

ICBM EAR Week of August 8, 2024, Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic and Senior Fellow, NIDS.

Summary

This week we assess a number of ideas being put forward to respond to the Russian and Chinese nuclear buildup, including proposals to unilaterally cut back on the US nuclear arsenal, significantly reduce nuclear modernization spending and instead rely solely on conventional weapons for deterrence.

Russia proposes an arms deal framework that bypasses the Senate while China is again pushing no first use policy at the United Nations.

A number of essays deal with the general threat from China and specifically Shoshana Bryen discusses the Chinese threat in the Middle East.

Chris Ford spoke to a NIDS Huessy Nuclear deterrent seminar particularly about China's push in 1982 to proliferate nuclear weapons technology.

NIPP has a new study on Dr. James Schlesinger's Tailored Deterrence.

South China Morning Post essay explored the support for nuclear weapons in the Republic of Korea and to a lesser extent in Japan.

Dr. Blank and Mr. Huessy address whether the US defense modernization plans will occur in time in a new Gatestone essay.

Huessy writes a new essay on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and discusses a book using intercepted radio messages as a means of assessing why Japan did surrender unconditionally at the end of World War II.

Quotes of the Week

Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins: "Thank you to Gen. Anthony Cotton for a great visit. We discussed how the @StateDept and @US_STRATCOM can work together to ensure we advance our international security priorities."

Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO) wrote: "Tuesday marks the 79th anniversary of the atomic bombings in Japan. In a nuclear world, deterrence is the best guarantee these weapons are never again used. The United States must maintain and modernize a deterrent nuclear force sufficient to make our adversaries think twice before holding the world at risk."

Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) said: "This week we remember the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki along with every victim of nuclear weapons production and testing. It is our job to promote diplomacy over destruction and commit to creating a world free from the threat of nuclear war."

Essay of the Week by the ICBM EAR

There is now a widespread acknowledgment that China is building a much-expanded nuclear force and that Russia may have deployed strategic nuclear warheads beyond the New START limits. There is thus consequently a growing discussion of what the United States and its allies should do in response.

There are two new Congressionally mandated reports from July 2024 and October 2023 that call for fully modernizing our nuclear forces and undertake measures in addition to the nuclear program of record. The administration has also gone from anticipating that sometime in the future the US may need to implement some kind of hedge in deploying more warheads to discussing what kind of build up may have to be done sooner rather than later.

The administration has also continued to argue that arms control deals cutting weapons are better than arms buildups, and that the administration still seeks to “reduce” the salience of nuclear forces in our deterrent policy. Although to do so safely would require reciprocity from Russia and China, and both of which show no sign of moving in that direction, in fact very much the opposite.

As Dr. Chris Ford told a NIDS nuclear seminar on August 9th, the three nuclear powers of China, Russia and North Korea, are cooperating with each other to a greater extent than has heretofore been the case, in addition to working with Iran which may very well have nuclear weapons already.

Possible US responses pushed by enthusiasts of eliminating nuclear weapons entirely fall into two categories: one, actually reducing the US nuclear deterrent and two, adopting a strategy where the US abolishes the idea that any nuclear weapons can be used in a conflict.

Now deciding up front that if deterrence breaks down the US would still not use nuclear weapons is often described as keeping nuclear weapons for deterrence but not warfighting. But if you are not going to respond with a retaliatory nuclear strike, your deterrent strategy is nothing more than a “bluff” which hardly strengthens deterrence, in fact the very opposite. And while the US policy might very well be based on a conviction that no use of nuclear weapons is possible without an escalation to Armageddon, our enemies may not believe that at all.

One idea from the International Institute for Strategic Studies and authored by Douglas Barrie and Timothy Wright calls for a qualitative rather than quantitative response—in short deploying less weapons to cover more targets but with greater assuredness. This would say the authors, somehow seize the high ethical ground of “responsible” statecraft as if China, Russia and North Korea can be persuaded to change their nuclear strategy by a US appeal to high moral behavior and thus successfully push our enemies to adopt “responsible” strategies.

A second idea is by Charles Moxley who argues that any use of nuclear weapons including low yield weapons will not avoid Armageddon but will automatically escalate to all out nuclear war. Annie Jacobsen book on nuclear war makes such an argument and concludes the onset of nuclear winter follows along with 5 billion casualties. Moxley then goes so far as to argue that the US does not even need nuclear weapons, explaining: “And here’s the ultimate irony: **We largely no longer need nuclear weapons. We have developed such superiority in our conventional forces that we’re able to address many, if not most, of our potential military needs with such weapons.** The accuracy of contemporary delivery vehicles, whereby we can or will soon be able to hit

essentially any target anywhere in the world within an hour or less, removes many needs that might have been believed in the past to require nuclear weapons.”

However, Moxley appears oblivious to the argument of our senior US military leaders that in a conventional conflict the use of nuclear weapons by our adversaries/enemies eliminates whatever advantage our conventional capabilities may give us. In the words of one senior military commander, “nothing holds” in the event of the use of nuclear weapons. [Moxley also thinks—incorrectly—that our nuclear policy is one of MAD, or mutual assured destruction, which he writes the US should jettison.]

A third recent essay by Geoff Wilson from the Stimson Center argues that since the launch of the new [USA] nuclear modernization plan, [in 2010], “every single nuclear-armed nation has begun redeveloping or expanding their nuclear arsenals.¹⁹ While some experts may argue what the specific cause of this may be, the U.S. decision to spend nearly two trillion dollars on recapitalizing its nuclear arsenal was a significant factor.”

But even the Washington Post recently noted that while the world has a lot of arms but not much control, it’s not the fault of the United States. Surprisingly, the Post explained the US has exercised restraint in its nuclear modernization—staying within the New START limits—not so Russia and China, with the result that an arms race is underway but the US has yet to put its track shoes on.

Here Wilson seems unaware that the American nuclear modernization program of record was adopted in 2010 as part of the requirement to undergird the New START agreement where the entirety of the US strategic nuclear deterrent was actually a reduction by 75% from the START I level and relatively a duplicate of the Moscow treaty numbers, hardly what one could term an initiation of an arms race.

The Moscow treaty was 1700-2200 warheads and the estimated US deployments that are consistent with the New START treaty are around 1700-1900 depending upon how many bomber weapons one estimates the US could deploy with our 60 allowed bombers and our available cruise missiles and gravity bombs.

The Stimson essay also, just as CBO and other analyses do, lumps together the costs of the current legacy force for all legs of the TRIAD and the cost of the new replacement systems and calls it all “modernization.” To make the costs seem prohibitive Stimson lays out the costs over three decades for the MMIII, Ohio-class, and B2/B52 strategic bombers, all the NNSA work, all of the estimates for NC3, and then adds in the projected estimates for the ICBM Sentinel, the new strategic bomber or B21 and the Columbia SSBN and associated D-5 missile.

When examined, however, the three new platforms will cost as an increase over what we would ordinarily spend for the legacy systems, roughly \$400 billion in RDT&E and Acquisition. It is important to note that only a fraction of the strategic bomber costs are for that portion of the strategic bombers that are nuclear capable.

Costing out the systems on an annual basis reveals that the ICBM Sentinel will cost \$3.1 billion a year over its lifetime through 2080 when counting RDT&E and Acquisition. The Columbia class submarine and D-5 missile would cost roughly \$3.9 billion a year over its lifetime. Even if the legacy MMIII could be sustained indefinitely, its O&M operating costs can hardly be added in as part of the cost of modernization.

Adding in the entirety of the RDT&E and Procurement costs for the three TRIAD platforms plus an estimated \$5 billion annually for nuclear command, control and communication, comes to around \$19 billion annually for the FY2025 budget request now pending before Congress, which is the real increase in nuclear costs associated with modernization.

The idea that the legacy forces can be maintained as an alternative to modernization is simply invalid. As retired Admiral Richard argued correctly, the choice is between sustaining deterrence or going out of the nuclear business. I repeat: either modernize or go out of the nuclear deterrent business.

This is also true of the warhead and production complex of the NNSA—either we refurbish the old warheads or we retire them. Such work together is not an arms race at all but simply a sustainment of the New START nuclear force approved by the US Senate.

Even that portion of the nuclear complex not under the New START agreement is that for the United States limited to 200 gravity bombs located in Europe aboard tactical aircraft. The Russians have at least 10-fold more theater nuclear forces according to the US intelligence community.

Given projections that Russia and China together will have as much as 10,000 deployed nuclear weapons by 2035-40, the idea that the US is creating an arms race is absurd. Even of the US deployed our entire available stockpile of weapons, (3748) the US might be able to deploy an additional 1000 warheads by the end of this decade according to NIPP expert Mark Schneider.

Here are the three essays and links.

ANALYSIS: Not More, But More Assured: Optimizing US Nuclear

Posture International Institute for Strategic Studies – Douglas Barrie, Timothy Wright
August 9, 2024,

A qualitative rather than quantitative response may well be more effective for US nuclear posture, while also allowing the US to hold the ethical high ground as a responsible actor.

[Read Full Article](#)

OPINION: Our Political and Military Leaders Must Abandon MAD Nuclear Policies

Common Dreams – Charles Moxley
August 9, 2024,

We must require our political and military leaders to reformulate our nuclear policies; however, moving the world toward mutual security will be hard in the current environment.

[Read Full Article](#)

ANALYSIS: America's Nuclear Weapons Quagmire

Stimson Center – Geoff Wilson
August 7, 2024

The United States does need to make serious budgetary cuts about its nuclear arsenal, but should promote international strategic stability and cut waste, fraud, and contractor

overreach in the defense budget as a whole.

[Read Full Article](#)

'Just in Time' Defense Modernization: Will the United States Miss the Boat?

by [Peter Huessy](#) and [Stephen Blank](#)

August 9, 2024 at 5:00 am

- All four reports called for major new investments in US defense spending, completion of the current nuclear deterrent modernization effort, and also recommended, given the projected rise of military power by America's enemies, that the US add serious new nuclear capabilities to its deterrence.
- The issue *not* addressed by all of the reports is: before the improvements in US defense capability are completed, will the US be able to successfully avoid conflicts with the new axis of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea?
- All four studies emphasized that the time was late for US modernization and that the dangers are escalating.
- All of the studies also proposed significant upgrades to the US deterrent capability, including nuclear, conventional, space, cyber and missile defense weaponry, and emphasized with the utmost urgency that modernization was needed *now*.
- Modernization, unfortunately, is slow. The system has not achieved what then Secretary of Defense James Mattis explained in [2018](#) was the ability to buy weapons at "[the speed of relevance](#)" -- a capability that remains dangerously elusive...
- The timetables for the invasion of Ukraine, and the coordinated attacks on Israel, the potential invasions of Taiwan or the Republic of Korea, are in the heads of four dictators, Putin, Xi, Kim and Khamenei. They are not necessarily going to wait for the US to modernize its deterrent strength before striking.
- With US deterrent strategy perceived as weak, there are serious concerns that US military modernization may not be completed in time, but only "outside the time-zone," as Zelikow notes, meaning *after* it was needed.
- Without nuclear modernization of our long-range delivery vehicles, as Admiral Charles Richard, the former commander of Strategic Command, has [emphasized](#), the US is out of the nuclear business.
- Where Zelikow gets it right is in his proposals that the US also use its *economic strength* as a deterrent, particularly against China.... Success cannot be ensured, however, at the expense of de-emphasizing US military power.
- If the US fails to deter its enemies, and they are left to believe that, instead, the United States will *deter itself* from winning for fear of "escalation," the ground is set for major new conflicts, especially over the next few years when the United States may be poorly prepared to win.

Four recent reports call for major new investments in US defense spending, completion of the current nuclear deterrent modernization effort, and also recommend, given the projected rise of military power by America's enemies, that the US add serious new nuclear capabilities to its

deterrence. Pictured: An unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile launches during an operational test on August 2, 2017, at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California (Image source: U.S. Air Force)

The US election in November 2024 may well determine the future direction of US national security strategy. In the past year, there has been a steady stream of thoughtful reports about what America's national security strategy should be. This is a discussion that will hopefully be taken up by the various campaigns of those seeking the presidency.

Four reports are particularly worth attention. They all assess in various detail the current and projected US nuclear posture as well as the nuclear threats the United States faces, especially compared to the situation of a decade and a half ago.

Two of the studies were mandated by Congress. The October 2023 report on the [Strategic Posture of the United States](#) and the July 2024 report on the [National Defense Strategy of the United States](#).

The other two reports were both more narrowly focused on US nuclear capability. One was by Robert Peters of the Heritage Foundation, [issued in July 2024](#), the "[New American Nuclear Consensus](#)." The other was "[The Next Chapter in US Nuclear Policy](#)" by Brad Roberts, the Director of the Center for Global Security Research Center of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

All four reports called for major new investments in US defense spending, completion of the current nuclear deterrent modernization effort, and also recommended, given the projected rise of military power by America's enemies, that the US add serious new nuclear capabilities to its deterrence.

The issue *not* addressed by all of the reports is: before the improvements in US defense capability are completed, will the US be able to successfully avoid conflicts with the new axis of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea?

In "[Confronting Another Axis? History, Humility, and Wishful Thinking](#)" Hoover Institution fellow Philip Zelikow wrote for the Texas National Security Review an article which concludes that US defense modernization may be completed but only *after* the US is challenged by armed conflicts initiated by the four new axis members and/or their proxies.

All four studies emphasized that the time was late for US modernization and that the dangers are escalating.

All of the studies also proposed significant upgrades to the US deterrent capability, including nuclear, conventional, space, cyber and missile defense weaponry, and emphasized with the utmost urgency that modernization was needed *now*.

The US however, will not acquire such nuclear and other capabilities for at least a decade, due to the current defense acquisition system of the US defense department, as Zelikow [noted](#). Some

near-term nuclear advances could be implemented sooner, such as acquiring the B61-13 earth-penetrating nuclear bomb, or adding nuclear warheads to America's existing force of ICBMs, SLBMs or strategic bombers. Such an effort might take as long as three to four years to complete.

Modernization, unfortunately, is slow. The system has not achieved what then Secretary of Defense James Mattis explained in [2018](#) was the ability to buy weapons at "[the speed of relevance](#)" -- a capability that remains dangerously elusive, just as Zelikow warns.

The four main enemies of the US -- North Korea, Iran, China and Russia— Zelikow warns, have their own internal clocks. The timetables for the invasion of Ukraine, and the coordinated attacks on Israel, the potential invasions of Taiwan or the Republic of Korea, are in the heads of four dictators, Putin, Xi, Kim and Khamenei. They are not necessarily going to wait for the US to modernize its deterrent strength before striking.

Whatever their current timetable, those internal clocks may also be suddenly reset. Soviet ruler Josef Stalin changed his mind late in the day about supporting North Korea's invasion of the Republic of Korea, as Zelikow [notes](#), and the Japanese leadership decided to go to war in southeast Asia and Indochina only after seeing the Nazi success in seizing France in WWII.

Zelikow relates that these current axis leaders pay particular attention to world events and especially actions by the US that inform them of America's ability and willingness to defend its interests. A key factor is always whether the US is seen as having a credible will to use its deterrent, let alone having the necessary deterrent capability to begin with.

Over a period of recent years, according to the military historian Victor Davis Hanson of the Hoover Institute, the US took actions that gave the impression of seeking to forgo conflict in the short-term interests of keeping the peace, but also mistakenly took off the table the threat of escalation as a means of winning a conflict, out of the fear of triggering a wider conflict, or a nuclear war.

The US, Hanson notes in a July 26 [podcast](#), has made a series of moves that have, in the eyes of our enemies, undermined deterrence:

- Embargoed arms to Ukraine after the 2014 Russian invasion, and in December 2021 had to take back the comment that "[a minor incursion](#)" by Russia into Ukraine might be acceptable: "I think what you're going to see is that Russia will be held accountable if it invades. And it depends on what it does. It's one thing if it's a minor incursion and then we end up having a fight about what to do and not do."
- Withdrew from Afghanistan without requiring any *quid quo pro* from the Taliban and ending in a tragic killing of American special forces while Afghani citizens, seeking to escape, died trying to hang onto US airplanes. The US also left behind billions in military hardware and a \$96 million-dollar military airbase now presumably being used by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), as well as the Taliban
- Failed to challenge Chinese spy balloons roaming over key military installations in the US.

- Failed to rebut accusatory allegations when senior US diplomats were repeatedly insulted by Chinese officials at an official meeting in Anchorage.

With US deterrent strategy perceived as weak, there are serious concerns that US military modernization may not be completed in time, but only "outside the time-zone," as Zelikow notes, meaning *after* it was needed.

Gordon Chang, a China expert and Gatestone Institute Distinguished Senior Fellow, has also [expressed](#) significant concern that America's military insufficiency, especially in the near future, needs urgent attention to move it front and center in a debate over America's future security policy.

The issue is particularly urgent given that members of this new "axis of evil" may decide at any time to widen their aggression. Zelikow and others stress that this belligerency is possible, most probably in the next few years. All four countries are now part of current wars against American allies, Ukraine and Israel.

Where Zelikow disappoints, however, unlike Chang, is in his implied opposition to the various calls for greater defense spending. Even assuming a more benign view of the world, the US defense strength is not now sufficient to credibly meet our current security obligations, as the two Congressionally-mandated reports referenced above unanimously concluded.

There is no doubt that US defense modernization is critically needed, especially in the nuclear area. Without nuclear modernization of our long-range delivery vehicles, as Admiral Charles Richard, the former commander of Strategic Command, has [emphasized](#), the US is out of the nuclear business. The same point was also made July 29 at an event hosted by the National Institute for Deterrence Studies on Capitol Hill, in [remarks](#) by Jill Hruby, Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security and head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, on the urgent need to rebuild US nuclear warheads.

Where Zelikow gets it right is in his proposals that the US also use its *economic strength* as a deterrent, particularly against China -- a point underscored by Institute of World Politics President Emeritus John Lenczowski in his recent [essay](#) on taking down China.

As part of an all-of-government approach to security, as highlighted in recent [testimony](#) by the chair and vice-chair of the National Defense Strategy Commission to the Senate Armed Service Committee, it makes great sense for the US to use its economic tools as a primary means of deterring the serious dangers presented by the new axis, and to do so aggressively to ensure US success. Success cannot be ensured, however, at the expense of de-emphasizing US military power. As the late [Henry Kissinger wrote](#), "The attempt to separate diplomacy and power results in power lacking direction and diplomacy being deprived of incentives."

If the US fails to deter its enemies, and they are left to believe that, instead, the United States will *deter itself* from winning for fear of "escalation," the ground is set for major new conflicts, especially over the next few years when the United States may be poorly prepared to win.

Peter Huessy is a Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrent Studies and Dr. Stephen Blank is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

August 11, 2024: The Lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

By Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow, NIDS and President, Geo-Strategic Analysis

For most of the nuclear age nuclear weapons were thought by the West to be instruments of deterrence, to prevent war. Today, over time, the criminal enterprises such as Russia, China, and North Korea, that masquerade as legitimate nation-states, see nuclear weapons as instruments of coercion and blackmail. This unnerving point was underscored by the unanimous October 2023 Strategic Posture Commission report and echoed by another new Congressionally initiated report on the National Security Strategy of the United States just issued in July 2024.

On the anniversary of the use of two nuclear weapons against Japan at the end of World War II, it's appropriate to examine again whether President Truman made the right decision. Most analysis treats Truman's decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki as unnecessary at best and even criminal at worst, as solely a political move to intimidate the USSR, detract from Moscow's role in defeating the Japanese and to show folks who was boss. On top of which, it is often claimed the Japanese government was ready to surrender, primarily as it anticipated a coming blockade of the homeland. In short, no such use of nuclear weapons was necessary.

As part of the almost ritualistic assessment of Truman's decision, this year saw a slight twist in the assessments. A new poll was taken using word for word the same questions Roper polls used in 1945 to test American attitudes toward the use of nuclear weapons. One analysis led by Scott Sagan was disappointed most Americans actually support a strong and robust deterrent, as well as generally supporting the Truman decision to end WW2 by using nuclear weapons.

Such polls also show a public resistant to accepting the idea of lessening the salience of nuclear deterrence in US security policy. And that any such policy would also have to persuade Russia and China to lessen the role of nuclear weapons in their security strategies, a prospect not even far over the horizon let alone possible in the near-term.

In fact, the very opposite is occurring. Over two decades ago, Russia issued a 1999 directive to develop low-yield, highly accurate, battlefield nuclear weapons, a plan implemented by Russian President Putin. China also has built over 300 new ICBM silos just in the past few years and is now beginning to fill the silos with two types of missiles---which can each carry 3-10 warheads.

Projections by James Howe are that around 2035-45, Russia could have 7000+ deployed strategic long-range nuclear warheads, while Chris Yeaw of the University of Nebraska projects China and Russia together could easily have 10,000 deployed nuclear weapons by 2035-40.

In the face of such numbers, what sense does it make to assume nuclear US restraint will be mirrored by China and Russia when the two latter countries have been building new nuclear weapon systems for between 10-20 years? And have even accelerated the pace of their acquisition to where the recently retired commander of the US Strategic Command described China's nuclear growth as "breathtaking."

The critics of US nuclear modernization continue to complain the US is accelerating or initiating an arms race when in fact the very opposite is the case. In 2002-3 and 2010, the US reduced its

nuclear forces from six thousand down to one thousand five hundred and fifty and limited its theater or regional nuclear forces to around two hundred gravity bombs in Europe. The US nuclear modernization plan now moving forward replaces only the force structure allowed by the New START treaty. And even if we upgraded all our current SLBM and ICBM forces with more warheads, we might be able to deploy somewhere around an additional 1000 warheads over the next 3-4 years but probably not considerably more, hardly an example of the US leading an arms race.

While Russia joined the US in both nuclear arms deals in 2002 and 2010, the theater systems they already had measured in the multiple thousands of warheads and were not under any arms limits. And Russia also has long-range systems that are also not under any arms limits such as the Backfire bomber, while their ability to buildup far beyond the START limits continues to grow.

The question on the table is thus how reckless Xi and Putin will be with their projected very large arsenals, and will they use nuclear weapons not only for coercion but actually employ such weapons? To say nothing of the rulers in Iran and North Korea who are top state sponsors of terror and are allied closely with China and Russia and each other.

Unless the US builds a deterrent second to none, we may find out the hard way when nuclear weapons are used, as both Russia and China have both threatened to do on a serial basis.

Some global zero advocates minimize China's buildup and still try and characterize the nuclear strategy of China as reflecting a "minimal deterrent" which is often described as a simple plan to retaliate only with limited nuclear weapons. And not use nuclear weapons first nor use nuclear weapons for coercive purposes or against nations that were non-nuclear powers.

But when Chinese government officials were cited threatening Japan with nuclear strikes should Japan come to the defense of Taiwan, the whitewash of Chinese nuclear strategy disappeared. And just so everyone understood, China emphasized "just as happened in WWII" Japan would be defeated.

So, is the US justified in building a better deterrent in the face of China and Russia building up?

A new assessment of the bombing in Japan at the end of WWII reveals that using the evidence in radio communications of the Japanese which the US was intercepting, reveals the central role played by the nuclear strikes in Japan, especially the second nuclear bomb, in persuading the Japanese emperor to break the deadlock in his war cabinet and agree to an unconditional surrender.

Secondary but in the mix was the threat of a naval blockade of the islands. But of no special importance was the Russian presence in Northeast China and NE Asia with respect to the Japanese decision to adopt unconditional surrender, although the Russian presence may have impacted the regional decisions of some Japanese forces on the Asian mainland to stop fighting.

The end of the war and the Japanese surrender was not just a relief from the prospects of an island invasion and more than one million American and allied soldier casualties. While one million Japanese civilians tragically were lost in the war, often left unmentioned are the eighteen million civilians killed in China, Burma (now Myanmar), Indonesia, Malaysia, and Korea at the

hands of Imperial Japan. The end of the war ended the continued awful loss of civilian life throughout East Asia, a development that must also be weighed in the mix.

And the end of the near half century of brutal Japanese occupation of Korea finally freed the Korean people to create the ROK as a beacon of economic prosperity and freedom---despite a terrible war in 1950-53 brought about by North Korea, China, and the USSR.

The lessons of August 1945 over Japan are that deterrence works. Especially when demonstrated as the US did on August 6th and August 9th. The incredible damage done to the two cities just with the use of two bombs seared into the world's memory the nature of atomic warfare, especially when weapons some 20 or 50-fold bigger than the two weapons used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki became parts of the nuclear forces around the world.

That may be one reason no such weapons have been used since, over a period of 79 years.

The Will and the Power: China's Plan to Undermine Pax Americana

Here's how China threatens five core American national interests.

by **Robert D. Blackwill** **Richard Fontaine**

Editor's Note: The following article contains excerpts from [Lost Decade: The U.S. Pivot to Asia and the Rise of Chinese Power](#) (Oxford University Press, 2024) with the permission of the publishers.

From [Washington's Farewell Address](#) to [Biden's national security strategy](#), the core [U.S. national interest](#), unsurprisingly, has not changed: to ensure the fundamental security of the homeland and its people in freedom. As [Alexander Hamilton](#) put it, "Self-preservation is the first duty of a nation." Vital U.S. interests are all increasingly threatened by China and can be defined as the following:

1) To prevent the use and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and catastrophic conventional terrorist attacks or cyber-attacks against the United States, its military forces abroad, or its allies.

China's burgeoning intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and nuclear capabilities present a threat to the American homeland and its forces abroad. [China](#) plans to increase its stockpile of strategic nuclear warheads from an estimated 500 in 2022 to 1,500 by 2035. This rise is accompanied by increased infrastructure-building to produce and separate plutonium. [Beijing](#) is reportedly constructing [300](#) new missile [silos](#) in the country's western desert—a tenfold increase over the number operational in [2022](#)—in addition to its arsenal of an estimated one hundred [road-mobile ICBM launchers](#).

2) To stop the spread of nuclear weapons, secure nuclear weapons and materials, and reduce further proliferation of intermediate and long-range delivery systems for nuclear weapons.

Beijing continues to permit state-owned enterprises and individuals to violate the Missile Technology Control Regime ([MCTR](#)) and “proliferate technology that [Iran](#) has used to improve the accuracy, range, and lethality of its ballistic missiles.” At the same time, Beijing has undermined sanctions against [Tehran](#) by dramatically boosting its economic support for the Islamic Republic. [China](#) has steadily remained the Islamic Republic’s top trading partner, and commerce between the two countries exceeds \$15 billion annually. If Iran eventually acquires a [nuclear weapon](#), Beijing, through its economic and technical assistance, will bear substantial responsibility.

Beijing has also looked away as its citizens and corporations violate the MTCR vis-à-vis North Korea, despite China’s stated aim of finding a peaceful solution to Pyongyang’s nuclear program. A January 2023 [Congressional Research Service report](#) indicates that “Chinese financial companies set up paper companies to act as agents for North Korean financial institutions, evading sanctions to finance the North’s proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programs.”

3) To maintain a global and regional balance of power that promotes peace, stability, and freedom through domestic robustness, international power projection and influence, and the strength of alliance systems.

Beijing has mounted an all-out assault on the military, economic, and diplomatic balance of power in Asia and on America’s alliance system in the region. [China’s military modernization](#), made possible by unprecedented increases in defense spending, laid the foundation for this rapid change. The People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) modernization includes a new command-and-control structure, [upgraded equipment](#) across the [navy](#), air force, and army, expanded and improved training for cadets, and the establishment of the Strategic Support Force to centralize its new combat capabilities. In addition to the buildup of its nuclear arsenal, Beijing now boasts the [world’s most oversized navy](#), as well as the largest [ballistic and cruise missile inventory](#).

On the economic front, China has pursued two strategies to undermine American power in the Indo-Pacific. First, Beijing threatens and coerces America’s partners in Asia to adopt policies conducive to Chinese regional dominance. Second, the People’s Republic (PRC) created and now promotes [international economic organizations](#) and initiatives that exclude the United States, privilege China’s position, and undermine global rules and standards.

China also sought to expand its leadership in international governing institutions and weaken U.S. influence. At the [United Nations](#) (UN), in particular, Beijing has become more assertive

and activist, mounting an assault on democratic norms, including the rule of law, human rights, transparency, and accountability.

4) To prevent the emergence of hostile powers or failed states in the Western Hemisphere.

Beijing has successfully attempted to [deepen its strategic involvement](#) with [Latin American nations](#), increasingly at the expense of the United States.

[China](#) is now South America's top trading partner and the second largest for Latin America as a whole, after the United States. That is a significant leap for a country that, in 2000, accounted for less than [2 percent](#) of Latin America's exports. China has built ports, railroads, and dams, installed 5G networks throughout Latin America, and loaned the region's nations [\\$138 billion](#).

Notably, China has made a concerted attempt to engage Latin America and the Caribbean in the security domain. Beijing's [2008](#) and [2016](#) policy papers for the region outline Chinese commitments to increase "military exchanges and cooperation," assist the "development of the army in Latin American and Caribbean countries," and "enhance cooperation in military trade and military technology." Between 2002 and 2019, senior PLA leaders conducted [215 visits](#) to the region, with Chile, Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina accounting for over half of these interactions.

5) To ensure the viability and stability of major international systems (trade, financial markets, public health, energy supplies, cyberspace, the environment, freedom of the seas, and outer space).

Over the past fifteen years, China has sought to weaken virtually all these major global systems.

Through its repeated violations of international commercial practices, Beijing has disrupted the stability of world markets. It uses [hundreds of billions of dollars](#) in government subsidies and intentional overproduction to flood global markets with artificially low-priced Chinese goods and services. [Beijing](#) also restricts market access to foreign companies and imposes arbitrary non-tariff barriers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, [China delayed the transmission](#) of crucial data for weeks and continues to resist any serious inquiry into the origins of the virus. In addition, China's role in the [fentanyl epidemic](#) poses a direct threat to American citizens. China has created a sprawling and immensely powerful cyber operations command, which it employs to interfere with other nations and repress its own citizens. It uses [cyberattacks and cyber espionage](#) as

elements of influence campaigns in the United States, through which it tries to shape public perceptions of China, suppress criticism, and mislead American voters. It has penetrated [U.S. infrastructure](#) and critical facilities and continues to [steal data](#) from hundreds of millions of Americans.

China consistently hampers global efforts to slow [climate change](#) and mitigate its impact. It emits more greenhouse gases than any other country and constructs new fossil fuel infrastructure across the world as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. It also exposes its own air, soil, and waterways to [immense pollution](#).

China claims sovereignty over the South China Sea (SCS) and [declares the area](#) its “inherent territory,” inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Beijing’s assertive behavior in the South China Sea [challenges established norms](#) in the maritime domain, such as geographical boundaries, the rights of countries to control natural resources within their delineated zones, and international dispute resolution mechanisms.

In [pursuit](#) of Xi’s “[eternal dream](#)” for China to become a “space power,” Beijing has also made a concerted effort to [expand](#) its private and state industries rapidly. The PLA draws an explicit link between space and conflict; its [2020 Science of Military Strategy](#) document describes “the dominance of space [as] inseparable from the outcome of war.”

This enumeration vividly demonstrates China’s comprehensive policies to undermine each of America’s five vital national interests that safeguard and enhance Americans’ survival and well-being in a free and secure nation and bolster international order. As [U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin](#) explained in late 2022, “The PRC is the only country with both the will and, increasingly, the power to reshape its region and the international order to suit its authoritarian preferences.”

In weakening these five vital U.S. interests by threatening nuclear annihilation, Beijing could deter the United States from acting in a crisis. In attempting to dominate Asia, China could prompt nuclear proliferation across the region, beginning with [South Korea](#) or even [Japan](#), as countries seek a last-ditch nuclear deterrent capability. A China-dominated Asia could fatally fragment the United States’ Asian alliance system, as one U.S. ally after another kowtows to Beijing. The PRC could undermine U.S. ties with Mexico and other countries in Latin America to distract the United States from pursuing its national interests in Asia and elsewhere. A China that dominated Asia would alter global values, rules, and practices to the United States’ disadvantage.

[Steve Tsang](#), director of the China Institute at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, summed up the Chinese president’s ambitions. “Xi Jinping,” he said, “is not trying to out-compete America in the existing liberal international order dominated by the [United States]. His long-term goal is to change the world order into a Sino-centric one.”

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Nuclear Weapons Are Coming Back'

<https://www.businessinsider.com/nuclear-weapons-era-comeback-china-us-russia-experts-2024-8#:~:text=Nuclear%20weapons%20are%20poised%20to,paying%20attention%20the%20worrying%20trends>

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<https://breakingdefense.com/2024/08/into-the-unknown-managing-conventional-and-nuclear-uncertainty-in-the-indo-pacific/>

China pushes No First Use Strategy. U.S. rejects China's 'no first use' nuclear weapons plan; Washington Times Online ('Inside the Ring'), Aug. 7 | Bill Gertz

A Chinese proposal submitted to the United Nations last month calling on all nations to adopt Beijing's questionable "no first use" nuclear weapons policy is a nonstarter for the United States. A State Department official told Inside the Ring that the no-first-use policy would be unacceptable given China's massive nuclear weapons buildup and its refusal to join U.S. arms talks.

“The PRC's rapid and opaque buildup of a more flexible nuclear arsenal calls into question the objectives behind its no-first-use proposal," the official said, speaking on background and using the abbreviation for People's Republic of China. “[China's] refusal to engage in meaningful bilateral or multilateral discussions on arms control and risk reduction, including on questions about the PRC's stated no-first-use policy, reinforces these concerns."

The proposal was introduced in a U.N. preparatory meeting in Geneva from July 22 to Aug. 2 in advance of a major 2026 review conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In a working paper by the Chinese government, President Xi Jinping describes nuclear arms as a “sword of Damocles” threatening humanity. All nuclear weapons should be “completely banned” in pursuit of a nuclear-free world, he said.

China asserts in the paper that declaring not to be the first to use nuclear arms in a conflict is a way to implement Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That article calls on all

signatories to “negotiate in good faith” for nuclear disarmament, something China has so far refused to do.

The State Department official said American diplomats in Geneva posed questions to Chinese officials about entering arms talks but received no response.

China's proposal, “which followed its suspension of bilateral consultations on arms control and risk reduction, appears likely to be an attempt to deflect responsibility for its unwillingness to engage in substantive discussions,” the official said.

The Chinese proposal calls on the five leading nuclear weapons states — the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France — to sign a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons. No-first-use is what arms control officials call a declaratory policy intended to signal nuclear deterrence goals.

Current U.S. declaratory policy, dating back to 2009, uses calculated ambiguity on how nuclear arms would be used in deterring an array of threats, both to the United States and allies in Europe and Asia covered by U.S. “extended” deterrence.

Successive presidential administrations have rejected both no-first-use and another policy once favored by President Biden called “sole purpose,” which holds that the only justified use of nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack on the U.S. and its allies.

Marshall Billingslea, presidential envoy for arms control in the Trump administration, said no-first-use would be bad policy for the U.S., citing concerns it would increase — not decrease — the risk of war by offering an incentive for non-nuclear aggression.

“We have always maintained ambiguity about what might prompt a U.S. nuclear response,” he said in an email. “In fact, there are scenarios where we might be the first to use these weapons, and Communist China needs to understand that.”

The Pentagon's most recent annual report on the Chinese military also questioned the no-first-use policy amid a massive nuclear forces buildup of missiles, bombers and submarines by Beijing.

China's nuclear strategy, contrary to no-first-use, likely includes plans for nuclear strikes in response to non-nuclear attacks that threaten nuclear forces or command and control systems, or after an attack that equals the strategic effects of a nuclear strike, the report said.

China would also resort to nuclear weapons if a conventional military defeat in Taiwan gravely threatened the Chinese Communist Party's regime survival, the report said.

China's rapid buildup of nuclear forces in the more than a decade since Mr. Xi came to power has been described an unprecedented “break out.” The Pentagon estimates China's warhead stockpile, once limited to around 250 warheads, will reach 1,500 by 2035 deployed on missiles, submarines and bombers.

Strategic Developments: Russia Proposes Arms Control Talks

Russia ready to consider political deals with US in disarmament area –

According to Anatoly Antonov, the US executive branch understands this and is thinking about reaching some political agreements that do not require ratification by the Senate and would take effect after the expiration of the US-Russian Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, also known as New START

WASHINGTON -- Russia is ready to consider new political agreements with the US in the area of arms control and disarmament, Russian Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Antonov said.

According to the diplomat, the US is in effect unable at this point to ensure ratification of any new US-Russian arms control agreements that would reflect Moscow's priorities.

"Is it possible to assume today that Congress will ratify US-Russian agreements that would take into account Russian priorities? I'll answer you: no," Antonov said in an interview with TASS.

According to the ambassador, the US executive branch understands this and is thinking about reaching some political agreements that do not require ratification by the Senate and would take effect after the expiration of the US-Russian Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, also known as New START.

"The Americans understand this, so today they are thinking about politically binding agreements for after 2026, or after the expiration of the New START, which would be in effect only for the duration of the president's term in office," Antonov said.

The ambassador reiterated that Russia is mostly interested in legally binding arms-control agreements.

"We are interested in any agreements with the United States of America being legally binding. People could argue with me now and say, 'We are not ruling out political agreements.' We are not. But given the lack of trust between our two countries, of course, legally binding agreements are in our interests," the diplomat said.

He also said that until the US rejects its hostile policy toward Russia, there can be no new arms control agreements.

"If the Americans don't abandon their hostile position or policy toward the Russian Federation, we can't engage in what the Americans are offering us," the ambassador stated.

Demands that can't be met

According to Antonov, the US sometimes makes arms-control demands to Russia that the US itself is not prepared to meet.

"The Americans sometimes make demands to us that they themselves can't meet," he said.

"I say to the Americans, 'Are you ready to allow me, a Russian diplomat, to come to your depot and look at your nuclear warheads?' They say, 'No,'" the ambassador recounted. "'Do you want to come [to Russian nuclear weapons depots]?' 'Yes.'"

According to the diplomat, this means that some issues related to arms control are now being handled by incompetent individuals in the US.

"This shows that the people who are dealing with these issues are not professionals, not specialists. They don't understand what they are saying," the Antonov said.

He said Russia never issues ultimatums in arms-control talks.

"I want to say this: We have never assumed that our position is all there is. We say: Here is our position, and we propose to discuss it. This is not an ultimatum, but an invitation to discussion," he said. "My negotiating tactic is very simple: Both you and I need to take a piece of paper and write down what you want and what I want. Take the two pieces of paper.

My Take

by Shi Jiangtao

Could Japan and South Korea join the nuclear club? Cold war fears put the prospect in play

- Nearly eight decades have passed since the US bombing of Hiroshima and momentum for nuclear disarmament appears to be waning

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Shi Jiangtao

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Published: 7:30pm, 6 Aug 2024

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As Japan marked the 79th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Tuesday, the country's prime minister noted a major shift towards nuclear weapons.

Amid the spectre of superpower confrontation, Fumio Kishida warned that for the first time since the height of the Cold War, the momentum towards a world without nuclear arms was on the verge of reversal.

Despite his pledge that Japan, "as the sole country to have experienced the use of nuclear weapons in war", would continue to champion non-proliferation, Kishida admitted it had become "all the more challenging" due to conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza and divided views over nuclear disarmament.

Tensions have been soaring on the Korean peninsula, in the South and East China seas and across the Taiwan Strait, with the emergence of two opposing cold war-style camps: one led by Washington and the other by Beijing.

In a "seismic shift" in the regional security landscape, China, Russia and North Korea have inched closer to counter the US, prompting growing calls in Japan and South Korea for the two

countries to acquire their own nuclear weapons to fend off a potential axis of nuclear-armed authoritarian regimes.

The nuclear options used to be largely a taboo topic in the two US treaty allies after World War II, with Washington instead promising to keep both Seoul and Tokyo under its nuclear umbrella.

North Korea's Kim Jong-un guides country's 1st 'nuclear trigger' simulation drills

However, there were doubts in South Korea in the 1970s about how far the US could be relied on in the event of an attack from the North, prompting Seoul to launch a secret nuclear weapons programme – only for it to be abandoned later under US pressure.

But with the backing of China and Russia, North Korea has rapidly expanded its nuclear abilities to become a de facto nuclear power, fundamentally changing the nuclear balance on the peninsula and significantly raising the stakes for a US military intervention.

A February poll by Gallup Korea showed that nearly 73 per cent of South Koreans said their country should have its own nuclear weapons, given the North's repeated threats of nuclear attacks.

Another poll in late June found that 66 per cent of respondents were in favour of going nuclear, Yonhap News Agency reported, citing a survey by the state-funded Korea Institute for National Unification.

Over 44 per cent said they preferred to keep US troops out of the country and develop South Korea's own nuclear weapons, the first-time public support for nuclear armament outran support for American troops, the news agency said.

Fewer people also thought the North would not use nuclear weapons against the South, with the share of those respondents falling more than 23 percentage points to 31 per cent from a 2017 survey.

Echoing the public sentiment, some South Korean politicians, including President Yoon Suk-yeol, have called for the development of the country's own nuclear weapons, a step Washington opposes.

Yoon said in January last year that if North Korea's nuclear threat continued to grow, South Korea might consider building its own nuclear weapons or asking the US to redeploy tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula – arms that Washington withdrew in 1991.

While the Japanese public is generally more cautious about nuclear armament, there has also been growing support for nuclear generation despite the 2011 Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster.

Japan plans to peer inside the Fukushima nuclear plant using drones to safely decommission it

A poll by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper in March last year showed 51 per cent of respondents supported restarting nuclear reactors, while 63 per cent were open to discussions of a nuclear-sharing option with the US in the wake of Ukraine war.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was also cited as a turning point in Chinese and Japanese views about the prospect of a nuclear war, with a rare survey showing more pessimistic perceptions in China than in Japan.

The survey jointly conducted last year by China International Communications Group and Genron NPO, a Japanese think tank, said over 52 per cent of Chinese respondents believed the world could see a nuclear war "in the next few years" or "not-so-distant future". In contrast, nearly 40 per cent of Japanese respondents said nuclear conflict was possible in the next few years or not-so-distant future.

More worryingly for Beijing, Washington has strengthened its military alliance with Tokyo and Seoul, with commitments on “extended deterrence” that include providing nuclear protection in the event of nuclear attacks.

The Chinese foreign ministry last week slammed this extended deterrence as a “Cold War relic,” saying US-Japan collaboration on nuclear deterrence would “stimulate regional tensions and heighten risks for nuclear proliferation and conflict.”

Kishida shot back in Hiroshima on Tuesday, claiming extended deterrence was “an extremely important means to protect the lives of the people,” and that nurturing trust with the US would help them work together towards a world without nuclear weapons.

North Korea launches mock nuclear warhead missiles to ‘warn enemies’

From the perspectives of Japan and South Korea, it is Beijing’s worsening ties with Washington, its own nuclear ambitions and the indulgence of Pyongyang’s nuclear brinkmanship that have brought Seoul and Tokyo closer to its American ally.

In a survey by the Pew Research Centre last year, 76 per cent of Japanese adults said they saw China as a bigger threat than North Korea’s nuclear weapons.

A veteran South Korean analyst quipped: “If China is serious about denuclearization and the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula as it has been saying, the Chinese leader should invite [North Korean leader] Kim Jong-un and Yoon to have reconciliation talks in Beijing.”

Washington’s attitudes on whether its regional allies should be allowed to have the nuclear option also appear to have shifted over the years.

Former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger said in an interview last year that Japan was “heading towards becoming a nuclear power in five years.”

Some US experts have even suggested that Washington should use the threat of its support for a nuclear Japan and South Korea to force China to take part in meaningful arms control negotiations.

They point to past success during the Cold War of Washington’s use of coercion, such as the deployment of nuclear-tipped missiles in Europe, to compel the Soviet Union to stay at the negotiating table.

Mainland experts also expressed frustration about Beijing’s refusal to reflect on its own problems and missteps in handling ties with Seoul and Tokyo.

“Realistically speaking, the best hope for China is that the US will block Japan and South Korea from developing nuclear weapons for as long as possible,” a regional affairs expert commented.

Jewish Policy Center: China’s Malicious Influence in the Middle East

Shoshana Bryen • August 9, 2024

More than a dozen Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, signed a joint declaration in Beijing last month to create an [interim unity government](#) that would operate in both the West Bank and Gaza. But the deal has no implementation mechanism, and there is no apparent settlement of the Hamas-Fatah war that started in 2007 and has been [brewing on the West Bank](#) since 2021.

The declaration in Beijing raised a few eyebrows, but mostly for the wrong reasons.

China has recognized “Palestine” since 1988, with little impact on the region. For the Palestinians, especially Hamas, being hosted in Beijing in the post-October 7 period was appealing, even if it didn’t solve any of their problems. But China’s moves in the Middle East and Red Sea are less designed to boost Palestinian statehood than they are to speed the decline in American influence in the region – and China is well placed to do just that.

In 2023, China was the [top purchaser of Iranian oil](#), some 60% above pre-sanction peaks recorded in 2017. With that base, Beijing reached out to Saudi Arabia and brokered a [Saudi-Iran “reconciliation” agreement](#), seven years after the Saudis had severed relations in the aftermath of an Iranian mob setting the Saudi embassy in Tehran on fire.

China has also increased its support of the Iranian-sponsored Houthi terrorist movement in the Red Sea, where the US has been unwilling or unable to prevent attacks on Western shipping, reducing traffic through Egypt’s vital Suez Canal by [more than 50 percent](#).

[Bloomberg News](#) reports, however, that the Houthis “have told China and Russia their ships can sail through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden without being attacked, according to several people with knowledge of the militant group’s discussions.”

China’s hostility toward Israel has also increased, particularly as Israel has limited its technology-sharing with China over the past several years, culminating in China’s pro-Hamas UN Security Council Resolutions after the October 7 massacre.

Some history is in order here.

For centuries, Great Britain was the guarantor of freedom of the seas and security in the Middle East. After World War II and into the mid-1950s, as Britain divested itself of its colonies and responsibilities, the United States took over. It was a major realignment that had both promise and problems.

The standard American schoolroom map of that period (you remember it, right?) placed the US in the center of the world, between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The eastern Pacific was ours – Canada, Mexico, Central America and Chile. Then the ocean, and on the western side, a series of American allies or trading partners – Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and even, more recently, Vietnam.

We assumed that, from China's point of view looking to its east, the US was in charge of the Pacific. However, as China worked to change its economic and political fortunes over the past few decades, the country looked to its *west* – where it has relatively unimpeded access to the energy-rich countries of Central Asia and the Middle East, and then south to Africa — with the Indian Ocean as a vital waterway. The China People's Liberation Army naval base in Djibouti opened in 2017, just north of the American base at Camp Lemonnier and the French and Japanese bases in the Red Sea.

China's rise in the Middle East has moved in tandem with Biden administration policy that has irritated our traditional ally Saudi Arabia; offered support, including sanctions relief and financial support, to Iran, the Houthis, and the Palestinians; and frightened the Abraham Accord countries (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Israel).

As our longtime friends in the Middle East and Persian Gulf see it, the US has abandoned the role we have historically played – the “indispensable nation,” the security guarantor, protecting their ability to pump, sell, and move oil. President Biden is giving Iran waivers to sell oil to China. US power still controls the sea lanes, but China gets the benefit — and they've been using their money to build commercial ports all along the route from Iran to the Pacific and then military facilities along the islands they're building in the Pacific.

China's political overtures to both sides of the Sunni-Shiite conflict in the region, plus increasing presence on the waterways from the Middle East to Asia, and purchases of crucial raw material and mineral assets in Africa – without waging a physical war in any of them – makes the broad picture much more frightening than the hosting of Fatah and Hamas in Beijing.

Many former (or current) US allies are leaning into China. We might think we are “the indispensable nation,” but they may not. China doesn't talk about “democracy” or “uprooting corruption,” or even “women's rights.” It goes for political and economic benefit which doesn't threaten the people of the region. But that might just be for now.