want to take money from the American people….they probably want to improve their roads or improve their schools. But to put it into the military is hard to do--President Reagan's pursuit of a peacetime military buildup. . . . If you want to take money from the American people . . . they probably want it to improve their roads or improve their schools. But to put it into a military is hard to do, and you have to make the case." The next point Zakheim makes is that Reagan's views were shaped by the era of disarmament pursued by the US "by the First World War and by the 1920s and 1930s, the era of disarmament, His major takeaway was that a lot of people died in the 1940s because too many people in the 1930s did not invest in strength. That was Reagan's core belief and outlook. That's what peace through strength was fundamentally about. "Reagan was part of the Greatest Generation, the generation that fought and prevailed in the Second World War. Zakheim concludes that **President Donald Trump should emphasize, as Reagan did, that a military buildup helps protect freedom around the world. "**"Reagan spoke about his defense buildup every three days in office. . . . He referred to the buildup . . . [as] 'a sheltering arm of freedom in a dangerous

world.' The military was fundamentally built and needed to be rebuilt to give free peoples shelter because he understood the world was dangerous. That was unique to Reagan, and President Trump doesn't emphasize that quite as much."

ICBM EAR Notes from remarks by Roger Zakheim, Reagan Institute

Peace Through Strength 20th November Podcast

Détente, Cut Defense….vs Peace Through Strength was Reagan's Own….1962 Speech draft never delivered. Put forward a vision of the world….containment not the way to go. Our system will win not just arms race….Richard Allen, Caspar Weinberger critical in developing Reagan's bold view. Europe thought RR was a nuclear armed cowboy. The defining issue of the 1980 campaign, peace through strength vs. war monger. RR for many years hosted a radio show with 20 million listeners. Deep criticism of SALT arms control process with 24 radio shows just on SALT! Huge critic of these deals. US comply but not USSR. How to fashion a message developed during radio address. Modernize our TRIAD. Deeply opposed to cutting B1 program. Experts relied on were: Ikle, van Cleave, Allen, Sen Tower, Heritage Foundation key. RZ: the US would not get buildup without Carter's bad policies. Harold Brown, Brzezinski supported buildup but President Carter believed military strength was provocative. Republican platform also excellent blueprint. Within the administration there was a big fight between Stockman vs Weinberger: Reagan did not like being a referee in such fights. Slow growth alternative was Stockman's and it crashed and burned. He wanted to dial back Pershing, GLCM and SDI. Stockman looked through a political lens, and he saw the military buildup as a liability. Reagan supported Roll-back vs détente. 600 ship Navy—superiority was a margin of safety. Battleships still have fight in them. Lebanon was the worst mistake. MX program was huge issue. On the Tonight show Carson---ridiculed what was "dense" pack or closely spaced basing that was called "dunce pack"….Trump first President to campaign on peace through strength. Nunn, Jackson, types present. Blue-dog Democrats key to success in Congress. 1982-6 RR buildup. Industrialized base was present for RR but under Trump needs to expand the industrial base including AI into the system. Soviet buildup was vastly greater than the official #5% was actually 40% of GDP during RR administration. China buildup is a parallel with the USSR. And with a "thriving" economy or much bigger and growing economy than USSR. USSR limits not fully known at the time. Trump not yet developed a "roll back" strategy. And where are we now vis the Cold War #1. China Blue water Navy big objective; dominate the 1st island chain; has global ambitions; building a full up nuclear Triad. What was the cause of USSR decline and collapse? Military buildup. (Editor's note see Warren Norquist essay on the subject). Reagan pressure made Gorby address contradictions that he could not resolve within the context of Soviet communism. SDI key was part of the overall peace through strength. MX was counter to the SS18 and MX was an asset as part of a foreign policy strategy. SDI, (RR wouldn't eliminate, USSR couldn't compete) and then GLCM and Pershing (quick strike). We did not build in 1930s and thus a lot of people died in the 1940s. Be strong so we do not have to fight.

ICBM Essay of the Week

The Military Strategic Drivers Behind China's Nuclear Expansion

Gerald C. Brown

November 17, 2026

In June 1993, a group of Second Artillery Corps senior leaders gathered at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center. The organizers brought Li Xuge, recently retired commander of the Second Artillery, as a special guest for the event. Li had watched the Second Artillery develop from its infancy to this day, when China finally tested a ballistic missile capable of striking anywhere within the United States. However, Li had received significant pushback on the program in the years prior to this launch.

In the early 1990s, China's military strategy was shifting to focus on war with Taiwan. In that environment, senior leaders questioned the value of a global-ranging missile: Who would they even target? Li managed to receive approval for the development, but only because it did not require extra funding and had initially been an objective of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai decades earlier. As in Li Xuge's time, China's nuclear forces today are one of many elements of the country's military power that support its broader military strategy. To properly understand Beijing's approach to nuclear weapons and the drivers behind its recent nuclear expansion, analysts need to place developments within the context of China's overall military strategy.

China's nuclear force has changed significantly since the early 2000s and especially since 2019, fielding a larger array of intercontinental systems, shifting towards a launch-on-warning posture, and developing precise-regional range systems. However, China's general approach to nuclear strategy has remained relatively consistent — China's nuclear force deters nuclear attacks and prevents nuclear coercion. What has changed is less about China's nuclear strategy than about the military strategy China's nuclear weapons support. Shifts to China's military strategy in 2004, 2014, and 2019 have increasingly focused on the need to counter intervention by a nuclear-armed United States during a Taiwan conflict. Shifting preparations towards fighting the United States includes the need to develop credible nuclear response options to deter U.S. nuclear employment. Beijing has increasingly prioritized the nuclear component as it perceives the United States is lowering its threshold for nuclear use and integrating nuclear weapons into its Taiwan war plans. In developing credible response options, China seeks to take nuclear weapons off the table for the United States, deterring a perceived key element of U.S. military strategy and thus limiting its ability to intervene. Policymakers should examine the overarching objective that China's nuclear forces are meant to serve and focus their efforts on the best way to deter a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

The Origin Story

China's military strategic guidelines determine its military strategy, which guides the overall objectives of its military and the wars it is preparing for. Beneath this level sit the various forms of military force in China's employ, each serving unique roles in pursuit of these larger military strategic objectives. These include theater strategies, which guide China's military theater commands in charge of employing its military forces to achieve these goals; service strategies, which guide the military services responsible for manning and equipping those forces; and other areas such as nuclear strategy. People's Liberation Army texts establish that China's nuclear strategy serves the country's overall military strategy, rather than operating in isolation. The 2012 textbook *Lectures on Combat Force Development*, for example, states "strategic nuclear forces tasks are determined primarily by the state's military strategy, along with the nuclear policy and nuclear strategy formed under the guidance of that military strategy." Nuclear weapons, as with all other elements of the Chinese military, are one tool of many, performing specific tasks in pursuit of China's broader military strategic objectives.

In 1993, China's military strategic guidelines pivoted to Taiwan. [Exactly at the time that US analysts were arguing that such threats as the USSR during the Cold War were a think of the past.] Subsequent changes in 2004 and 2014 maintained a Taiwan focus while assigning a steadily increasing role to counter the United States, as concern grew that it would intervene in a Taiwan conflict. While the objectives of China's nuclear strategy remained relatively consistent, these changes in military strategy shifted the conflict China's nuclear strategy would operate in, making the United States its primary target. Thus, China's nuclear forces needed to deter U.S. nuclear attacks and coercion during a fight over Taiwan.

However, China's nuclear force was ill-suited to assure retaliation against the United States in a Taiwan conflict. In the early 2000s, China primarily possessed a small array of regional-range nuclear systems that could not reach the continental United States, with only 18 silo-based DF-5A missiles capable of striking the U.S. mainland. These were stored unfueled and without warheads. China's nuclear force was vulnerable to preemptive strikes and posed almost no threat to the United States.

As China's military strategy began realigning its efforts toward the United States, the service strategy of the military services tasked with training and equipping forces to meet these goals also began to change. The People's Liberation Army sought to ensure it could execute the tasked nuclear strategy in the context of the conflict it had to prepare for. The 2006 *Science of Service Strategy* noted increasing nuclear risks from the United States as confrontation grew, with the country's superior nuclear force and missile defenses undermining the credibility of China's response. It called for improvements to China's intercontinental-range nuclear force, particularly in mobility. During this period, China began deploying the DF-31 class, providing a mobile intercontinental ballistic missile capability and increasing its number of intercontinental-range nuclear weapons.

As time marched on, Chinese leadership grew increasingly concerned about the extent of U.S. military intervention in a Taiwan conflict. As such, the requirement to deter U.S. nuclear attacks during that conflict also grew more urgent. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* highlights a growing nuclear threat from the United States and notes the need to focus on intercontinental-range missiles given the distance from "China to its main strategic opponent." The text notes the need to develop a wide range of capabilities — including defense penetration, readiness, and multiple warhead technology — to execute its assigned nuclear strategy. Following that same logic, the 2013 text *Lectures on Service Strategy* states that China should accelerate the replacement of nuclear forces with intercontinental systems, keep optimizing force structure, strengthen strategic ballistic-missile early warning, push the development of a new generation of nuclear missiles, appropriately increase the number of nuclear warheads, and strive for a qualitative leap in combat performance.

By 2019, China had introduced a wide array of mobile intercontinental missiles, some with multiple warheads, and had shifted to a nuclear force of roughly 90 missiles capable of targeting the continental United States. These missiles were increasingly mobile and survivable, with significantly improved defense penetration technology and operating at higher readiness levels.

That same year, China revised its military strategic guidelines once again, unveiling the "Military Strategic Guideline for a New Era". These new guidelines kept Taiwan as the primary strategic direction but shifted China's focus to more directly confronting the United States. In one of a special series of authoritative essays on the new guidelines from the Academy of Military Sciences' *Military Art*, Deputy Eastern Theater Commander Wei Gang explained the "profound adjustment of the international strategic landscape" that had driven the change in military strategic guidelines. In the essay titled "Some Thoughts on Strategic Guidance for the Struggle against the Powerful Adversary," Wei described a stark environment, fueled by a "fundamental difference in development paths" between the two countries. Wei claimed the United States was undertaking a whole-of-government strategy to undermine China, which it regarded as a "long-term, primary, and comprehensive strategic competitor." U.S. actions included employing a wide array of new military measures designed to "encircle and provoke" China, while noting General Secretary Xi's view that the United States "may charge at us at any time."

These "new situations" required a strategic shift from simply "responding to intervention by the powerful adversary" to instead "directly crossing swords with the powerful adversary," a strong statement indicating that a war fought over Taiwan would put the People's Liberation Army in direct conflict with the United States. The struggle against the United States became the "strategic task that underpins national rejuvenation," a concept describing China's rise to its perceived rightful global position and explicitly requiring unification with Taiwan. The text called for a long series of military measures to "enhance the capability to counterbalance the powerful adversary," including increased investments in nuclear forces.

As China's conviction hardened that it would need to directly confront the United States in a war over Taiwan, so did its concerns that the latter would employ nuclear weapons to deny its capability to succeed. Around 2018, Beijing became increasingly concerned that the United States was lowering the nuclear threshold and was willing to employ nuclear weapons against a Chinese invasion fleet of Taiwan. Recent Chinese sources show a continuation of this trend as well as concern about U.S. nuclear first strikes. Writing in a 2025 *Military Art* article titled "An Analysis of Development Trends in International Nuclear Forces," writers from the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force described a further lowering of the U.S. nuclear threshold, particularly with the United States "accelerating the research, development, and deployment of tactical nuclear weapons." Authors from the Academy of Military Science described U.S. actions to "balance against the development of China's nuclear forces" and "break the existing strategic balance" in a 2026 *World Military Review* article titled "An Assessment of the International Nuclear Strategic Posture." They claim the United States intends to "raise the number of deployed nuclear warheads to over 3,000" and is "reactivating the concept of 'limited nuclear war,'" further lowering the nuclear threshold.

As these concerns grew, China increasingly prioritized the role of nuclear forces in accomplishing this broader military strategy to ensure that U.S. nuclear first strikes could not deny China a victory over Taiwan. In an expanded meeting of the Central Military Commission in 2019, China developed the 2027 goals for the People's Liberation Army, organized under the "three major strategic capabilities" — the capability to achieve "strategic decisive victory" over Taiwan, to "strategically counterbalance" the United States, and to achieve "strategic deterrence and control" to limit horizontal escalation. These goals accelerated key aspects of the People's

Liberation Army's existing modernization that China needed to prioritize in pursuit of its military strategy. Observers of China's nuclear force have highlighted the role of "strategic counterbalance" within China's approach to nuclear weapons. The term represents a core task of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force and includes a wide array of nuclear and conventional capabilities geared toward confronting the United States. What's new is the importance and acceleration of these capabilities. Following these changes, Xi Jinping has repeatedly called for accelerating a strong system of strategic deterrence to meet China's 2027 objectives, with nuclear weapons as a core, but not the only, element of China's strategic deterrent.

A Nuclear Shield for Conventional Attack

Observers should understand China's nuclear force today and its continued developments as one element within the context of China's broader military strategy. First and foremost, China's military focus is developing a force that can succeed in a fight over Taiwan. This involves a wide array of tools necessary for overwhelming Taiwan and succeeding in an amphibious landing and occupation. Particularly after 2019, this also increasingly includes the ability to directly confront a perceived increasingly belligerent United States during that operation. Nuclear weapons are one of the many instruments that serve this purpose, alongside a growing role for capabilities such as space, cyber, long-range strike, and far-seas naval operations among others. The specific task of China's nuclear force in confronting the United States and limiting intervention is to prevent nuclear use and coercion against China during that fight. In other words, China's nuclear strategy is geared toward creating a "nuclear shield" that deters the United States from using nuclear weapons to defeat an invasion force or target China's cities and industry during operations against Taiwan.

To do this, China believes that it is essential to possess a survivable, intercontinental and regional-range force that operates at higher readiness levels and can credibly respond to any threat the United States can muster. China wants to take nuclear weapons off the table for the United States in a fight over Taiwan and thus accelerated the development of its nuclear force. Chinese military writings are increasingly clear on the role nuclear weapons will play in counterbalancing the United States in pursuit of unification with Taiwan. Educational lectures contained in an October 2022 edition of *Rocket Force News* describe nuclear weapons as a prominent feature of great-power competition, stating that possessing a stronger nuclear force would be necessary to regulate adversary "nuclear provocations" in pursuit of the goal of national rejuvenation. Speaking directly to achieving "complete reunification" with Taiwan, an author in a key journal on Chinese Communist Party ideology stated that "China is building a strong system of strategic deterrence forces in order to resolutely oppose interference by external hegemonic forces."

Over recent years, Chinese strategists have increasingly come to believe that in developing a force that can deter U.S. nuclear attack, they can also deter U.S. conventional operations as the United States integrates nuclear weapons more deeply into its conventional war planning. There has long been some understanding within China that nuclear forces play a role in deterring broader military interactions. However, military writings over the past few years have grown more candid regarding the role Chinese nuclear weapons can play in directly deterring U.S. conventional actions. This appears to stem from a growing belief that nuclear weapons are central to U.S. military planning for a conflict with China and thus deterring their use constrains a key element of American strategy.

In a 2023 textbook titled *Introduction to Missile Weapons Systems*, cadre at the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force University of Engineering — the military academy that trains Rocket Force cadets — added preventing "military interventions from other countries" as a direct objective of Chinese nuclear deterrence, [i.e., stopping the USA from coming to the defense of its allies] a departure from traditional writings on the topic. Writings from prominent authors in *Military Art* across 2024 to 2025 discuss this in even more explicit terms. For example, a series of Academy of Military Science authors in a 2024 article titled "The U.S. Proxy War Model and Countermeasures" discuss the "'Ukrainization' of the Taiwan question" and perceived U.S. plans to turn a war to unify with Taiwan into a U.S.-China conflict. As the leading countermeasure, the authors describe the need to build a "powerful strategic deterrence force system," specifically calling out further developments in a wide array of nuclear forces, to "prevent external forces from intervening in the war of reunification." The authors claim that "only if we possess the strength and will that the U.S. military dreads can we snuff out its idea of military intervention."

In an article titled "Research on the Asymmetric Operational Employment of Navy Submarine Forces," a group of Chinese Navy authors discussed "using the nuclear to curb the conventional" to deter U.S. military intervention. They claim they need the nuclear capacity to retaliate under all circumstances,

so that the enemy is convinced that, in the event of being struck by its nuclear and conventional weapons, we still have the capability and the determination to resolutely carry out nuclear strikes, thereby achieving the aim of overawing and halting military intervention against us by the powerful adversary and guaranteeing our right to freedom of military action in safeguarding core interests in the course of the great rejuvenation.

Finally, in a 2025 article titled "Making Combined Efforts to Raise the Quality of Preparations for Military Struggle in the Maritime Direction," People's Liberation Army Navy authors insisted on the need to use "nuclear forces to

check conventional ones," in response to the United States' increasing integration between nuclear and conventional force planning. They claim China should accelerate the construction of a credible and reliable nuclear counterattack force as nuclear and conventional operations became further blurred and a more prominent component of great-power competition.

The emerging use of nuclear weapons to deter U.S. military intervention in a Taiwan conflict is the primary area where analysts might identify specific evolutions of the objectives of Chinese nuclear strategy. Despite this, the mechanism used to deter intervention—a survivable retaliatory force that can counterattack under any conditions—remains identical to previous Chinese thinking on the topic. Beijing believes that American strategists are more deeply integrating nuclear weapons into a wide range of military planning, citing as evidence conventional-nuclear integration and the use of tactical nuclear weapons to support military operations in the Pacific. In facing a combined conventional-nuclear threat from the United States, maintaining a strong and reliable nuclear counterattack force becomes central in responding to that challenge. Thus, by deterring the nuclear force that is perceived as increasingly central to U.S. intervention in a Taiwan conflict, you support the objective of deterring American intervention. The writings discussing the topic are still geared towards a traditional, retaliatory model to achieve the desired effects, instead of threatening nuclear first strikes to deter U.S. conventional actions. Since Chinese strategists believe that U.S. nuclear weapons are increasingly central to U.S. plans for intervention in a Taiwan conflict, taking nuclear options off the table for the United States helps deter American intervention writ large. Writings discussing the topic still favor a traditional, retaliatory model to achieve the desired effects, rather than threatening nuclear first strikes to deter U.S. conventional actions.

As with any problem in international affairs, the drivers behind China's nuclear expansion are multi-faceted. International status has a long-standing role in China's views of nuclear weapons, and Chinese concerns of a U.S. first strike or conventional counterforce options are longstanding concerns and key areas that China would need to prepare for within a Taiwan conflict. But understanding the growth of changes to China's nuclear force as one component of a broader pattern of evolutions in military strategy paints a more complete and coherent picture while aligning with the way the People's Liberation Army discusses the role of its nuclear force. On the other hand, explanations such as China planning to employ nuclear first strikes or attempting to surpass U.S. nuclear force size contradict the robust discussion on the role of China's nuclear force in deterring the United States as China's military and political leaders describe.

When trying to understand China's growing nuclear force and develop effective responses, defense planners would be wise to examine the best means of countering strategic military objectives over Taiwan as opposed to narrowly reviewing symmetric responses. Understood properly, U.S. nuclear forces are one of many elements of U.S. national power and may or may not be the best means of deterring an invasion of Taiwan. If Beijing believes it can now launch on warning of a large-scale U.S. strike and respond proportionally to control escalation in the face of a limited U.S. first strike, it may no longer believe the United States has credible nuclear options to threaten it during an invasion of Taiwan. In this case, it seems unlikely that additional U.S. nuclear forces would alter this situation, and thus they may not provide significant benefit from a deterrence perspective. This outlook would be different if China were instead seeking a posture geared towards preemptive first strikes or damage limitation, where additional U.S. nuclear forces could complicate Chinese nuclear targeting. U.S. defense planners should examine the cross-strait security dynamic as a whole, weighing which investments across the force would best disrupt China's attempts at an amphibious landing and credibly complicate its planning.

Gerald C. Brown is an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. His research focuses on Chinese military and security issues, cross-strait security, and strategic deterrence. Brown was previously an analyst in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. He has spent time as a researcher supporting the Department of Defense and served in the United States Air Force. All opinions are his own and do not represent those of any current or former employers.

Missile Defense Corner

Why do folks oppose missile defense? Nuclear abolitionists like the US being vulnerable to nuclear attack because then the assumption is that the USA won't be "frisky" or as the editor of the New York Times once wrote "unfettered." Since the bad guys are just reacting to our being bad (remember as Amb Kirkpatrick explained) always blame the USA. And thus, our unilateral restraint (build no defenses) will of course be reciprocated by the 'bad guys.' It's a variation of the "Mommy he made me do it" defense—when you were caught eating the plate of brownies, you blamed it on your brother! There are no evil adversaries but there are American leaders (Trump, Reagan) that simply have to be restrained because they make other powers do bad things. It's a variation of the view that in the absence of the USA and thus imperialism and colonialism and capitalism, the world would be in a state of utopia.

Tribute to the US Navy and GD-EB Industry

The U.S. Navy has cut submarine maintenance delays by 40% and returned or delivered 10 submarines over the past 12 months, senior service leaders reported at the Naval Submarine League's 2026 Annual Symposium as U.S. submarine industrial base reforms gain traction. Throughout his opening remarks, Vice Adm. Rick Seif, Commander, Submarine Forces, outlined joint Navy and industry efforts to shorten maintenance availabilities for active submarines while scaling new-construction deliveries. That push follows landmark procurement commitments, including July's $76.6 billion contract package for five Columbia-class Build II and nine Virginia-class Block VI submarines, alongside $5 billion in industrial base investments. Seif noted that 10 submarines either entered or returned to service over the past 12 months. That total comprises two new-build Block IV Virginia-class fast-attack submarines commissioned in early 2026—*USS Massachusetts* (SSN-798) and *USS Idaho* (SSN-799)—alongside two boats completing Post-Shakedown Availabilities (PSAs) and six completing scheduled Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) depot maintenance availabilities."10 boats returned, all those boats are combat surge ready. Each availability completed represents a combat hull put back into the hands of fleet commanders to generate combat readiness." [*Vice Admiral Rick Seif, Commander, Submarine Forces.]*

Vice Adm. Rob Gaucher, Director, Submarine Programs and the Pentagon's Submarine Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager, highlighted progress on the next two Block IV boats: the future *USS Arkansas* (SSN-800), which is on the precipice of sea trials, and the future *USS Utah* (SSN-801), which is nearing its fast cruise. Both boats are scheduled for delivery within two months and commissioning in Spring 2027. On-time delivery of *Arkansas* and *Utah* would mark four new-build Virginia-class deliveries within a 14-month span.

SHORTENING MAINTENANCE PERIODS

Gaucher detailed parallel progress in public and private shipyards, announcing that every fast-attack submarine currently in maintenance at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is either on or ahead of schedule. Boats such as *USS John Warner* (SSN-785) and *USS Illinois* (SSN-786) represent key recovery cases; although delayed relative to their original baselines, both are now projected to return to the fleet ahead of their adjusted schedules.

Post-deployment maintenance windows have also compressed. *USS Iowa* (SSN-797) completed its PSA in roughly six months compared to the typical eight-to-12-month window, making the boat available for surge tasking ahead of schedule. Gaucher also pointed to *USS Massachusetts* (SSN-798), whose formal PSA was waived in favor of pier side work facilitated by Huntington Ingalls Industries' (HII) Newport News Shipbuilding, avoiding a drydocking period and accelerating fleet readiness.

"We must commit first, remove our own barriers, and add capacity across our enterprise. No one organization can solve this by themselves. It requires a shared commitment to deliver what the nation needs."

– *Vice Admiral Rob Gaucher, Director, Submarine Programs.*

Across the enterprise, cumulative days of maintenance delay fell from 1,400 days in FY24 to 800 days in FY25, before dropping another ~40% to 500 cumulative days in FY26 to date, with further reductions expected. At the

same time, total submarine construction hours rose to nearly 29 million in 2026, up from 22 million the previous year—tracking toward a targeted ~30% year-over-year increase.

The effect of drastically reducing delay backlogs and the amount of time taken to produce or retrofit submarines come from a dedicated effort and sweeping reform, especially as it relates to how the Navy, funding bodies, and industry interact and work together to solve issues. In particular, Gaucher noted that reforms such as prior investments into *Virginia*-class parts and ensuring a stock of spare material over the past 3 years yielded dramatically positive effects on ensuring maintenance continued even through potential issues.

Part of ensuring availability of materials also stems from Gaucher's efforts to remove administrative bottlenecks for a supplier base totaling ~27,000 separate suppliers through responding efficiently to industry feedback. Eliminating administrative barriers remains a high priority, with reduction in vendor certification times by up to %60 in some areas, nearing the %75 reduction originally ordered by Gaucher.

Rapid funding mechanisms also helped to improve prospects, as 11 Other Transaction Authority agreements were implemented in the past year, with Gaucher noting the increased speed of getting necessary funds to suppliers and contractors over legacy contract systems. Consolidation of contract has also have had a measurable effect, as contractors that may have received 100s of separate contracts now get a handful of contracts covering the same items , allowing for easier access, a tally of needed parts, and easier management across program offices, with the goal of consolidation of work into master contracts most suppliers.

Other reforms include the establishment of 41 priority suppliers, the establishment of facilities to construct sub-components outside of prime shipyards enabling greater focus on work only larger contractors can do, working personally with major yards to shore up behind schedule programs, pay increases for workers, and increasingly digitized infrastructure at suppliers/yards/contractors.

Gaucher also underscored the impact of a new internal "scorecard" tracking individual submarine programs across production milestones. Early warning indicators prompt direct engagement with prime contractor executives before schedule slippage compounds. Under the current assessment, two submarine shipbuilding programs are ahead of schedule, six are on schedule, and only one is behind.

Beyond hull construction and maintenance, Seif announced that the U.S. Navy's torpedo inventory grew by up to 200 Mk 48 ADCAP heavyweight war shots, supporting full loadout availability across the submarine force.

Additionally, construction of support facilities and weapons programs designed to outfit submarines notably increased within the past 12 months, with *Naval News* reporting on the construction of new hypersonic weapons facility near Naval Station Norfolk, the progress of the Mk-58 Compact Rapid Attack Weapon, and the Navy's need for the new lower-cost RAPTOR heavyweight torpedo

China Essays

In a new essay, two Brown University analysts urge the US to engage in unilateral restraint and thus prevent a nuclear arms race with China. The authors believe that China has previously shown restraint and thus is open to a positive response to such a US strategy. The ICBM Ear produced an essay on this with noted China expert Bradley Thayer which will be published soon. It is posted just below. Here are also some notes re the history of China's "record of restraint."

China's Military Buildup by Peter Huessy and Bradley Thayer

A number of scholars, analysts and military experts believe that serious conflict between China/the CCP and the United States is inevitable due to two interconvertible forces: China seeking to be the world's hegemon and China's aim to take over and incorporate Taiwan—by force if necessary---into the mainland system. The Director of the China Initiative and an Associate Teaching Professor at Brown University call on the United States to avoid an "arms race" and armed conflict with China by unilaterally reducing three things: our nuclear warheads, our nuclear warheads on alert and our nuclear warheads used to fight wars. Then, it is claimed, the chances of armed conflict with China will diminish significantly.

This process of US restraint is strangely described as one of "reciprocal de-escalation" and "compromise" although China restrains nothing. While it may be true that China wants no war with the United States, it still wishes to seize Taiwan, only it prefers to coerce the United States into surrender. As Sun Tzu said, the acme of military victory is to be able to win without fighting.

Apparently, China wants the US to modify our support of Taiwan and make China an arms control big shot. How this is meant to be accomplished in practice is not spelled out, probably due to any factual review of China's CCP nuclear behavior leaves little hope China can change.

For example, in late 1982 the Chinese Politburo met secretly and as detailed by Danny Stillman and Tom Reed in The Nuclear Express deliberately set out to transfer nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan and through Pakistan in turn to North Korea, Libya, Iran, and Syria. All these nations secured nuclear weapons technology of some kind, with two (North Korea and Pakistan) now having nuclear weapons, one continually being on the cusp of having nuclear weapons, (Iran), and two, (Syria and Libya), their nuclear technology being taken down by military action by the United States and Israel. China was building a rogue's gallery of nuclear bandits, all of which required US and allied military action to deter and eventually undo.

How this can be characterized as a China with a "long tradition of moderation" in nuclear matters is puzzling. To say nothing of decades of CCP funding, arming and training scientists associated with the nuclear programs of Pakistan, Iran and North Korea. And it does not take a great leap of logic to understand how each of these nuclear rogues could be used by China as proxy warrior nations designed to militarily tie down US and its allied forces, while China is busy engulfing Taiwan.

As the Brown University folks admit, "a recent editorial in a leading Chinese foreign affairs newspaper took the candid yet disturbing step of explicitly linking China's rapid nuclear buildup to its desire to exert sovereignty over Taiwan. 'The great cause of national reunification," it asserted, "must rest on a solid, realistic foundation. That foundation is, first and foremost, hard power." And the US military believes it as Army General Ronald Clark, the head of the U.S. Pacific Command, is readying for a CCP led invasion of Taiwan by 2027.

Much is made of the relatively small nuclear force maintained by China as if this excused otherwise dangerous nuclear behavior. Also, the 3700 nuclear warheads imputed to the United States are not either deployed or on alert, with the actual number some half of that. It is proposed that the US reduce its nuclear warheads---but which has already been done by 85%. It is proposed that the US reduce the warheads it has on alert and there the US has reportedly reduced that number by nearly 100%. On top oof which the US bombers are also not on alert, with their weapons stored, reducing the US nuclear Triad to a Dyad.

As for Secretary Colby's proposal to build up with tactical nuclear weapons, the Posture Commission of October 2023 unanimously agreed that while the US nuclear Triad modernization was critical, it was not sufficient. And that what was also critical was necessary was the build of additional theater nuclear forces to better deter Russian and Chinese theater nuclear capability, and in particular a mobile, offshore, fast deterrent force such as a SLCM-N which is now been approved and funded by Congress and the administration. Colby is right that the bad guys have "got to believe there's some sense in which we would use" such weapons in response to "escalate to win" strategies. As for the United States "building a new intercontinental ballistic missile, a new air-launched cruise missile, and new nuclear-armed submarines and bombers" these all are replacing our legacy systems without which the US nuclear force would "rust to obsolescence."

As for building missile defenses, the Golden Dome homeland defense is to prevent Russia and China from seeking to engage in a first pre-emptive strike, by complicating their objectives to such a degree that they cannot achieve their military objectives, in addition to stopping more limited strikes from rogue states such as North Korea and Iran---both of which are being armed by China! We could as is implied jettison our nuclear deterrent strategy although our Brown University friends admit that war with China is only prevented with nuclear deterrence.

Adding missile defense as another layer further adds to deterrence, on top of which unprecedented arms control. From INF (847), and START I (5000), Moscow and New START (3200), and the Presidential Nuclear Initiative (2000), the US has already cut our nuclear arsenal from 12000-13000 warheads to 1800-1900 warheads, or nearly an 85% reduction. During that same period of time, from 1987, China has tripled its nuclear force, from 200 to over 620, with projections that by 2030-5 China will have at least 1500, while some experts think the number will exceed 3000. Some time ago, China threatened to strike Japan with nuclear weapons should Tokyo come to the defense of Taiwan, an obvious admission that "no first use" is a charade as is its claim to only want a "minimal deterrent."

By any standard, Communist China's military expansion is alarming for U.S. national security. The growth of its conventional forces, increasing sophistication of its cyber, space, and logistical forces, as well as nuclear forces, including production of nuclear weapons and delivery systems such as ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missiles, as well as drones. In fact, Communist China's nuclear buildup was described as "breathtaking" by two U.S. Stratcom commanders on separate occasions--U.S. Navy Adm. Charles Richard and U.S. Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton, respectively. The pace and scope of the growth of Communist China's nuclear arsenal must be seen for it is—Beijing is racing for strategic superiority over the U.S. While the PRC has been building nuclear weapons frenetically, the U.S. needs urgently to meet Communist China's aggression and ensure the viability of the U.S. extended deterrent commitments to its allies like Australia, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines.

Addendum: China's Track Record on Nuclear Restraint and Cooperation

Recommendation by Brown University authors is for the US to unilaterally cut warheads, cut on alert warheads, and cut warfighting warheads. No reciprocal China actions proposed or suggested just that China would be amendable to restraint.

Backing Russian invasion of Ukraine 2014

Backing by its silence Russian nuclear threats 2014--

Lack of Transparency—especially dual use weapons---No warhead count of its nuclear force since….1966-

1982 Deng secret Politburo decision to transfer nuclear weapons technology including warhead schematic to Pakistan and from there to North Korea, Iran, Libya and Syria (Iraq unclear) in violation of its legal commitments under the NPT….1982

Decision to build up to at least 1550 warheads by 2035----320 new ICBM silos with 160 DF41 x10 and 160 DF31 x3 Totals: 2180 warheads…….2008-2035

Threats to take Taiwan by force—repeatedly plus grabbing elements of the first and second island chain……

Threats to attack Japan as occurred in WWII should Japan come to the defense of Taiwan---South China Morning Post 2025-6

Restraint doesn't work—US PNI in 1991 reduced theater weapons by 90%---Russia 1999 April Decision to build 10,000 battlefield nuclear weapons, currently have 5000.

US has cut warheads, and on alert warheads since 1987 some 87%-99%. Biggest cuts of any nuclear power ever. INF 484; START I 5000; PNI 2000; Moscow 2800; New START: 400+/-. 10,800 cut out of 12,400 deployed warheads. China at 200 in 1987 and now at least at 620, triple the number. By 2035, the CCP will increase 7/8 fold.

China Doesn't Want a Nuclear Arms Race

How America Can Avert an Unnecessary Rivalry

Lyle J. Goldstein and Nina Tannenwald
November 16, 2026

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Today, pessimism—almost fatalism—reigns in Washington about the United States' ability to avoid a costly and dangerous arms race with China. Policymakers point to China's increasingly aggressive policies toward Taiwan, its massive military buildup, and its resistance to engaging in some arms control measures as evidence that Beijing has accepted the inevitability of such a race or is even pursuing one. Worried by intellectual frameworks that emphasize the likelihood of war between rival great powers, many U.S. leaders and analysts see little choice but for the United States to arm itself, too. But this thinking risks becoming a self-fulling prophecy. The major danger is that an unrestrained arms race increases the likelihood of war over Taiwan or even of a catastrophic nuclear exchange.

But the pessimism about averting an arms race is misplaced. A nuclear arms race, in particular, is not a foregone conclusion—and the United States has real opportunities to curb one. Avoiding a nuclear arms race will require a broader approach than the two-pronged one Washington has recently favored: building up U.S. nuclear deterrence and seeking to force concessions from Beijing by imposing restrictions on trade and technology transfers. American leaders should instead look beyond traditional deterrence, which falls short because its threat-based approach tends to provoke competition over arms, and strive to establish a more fundamental strategic stability through a process of reciprocal de-escalation and compromise. China is likely to be amenable to reciprocal de-escalation: it has a long tradition of moderation in nuclear matters and, ultimately, Chinese leaders do not want a war over Taiwan.

There are recent signs that even U.S. President Donald Trump, who has often boasted about his distaste for compromise, sees the value of engagement. After two U.S.-Chinese bilateral summits this year, in October he suggested that his November trilateral meeting in Shenzhen with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin should focus on "denuclearization." But Washington will have to become much more consistent in its rejection of an arms race, including by modifying its support for Taiwan and incorporating China into global arms control leadership. A nuclear arms race with China becomes inevitable only if Washington continues to believe it is.

CHAIN REACTION

China is undoubtedly pursuing a military buildup, including investments in nuclear weapons. Between 2020 and 2025, China doubled the number of its nuclear warheads, from 300 to 600—a startling increase, although its arsenal remains small compared with the United States' approximately 3,700 warheads. In 2021, researchers at the Federation of American Scientists announced that China was constructing 350 new nuclear missile silos in three vast sites in Xinjiang and Gansu provinces. Beijing is also pursuing substantial qualitative upgrades to its

nuclear weapons, a push it showcased at an October 2025 military parade that unveiled a new sea-launched ballistic missile, two new kinds of intercontinental ballistic missiles, a new air-launched hypersonic missile, and a new long-range hypersonic cruise missile.

Then, this July, the Chinese navy tested a submarine-launched long-range ballistic missile that could carry nuclear weapons. This significant new capability will allow China to launch long-range nuclear strikes that can reach the United States from protected waters near its own coastline rather than having to sail out into the Pacific. A recent editorial in a leading Chinese foreign affairs newspaper took the candid yet disturbing step of explicitly linking China's rapid nuclear buildup to its desire to exert sovereignty over Taiwan. "The great cause of national reunification," it asserted, "must rest on a solid, realistic foundation. That foundation is, first and foremost, hard power." Although such overt nuclear saber rattling remains rare, the link between Beijing's nuclear forces and the Taiwan issue stretches back over three decades and is also supported by the scholar Tong Zhao's detailed analysis of China's nuclear buildup in *Foreign Affairs* in May.

As China builds up its military, the perception that it is on a collision course with the United States over Taiwan—one that inevitably includes the risk of nuclear escalation—has become widespread in Washington. Taiwan, of course, appears to be an obvious flash point. The United States has long committed itself informally to defending the island while China seeks to unify with it, by force if necessary. In October, Army General Ronald Clark, the head of the U.S. Pacific Command, affirmed that his forces are actively readying for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that could come as early as 2027.

The Biden administration and both Trump administrations made some attempts to engage China over arms control and nuclear risk reduction. Trump proposed trilateral arms control talks that would include Russia, whereas the Biden administration pursued bilateral talks with China on strategic stability and nuclear risk reduction. But both presidents gave up after China consistently rejected engaging in sustained talks on nuclear matters. Beijing's stance is that it has a small nuclear arsenal compared with the United States and Russia and that it is important to first establish trust and mutual reassurance about core interests.

Beyond China's resistance to arms control, theories about power that are trendy in Washington reinforce the collision course mentality. Numerous realist scholars argue that a U.S.-Chinese rivalry and even a great-power war may be structurally difficult to avoid. The political scientist Graham Allison captured this pessimism in his influential 2017 book, *Destined for War*, which argued that a so-called Thucydides trap—when a rapidly rising power challenges the position of the dominant power, yielding war—would doom the United States and China to conflict.

China hawks, such as Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby, increasingly advocate an aggressive focus on "preparing for World War III" with China as a way to avoid it. In a July *New York Times* interview, Colby argued that the United States must "deny" China "the ability to seize and hold the key territory" of Taiwan, by enhancing U.S. deterrence with a massive military buildup. The next month, speaking at a military conference, Colby specified that such a buildup ought to put a greater emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons and the ability to fight a so-called limited nuclear war. The enemy, Colby said, has "got to believe there's some sense in which we would use" nuclear weapons. Toward this end, the United States is building a new intercontinental ballistic missile, a new air-launched cruise missile, and new nuclear-armed submarines and bombers, and accelerating the ambitious Golden Dome homeland missile defense project. Unlike earlier U.S. missile defenses, which were designed to intercept limited strikes by so called rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, the Golden Dome is intended to defend against massive Chinese or Russian attacks. But the prospect of losing its ability to retaliate against a U.S. first strike only gives Beijing more incentive to expand its nuclear arsenal.

A DANGEROUS MISUNDERSTANDING

Such a nuclear-heavy approach only prevents a war with China if nuclear deterrence succeeds. That puts a lot of eggs in the deterrence basket. And recent wars suggest that nuclear deterrence is becoming less effective. Russia's nuclear threats have not coerced Ukraine into halting its strikes deep into Russian territory. Iran has proved willing to launch strikes against nuclear-armed Israel as well as U.S. bases and allies in the Middle East. What is most ominous, in May 2025, India and Pakistan crossed previous redlines and attacked each other's homelands, something that mutual nuclear deterrence was supposed to prevent. Even if neither the United States nor China want nuclear war, a China determined to unify with Taiwan may not be intimidated by U.S. nuclear threats.

A recent study by Brown University's Costs of War program found that the United States has already spent more than $3.4 trillion on its militarized rivalry with China over the last decade. Sustaining or ramping up this spending —which encompasses new warships, aircraft, long-range missiles, drones, base upgrades, forward deployments,

large military exercises, research and development, and new nuclear weapons—is infeasible in an era of ballooning national debt and expanding domestic needs.

One of the tragedies of an arms race is that neither party may actually want to pursue one. Despite its current arms buildup, Beijing has a long record of moderation in military and nuclear matters. For many decades, it has maintained a minimal nuclear deterrent and a no-first-use policy, and it did not use major military force to achieve strategic goals. Although it has long had access to the relevant technologies, China appears not to have produced or deployed tactical nuclear weapons. Chinese diplomats played a substantial role in coaxing Iran to accept the Obama administration's 2015 nuclear deal and supported the UN's relatively stringent sanctions on North Korea. And in the fall of 2022, according to then Secretary of State Antony Blinken and reporting by the *Financial Times*, China likely intervened diplomatically with the Kremlin to help stop Russia from using nuclear weapons in Ukraine. More broadly, China has embraced international law when it comes to war, playing a constructive role, for example, in removing chemical weapons from Syria in 2013.

The United States has already spent more than $3.4 trillion on its militarized rivalry with China.

Beijing's inclination toward restraint has not disappeared completely, even as it upgrades its military. In November 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden and Xi agreed to renew lines of communication between their countries' militaries that had been severed after U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan the previous year. A year later, the two leaders affirmed that humans, not AI, must control the decision to use nuclear weapons. And in late 2025, Beijing released a white paper emphatically reiterating its support for nuclear arms control and has moved toward more transparency by publishing more information, including in English, about its military upgrades.

Chinese leaders clearly do not want a war over Taiwan. Publicly, they repeatedly emphasize that their goal is "peaceful unification" and "winning without fighting," invoking the Chinese strategist Sun-tzu. Beijing's longtime "one country, two systems" policy toward Taiwan—which would bring the island under Chinese sovereignty while allowing it substantial autonomy—leaves room for a negotiated solution. Last year, in an important analysis of China's strategic ambitions, the scholars David Kang, Jackie Wong, and Zenobia Chan examined 12,000 articles and hundreds of speeches by Xi to argue that Beijing prioritizes regime stability and internal development over displacing the United States as a global military hegemon. Although China's major, unannounced exercises around Taiwan earlier this month may constitute an exception, overall, Chinese military exercises near Taiwan over the last five years are consistent with this interpretation: many have reacted to perceived provocations, illustrate only medium-scale capabilities, and have generally had a performative quality, accompanied by extensive press coverage.

NONNUCLEAR OPTIONS

There is still an opening for the United States and China to de-escalate. To achieve strategic stability, the two countries will need to make a concerted effort to defuse their security dilemma—the dynamic in which each side perceives the other's defensive measures as aggressive. First, U.S. and Chinese leaders need to revive superpower summitry. Biden held only three face-to-face meetings with Xi on the sidelines of regional economic meetings. Although the May 2026 Beijing summit between Trump and Xi yielded no major breakthroughs, the meeting did improve the two leaders' personal relationship; today, U.S.-Chinese tensions are lower than they were between 2021 and 2025. This progress suggests the great value of holding a regular, annual, multiday bilateral summit with a significant focus on nuclear arms control. Such meetings would give expert working groups time to methodically develop measures to reduce the risk of conflict. Just as important, the summits need to be long enough to leave room for unscripted conversations. At their first summit, in Geneva in November 1985, U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev famously broke away from anxious bureaucrats and advisers for an impromptu walk—an encounter that helped establish a more constructive relationship.

The United States must also take concrete steps to reduce the chance of escalation in the Taiwan Strait. Above all, it should adhere more consistently to its "one China" policy—its position that Beijing is the sole legal government of China. More consistency would include limiting U.S. legislators' trips to the island and downgrading U.S.-Taiwanese defense relations by, for example, holding meetings less frequently and at lower diplomatic levels. Washington should remind key allies such as Japan to proceed cautiously in terms of their rhetoric and military deployments. Such a restraint-oriented strategy would make it clear to Taiwan that independence is off the table, encouraging it to take a more accommodating approach that would lower the temperature with Beijing. If Washington were to agree to common-sense limitations on arms sales to Taiwan—such as refusing to sell Taiwan the surface-to-surface ballistic Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), which can reach across the strait to the Chinese mainland—Beijing would likely reciprocate by scaling back its military exercises and related military deployments around the island. There are real incentives for Beijing to de-escalate. Doing so could improve

relations with neighbors such as Japan, free up focus for domestic priorities, lower military spending, and limit the chance of war.

The Pentagon needs to demonstrate Washington's intent to avoid war over Taiwan by in the Luzon Strait between Taiwan and the Philippines and around Japan's Ryukyu Islands. Such deployments only exacerbate the security dilemma.

Above all, Washington should adhere consistently to its "one China" policy.

Exhibiting restraint does not mean the United States would be giving Taiwan away. The United States can continue to provide Taiwan with defensive arms (such as missile interceptors, artillery, drones, and mines) and harden U.S. bases in the region to provide stabilizing deterrence. But even if U.S. leaders publicly abjure direct military intervention to defend Taiwan—a rational step that would lower the risk of nuclear war—China will prefer negotiating with Taipei on the island's autonomy over a bloody military showdown with Taiwanese forces. For their part, Taiwan's leaders will likely accommodate themselves to limited self-governance under Chinese overall sovereignty. In the end, China's main goal is to get Taiwan out of the U.S. sphere of influence. Chinese leaders' major fear is not so much Taiwanese autonomy as the prospect of the island serving as a U.S. forward base—in Chinese parlance, "using Taiwan to contain China."

Another important step would be to seek a multilateral pledge by all nuclear-armed states to employ nuclear weapons only in retaliation against a nuclear attack. Such a policy would reduce the risk of miscalculation during a crisis. China has long embraced such a no-first-use policy, but U.S. leaders have traditionally opposed it, believing that it might expose U.S. allies to conventional attack. The U.S. nuclear deterrent for allies, however, increasingly lacks credibility because the costs of starting a nuclear war would vastly outweigh the benefits. And after the collapse of traditional nuclear arms control, a mutual no-first-use policy offers a promising area of common ground between the United States and China. It would reinforce the existing no-first-use policies of China and India and implicitly acknowledge their leadership in the area of nuclear restraint, a virtue when newer nuclear states are chafing under the old Cold War superpowers' dominance of arms control. This approach could even entice Beijing into a wider, more comprehensive process of bilateral or multilateral nuclear arms control.

Beyond these three major initiatives, the United States and China should sign an agreement to notify each other about their ballistic missile tests. Washington could also consider giving Beijing a larger role in nonproliferation efforts, for instance by affording China leadership roles in negotiations and inspection regimes in future nonproliferation arrangements. The U.S. arms control agenda with China should focus not only on offensive nuclear systems but also on missile defenses and tactical nuclear weapons, as well as AI technologies. And it would help if the United States evolved its own nuclear posture in the direction of restraint by reducing its warheads, warfighting capabilities, and alert posture.

Ultimately, the United States needs to get serious about reining in an arms race with China before its perception that one is apace becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The two countries have a mutual interest in restraint. If Washington continues to overlook Beijing's incentives to compromise—and the real signs that it is willing to do so—an arms race that, as of now, is mostly putative will become a reality. And a catastrophic war that could have been avoided could indeed become inevitable.

Iran

Iran: Its Their Nature by Victor Davis Hanson

Commentary

A modern Russian morality tale tells of a scorpion that has to cross a wide river. He asks a nearby frog to carry him across on its back. The hesitant frog is reassured when the scorpion argues that he would never sting his ride in transit, since doing so would drown them both. Convinced by this line of reasoning, the frog ferries the scorpion across the river. But halfway across, the scorpion suddenly stings the frog fatally. As both drown, the poisoned frog manages a feeble “Why? “Story continues below advertisement The drowning scorpion offers one final retort: “I couldn’t help it—it’s my nature. “The current Iranian theocracy is our scorpion. It cannot change its ways, even if its intransigent refusal to do so will eventually doom it. Theocratic Iran has never negotiated anything in good faith with anyone. It continually chooses terrorism, conflict, and murder, even when such violence is not in its own interests—and even when it involves the mullahs risking the destruction of a once-great Persian civilization. In short, America should not play the naive frog. The homicidal and suicidal scorpion of the Iranian theocracy cannot change its nature even if it wished to—which it doesn’t. During the current supposed “peace” between Iran and the United States, Iran’s terrorist proxies have certainly kept busy making war. Two of the most powerful officials in the U.S. government, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, were reportedly living on a secure military base near Washington. They apparently received serious threats from Iran-supported terrorist groups affiliated with Iran’s ruling Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Currently, U.S. President Donald Trump is reportedly curtailing some of his planned engagements, given intelligence reports of Iranian agents’ plans to use drones to assassinate him—a targeting that even the Soviets did not attempt. Two Iranians and one Iraqi national were also recently indicted for their involvement in nearly 20 terrorist attacks and attempted operations in Europe and the United States. One of these Iranian operatives had already been arrested in the spring for staging terrorist attacks against Jewish groups throughout Europe. Yet he managed to exchange coded messages with his terrorist comrades from jail. In September, Iran-sponsored terrorists were arrested near Royal Air Force Fairford in Gloucestershire, England. They were allegedly scouting how best to launch a drone attack behind the lines on 12 American B-1B Lancer strategic bombers—each costing about $300 million. The UK’s inability to ensure the security of the $3.6 billion forward-deployed American bomber fleet—many of the arrested suspects were initially released on bail—prompted the bombers’ redeployment to the United States. Ironically, forcing that withdrawal might have been the Iranian theocracy’s real aim all along. More recently, the United States diverted even more key American aircraft—KC-135 tankers and Osprey transport planes—from another UK Royal Air Force base because of yet another Iranian terrorist plan to launch drone attacks against American aircraft. So, without firing a shot, Iran has disrupted the strategic deployment of American assets in ways that surpass the schemes of our past Cold War enemies. And this is just part of an emerging pattern: Iranian threats and plots followed by Western compliance and retreat. The Iranians were not impressed by UK military security. Nor did they show any gratitude to the UK government for releasing their terrorists or for previously refusing to allow the United States to use key UK bases and airspace. Iran still boasts that it has restarted its missile factories. It claims that it has a vast new fleet of hypersonic missiles aimed at American bases in the Middle East and the Gulf oil-exporting nations. The theocrats also threaten to set Gulf oil fields afire and target several U.S. installations in the region should hostilities resume. These threats prompted the preemptive evacuation of even

more American diplomats from the Middle East to the United States. A recent devastating Iranian terrorist cyberattack targeted some 700 supermarkets in Europe, causing tens of millions of dollars in damage from spoiled food. Once again, as with the UK bases, the Iranians were not impressed by previous European truckling. Spain, France, Italy, and other NATO nations had joined the UK in denying U.S. military aircraft landing and overflight rights, in a de facto gesture of fawning appeasement to both Iran and their own restive Muslim populations. Iran's message to Western nations is this: Whether you oppose or appease Iran, you remain a target, not for what you do, but for who you are and what you represent. None of this is new. In the past half-century, Iranian terrorists have killed more Americans than any other terrorist group except al-Qaeda on 9/11. They have taken American hostages, killed some, blown up embassies, slaughtered Americans as they slept in military barracks and on their ships, and supplied our enemies with shaped-charge improvised explosive devices that killed hundreds of American soldiers. They and their surrogates, such as the Hezbollah terrorist group, harbor a sick hatred of Jews and have attacked them worldwide. Moreover, throughout the theocracy's half-century existence, Iran has waged a virtual terrorist war against Europe involving more than 100 operations. One reason Europe has not responded strongly to these repeated assaults—and often opposes U.S. action against the terrorist regime—is that it has felt compelled to accommodate both Iran and its own growing Muslim population. Well before the current war, to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, the oil flowing, and their own volatile Muslim immigrant communities compliant, Europeans had more or less downplayed radical Islamic violence at home and attacks on their interests abroad as mere police matters—even when sponsored by foreign powers such as Iran or carried out by its proxies, the Hezbollah, Hamas, and Houthi terrorist groups. But again, Iran's audacity is not limited to Europe. Neither our enemies during World War II nor the Cold War-era Soviets were ever able to threaten our top-ranking Cabinet officials to the point at which they were not safe outside military compounds. Nor did past foes dare to disrupt water plants in the American Midwest (as a recent Iranian cyberattack did), threaten to assassinate the president of the United States, or plot to kill former high-ranking officials such as Mike Pompeo, John Bolton, and Brian Hook. What are Iran's grievances and ultimate aims? It seeks vengeance against the West, the Jewish state of Israel, and moderate Sunni Muslim nations, especially the wealthiest Gulf oil exporters. Iran believes that Persians are historically the most sophisticated and cultured people of the entire Middle East and that, since Roman times, they have been the most successful in standing up to Westerners. Furthermore, the theocracy sees Shiite Islam as the only true religion, one historically persecuted by Sunni majorities along with their Western collaborators. A glimpse of the Iranian agenda was visible during the Obama administration. The Iranian regime convinced the Obama State Department that an Iranian-funded and administered Shiite crescent, extending from Iran through Syria and Lebanon to the Gaza Strip and Yemen, would establish a sort of creative tension, balancing the moderate Arab regimes and Israel and thereby allowing the United States to exit the region. In truth, Iran's patent strategic aim was to rid the region of American influence and power altogether, claim primacy in the Islamic world, destroy Israel (thus further discrediting its supposedly impotent Islamic rivals), and ultimately, from both within and without, overpower the West. Iran saw rich, free, and innovative Western nations, especially in Europe, as decadent and ultimately doomed—owing to their declining fertility, their open borders, their nihilistic energy policies, and their insidious disarmament—and as led by socialist pacifists and other useful idiots. A bullied Europe, then, was deemed ripe for the picking. Iran's dreams might seem delusional and preposterous, given the overwhelming conventional and nuclear power of the United States and its global economic and cultural dominance—especially after the Trump administration destroyed about 80 percent to 90 percent of Iran's military and began strangling its economy. But Iran already sees the latest midterms as a milestone anti-Trump vote that will accelerate its half-century effort to dominate the Middle East and beyond. The

regime believes that it stopped the U.S. attack after 38 days of bombing by seducing naive Americans into fruitless, passive-aggressive deal-making that ensured high gas prices and thus the Trump administration's midterm wipeout and loss of Congress. It has higher hopes that the 2028 elections will bring a sympathetic U.S. government to both the White House and Congress, with increasingly sympathetic first- and second-generation immigrants from the Muslim world. Indeed, some newly elected left-wing congressional representatives cannot tell who is a friend or an enemy of America or distinguish between democratic, pro-American Israel and the murderous, anti-Western regime in Iran. The theocracy still claims that it has enough hidden enriched uranium to craft 10 nuclear bombs. Given all this, the mullahs feel they are well ahead of their timetable for expansion—if only they can find a way out of the current American headlock on Iran's economy and the resulting damage to the regime. So, they continue their threats and their terrorism, hoping for a more appeasing government in Washington. The United States still has many ways to fatally weaken the theocracy, since the regime is feared or hated abroad and despised at home. It cannot withstand crippling sanctions, boycotts, and embargoes for long. If pressure on trade and banking continues to mount, Tehran will erode under Soviet-like economic suffocation, especially without access to the Strait of Hormuz and while facing lethal retaliation for any missile launches. Whether the United States throttles Iran slowly with sanctions or more quickly with military force, the mullahs have no way out—unless we play the naive frog and trust a lethal scorpion enough to negotiate with it.

Veterans Day 2026

Speech

By Peter Huessy

On November 11, we honor our veterans from all military conflicts However, today, many Americans see our military and defense industry as soley interested in endless wars & and the ability to profit from war. Some even believe we are being led into war by a sinister Israel and a Jewish cabal. So, we hear the demand to “stop endless wars,” including the current oil & economic blockade of Iran, and through a “defund the military” campaign.

What’s wrong with this narrative? Everything.

The mainstream media are missing some very big things. Yes, while they give lip service to veterans and those currently serving, they fail to even consider the military’s mere existence have and continue to prevent countless wars which we never have to fight. For example, while the Iranian regime attacked the US starting in 1979 critics claimed military action against Iran was a “war of choice.” Additionally, the administration and its supporters have forgotten a President Clinton appointed judge , confirmed Iran was the key force behind 9-11 and owes the survivors of 9-11 at least $6 billion. And as most people know, Iran is now allied and receives technology assistance from three nuclear armed enemies of the United States--Russia, China and North Korea . and came close to developing its own nuclear capability.

The mainstream media also asserts there is a “Jewish” conspiracy to enrich the defense industry and keep the US at war. While Iran certainly is a deadly threat, there are more threats looming on the horizon. China is dedicated to what the Chinese Communist Party publicly characterizes as “unrestricted warfare” against the West and particularly the United States.

Critical to our nation’s security is a modernized nuclear deterrent which has maintained our strength and sovereignty for over 80 years.. It is critical the Nation’s nuclear deterrent force continue to be modernized and maintained since the external nuclear threat is now more serious than at any other time in our history. Additionally, a growing number of shallow sighted legislators are an internal threat recommending we abolish our nuclear deterrent altogether.

Veterans, the Brothers Mayhem and Nuclear Deterrence

Now, given that exceptionally uplifting and positive outlook let me walk you through where we have been, where we are today, and where we should be heading. I have devoted the past half a century to sustain our nuclear deterrence force. The story I have to tell is how our dedicated members of our military, both retired veterans and currently serving military members, have played an extraordinary successful and herculean role in the decades long endeavor we often referred to as the “Cold War.” I’ve worked with hundreds of senior military officials in fighting the Cold War, defeating and eliminating the USSR, freeing Eastern Europe, confronting state sponsored terrorism, and working to defeat the cooperative cabal of what I dis-affectionately call the crazy brothers mayhem--Iran, China, North Korea and Russia.

These four are abnormal nations. Since 1951 have conducted cross border invasions, wars of national liberation, armed interventions and terrorist attacks on at least 42 nations: The Republic of Vietnam, the Republic of Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Grenada, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mozambique, Guatemala, Columbia, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Paraguay, Ethiopia, Morocco, Burma, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Angola, Kenya, Southwest Africa, Egypt, Burma, Somalia, Georgia, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, South Africa, Israel, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and the United States. Forty-two nations, or one out of every five nations on earth. According to one recent scholarly study, these wars included 200,000 terrorist, cross border and

armed attacks resulting in the death of some 14 million people, or equivalent to another Holocaust+. And since 911 there have been 48,410 Islamic terror attacks.

The Brothers Mayhem

So, if you're angry about "endless wars," well I just listed the perpetrators. Not the USA, not Israel, not the Jews and not the US military. Just these four nations---China since 1949, Russia largely since the end of World War II, North Korea since 1951, and Iran since 1979—and their multiple terror proxies, Hezbollah, Al Shabab, ISIS, Al Qaeda, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Weatherman, Black September, Baader-Meinhof (Red Brigades), the PLO, Palestinian Central Command, the Houthis….. have been at war with the world, especially the "West" in literally thousands of campaigns.

But despite multiple cross-border invasions, no world-wide conflict has ensued because beneath the US umbrella of unmatched nuclear strength, deterrence still works. In Korea, Berlin, Cuba, the Sinai, Georgia, Ukraine, and during operation Able Archer, cross border invasions did not erupt into world war. And while dozens of such conflicts were ended by the US and its allies, no nuclear weapons were expended, and only seven involved the use of American soldiers. Think that, even with a cumulative 279 years or 102 thousand days of warfare, US soldiers and veterans prevented—deterred-- these wars from making the jump to nuclear aggression. No nuclear weapon was ever ordered to be fired. In short, the US nuclear deterrent was used every day to make sure that threshold was never broken.

Peace Is Our Profession

For 81 years, American veterans from the US Army, Air Force and Navy have peacefully sustained and maintained the US nuclear deterrent for almost a century. Above the door to the office of the Commander of the US Strategic Command responsible for the nation's nuclear arsenal is the motto "Peace Is Our Profession." In 1961 President Kennedy was threatened by Khrushchev with an attack on US forces in Berlin. President Kennedy told the Soviet General Secretary that such an attack would result in nuclear warfare. Khrushchev took the deterrent threat seriously, and decided not to attack, but in August that same month, to save face, the Soviet Union built the Berlin Wall. In 1962, a little more than a year later, even though the US had superior deployed nuclear forces (6000 vs 600 strategic nuclear warheads), Khrushchev still chose to deploy medium range missiles in Cuba and try and seek to markedly and suddenly change the strategic balance. But Krushchev got out foxed. On that very day U-2 spy planes had relayed to the President the bad news from Cuba, the US deployed the first operational Minuteman ICBM at Malstrom AFB, Montana—a mere 5 years from its inception to operational capability. A unique one-of-a-kind development and deployment led by USAF General Bernard Schriever and USAF Colonel Ed Hall allowed Kennedy to secretly trade US Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy for the Soviets removing their missiles from Cuba. An off ramp to avoid nuclear war was available because the US was building both a new ICBM force and had recently deployed the first ever nuclear armed Polaris submarine that could replacing the deterrent capability of Jupiter missiles in Europe. [The Polaris and Minuteman were triggered by the October 1957 Soviet launch of Sputnik and were started by Eisenhower without any idea whether they would be successful! Kennedy himself would travel to the Larence Livermore National Laboratory to personally thank the scientists responsible for the success of both programs.

Now Kennedy long argued there could not be a deterrent strategy that gave nuclear armed enemies two bad choices: launch nuclear Armageddon or surrender. His "flexible response" strategy was adopted over time starting during the Eisenhower era and dauntedly helped the US avoid world war. And with Minuteman initial deployment, Kennedy could trade away US missiles in Europe to give Khrushchev a way to stand-down without being humiliated—but only because he had Minuteman as his Ace in the Hole

But the worry about some nuclear armed powers extending nuclear weapons to their allies still weighed heavily on the US and Soviet Union. In 1967, the US proposed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,

which opened for signature in 1968 when there were only five nuclear powers. There are now nine nuclear powers, but not the twenty or more feared by President Kennedy.

Reagan: Closing The Window of Vulnerability and Peace Through Strength

Right after the 1968 Presidential election, Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev called President-elect Nixon and demanded the US agree to ban all missile defenses. Secretary of Defense McNamara proposed in 1967 the US build a limited or "thin" missile defense to deal with a nascent Chinese offensive nuclear force. Brezhnev insisted the proposed shield was nothing but a ruse to erect a defense against the Soviet offensive arsenals. Now National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger (an Army Corporal in WWII) negotiated the 1972 ABM treaty ban on missile defense and also the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) executive agreement on nuclear weapons. However, SALT I allowed the Soviets to expand its nuclear deterrent from 2,000 to 10,000 strategic long range warheads, and the 1979 SALT II deal would have allowed a further expansion to 24,000 strategic nuclear warheads, a collective buildup that so worried analysts that it became characterized as a "window of vulnerability". The Soviets could build—even under "arms control"---500-600 huge ICBMs each able to carry 10-14 warheads. This projected danger helped create the Committee on the Present Danger (1976) which helped propel Ronald Reagan to the White House.

Because of my strong knowledge of the Democratics in Congresss, I was asked by the Reagan administration to help shepherd their nuclear deterrent force proposals through Congress. Democrats held a 243-192 advantage in 1981and grew to a 269-166 by 1983. That meant to secure a favorable vote in the House, the administration had to secure between 26-52 Democratic votes, primarily "blue dog democrats." But it took more than votes in Congress to win the Cold War. Reagan's "peace through strength" formula could not have been successful without the help of a pantheon of senior military officers and veterans who embraced the Reagan administration and helped end the Soviet empire. Let talk about one such patriot. Gen John Vessey was commander of US Forces-Korea and Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army. He had refused to support the Carter administration proposal to withdraw US forces from the ROK, and in fact worked successfully to change the administration's position. Even though offered promotion to Army Chief of Staff. Reagan heard the story of Gen Vessey refusing the offer and told people to "go get him as I want a General who can tell me I'm wrong." General Vessey was subsequently appointed by the President as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1982, the last WWII veteran to hold the job. His extraordinary humility and great knowledge of military matters served the country well as he markedly helped the Reagan administration overcome the push for such Soviet tricks as the nuclear freeze. He summed up the US nuclear deterrent position well:

"Our strategy is one of preventing war by making it self-evident to our enemies that they're going to get their clocks cleaned if they start one." Chairman: JCS, General John Vessey

Under a policy of peace strength, 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 Peace Through Strength Trifecta

But it was sometimes a close call. For example, after a very bad mid-term election outcome, a 245-176 vote on Dec 1982, the House turned down a "closely spaced basing" mode for the MX, later known as the Peacekeeper missile, cutting out the center piece of the nation's nuclear deterrent. It looked like the US was stuck. The liberal media cheered, claiming the President's "peace through strength" strategy was broken. How then to move forward? Well, luckily a group of pro-defense Democrats and Republicans including Senators Nunn, Tower and Gore, and Representatives Aspin, Dicks and Dickinson, got together and urged the President to create a "Commission" under the chairmanship of retired USAF Brig Gen Brent Scowcroft. The report would fully study the President's strategy and then report to the administration and Congress a summary of their findings, laying out the President's strategic vision, and

whether it fit into the current strategic environment. General Scowcroft had been national security adviser to President Ford and was widely respected by “moderate” elements in both parties.

During the Commission study period, the Reagan administration took two additional measures that markedly changed the debate for the better over the current strategic environment. On March 8, 1983, the President addressed the National Association of Evangelicals and declared the USSR was an “evil empire.” Ambassador to the UN (and lifelong Democrat!) Jeane Kirkpatrik and speech writer Tony Dolan both heavily influenced the speech, which framed the struggle between the US and the USSR in stark moral terms. Reagan warned that declaring a “nuclear freeze” and treating both the US and the USSR on equal terms was a danger, as he aimed his remarks straight at the American Catholic Bishops who were calling for a freeze, even though the idea was originally pushed by the USSR. [A freeze the Pope did NOT support.] The reaction was predictable with the New York Times joining the Kremlin in condemning the speech as “provocative” and potentially upsetting “arms control.”

However, Reagan wasn’t finished. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Watkins, was quietly brought into the Reagan campaign for missile defense, now currently banned by the ABM Treaty. The President had long supported missile defense and wanted to shoot down incoming missiles rather than just avenge an attack. Watkins secretly went to all other service chiefs of the services and earned their buy-in to support Reagan’s secret initiative. Now days before the President was going to give his speechSecretary of State Schultz called Colonel Bud McFarlane, who was National Security Adviser to the President and well aware of what the President was planning. Schultz was in a royal panic, terribly worried the White House was going to go for missile defense. McFarlane suggested they together go see the “boss.” When Secretary Schultz arrived, they both rushed over to the Oval Office. Secretary Schultz immediately warned the President, declaring “Some damn fool sir is trying to sell you missile defense!” Not missing a beat, the President smiled and said to his Secretary of State, “Well, George, that’s true and that damn fool is me.” Needless to say, Secretary Schultz thought he had been set up, which he had, but the President shortly gave his “SDI” address to the nation and called for a major US effort to build missile defenses to intercept nuclear warheads. The reaction was predictable. Senator Edward Kennedy and the Kremlin both condemned the proposal as a “Star Wars” first strike and “reckless red-scare” scheme.

A week later, the last of the peace through strength “trifecta” dropped. On April 8th, the Scowcroft Commission report was completed and reported its approval of building the MX missile and the entire nuclear deterrent force being proposed by the President. But the report had a twist that flummoxed the nuclear freeze folks. R. James Woolsey, an Army officer but also previously Under Secretary of the Navy and later Director of Central Intelligence, was a member of the Commission who also drafted the final report. He took to heart the recommendation of then Wyoming Senator Malcolm Wallop that you can’t make an elephant (Peacekeeper) a rabbit (small, fast and mobile) nor could you make a rabbit (a small single warhead mobile missile or SICBM or Midgetman) an elephant (a huge, heavy 10 warhead missile such as the Peacekeeper). Consequently, you needed both a rabbit (SICBM) and an elephant (Peacekeeper), and with a clever sleight of hand Woolsey closed the window of vulnerability in two steps, not one. The Commission also endorsed the simultaneous Reagan START control proposals of major reductions in Soviet nuclear weapons and the eventual elimination of heavy, large, multi-warhead land-based missiles, envisioned down the road to be achieved in future arms control deals such as START II. The Commission also endorsed the companion idea of missile defense, as a means of making any attack on the United States much more difficult to achieve, thus helping the nation’s deterrent strategy. Taken together the Commission report passed muster and led to the defense budget being approved by wide Congressional margins, (the Senate vote was 85-13, the House vote 251-148), saving the President’s nuclear deterrent strategy and budget. Here the reaction was mixed. The Washington Post favorably praised the report, because their editor Steve Rosenfeld understood deterrence, while the New York Times welcomed the lesser emphasis on survivable basing for the MX, meanwhile Representative Barney Frank said approving the missile was a “three stooges” decision.

However, the fight wasn't over yet. A year later, approximately 60 House Democrats opposed to all things nuclear, threatened to hold up the defense spending bill unless they could fence the entirety of MX/Peacekeeper funding until after the 1984 election. Rep Pat Schroeder (D-CO) fenced all strategic modernization funding but with a novel twist. To approve the money after the election, the House and Senate would both have to approve in each of 20 consecutive votes all the proposed funding, to be held over a 90 day campaign with all the votes to be tallied between March 1 and May 30, 1985. This required supportive votes in the subcommittee, full committee, floor, and conference and then back to the floor for final passage, for both the authorization and appropriations process. The closest vote was in the House Appropriations Committee, where by a 27-26 vote the Committee approved the funding. Final vote was the Senate adopting the conference report 55-45. By 1986, the first 50 Peacekeeper missiles went into silos in Wyoming, Midgetman was being developed, deployment of the new Ohio class submarine with the new D-5 missile was secured by 1990, with continued funding for the B2, B1 and B52, and with funding for the European fielding of the INF Pershing and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles approved as well. Subsequently the banning of all INF missiles was approved in a 1987 treaty with the USSR, and subsequently thousands of nuclear warheads were eliminated under START I (1991) and START II (1993), with huge reductions in conventional arms under the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) treaty, which collectively was the single greatest reduction in armaments in history.

Holiday From History

However, after 1991 and the end of the USSR, the United States and its allies switched gears and dramatically curtailed military nuclear deterrence spending to the point where just before 9-11, a decade later, US military spending was fully 59% (in purchasing power) below that of 1991 when the USSR was disbanded. The US and its allies also chose to take a holiday from investing in nuclear deterrence capabilities. There were substantial reductions in sustainment and modernization, with a laissez faire approach in anticipating any new challenges of a nuclear armed, peer adversary in China, or cyber, space, hypersonic speed, and missile defense technology challenges. You can only choose to kick the proverbial modernization can down the road so far until you literally run out of road. Retired USAF Major General Garrett Harencak called this a holiday from procurement a holiday from history as "we even stopped thinking intellectually about the need for a nuclear deterrent and what were serious threats to the United States." We killed the Ohio submarine production in 1992; Peacekeeper Rail Garrion was ended in 1991; the SICBM was eliminated (1991) and the B2 bomber production stopped at 20 aircraft in 1997, just as the latest model B-52 was nearing 50 years in service. Additionally, we limited annual production of the D-5 submarine launched missile to 12 in 1998. The projected time a new modernized force will be put in the US nuclear arsenal was projected to be 60, 48, and 68 years old, respectively, for US ICBMs, submarines and bombers.

By 2010, when the White House and Congress agreed to fully modernize the nuclear deterrent, the nuclear force was between 40-72 years old, including MMIII (1970); Ohio submarine (1982), the B52H (1972), and the ALCM (1982). A new Sentinel ICBM, Columbia Class submarine, B21 bomber, advanced air launched cruise missile and a life extended sea-launched D-5 missile would be procured, but only sometime around 2032-45.

In 1991, at the end of the USSR, the USA spent $65-70 billion annually on its nuclear deterrent. After 35 years, today the US is spending $65 billon including the National Nuclear Security Administration which has all our warheads, development labs and nuclear weapons infrastructure. Given inflation during that period, the $65 billion in 2026 would purchase $27 billion worth of weaponry by 2026. Consequently, our current nuclear deterrent funding is close to 60% (in purchasing power) less expensive than it was at the end of the Cold War. Looking at the entire nuclear deterrent acquisition equation, the cost is as follows: the ICBM force ($140B), the subs and D-5 missile ($130B), and the B21 ($14B for 20 airplanes). Including National Nuclear Security Administration within the Department of Energy and nuclear command and control costs, the entirety of the nuclear deterrent modernization program is $350-$400

billion spanning the next 10-15 years. That may sound like a lot of money, however, deployment of the Columbia class submarine and Sentinel ICBM will both last until roughly 2080…nearly half a century, costing some $8 billion a year on average for the entire lifetime of the deterrent. Americans spent $8 billion a year on Halloween candy and costumes.

The Challenges of the Future

Arguably our most serious deterrent requirement today is the quartet of China and Russia and Iran and North Korea. However, my remarks will now center on Iran and Ukraine as US forces in the Middle East engaged with Iran are the most controversial and probably the least understood, and Ukraine measures against Moscow are roiling energy markets. Both these issues had huge impacts on the just completed mid-term elections. And they both are serious challenges to our national security.

First, it was Iran that trained armed and gave sanctuary to the 911 terrorists. Second, the IRGC head Soleimani was the architect of 9-11. Third, Osama bin Laden himself explained in his declaration of war against the United States, issued in 1997 and 1998, that Iran gave sanctuary to Al Qaeda. Fourth, Iran went so far as to skip stamping the hijackers passports with Iranian visas, knowing that this would prevent them from entering America on their mission to fly airplanes into America's skyscrapers and Pentagon, and most likely our US Capitol building. And fifth, by mid-2025, David Albright's ISIS, the Iranian opposition group, the NCRI, had convincing intelligence that Iran was weeks from having a deliverable nuclear weapon, leaving the US with little room for restraint.

Deterring Iran however, is made more difficult by their theology dealing with of the regime. When Khomeini was asked wouldn't Israel destroy Iran if they determined Tehran had used nuclear weapons against Israel, Khomeini responded that he didn't care about Iran but did know that with nuclear weapons detonated over Israel "all the Jews would be dead" and the command of Allah would be fulfilled. Add to that the proxy terror groups that might also be given nuclear weapons---the Houthis, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah—and the deterrent task before the US becomes even more formidable.

The United States in 2014 refused to aid Ukraine, and came close to the same position again in 2022 when Russia took even more Ukraine territory. A key factor was that with respect to nuclear battlefield systems, the Russians far outnumbered American forces some 4-5 thousand,, to 100. Why the imbalance? In 1991 the United States unilaterally took down over 90% of our theater, nuclear weapons worldwide and left only 100 gravity bombs in Europe in order to balance thousands deployed in Russia, and able to hit targets throughout all of Europe. In April 1999, Mr. Yeltsin secretly called for the development of such highly accurate low yield and numerous battlefield nuclear weapons in order to change the outcome of a conventional battle, which Russia might be losing. Those forces have been built up by Mr. Putin,and are the basis for the dozens of threats from Putin to use these weapons if Ukraine, the United States, or NATO engages Russia in the wrong way or two robustly in the eyes of the Kremlin. Are such threats a bluff ,or would Putin be so reckless to use such weapons, and what would the US and its allies do in response?

Admittedly, the single most important task of deterrence today is to prevent the use of nuclear weapons against America and our allies. In order to do so we must have the forces capable of holding at risk those elements of power which are adversaries hold dear. That means the leadership, the machinery that holds them in power, and the weapons with which they use to commit aggression. These assets we hold at risk are the same ones we've held at risk for much of the nuclear age, going back to at least the mid Eisenhower administration. As President Kennedy remarked, the Minuteman missile deployed in October 1962 was his "ace in the hole" because it allowed the United States to hold at risk key Soviet targets which enabled him to blockade Cuba and demand the Soviets remove their missiles. Fortuitously, the United States could also secretly offer to remove our medium range missiles from Turkey and Italy because we could now reach key Soviet targets with our Minuteman missiles deployed in Montana.

However, the US is not always going to have the flexibility of a convenient offramp to offer adversaries that threaten us with nuclear weapons.

The American veterans which we honor 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 like we do with China and Russia. Combined, the capability to do so can only be secured with the continued robust modernization of our nuclear triad. The Posture Commission of the United States concluded in 2023 we need the addition of theater nuclear capabilities, such as a sea launch cruise missile. Additionally we could quickly add the number of warheads we have deployed on our D-5 Navy and Air Force MM III missiles.

Up to this point, 16 years after the bipartisan agreement to modernize our nuclear deterrent, funding has remained on track to finish modernization. Will that change with the election of a variety of new members who are advocates of Socialism, Communism and Islamic Jihad since they view the US and West as rich, corrupt, driven by white supremacy, and see wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as wars against Islam and for oil. These new representatives of the people believe Islam and Communism can bring Utopia. Unless the regime in Iran is eradicated from power, the IRGC will do whatever it can to coerce the West for concessions under the threat of disrupting energy supplies to cause price hikes in western economies. They will also work to surreptitiously reconstitute their nuclear program at Pickaxe and Minzadayi, in order to carry out the Jihad of “death” to Israel and the United States. Remember these are “Twelvers” who must create Armageddon here on earth to bring back the Mahdi or the 12th Imman to send all good Muslims to heaven and all infidels to Hell, bringing utopia to earth. When the Israelis raided Iran, they uncovered millions of pages of data revealing Iran plans to secure seven nuclear weapons to use against Israel and the United States. A robust missile defense system gives the US one option on how to deter Armageddon, if US intelligence doesn’t detect the creation of an Iranian nuclear arsenal, and if Iran attempts to deliver Armageddon in the form of a missile. This is where a robust missile defense system can effectively complicate and deter an attackers objectives of the crazy Ayatollah who sees virtue and success in death.

Closing, Some Thoughts

Deterrence is complicated and it is multiform. The military cannot do the job solely on their own. Let me explain. The 9-11 hijackers Mohammed Atta and Mohammed Hamzi --two of the pilots—overstayed their visas. Each were arrested for traffic violations. But the police officers were prohibited in North Carolina and in Florida from asking them their immigration status which would have revealed that they had both overstayed their visas and were subject to deportation and being turned over to the immigration service. So, because we didn’t have the courage to ruffle the feathers of the open borders advocates, we missed an opportunity to prevent the death of over 7000 Americans and the expenditure of nearly $7 trillion dollars. Similarly, if you remember some members of the military, along with their civilian colleagues, refused to complain about Major Nisan, the psychiatrist at Fort Hood, who repeatedly called for Jihad against America. Consequently, he was able to murder 13 and wounded 32 fellow soldiers because people did not have the courage to potentially be perceived as critical of Islam, so they refused to tell the authorities of the violent tendencies of this military doctor.

My key point is that our veterans have supported and defended the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic for generations, and active duty military continue to deter our enemies so we do not have to fight wars. Our military and veterans have saved millions of lives over the course of America’s existence. So we thank and salute all that serve today and have served in the past. The military men and women from the army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, from every corner of the United States that I have work since 1981are the most ethical, honest, and patriotic people I have ever had the honor and privilege with which to work. . And in closing, I want to salute my Uncle Clint Gardner who landed at Normandy, was wounded but made it back to his unit in France and ended up at the Battle of the Bulge, He was then was chosen by General Eisenhower to lead a team of US soldiers to Buchenwald prisoner

of war camp to document and photo the atrocities he discovered to ensure the Nazis couldn't deny any of those horrific actions. God Bless you all, and may God continue to bless the United States of America, Thank you.

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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