

**ICBM EAR for the Week of October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geo-Strategic Analysis and Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies**

The Ear this week begins with three essays—one on the relationship between extended deterrence, no first use and the Nobel Peace Prize award; the second on the nuclear security challenges facing the United States (remarks I also gave to the October 25<sup>th</sup> NIDS nuclear deterrent seminar); and the third a budgetary assessment of US nuclear modernization. We then have some essays in support of Iran getting nuclear weapons under the idea that such proliferation would be a good idea. Admiral Richard's discusses escalation and victory while an AEI essay supports the urgency of building a new nuclear deterrent. According to the House Budget Committee, the three year cost of Medicaid to illegal aliens says CBO is \$16.2 billion, which is almost exactly the annual cost of the US modernized nuclear platforms for FY25 of \$16.4 billion says Senator John Hoeven. And we end with a lengthy essay out of the South China Post that explains why China is not engaging in an arms race and still has a minimum deterrent strategy.

**Quotes of the Week**

**Congressman Don Bacon (R-NE):** With the growing alliance between Russia and China, along with the development of nuclear weapons that can hit the U.S. within 15 minutes, it is my steadfast view that America must strengthen its nuclear command and control survivability. It's all about deterrence. We've let this atrophy since 1990."

**President Zelenskyy** says Ukraine expects N. Korean troops to be deployed in battlefield in few days" and also sees the choice between joining NATO or going nuclear.

**Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD)** "Spoke with folks on the SD Legislature's select committee on Ellsworth AFB about the importance of preparing the Black Hills area for the bed down of the B-21 stealth bomber. Appreciate this committee's leadership on this issue."

**Noah Robertson in Defense News:** "China leading 'rapid expansion' of nuclear arsenal...China is accelerating its buildup of nuclear weapons, forcing the U.S. to more than double earlier estimates of its pace."

**Wang Zhen, a researcher of international politics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences'** Institute of International Relations, "The US misrepresenting of China's nuclear development serves mainly to justify its upgrading of its nuclear arsenal, and the so-called 'China nuclear threat' is used as an excuse to adjust its nuclear strategy".

**Shen Jian, China's ambassador for disarmament affairs,** "China has consistently maintained its nuclear forces at the minimum level required for national security and has not, and will not, engage in a nuclear arms race...the US, despite its huge nuclear arsenal, clings to a first-use nuclear deterrence policy, which underscores its pursuit of nuclear hegemony."

{Editor's Note: Shen says the US has abandoned international norms by getting out of the ABM treaty and the INF treaty. Left unsaid by the CCP mouthpiece is that China never was a party to these two arms treaties or any of the six nuclear arms agreements between Moscow and Washington from SALT through START and then New START.]

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### **Strategic Developments: Nuke Proliferation is Good As Long as its Only Iran Getting Such Weapons**

The Leftist Commentariat, long worried about Japan and the Republic of Korea going nuclear, have now decided that it's all right if Iran goes nuclear because, well, America and Israel made them do it.

Foreign Policy magazine leads the charge to let Iran go nuclear with "Iran Has Every Reason Now to Go Nuclear Oct. 24 | in an essay by Ellie Geranmayeh. Says Ms. Granmayeh, "The recent conflicts in the Middle East have ignited open debate among Iran's political elite over whether the country should weaponize its vast nuclear program. The rationale for doing so, from Iranian leadership's perspective, appears more convincing than ever. **Above all, Iran needs to reestablish deterrence equilibrium** with its longtime foes Israel and the United States. Traditionally, to deter its adversaries from attacking or implementing regime change, Tehran relied on a three-pronged approach focused on missiles, militias, and a nuclear program."

The New York Times joined the let Iran go nuclear parade with "The Dilemma Iran's Leader Faces," New York Times Online, Oct. 24 | by Karim Sadjadpour. Says the author: "If a person is fortunate enough to live into his ninth decade, life often **turns toward quiet reflection, relaxation** [Editors comment: **indeed, terrorism is a tough business!**] and the comforts of family and community. Not for the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The sunset years of Iran's supreme leader have been defined by a series of daunting challenges: regional humiliations, domestic uprisings, the looming threat of war with Israel and a pivotal decision on whether to pursue nuclear weapons — a choice with profound implications for his political legacy and the country he has ruled for 35 years."

And then there is "Nuclear arms proliferation is not necessarily bad news" according to the South China Morning Post (Hong Kong), Oct. 25, Pg. A11 | and Mohamed Zeeshan who writes "Amid the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, there is one notable casualty: the nuclear non-proliferation movement. Over the last few years, conflicts in both regions have been shaped by the fact Russia and Israel possess nuclear weapons but their adversaries in the immediate neighborhood do not." {Editor's note: Israel again is blamed for proliferation although Russia is too—although Russia engaged in aggression, not Israel, a point the ICBM EAR makes in its essays of the week posted below.]

#### **On Victory and the Search for a Status Quo Ante Bellum**

National Institute for Public Policy, Oct. 24 | Adm. Charles Richard (Ret.) and Robert Peters

Admiral Richard in remarks September 20<sup>th</sup> at the Minot Task Force 21 TRIAD Symposium, raised the issue of whether “victory” achieved through escalation should be a term more often included in the United States security lexicon. In a recent publication, the authors—a former senior military commander and a defense policy civilian—argued that America’s national security professionals are far too quick to dismiss escalation as a tool of statecraft—a position that undercuts America’s ability to deter its adversaries. Another consequence of a hesitancy to consider escalation by America’s national security practitioners—particularly military officers—is a loss of focus on the goal they ostensibly should be most focused upon: victory. In the authors’ experience, very often during a conflict (real or simulated) American national security professionals do not think in terms of achieving a victory that can lead to a newer, potentially better status quo. Instead, the current generation of national security professionals focuses on reestablishing the status quo ante bellum, or the situation as it existed before the war.

### **Essay #1: OPED: “No First Use” Nuclear Weapons Policy is Dangerous**

This promise by the United States was called extended deterrence. Washington would extend its deterrent nuclear umbrella over the NATO allies in Europe and Western Pacific allies as a security guarantee.

**By Peter Huessy, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Senior Warrior Nuclear Weapons Expert**

The Nobel Peace Prize gave their award this year to Nihon Hidankyo, representing the survivors of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The point was to emphasize that nuclear weapons should never be used again under any circumstances and must be abolished. US policy has been for decades that if required, the United States would reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to a conventional, biological, or chemical weapons attack on the United States and its allies.

For example, during the entirety of the Cold War, the United States did not match the Soviet armies tank for tank or artillery piece for artillery piece in central Europe. President Eisenhower understood such a large conventional force would bankrupt the United States. While the US had 423,000 troops in Europe and Asia at the height of the Cold War, it was assumed that a Soviet tank army attack through the Fulda gap into Western Germany or a North Korean attack on the ROK or a PRC attack on Taiwan, might very well require the United State to respond with nuclear weapons. The US and its Pacific or NATO allied forces, while formidable, were not necessarily sufficient to hold the ;line.

This promise by the United States was called extended deterrence. Washington would extend its deterrent nuclear umbrella over the NATO allies in Europe and Western Pacific allies as a security guarantee. In this way the Soviets could not swallow one NATO country after another because any attack on one NATO nation was considered an attack on the entire alliance. In the Pacific, an attack on a US ally would be considered an attack on the United States as well. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Warsaw Pact, NATO remained and added a considerable number of nations that were previously allied with the Soviet Union. These

nations did not want to remain in security limbo between a new Russia and an old NATO. These nations joined NATO to feel secure.

Now the CFE or Conventional Forces Europe treaty of November 1990 did confirm the most dramatic reduction in conventional forces in history, but the concerns of the former Soviet empire states were confirmed when in 2007 Russia suspended its participation in the treaty and in 2015 completely halted its participation and then withdrew from the treaty altogether in 2023. As a military force NATO was relatively formidable but not postured to be an offensive factor in central European security. It literally posed no threat to Russia's security. However, with Russia's growing nuclear forces plans initiated in part by the 1999 Yeltsin decree calling for the development of battlefield nuclear weapons, and Mr. Putin at the helm, Russia came to be seen as a growing threat. With Moscow's invasion of Moldova and Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, for most of Europe, the extended deterrent of the United States was deemed essential to protect their security.

The Biden administration did consider adopting a nuclear policy known as "No first use." The theory was that if all nuclear armed nations pledge not to initiate the use of nuclear weapons,

then nuclear weapons will remain deployed but never used, and in this way their salience as a security measure can be gradually reduced to where abolition becomes a real possibility.

However, the US extended security guarantee to Europe was based on the United States explicit willingness to use nuclear weapons in retaliation to an attack, with the long-standing assumption that a nuclear conflict could very well grow out of a conventional conflict.

This was also true for our extended guarantee we had traditionally provided for Japan and the Republic of Korea. Part of the guarantee was symbolized by the deployment of multiple thousands of small, regional, theater nuclear weapons, such as Tomahawk cruise missiles, deployed in both Europe and Asia.

In 1991, the United States proposed what was known as the PNI, or the Presidential Nuclear Initiative where the United States unilaterally took down its thousands of regional or theater nuclear weapons, leaving a force of around 200 gravity bombs in Europe but completely eliminating our regional or theater nuclear forces in Asia. The administration at the time was assured by Moscow that Russia would follow suit and eliminate its multiple tens of thousands of such weapons as well.

Today, the US intelligence community annually tells Congress that Moscow has some 1900 such deployed weapons, while independent experts such as Mark Schneider of NIPP and Chris Yeah of the University of Nebraska believe the Russians have upwards of at least 4000 such weapons. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee thinks nuclear weapons are wrong even for deterrence and reiterate the policy that nuclear weapons should never be used, a nuclear war should never be fought and a nuclear war cannot be won. This narrative sounds compassionate but it is strategic nonsense.

If a nuclear deterrent is to be taken seriously, then the guarantor has to be serious about using nuclear weapons in retaliation to an attack, whether conventional or nuclear. Otherwise, the deterrent promise is pure bluff and cannot be taken seriously. After all, what is the point of a security guarantee if at the same time one openly declares an unwillingness to use such weapons? The abolition community that supports no first use often describes such a policy as

nuclear weapons being only for deterrence but not for “warfighting”...under the assumption that any use of nuclear force even in retaliation to a nuclear attack in the first place is “warfighting” and thus not a policy capable of achieving any objectives.

This view has gained considerable support with the Oppenheimer movie and the Annie Jacobson book “On Nuclear War,” both of which have adopted the theme of abolition and a view that US deterrent policy as adopted would automatically lead to all out nuclear Armageddon and the death of billions of people from nuclear winter.

Not coincidentally just as the Nobel Peace Prize Committee awarded its annual prize, the Chinese communist government again put forward its proposal that the nuclear powers of the world should adopt a new declaration, pledging No First Use of nuclear weapons.

If adopted such a policy would help the CCP achieve its hegemon goals. For example, if the CCP attacked Taiwan with cyber, space, EMP or conventional forces, any retaliatory strike would not include the use of nuclear weapons. Chinese forces would thus have a major advantage as attacking Taiwan would be in its own backyard would be in a nuclear sanctuary.

When Japan said this past year that it would come to the defense of Taiwan, official Chinese press sources declared that China would respond by destroying Japanese military capability “just as occurred in WW II,” along with demanding “unconditional surrender” an implicit pledge to use nuclear weapons against Japan, a nonnuclear state. And of course, engage in the first use of nuclear weapons in such a conflict.

What China (and Russia) are seeking is a world in which it is safe for the two nations to engage in conventional military aggression without having to worry that a nuclear response might be forthcoming. The No First Use pledge therefore is meaningless as Russia and China nuclear doctrine if examined carefully has myriad loopholes through which one could drive a heavily nuclear laden 18 wheeler!

The Nobel Committee has also inadvertently fallen into the political trap of implicitly blaming the United States for the nuclear threats we see cascading in Asia and Europe. The United States’s extended deterrent— despite keeping the peace for the past 80 years (a point the Nobel folks acknowledge)— is now described as possibly leading to the use of nuclear weapons and thus the end of life on earth, to be remedied by the United States jettisoning its extended deterrent strategy that currently protects all of NATIO and its Pacific allies as well.

And given the Nobel Committee’s assumption that nuclear weapons cannot be used and no such nuclear conflict can be won, what then is the need for such weapons? Given conventional, cyber, biological, chemical and EMP attacks no longer will trigger a possible nuclear response, and given that no one will now use nuclear weapons, (having pledged not to go first), cannot the United States logically safely embrace the unilateral elimination of its nuclear forces?

What the Nobel Committee has helped set in motion—inadvertently—is the possible significant expansion of nuclear forces, especially with respect to Japan and the Republic of Korea as they both worry the United States’s extended deterrent is less than available. The new Prime Minister of Japan announced that Japan is seriously considering asking the United States to deploy nuclear forces in Japan or the region, a development parallel to growing support in the Republic of Korea for the same nuclear capability.

Now the origin of the growing nuclear threat to the Western Pacific is centered on China. As Tom Reed in his book “The Nuclear Express” detailed, China in 1982 secretly decided to help spread nuclear weapons technology through Pakistan, (what became the Khan network), to where nuclear weapons programs were initiated not only in Pakistan, but Libya, Iran and North Korea as well. In China’s view, having its friends brandish nuclear weapons would help intimidate the United States and its Western Pacific allies, and eventually drive the US out of the region. At least that was the theory.

The United States has not adopted a No First Use policy although it was under consideration when the current administration originally took office. That factor alone has heightened the concern among US allies that the nuclear extended guarantee of the United States is less than solid. This in turn has led to a growing consideration of our allies to secure nuclear weapons themselves or bring such weapons into the region under the control of the United States. Now the opponents of extended deterrence will counter with more calls for arms control and nuclear deals with China, North Korea or Russia, and greater reliance on conventional forces alone. But what if these rogue nations have no interest in reasonable measures to limit nuclear forces? And what if the United States is faced with a conventional conflict not “holding” because of an adversary introducing nuclear force?

It is often claimed that a deal with North Korea was in the cards and should continue to be pursued. And that it was the unnecessarily harsh US reaction to discovering in 2002-3 that the DPRK was illegally enriching uranium that drove the North to develop and deploy nuclear weapons.

But as Ollie Heinonen formerly with the IAEA in Vienna, Austria and a top nuclear expert on the matter explained recently, the North was developing nuclear weapons while participating in the Six Party Talks and the Agreed Framework, with the full intention of demonstrating such a capability when the bombs were developed. Which North Korea did in 2006, just as they planned all along says Heinonen.

The lesson? The United States is dealing with rogue regimes fully intent on using military aggression to serve their national purposes and drive the United States out of the Western Pacific,

the Middle East and Europe. And as former Secretary of State Condi Rice has warned, strut their stuff across the world stage as tyranny takes hold and democracy wanes. No First Use sounds nice, but as with most fortune cookie analysis, it has no substance. It is in fact dangerous.

## **Essay #2: US REVIEWS NUCLEAR SECURITY POLICY AMIDST GRAVE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES**

The catalyst of a breathtaking acceleration of Chinese, North Korean and Russian nuclear force modernization has pushed the United States into reviewing its security policy and defense strategies, especially with respect to nuclear weaponry. In addition, two recent congressional mandated commissions have both unanimously warned of the necessity of significant new investments in the USA military budget for both conventional and nuclear forces.

This is taking place within the context of a series of parallel developments with the overarching reality that Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran are increasingly joining forces to up end

international norms and law, engage in armed aggression and terrorism, while raking in billions in criminal cartel behavior.

These four nations are pursuing a coordinated campaign of unrestricted warfare including:

- Attacks against the United States and its Allies in the Middle East from Iran and its terror proxies,
- Attacks by China on the Philippines and Taiwan in the South China Sea;
- Threats by North Korean multiple missile launches toward ROK and Japan,
- Disruption of ocean borne freight traffic by the Houthis in coordination with China, Iran and Russia.
- Russia's lethal and criminal attacks against Ukraine's civilian society and infrastructure.

The massive nuclear build by all four currently provides the cover for this coordinated campaign against the United States and the West.

All of which must be reckoned with for the United States and its Allies to successfully restore deterrence.

Most worrisome are five ongoing nuclear developments:

One, the Russian initiated war against Ukraine now in its third year, has been accompanied by multiple dozens of reckless threats by Moscow to use nuclear weapons, threats that have come to be viewed as bluff.

Two, an apparent change in Russian nuclear doctrine to allow for the early use of nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict with Ukraine should a nuclear power assist in the conventional conflict has heightened nuclear dangers.

Three, there is also a growing tendency by the United States to advocate restraint and negotiations during a conflict, including carrying out only a proportionate response to enemy aggression, and an avoidance of escalatory actions, especially the use of nuclear force.

Four, pressure from both the far left and far right to jettison Americas long-standing policy of extending its conventional and nuclear deterrent over its allies in Europe and Asia is growing. Most particularly, the narrative is growing that any retaliatory use of nuclear weapons by the United States in defense of its allies would quickly escalate to all out nuclear war.

Five, this calls into question whether US nuclear deterrent policy will be taken seriously. Especially as parallel pressure grows to denigrate the role of nuclear weapons in USA security policy and unilaterally reduce USA force levels toward the goal of zero nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, there is some good "nuclear" news that may help the United States.

One, large bipartisan majorities, in both houses of Congress, support significantly increasing the capability of America's nuclear forces, in particular cruise missiles, overall warhead levels and the nuclear Triad.

Two, an equally strong bi partisan majority in Congress supports significantly increasing the capability of America's conventional forces deterrent including long range, prompt conventional strike at hypersonic speeds;

Three, senior deterrent experts are advocating a robust US response to armed threats, including escalation with the aim of winning even should the use of nuclear weapons be contemplated. In short, taking deterrence seriously.

Four, both USAF and US Navy leaders are seriously committed to building a new nuclear deterrent, even while sustaining a very old legacy deterrent .

Five, the end of the New START agreement may, according to some analysts, finally remove the fiction that Russia is complying with the terms of the agreement and allow the US to build the required deterrent force without relying on Moscow's consent.

Finally, while there exists a myriad of interpretations as to what China's nuclear strategy entails, ranging from a requirement to have an assured, retaliatory capability, an escalate to win theater nuclear capability, a no first use posture, a response to US missile defenses, or a coercive nuclear force capability including a pre-emptive first strike stance, the overall direction is toward Washington undertaking a serious assessment of China's hegemonic ambitions.

Taken together, the future landscape still looks treacherous, at best. Although there is an emerging national sentiment that our nuclear forces and strategy must modernize, whether a path through these geostrategic landmines can be found remains in serious doubt. My colleague Frank Miller will now address what the US needs to do to sustain and improve and enhance our nuclear deterrent. .

**Essay #3: *What is the Cost of a Modernized Nuclear Deterrent? An Update.***

**By Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow, NIDS & Senior Fellow, Maven Warrior**

The assessment of the how much the United States should pay for nuclear deterrence involves looking at both the legacy nuclear systems America maintains and the replacement or modernized platforms and warheads scheduled for acquisition. On top of which operating and maintaining a nuclear force is also part of the cost and this includes security forces, operating crews, and the bases from which the US forces are deployed. In addition, the National Nuclear Security Administration builds and maintains the thousands of nuclear weapons deployed and on alert as well as in the hedge stockpile of weapons that could be added to the nuclear force if needed.

A number of organizations publish such studies and have concluded that over the next three decades, the United States plans to spend as much as \$1.7 trillion on nuclear deterrence and an average of \$75 billion a year for the next decade. These numbers further give the impression that the US is planning to spend far more than is affordable and with smart choices can significantly reduce such costs as well as show some restraint in securing nuclear deterrence, a restraint that will also lead China and Russia to limit their already undertaken nuclear buildups.



The current legacy systems of the MMIII ICBMs, the B52 and B2 strategic bombers, and the Ohio class submarines have been in or will be in the US force when they are retired some 42-70 years. It is remarkable that the Navy and Air Force and the supporting aerospace industries have engaged in truly heroic efforts to keep these forces at the ready for ongoing deterrence, especially given the growing difficulty of sustaining systems that are not just decades beyond their certified life-cycle but becoming increasingly costly to sustain.

The current RDT&E and Acquisition budget request for new ICBMs, new submarines and submarine launched missiles, and the portion of the new strategic bombers that are designated for the nuclear force, plus a rough estimate for the costs of nuclear command, control and communication, comes to under \$19 billion annually according to Senator John Hoeven (R-ND) and a member of the Senate defense appropriations subcommittee. Over 30 years the modernization numbers are nowhere near the highly exaggerated \$1.7 trillion often [used by nuclear abolitionists](#).

As a number of senior military officials have explained, if we do not sustain these legacy forces we are out of the nuclear business. But the ability of keeping the legacy forces for much longer is in serious question and thus as retired Admiral Richard and retired General Mattis and others have explained we have two choices. First, sustain the legacy systems as long as possible but forgo modernization and in the process disarm over time and get out of the nuclear deterrent business. Or second, modernize and stay in the nuclear business with the added cost of the new platforms, which does not include the legacy costs of the operations and maintenance we are already spending.

Forgoing modernization is thus not in the cards unless one is willing to unilaterally disarm. Some analysts do not even think that is a problem as they have also concluded US conventional military capability is of such a magnitude that nuclear weapons are no longer needed.

However, in their zeal to cut nuclear expenditures, most nuclear program cost estimates include current operations and maintenance and personnel for the current legacy forces. However, these costs are a given and cannot be considered part of any new “modernization” effort. That is part of the explanation for the excessively high estimated numbers used by abolitionists and nuclear critics.

But the idea that hundreds of billions can be cut without effect from the nuclear budgets is also a dangerous fallacy. Cuts to either current operations and maintenance or modernization take us down a gradual disarmament path. [Avoiding disarmament](#) requires one to support modernization which is simply replacing old legacy forces with newer technology.

The new technology is also designed to make the cost of subsequent sustainment and maintenance less expensive such as being able to forgo the redoing of the reactor cores on the submarines or being able to [sustain the ICBMs](#) without having to open up the silo doors. The new technology also would enable ICBM warheads to penetrate to their targets, and bombers to better get [through air defenses](#), and allow submarines to stay on patrol longer and be more survivable.

There are critics that think the United States “modernization” is synonymous with what is termed “nuclear warfighting,” or the idea that nuclear weapons far from being viewed as stopping conventional and nuclear conflict have now become seen as instruments of actually conducting war.

Such allegations are silly but they **are also dangerous**, as they make a number of Americans who swallow such baloney actually believe their leaders want to risk blowing up the world. The United States deterrent strategy holds at risk those key elements of an adversaries power they most value. That would include leadership, military forces, the security forces that keep them in power, and the defense production industry. That has been the US strategy for seven decades and has been adopted by each of the past 13 administrations dating back to the Eisenhower administration. Telling your adversaries you have no intention of using such forces to retaliate in the event of a nuclear strike on the United States is admitting your deterrent is a bluff.

The currently planned modernized nuclear forces was cemented into the United States strategy during the period just before and during negotiations over the New START agreement of 2010. This arms control treaty pretty much mirrored the warhead numbers of the Moscow Treaty of 2002, but the treaty was far more detailed with verification measures lacking in the Moscow agreement. However, the verification measures of START I remained in effect through 2009 and thus the Moscow numbers could be verified and acted as a bridge to the New START agreement.

But the strategic nuclear force structure adopted was that of the New START treaty and vice versa. Critics of the modernization effort claim the administration was jammed up by the military into agreeing to an excessive build-up when in fact the adopted arms control numbers in New START were what the US could build to, no more and no less. As General Cartwright told me at the time, he was going to split the difference between the SNDVs the US had and those in the Russian forces but Russia insisted the US reduce those even further so Moscow would not have to ***build-up too far*** to match the US force levels.

The administration at the time met with Senator Jon Kyle to put the deal together. The Senate leaders pledged to support the New START agreement and the administration in return would support an across-the-board modernization of the nuclear forces including the Triad of nuclear platforms, the nuclear command and control and the NNSA warhead complex.

It is important to remember that the force being built was completely consistent with the New START treaty numbers of 1550 “official” allowable numbers. Given the strategic force modernization the US was undertaking was not going to exceed the force allowed by the New START agreement, it is thus impossible to describe such a force build as somehow instigating or creating an “arms race” unless the New START treaty itself was an “arms race” and not “arms control.”

As for the United States and the enthusiasts’ push for further US nuclear force reductions toward zero or abolition, the widespread conventional wisdom at the time of the New START agreement was that Russia and China would be cooperative with the United States both in preventing the

proliferation of nuclear weapons and preventing the access to nuclear weapons by terrorist organizations. There was little concern that either Russia or China were going to embark or already had embarked on building up their nuclear forces by many additional thousands of warheads.

In fact, four foreign policy and security leaders—George Schutz, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn and William Perry—had taken a message to the American public calling for the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. They urged the US to start a march “up the abolition mountain” even if the summit was not yet visible through the clouds of current challenges to strategic stability that still remained among the nuclear powers of the globe. Eventually Dr. Henry Kissinger would write with General Brent Scowcroft that such a move was not such a good idea, the latter telling me that the “four horsemen” as they came to be known had “got a little ahead of things,”

The cost of the nuclear force was not that of a nuclear force designed for “warfighting” but for sustaining deterrence at warhead levels some 90% less than the 10,000 plus sustained at the end of the Cold War just prior to the collapse of the USSR. Senator Dan Coats told the Senate that as the US was going to ratify the START 1 arms control agreement with Moscow, the US was facing a country with upwards of an allowable 13,100 long-range strategic nuclear warheads [the US had some 10,200] that were now going to be restrained to 6000 by the START 1 agreement, and eventually to 1700-2200 and 1550 by the Moscow and New START agreements, respectively, or an implied cut of upwards of 85-90%. [Mark Schneider says Moscow probably deployed around 10,000 strategic nuclear weapons and not necessarily the number one could deploy under the SALT rules.]

In thus measuring the cost of the US nuclear modernization effort, one should not include the cost of sustainment and operations of legacy forces, as those costs will be incurred whether one modernizes or not. And given critics claim of wanting to sustain the legacy forces and not modernize, it hardly makes sense to include legacy force support in the “modernization” funding category.

Modernization is a choice and it could involve upwards of replacing the platforms carrying 1550 warheads, (plus allowable bomber weapons for 60 strategic bombers including the B2 force and 40 B52s.) With the expiration of New START in 2026, the United States may face a growing Russian and Chinese nuclear force of both strategic and theater nuclear forces that some projections place at a combined 10,000 nuclear warheads by 2035-40, a decade and a-half hence, or equal in time to the distance from today back to the New START treaty ratification.

Having a good metric for judging the cost of additional deployed warheads may be useful in making such decisions. The combined RDT&E and Procurements costs for the ICBM and Submarine/D-5 modernization package reaches \$300 billion over the next 30 years with most of the actual building between 2030-2042, assuming the current schedule remains.

But over 30 years the cost per year comes to \$10 billion, which is some 3.2% of the \$310 billion the US DoD spends on all RDT&E and Procurement for all services. When the DoD estimates

what weapons it buys every year, it does not include the nearly \$600 billion spent annually on operations, sustainment and personnel costs.

For strategic bombers, the US currently has 60 B2 and B52 bombers in the nuclear category. Of the 100 B21 bombers now scheduled for acquisition, some 20 are scheduled to be nuclear capable, which according to former US Defense official James Miller adds some 3% to the cost of a strategic bomber. Using 20% of the costs associated with the nuclear capable bombs then raises the 30-year cost estimates for all nuclear platforms to \$325 billion, which comes to \$10.8 billion a year, or 3.5% of the current defense budget.

A possible way of examining the modernization costs would be to determine what is the cost of maintaining an on-alert warhead for the submarines and the ICBMs, using the 30-50 years RDT&E and Acquisition costs or the modernization costs as opposed to total program costs including operations and maintenance that is also currently being undertaken for the legacy programs. What is new are the modernization costs for the replacement platforms.

The 1090 submarine warheads now in the force are on alert or able to hit their targets when deployed some 35-70% of the time depending upon your assumptions, given the actual alert rate is classified. Submarines can be in transit to and from their two bases in Georgia or Washington, or on patrol deep into the Pacific or Atlantic. For ICBMs, the alert rate reaches 98% of the 400 Minuteman missiles.

For the Sentinel ICBM and Columbia submarine combined, the cost per year/alert warhead comes to \$9-11 million annually over 30 years. When looked at over the lifetime of the Triad platforms or through 2080, the costs come to an average of \$7 million per alert warhead/year, also hardly prohibitive, and well within any affordability metric for the United States.

Since the US sustains day-to-day deterrence by keeping our nuclear systems on alert, (to avoid a surprise decapitation), the cost of having roughly day-to-day 1000-1200 strategic warheads are the cost of modernization, which every day would in total cost the United States some \$11 billion annually. That is what we are planning to spend "extra" above and beyond what we are now spending for the current legacy forces, (although some limited RDT&E and Procurement Costs are associated with the legacy MM III ICBMs and Ohio-class submarines of around \$.5 billion a year each.)

One could reasonable add the costs of the NNSA programs at the Department of Energy to the costs of sustaining nuclear deterrence, as without redoing the warheads in the US force, the United States would be going out of the nuclear deterrent business, as Administrator Jill Hruby explained at a late June NIDS nuclear seminar at the Capitol Hill Club. It is not that the NNSA is building new nuclear warheads because someone wants to go and fight a nuclear war. The NNSA is refurbishing and giving a life-extension to our warhead stockpile because without doing so, the US would be out of the nuclear deterrent business.

Making the case that the United States is planning to spend too much on nuclear deterrence over the next decades is implicitly making the case the US should be out of the nuclear business. Not

modernizing is simply synonymous to slowly adopting unilateral nuclear disarmament because at some point, our legacy systems will not work anymore. This is precisely the point made some years ago by SASC member Senator Jean Shaheen (D-NH). We can “rust to obsolescence” and unilaterally disarm as PONI founder Clark Murdock warned or we can modernize. As Admiral Charles Richard explained when he was commander of the US Strategic Command, the United States only has two choices: unilaterally disarm over time or stay in the nuclear business and deter our nuclear armed adversaries. Those are the only two choices.

### **Important Commentary**

## **Adding to the US Nuclear Posture**

<https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/adding-slack-to-the-us-nuclear-posture/>

By: [Kyle Balzer](#) for the AEI [AEIdeas](#) // October 18, 2024

The winner of November’s presidential election will confront a challenge with no immediate cure-all:

America’s nuclear weapons are aging faster than they can be replaced. Moreover, this dilemma is compounded by the dual shocks of China’s breathtaking nuclear buildup and Russia’s geopolitical reversion into an acute threat—to say nothing of a North Korea that is improving its own arsenal and an Iran that is, arguably, a de facto nuclear power. Put simply, the US strategic nuclear posture has very little, if any, slack to offset a [growing range of threats](#) before next-generation weapons systems begin replacing older platforms.

Immediately upon taking office, then, the next president should consider stop-gap measures to mitigate the long-term structural problems afflicting America’s nuclear program. All three legs of the nuclear triad are under strain. Land-based Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles are nearly 60 years old—and their scheduled replacement, the Sentinel, has incurred significant [cost overruns](#) and might not enter service until the late 2030s.

Sea-based Ohio-class submarines are nearly forty years old and will begin to reach the end of their service life in 2027 before the [first](#) next-generation Columbia-class boat is delivered. And the air-based leg, featuring B-2 and B-52 strategic bombers, is heavily taxed due to operating costs, [force reductions](#), and the decision to [dramatically scale back](#) the nuclear air-launched cruise missile inventory.

Therefore, the US triad desperately needs more capability in the short term to offset geopolitical threats that the aging and delayed program of record was not sized and shaped to address. Fortunately, the next president has two, albeit imperfect, off-the-shelf options that could help mitigate present burdens. First, the United States could upload more warheads on either the land- or sea-based legs. The 400 operational Minuteman silos, for example, are currently loaded only with single-warhead missiles.

If loaded with all available warheads, however, the Minuteman fleet can [reportedly carry](#) some 800—if not more. As for the sea-based leg, the US Navy normally operates 12 Ohio-class submarines, armed with 20 Trident D5 ballistic missiles, which carry [approximately](#) 960 warheads (four to five warheads per Trident). If fully uploaded with eight warheads per missile, the force expands substantially.

However, this option does not come without political, material, and operational costs. Politically, the US upload capacity is limited by the New START Treaty signed with Russia in 2010. Each signatory is confined to 1,550 strategic warheads spread across their respective nuclear triad until 2026 (the United States already deploys some 1,400 strategic warheads). Given that Russia is [currently in violation](#) of New START, however, and in light of Russia's barbaric war in Ukraine and its unceasing nuclear threats against NATO, the next president has cause to exit the agreement.

Nonetheless, though additional warheads are readily available in the reserve stockpile, this upload option also comes with material costs that cannot be ignored—most notably in straining submarine maintenance schedules. And operationally, loading additional warheads on Trident would impact its range and targeting flexibility. The second off-the-shelf option entails modifying Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (TLAMs), an existing conventional sea-launched cruise missile, with W80 non-strategic warheads from the reserve stockpile.

In the near term, this would return a regional nuclear option—free from New START central limits—to the sea-based fleet, filling a gap that emerged following the [retirement](#) of the nuclear-tipped Tomahawk (TLAM-N) in 2013. Since the next-generation nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N) won't [arrive](#) until the mid-2030s, this would help address the massive Chinese and Russian theater-range arsenals in the short term.

In the Asia-Pacific, for example, TLAM-N's retirement left the United States without a forward-deployed nuclear option to offset China's [growing](#) regional capabilities. And in Europe, Russia's [arsenal](#) of some 2,000 theater nuclear weapons dwarfs the hundred or so gravity bombs the United States forward deploys on the Continent. However, much like the upload option, modifying TLAM comes with its own set of costs. The US Navy would have to pull some missile launchers away from conventional missions.

And resources and time would have to be devoted to certifying personnel for the nuclear mission. Still, the attack submarine fleet would not have to devote large numbers of launchers to nuclear missions: the United States simply needs to convince its adversaries that a regional strike option is on station and ready to respond. Refurbishing the TLAM-N, then, might be more appealing than uploading Minuteman and Trident, given that cruise missiles evade New START restrictions and American adversaries are growing theater nuclear forces.

The above options are not perfect—indeed, far from it. Nonetheless, their costs are relatively modest when placed in a broader perspective: The nuclear arsenal is the backbone of America's global military posture, which has deterred great-power war since 1945. As former Secretary of Defense James Mattis [once quipped](#), “America can afford survival.” Learn more: [America's Enemies Would Rejoice at a U.S. Military Retreat from Europe](#) | [The U.S. Is Losing a New](#)

[Nuclear Arms Race](#) | [Nuclear Bipartisanship: An Enduring American Tradition](#) | [History Supports Senator's Plan to Revive the Nuclear Arsenal](#)

**Dezinformatsiya Chinese Style:**

**China not part of nuclear arms race, says envoy**

US, with largest arsenal, called on to stop misrepresenting nation's policy  
By MINLU ZHANG at United Nations and SHAO XINYING in Beijing | CHINA DAILY |

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A Chinese arms control official called on the United States on Friday to "stop misrepresenting China's nuclear policy" and said that China "has not, and will not, engage in a nuclear arms race".

A representative of the US told the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on Friday that Russia is violating the New START Treaty and employing "irresponsible nuclear rhetoric" amid the Ukraine crisis. The representative also claimed that China has not fully disclosed the extent of its nuclear weapons modernization.

Shen Jian, China's ambassador for disarmament affairs, told the committee that China's no-first-use policy "requires maintaining a certain level of ambiguity regarding its nuclear arsenal to ensure the survivability of its limited nuclear forces".

"As long as no country uses nuclear weapons against China, it will not face a nuclear threat from China. This is the most meaningful form of transparency," Shen said.

He said the US possesses the largest and most advanced nuclear arsenal, adding that it adheres to "the policy of preemptive nuclear strikes, and even tailors nuclear deterrence strategies for other countries".

"The transparency of the US display of nuclear power is nothing more than a 'muscle show' that will not make other countries feel safe," he said.

"China has consistently maintained its nuclear forces at the minimum level required for national security and has not, and will not, engage in a nuclear arms race," the Chinese envoy said.

He said China must "appropriately" modernize its nuclear forces to "ensure the safety, reliability and survivability of its minimum nuclear deterrent", as "China's external security environment continues to deteriorate", noting that certain countries are developing global missile defense systems and other weapons that "impact strategic stability".

He urged the US to "stop misrepresenting China's nuclear policy". For 60 years, China has adhered to a no-first-use policy with a high degree of stability, consistency and predictability, he

said. Recently, China again formally proposed that nuclear-armed states negotiate a "No First Use Treaty" or issue a joint political statement on the matter as soon as possible.

China has engaged in arms control and nonproliferation dialogues with many countries around the world, including the US, Shen said. As the current coordinator of the P5 mechanism, China is also actively promoting dialogue and cooperation among the five nuclear-weapon states.

The P5 mechanism is a dialogue process among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US.

Shen said that the US should stop projecting its logic that "power inevitably seeks dominance" onto China.

Shen said that over the past 20 years, the US has withdrawn from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Iran nuclear deal, and these moves undermine the international arms control regime.

According to The New York Times, amid ongoing global conflicts, the US plans to allocate an estimated \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years to modernize its arsenal.

Shen noted that while some countries have criticized China and Russia with regard to their nuclear arsenals, they made "no mention of other nuclear-weapon states upgrading their arsenals". He called this a "double standard" and emphasized that such actions, which "draw lines based on ideology and stir up bloc confrontation", will not advance nuclear disarmament.

Wang Zhen, a researcher of international politics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations, told China Daily that "the US' misrepresenting of China's nuclear development serves mainly to justify its upgrading of its nuclear arsenal, and the so-called 'China nuclear threat' is used as an excuse to adjust its nuclear strategy".

He said that the US, despite its huge nuclear arsenal, clings to a first-use nuclear deterrence policy, which "underscores its pursuit of nuclear hegemony".

### **Where the US Budget Goes....**

Last month, Chairman Jodey Arrington (R-TX) asked the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to analyze **the cost to taxpayers of Vice President Kamala Harris' open border agenda on the Medicaid program**. CBO's conclusion: between 2021 and 2023, the Biden-Harris Administration's open border agenda provided taxpayer-funded emergency Medicaid services to illegal aliens, costing federal and state taxpayers **more than \$16.2 billion**. This is a staggering **increase of 124 percent** compared to the same period under the Trump Administration. By comparison, as Senator John Hoeven told the Minot Task Force 21 Triad Symposium on September 20<sup>th</sup>, the Sentinel, D-5, LRSP, B21 and Columbia new nuclear platforms will cost **\$16.4 billion in the FY2025** defense budget. Almost identical to the Medicaid cost to illegal



aliens over 3 years.