

**ICBM EAR Prepared by Peter Huessy, Senior Fellow at NIDS and President, Geostrategic Analysis for the Week of February 22, 2025.**

Summary: Did the Biden administration fear of escalation create the very conditions under which the use of nuclear force is more likely? A Canadian research paper thinks so, posted here at the end of this weeks report. Senator McConnell is retiring but has some eloquent words on the need to restore deterrence. Russian official Medvedev makes a new nuclear threat. The House and Senate add \$100-150 billion over 10 years to defense. SecDef Hegseth seeking an additional \$50B for top priorities through cutting 8% over 5 years but excluding nuclear deterrence from such cuts. Creedon and Miller will update the Posture Commission on Friday 10-11am at the NIDS/Huessy nuclear deterrent seminar. The Christian Science Monitor did a very lengthy review of the MMIII missile force and the head of Public Affairs at the 90<sup>th</sup> Missile wing did a great review which the ICBM Ear received permission to post. Senator Hoeven and Senator Cramer propose that the three ICBM base modernization work be done concurrently, savings billions. According to Lithuania, the Russians are pushing nuclear winter as a result of any nuclear weapons use. General Armagost details the US-ROK deterrent; Trump, Jr. pushes the nomination of Elbridge Colby; the AEI's Balzar as a review of what arms control might be possible but makes some mistakes re US INF deployments; a look at when CBO scored the tax legislation Congress is seeking to make permanent, they were off by half a trillion; and the ICBM EAR explains with the help of expert James Howe why Dr. Ted Postol's analysis of what a nuclear bomb would do to Washington, D.C. ignores new Russian developments which indicate the development of small, battlefield, highly accurate nuclear weapons, ordered by President Yeltsin in 1999, have dramatically changed the new of nuclear warfare by the Russians. The EAR has a **draft commentary** on what lessons can be learned from the past near five decades of US security policy.

**Quotes of the Week:**

**Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-TX):** "China is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal. Russia's Army is bigger now than before invading Ukraine. North Korea is doubling down on nukes. Iran's proxies attack American troops. **We need to make serious investments in our defense to keep pace with the threats we face.**"

**Camille Grand, former NATO Assistant Secretary General:** "The real conversation has started, a former NATO assistant secretary general. After quiet hints from Trump officials, Mr. Hegseth "has now presented the American ask and the terms are clear," Mr. Grand said. "Now the Europeans need to respond. Either the Europeans say, 'Oh my god, we can't do this without you Americans,' and add to the Trump perception that they are useless and security free-riders, 'or more likely, 'We're ready to look into this and mobilize troops and resources, but these are our conditions to do it."

**Senator Mitch McConnell:** Every debate over policy is downstream of our obligation of national security. Every policy here at home is contingent on our duty to provide for the common defense. Americans depend upon the credibility of our Americas commitment to friends and the strength of our threats to our enemies. Enemies must think twice before challenging our military, and that those enemies never face a fair fight. **Since Reagan's Presidency, McConnell sadly notes "We have allowed US power to atrophy, and today a dangerous world threatens to outpace our ability to rebuild it."**

**DoD Secretary Hegseth:** "The United States remains committed to the NATO alliance and to the defense partnership with Europe, full stop, but the United States will no longer tolerate an imbalanced relationship which encourages dependency.

**USAF General Jason Armagost, US Global Strike Command:** "America can respond in an "overwhelming" way in the "time, place and manner of our choosing" in the event of a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) attack."

**Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev:** "A nuclear apocalypse will prove inevitable if Russia's adversaries do not realize the impossibility of bringing Moscow to its knees or inflicting a "strategic defeat" on it."

**Congressional Defense Developments**

The House and Senate will add \$100B and \$150B respectively to the defense budget. The **resolutions adopted have a ten-year window. So, \$10-\$15B a year on average for defense will be added.** Those areas where the added funds are to be used: To expand the Navy, strengthen the defense industrial base, build an integrated air and missile defense system, and **continue the modernization of strategic nuclear forces.** About \$20 billion would also increase funding for the Coast Guard.

### **Administration Defense Developments**

NIDS works with Mr. DiNanno on a number of projects. And the National Strategic Research Institute at the University of Nebraska wrote: “Thomas DiNanno, NSRI director of strategic resiliency and wargaming, has been nominated by President Donald Trump to **serve as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.**”

The SecDef vision is that \$50 billion in low priority programs (1.6% cut per year or 8% over 5 years) can be shifted to more urgent priorities. This is over **the next five years which would transfer \$10/B more annually within the defense budget to be spent on high priorities.** So, adding in the Congressional initiatives, the US DoD would receive an additional \$20-25B a year that would go to new RDT&E and Acquisition Programs including nuclear modernization. And nuclear modernization will not be subject to the Hegseth 8% over 5-year budget cuts.

**ICBM News** Hoeven urges Sentinel program be done concurrently at ICBM bases

Minot Daily News Online, Feb. 18 | Eloise Ogden

**MINOT AIR FORCE BASE -- Upgrades to the nuclear mission at Minot Air Force Base and the two other intercontinental ballistic missile bases must be done concurrently at all three bases and not sequential, Sen. John Hoeven, R-ND, said during a visit to Minot AFB. Hoeven visited the base with Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. James Slife on Saturday.**

“That’s vitally important. We’ve identified how to do it, we can save time and save money,” Hoeven said referring to having the upgrades done concurrently instead of sequential.

Hoeven and Slife reviewed efforts to modernize the dual-mission at Minot AFB during their visit and met with military and local leaders.

Minot AFB, F.E. Warren AFB in Wyoming and Malmstrom AFB in Montana are slated for the Sentinel program, the new weapon system to replace the Minuteman III ICBMs.

The Minuteman III ICBMs have been in service in the Minot missile field for more than 50 years. The 741st Strategic Missile Squadron, a unit of the 91st Strategic Missile Wing, became the first operational Minuteman III squadron in 1970. Prior, the wing had Minuteman III ICBMs, according to Minuteman III history.

At a news conference held in Minot late last year, Hoeven said the original plan was to have bases transition sequentially, but after the completion of the Nunn-McCurdy review of the Sentinel program, the option for partial concurrent construction at the three bases looked to be what would be done, reported The Minot Daily News in its Nov. 1, 2024, edition. William LaPlante, undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, and Hoeven visited the base at that time to review efforts for the transition to the Sentinel ICBM.

The Sentinel project includes replacing all land-based Minuteman III ICBMs deployed in the continental United States with Sentinel ICBMs, according to Air Force Global Strike Command information.

As a member of the Senate Defense Appropriations Committee, Hoeven has been working to accelerate the schedule for deploying the Sentinel by identifying additional cost savings to address increased construction costs and pushing for concurrent construction of facilities at all three missile bases with officials at the Department of Defense and Northrop Grumman, according to information from his office.

Minot AFB is the only nuclear-capable base in the Air Force, hosting two legs of the U.S. Nuclear Triad. The 5th Bomb Wing operates B-52 bombers and the 91st Missile Wing operates, maintains and secures Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles in the Minot missile field.

During Saturday's visit to the base Hoeven also said the Air Force needs to request money in the next budget cycle for the Weapons Storage facility at Minot AFB so work can begin on facilities for the Long-Range Standoff (LRSO) cruise missile.

Hoeven authored a provision in the fiscal year 2025 Military Construction bill to help ensure Minot has the facilities needed to operate and maintain the new LRSO missile, which will be carried on the B-52, as soon as the weapon is ready to enter service, according to information from Hoeven's office.

"Minot Air Force Base is the only dual nuclear base in the nation," Hoeven said in a news release. "We've made important investments in upgrading and modernizing our nuclear forces and we appreciate General Slife visiting Minot Air Force Base to see the importance of these projects firsthand. Our nuclear forces are a vital deterrent to our adversaries and we need to keep our modernization efforts moving forward. That's why we made a strong case for the Air Force to budget for upgraded facilities that will ensure Minot can operate the next nuclear cruise missile as soon as it is fully developed. At the same time, we continue making the case for the Air Force to keep the Sentinel program on track by concurrently building infrastructure at Minot and the other two missile bases. This will help reduce costs on this vital defense asset."

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-ND, also took part in visits to Grand Forks and Minot AFB with Slife over the weekend. Cramer said he was on the flight from Joint Base Andrews in the Washington, D.C., area with Slife when they discussed "the very bright future of North Dakota's Air Force Bases as we imagined new ways to position GFAFB (Grand Forks Air Force Base), Team Minot (Minot Air Force Base), which was the second stop on our Valentine's Day Weekend tour, and the 119th Wing North Dakota Air National Guard to meet the growing demands of modern warfare.

Cramer is chair of the Senate Armed Services Airland Subcommittee.

***This podcast by Simon Whistler*** explores the modernization of the ICBM leg of the Triad, the Sentinel. [Link here: [LGM-35A Sentinel: Replacing America's Nukes](#)] He concludes that should the Sentinel be acquired and deployed, but is never used in combat, that would be the best return of investment as nuclear deterrence would have held for many additional decades.

***MajGen Stacy J Huser, the Commander of the 20<sup>th</sup> USAF*** and the three wings of MMIII ICBMs graciously provided the ICBM EAR a summary of a Christian Science Monitor essay that in great detail discussed this key element of the US nuclear Triad, which the ICBM Ear has been working to support since 1981. The author of this summary is Mr. Glenn Robertson, of the 90th Missile Wing, Office of Public Affairs.

#### **BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front):**

The Christian Science Monitor provides an in-depth, on-the-ground perspective of the U.S. Air Force missileers stationed at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, detailing their critical role in nuclear deterrence, the gravity of their mission, and the personal and ethical complexities of the job. The article explores their day-to-day responsibilities, historical context, and the evolving nuclear landscape. The article offers a well-rounded, detailed look at the world of missileers, providing historical and operational context while acknowledging the evolving challenges of nuclear deterrence. While largely neutral, it subtly raises questions about the long-term sustainability and morality of nuclear forces. The 90th Missile Wing is well-represented, though the focus remains on broader nuclear policy discussions rather than specific command perspectives.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Missileers' Role & Readiness:** The article follows missileers at F.E. Warren AFB, responsible for the launch and oversight of nuclear-armed ICBMs, highlighting their 24-hour shifts and strict operational protocols.
- **Lack of Targeting Knowledge:** Missileers do not know the specific targets of their missiles at the time of execution, reinforcing the compartmentalization of nuclear command and control.

- **Ethical & Psychological Aspects:** The piece delves into the mental burden missileers carry, with some wrestling with the morality of their role, particularly in the context of faith.
- **Historical Context & Current Relevance:** The article touches on the Cold War origins of missileers, their continued relevance despite fading public awareness, and the growing nuclear threats from Russia, China, and Iran.
- **Retention & Diversity Challenges:** Leadership concerns focus on attracting and retaining personnel, particularly women and minority missileers, within a demanding career field.

#### Themes:

- **The Human Element of Nuclear Deterrence:** By profiling individual missileers, the story brings a personal, almost intimate focus to a highly technical and strategic mission.
- **Nuclear Stability & Modern Threats:** The article connects the missileers' role to larger geopolitical shifts, including Russia lowering its nuclear-use threshold and China expanding its arsenal.
- **Moral & Existential Reflections:** Through interviews with past and present missileers, the piece examines how those in the field reconcile their duties with personal beliefs and the potential consequences of nuclear war.
- **Operational Challenges & Legacy Systems:** The aging Minuteman III missile system and its upcoming replacement by the Sentinel program are discussed, as well as outdated technology still in use, like floppy disks.

#### PA Analysis:

- **Tone:** The article is largely neutral, blending an immersive, descriptive style with factual reporting. It neither glorifies nor condemns the role of missileers, instead allowing their voices to shape the narrative.
- **Thoroughness:** The piece is well-researched, incorporating perspectives from active-duty personnel, Air Force leadership, nuclear policy analysts, and even a former missileer-turned-pastor. It covers operational, psychological, and policy angles.
- **Slant:** While the article does not explicitly take a stance, certain elements—such as the focus on the moral dilemmas of missileers and references to past scandals—suggest a subtle undertone of skepticism about the role of nuclear weapons. However, it balances this by emphasizing deterrence and the professionalism of the Air Force personnel.
- **Coverage of 90th Missile Wing:** Several personnel from the 90th Missile Wing, including Capt. Eulondra Houghton, 1st Lt. Trevor Straub and 2nd Lt. Jacob Baughman of the 319th Missile Squadron, are quoted, reinforcing the human and operational aspects of their job. Major General Stacy Jo Huser, commander of 20th Air Force, is also prominently featured.

The entire Christian Science Monitor Essay is below It questions the ability of nuclear deterrence to continue working and the morality of such an endeavor. And it repeatedly notes the missile once launched cannot be recalled. Exactly the same as our SLBMs, ALCMs and Gravity Bombs.

#### Georg Schultz, SDI and the End of the USSR

**The Hoover Institute features a program known as Uncommon Knowledge created and hosted by Peter Robinson, a former Reagan chief speechwriter. Recently he hosted a program on the contribution Secretary of State George Schultz made to the Reagan administration and the end of the USSR. One guest was former Secretary of State Condi Rice. Here are her comments on SDI:**

**Secretary Rice:** But as you know, I did a lot of work on the Soviet military. And there's an article written in Military Thought of the Soviet Union, their principal military journal. And it's written by the chief of the General Staff. And he had a very different view of missile defense, which was how much [the US] would learn in terms of sensors, in terms of command and control. He authored an article called the Third Revolution in Military Affairs. And do you know what he said?

He said, the Americans have now made our entire military investment over the last 40 years irrelevant. We now have to take on a new world. But [the Soviets] fired him. But Gorbachev would understand that they could no longer win the military competition. And a lot of his desire to change the terms of Soviet foreign policy and ultimately to change the terms of Soviet domestic policy came from a recognition that they were not going to win. You have to chalk that up to Ronald Reagan and the defense buildup that changed the terms of the debate about what the Soviet Union was capable of doing.

### **Space Development Agency and Missile Defense,**

SDA asks industry to propose 60-day studies of 'novel' capabilities for Iron Dome

*The SDA call for studies on speeding HBTSS "missile defense capabilities" is interesting, as its wording differs somewhat from language in an earlier solicitation from the Missile Defense Agency for proposals that appears to refer to an HBTSS satellite constellation.*

#### **BreakingDefense.com, Feb. 12 | Theresa Hitchens**

WASHINGTON -- The Space Development Agency (SDA) is soliciting "executive summaries" from interested vendors for fast-track studies of how the agency's Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture (PWSA) satellite network in low Earth orbit can be best exploited to support President Donald Trump's "Iron Dome For America" missile shield.

The United States "remains committed to the NATO alliance and to the defense partnership with Europe, full stop, but the United States will no longer tolerate an imbalanced relationship which encourages dependency," Mr. Hegseth said.

So, Europe must step up to take responsibility for its own conventional defense, he said, while implying that the American nuclear umbrella that helps protect NATO and Europe would remain in place.

He urged Europeans to keep their commitments on military spending and increase them. "We challenge your countries and your citizens to double down and recommit yourselves not only to Ukraine's immediate security needs, but to Europe's long term defense and deterrence goals," he said.

"We hear you," said John Healey, Britain's defense secretary, in response to Mr. Hegseth's remarks before the meeting was closed to the media.

### **Responsibility**

**Christian Science Monitor February 14, 2025: Deep underground, missileers watch over America's nuclear weapons**



Capt. Gramm Roberts (at front) and Capt. Eulecondra Haughton sit in a training capsule at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Oct. 21, 2024.

### **RESPONSIBILITY**

**By Sarah Matusek**, Staff writer; **Alfredo Sosa**, Staff photographer

February 14, 2025

**CHEYENNE, WYO.**

In a secured room at the F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming, a Monitor journalist and photographer are getting ready to launch a nuclear missile. It takes two to launch. The training console before them has four screens, its updates appearing in a kludgy old font. There are too many keys. Three Air Force officials are calmly walking them through the steps to fire off intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). It's a thicket of acronyms and codes.

### **WHY WE WROTE THIS**

*U.S. Air Force missileers have their hands on the triggers of nuclear-armed missiles. Our reporter and photographer participate in a training drill and report their experience.*

The journalist feels herself smile. It's a common reaction when she's both panicked and being watched. She cannot stop smiling as her fingers lag behind commands. The Monitor colleagues fail to synchronize and must try again. Do missileers know what they're targeting, when ordered to launch? she asks aloud. No clear answer comes from the men behind her. The photographer, in hindsight, will note how the focus on being precise left little room for mulling what's at stake.

Another try. The journalist puts her left hand on a switch. Right hand on a key. The photographer has his own two switches to grip. The pair count down. Two sets of wrists turn right. This time, they're in sync. The ground would tremble now as a 110-ton launcher closure door opens and the engine ignites. Get the Monitor Stories you care about delivered to your inbox.

Today is a simulated show-and-tell. A real ICBM launched cannot be recalled.





A launch key is in place at the training capsule. Two teams of two missileers in different locations are required to launch an ICBM: commanders who must turn a key and switch, and deputies who must turn two switches.  
Alfredo Sosa/Staff

Missileers are “consequential, influential people” Donald Trump is once again the only person in the world who can launch U.S. nuclear-armed ICBMs. Or rather, as president, he’s the only one who can put the order in. It would then come down to missileers, men and women of the Air Force, to launch those spears of war. On 24-hour shifts, every day, each year, they rehearse for a reality they hope will never come. Readiness is the engine of deterrence. The role of the missileer rose from the Cold War as the United States and Soviet Union began to build warheads en masse. A new kind of warrior was born, with the power to kill millions with turns of keys. At the same time, a “ban the bomb” movement was born, as students, artists, intellectuals, and world leaders cried out against this new weapon that could end the world.

But as this bipolar world of competing nuclear powers broke down in the 1990s, these weapons seemed to fade from the awareness of most Americans – along with the role missileers play. Yet missileers are still “consequential, influential people,” those who are the last step before a nuclear missile is launched, says Mackenzie Knight, a senior research associate at the Federation of American Scientists’ Nuclear Information Project.



A Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile stands tall at a training site at F.E. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Oct. 21, 2024.  
Alfredo Sosa/Staff

Many Americans might consider them relics of history, she says. Or might not know that “Missileers still very much exist.” There are up to 400 nuclear-capable missiles lying in the ground and “on alert.” The 90th Missile Wing, based at F.E. Warren, oversees 150 of these across Wyoming, Nebraska, and Colorado. A warhead launched on an ICBM today could yield an explosive force some 20 times greater than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan.

And according to Air Force Global Strike Command, no: Missileers won't know what their missiles target if told to launch. "Missileers do not receive specific details about weapon targets at the time of execution," writes spokesperson Charles Hoffman in an email. Nevertheless, they're "always ready," he says. Airmen face routine checks to ensure they're mentally fit for the job.



Air Force maintainers observe a missile at a Minuteman III training site at F.E. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Alfredo Sosa/Staff

Two other missile wings sit deep underground in rural swaths of Montana and North Dakota. The airmen stationed in these facilities include "maintainers" and "defenders," who keep the weapons viable and safe as they work with the missile combat crews. Those missileers are sitting underground right now. Ready.

About an hour's drive east of the base, past the Nebraska state line, there's a beige building called Missile Alert Facility Echo-01. Just like at the base in Wyoming, the journalist must leave behind her cellphone and keys with a fob. She's chaperoned by Air Force public affairs personnel. Prepared by a topside chef, a chicken sandwich is making its slow descent down an elevator, carried by an official who joins the reporter and her chaperones.



Missile Alert Facility Echo-01 in rural Kimball County, Nebraska.

Sarah Matusek/The Christian Science Monitor

They reach the launch control capsule, which is as deep as 80 feet underground. The plate is lunch for 1st Lt. Trevor Straub. Lieutenant Straub is a launch control capsule commander with the 319th Missile Squadron. He and another Generation Z missileer, 2nd Lt. Jacob Baughman, a deputy commander, have just begun to "pull alert" for a 24-hour shift. The underground capsule is part of the base's 9,600-square-mile missile field. Out here, strong winds sweep across farmland. Tan-backed antelopes graze, and rabbits scampering too close to missile sites are known to trigger alarms.



Beyond the console and other mission-critical machines in the capsule underground, there's a bathroom, a microwave, and a bed. "I sleep like a baby," says Lieutenant Baughman. Not all can. The cramped quarters here were built in the 1960s; some mint-green fixtures remain. Outdated technology involves cables that must be dug up from the earth to be tested. And for a time, the missileers say, crews have used actual floppy disks.

Suddenly, the system beeps.



Second Lt. Jacob Baughman (left), an Air Force missileer with the 319th Missile Squadron stands with 1st Lt. Trevor Straub at the start of their 24-hour shift Nov. 26, 2024, which they call "pulling alert."  
Glenn S. Robertson

"Oh, um, actually, if we could have you step out," says Lieutenant Straub. The Monitor journalist steps behind a curtain as directed. The wait is brief. "Just an update," Lieutenant Straub explains. He won't share more. And no, Lieutenant Straub says in response to a question. He doesn't give much thought to missileers in Russia. Their weapon, the Sarmat, is named for centuries-old nomads who traversed the steppe on horse. American ICBMs are currently personified as Revolutionary War "minutemen." The Minuteman III, in service for over 50 years, will be replaced by the Sentinel.

It is the human beings – missileers – with the weapon in their name. They often etch their presence onto these old subterranean walls. Dates and names and inside jokes. On the day he first pulled alert three years ago, Lieutenant Straub made his mark above an entryway in permanent black ink: "Straub was here." There are downsides. Stress, a wonky schedule. The job has also taken hits to its reputation. Concerns linking missileer service and cancer have led to an ongoing Air Force study.

There have also been reports of low morale. And there was a cheating scandal a decade ago involving proficiency tests. Several leaders were dismissed. The men in Echo-01 recognize the destructive power of their roles. Much of the job comes down to trust. "Trusting the people above us," says Lieutenant Baughman. "I wouldn't say 'pressure,' but ..." His voice trails off in search of words. "We understand the weight of what we're executing – if it comes down to it."



A bed is available for missileers “pulling alert” for 24-hour shifts below ground inside Missile Alert Facility Echo-01 in rural Kimball County, Nebraska.

Glenn S. Robertson

Calculating nuclear risk in a 21st-century world. Pressure is building above ground, however. Last November, Russia declared it had lowered the threshold at which it would consider launching nuclear weapons. An arms-reduction agreement between Moscow and Washington is set to end a year from now. China is expanding the number, and quality, of its nuclear warheads. Iran has been stockpiling enriched uranium that approaches weapons-grade levels, the United Nations nuclear watchdog reports.

President Trump said Thursday he plans to pursue nuclear arms control talks with Russia and China. “There’s no reason for us to be building brand-new nuclear weapons,” he said in the Oval Office. “We already have so many you could destroy the world 50 times over, 100 times over.” The hands of the Doomsday Clock, meanwhile, point to 11:58:31 p.m. – or 89 seconds to midnight. That figurative clock estimates how relatively close we are to a global catastrophe. It’s the “closest it has ever been,” the scientists and security experts who publish the clock said in January.

Still, many analysts call nuclear war unlikely, due to what has long been called “mutual assured destruction,” or MAD. Based on game theory, MAD describes a theoretical equilibrium in which nuclear-armed actors will not launch a preemptive attack because it would be an act of certain self-destruction. Threats are currency in a nuclear world. Misunderstandings or mistakes, however, could spell catastrophe. Yet the risk of nuclear weapons today is less about surprise attacks than about an escalation of conventional war, says Scott Sagan, co-director of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University.

If, during a conventional war, one country is standing on the brink of defeat, he says, that country could resort to first use of nuclear weapons. “That’s uncharted territory,” Dr. Sagan says. But it is the daily duties and readiness of missileers that ensure the deterrence embedded in MAD. Despite the job being “thankless,” as several say, and often mundane, their compliance keeps weapons on alert. And that readiness keeps allies assured and adversaries at bay.

The morality of being a missileer – and minister. David Feddern was also a missileer here in Echo-01. He arrived toward the Cold War’s end. He’s now the pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Hampton, Nebraska. He grew up on a hog farm in the state, raised as a patriot who stood, hand on heart, whenever he saw the flag.



David Feddern, a Lutheran pastor in Nebraska, participated in a test launch of an ICBM for the U.S. government as a missileer in 1989.

Courtesy of the Rev. David Feddern

But after he became a missileer, the Rev. Feddern says he began to wrestle with meshing his job and his Christian faith. Take the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” But weren’t some wars led by the government just? The missileer eventually told himself he could serve his country honorably and pray the order to launch would never come. Both the military and ministry are about service, he says. Both require sacrifice and a faith, in one sense, in a higher power. “You can live in both kingdoms,” the Lutheran pastor says.

Several years ago, his role as a pastor led him to ponder his career as a missileer anew. He was brought to talk and pray with a World War II pilot before he died. The veteran pilot said he had flown over Hiroshima, shortly after the blast, to gather reconnaissance photos. “He was having trouble reconciling the brutality and the depravity of World War II, and the Japanese, and his military service as a Christian,” Mr. Feddern recalls. The pastor knew the inner quarrel well.

“I said, ‘Well, you would be surprised, then, to hear what I did while I was in the Air Force.’” In 1989, Mr. Feddern was one of a few missileers to launch an actual ICBM. Such routine tests of unarmed missiles continue at Vandenberg Space Force Base in California. (An ICBM test launch took place the evening of Election Day last November.) He says this launch of a real missile felt different from rehearsals on base after two years of training. “Reverence and awe” are the words that come to his mind. He has a photo of that ICBM blasting into the air with a gray-white plume.

He calls the missile a bird. Because, he says, it flies. Why this journalist became interested in nuclear missiles. My interest in missileers was piqued, fittingly, underground. In a stranger’s basement in Colorado Springs. An estate sale in this basement in 2023 was selling a trove of military papers, manuals, and plaques. For a dollar, I bought a thin 1984 workbook for Air Force Academy students. A cadet’s pen marks remain.

I read in-class exercises: “Intelligence sources have learned that Middle East terrorists have acquired an ICBM and are planning on destroying St. Louis (40N,90W). The terrorist’s launch site is known to be at 35N,40E.” One question asks cadets to determine the minimum time from launch to impact. Another asks, “If the ICBM lands short of St. Louis, where will it land?”



Air Force maintainers work on the launcher closure door for a Minuteman III at the training site.  
Alfredo Sosa/Staff

I grew up in St. Louis. I moved west to Colorado during the pandemic. But I never knew the history or logistics of the United States' land-based nuclear arsenal, and their impact on both states. Like Colorado today, Missouri once siloed nuclear-armed missiles across its plains, until a drawdown 30 years ago. I was born in 1991, the year the Cold War ended. It bugged me that, perhaps like many Americans, I hadn't known about the patchwork of missile silos across the American West – and the people who stand ready to launch nuclear weapons.

Maybe because these weapons have never been used? Maybe because deterrence worked? But would I be willing to turn the key? The bleak bargaining chips of deterrence. In 2005, Thomas Schelling won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for enhancing understanding of conflict and cooperation through game theory analysis. A progenitor of nuclear deterrence, he said:

“The most spectacular event of the past half century is one that did not occur. We have enjoyed sixty years without nuclear weapons exploded in anger,” he said in his acceptance speech. “What a stunning achievement – or, if not achievement, what stunning good fortune.” No country has used nuclear weapons since the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Japan in 1945. Several nations, however, have acquired them. These state actors arguably “use” their nukes, without detonating them, as the bleak bargaining chips of deterrence.

Defenders say the absence of nuclear war proves the weapons' worth – and the need to maintain them. Others take a step further, calling for their expansion. These include the author of a Heritage Foundation report that calls for “road-mobile” nuclear missile systems. ICBMs are the land-based leg of what is known as the U.S. nuclear triad. There are also bombers and submarines with nuclear-armed missiles. It's generally understood that, in response to an incoming nuclear attack, the land-based ICBMs could be first to launch.

In part because, for decades, foreign adversaries have known exactly where U.S. silos are. A declassified Air Force memo from 1963 bemoans the freedom afforded Iron Curtain attachés to “reconnoiter our missile sites.” (Espionage concerns endure. Last year, Nebraska lawmakers signed off on bills to deter land sales to foreign adversaries.) There remain people and groups who say Earth would be safer if stockpiles of these weapons were reduced. The group Global Zero says they should be dismantled once and for all. (Global Zero was co-founded by the late Bruce Blair, a veteran missileer and military command and control expert.)

America's new Sentinel ICBM program, behind schedule and over budget, is costing more than \$140 billion. The military and its supporters argue it's key to keeping deterrence “credible” by updating the aging arsenal, in a world becoming less stable.

Women in command

Maj. Gen. Stacy Jo Huser, commander of 20th Air Force, Air Force Global Strike Command, is the first woman to oversee the nation's ICBMs.

When she was a missileer herself earlier in her career, Major General Huser says, she sometimes struggled to find her "why." She says that's not true for airmen today.



Maj. Gen. Stacy Jo Huser, commander of 20th Air Force, Air Force Global Strike Command, is the first woman to command the U.S. arsenal of ICBMs. Major General Huser spoke to the Monitor during an October interview at F.E. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Alfredo Sosa/Staff

This moment in history "does seem exceptional, and I think it seems that way to our airmen as well," she says during an interview at the base. They don't have to "remind themselves why what they're doing is important. ... It's on every news channel, what our adversaries are doing." Major General Huser isn't afraid to hug. Or to say she's putting people first, ahead of the mission. That involves making sure her airmen and their families feel cared for, she says.

"Is their spouse able to find employment? Do they have childcare issues that need to be resolved?" she says. "If our airmen and their families are not concerned about those things, then they can focus on the mission." "I think we are attracting the type of force that we need," she says. "My big concern is, How do we retain that force, especially a diverse force?" As of December, the Air Force reports that 71.6% of its nearly 800 missileers are male. An identical share identifies as white.

Women became eligible for missile combat crews in 1978. But it took a decade for women and men to serve together during shifts underground. Keeping women in the service long-term, amid family demands, is another priority of Major General Huser's. When Capt. Euleeondra Haughton joined the military, she followed in the footsteps of her grandfathers, uncles, and father. It's a "thankless job," says the nuclear and missile operations officer with the 319th Missile Squadron. Missileers are often lower-rank airmen – and therefore younger.

Yet the young Black flight commander says she is not seeking thanks. She's clear on her mission. It's as her colleague, Capt. Gramm Roberts, an Emergency War Order planner, says. Whenever a shift passes without a call to launch, "It's always a good day. "That makes me imagine a bad day.

An ICBM launched cannot be recalled

It begins with a beep.

The order appears on the higher-authority screen. If an airman has been napping, the nap is over now.

Two missileers rush to the console; strap into their seats; notice their hearts are racing but choose to ignore that; whip out classified codebooks; chip away at a decryption to confirm the command; think of loved ones above off to school or home from work; steady frantic fingers; wake silos from their sleep; place a left hand on a switch and a right hand on a key (if the commander); place two hands on two separate switches (if the deputy); focus on the mission, the mission, the mission; and should one missileer object, two other crews, miles from here, will step in and authorize the launch.

The commander counts down. Two sets of wrists turn right.

The bird flies. An ICBM launched cannot be recalled.

### ***Nuclear Winter Triumvirate: Carl Sagan, Annie Jacobson and Russian Ministry***

The late Carl Sagan claimed that even the small scale use of nuclear weapons would cause nuclear winter and thus the need for the US to adopt the nuclear freeze. Now decades later, Annie Jacobson's new book on nuclear war makes the same claim but adds that the small scale use of nuclear weapons would automatically lead to all-out nuclear war as the US military would "jam up" an American President to make a large US retaliatory strike. And now the Estonian intelligence folks tell us that Russia will be spreading exactly the same message, hoping to recruit American scientists to instill fear in Americans that the United States continued support to Ukraine would risk the outbreak of nuclear conflict. And such nuclear conflict would lead to nuclear winter.

Russia to target Americans with 'nuclear winter' propaganda, Estonia intelligence says

Semafor.com, Feb. 12 | Mathias Hammer

*The Kremlin plans to launch a propaganda campaign to resurrect concerns in the US about the dangers of a "nuclear winter" in an effort to instill fear and reduce support for aid to Ukraine, according to Estonia's annual Foreign Intelligence service report released Wednesday.*

The report said that Russia hopes to recruit American scientists this year to spread warnings about nuclear winter, a contested theory that predicts a nuclear conflict would produce catastrophic global cooling and famine. Moscow's policymakers and experts have debated for months why the Kremlin's nuclear saber-rattling has yet to have the desired effect. Russian President Vladimir Putin has made frequent nuclear threats from the podium during the Ukraine war, but an attempt to sow fear directly among the US public by amplifying nuclear winter concerns would represent a stepped-up approach.

*Know More*

Scientists in the 1980s believed a nuclear conflict would lead to a scenario where dust and smoke would cause global temperatures to plummet by as much as 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Later research has suggested the effects would be less cataclysmic than Cold War estimates, although impacts could still be severe. The Kremlin is mobilizing popular Russian figures such as Vladimir Pozner, a television personality who became famous for presenting the Soviet Union's views to the West during the Cold War. According to Estonia's report, Pozner has said he is willing to do a similar series of televised debates with the US, focusing on the threat of a nuclear winter scenario.

The campaign is expected to use "YouTube, podcasts and carefully selected spokespersons with authoritative and 'palatable' viewpoints" to draw attention to the outcome of a possible nuclear conflict, the report said. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union's KGB tried to use the threat of nuclear winter to convince the West that their nuclear arsenals should be reduced, [Editor's note: Unilaterally reduced was the Soviet goal as they repeatedly turned down START I and II and INF proposals for mutual reductions] according to a declassified CIA study.



**U.S. can respond in 'overwhelming' way in case of N.K. ICBM attack – official**

**Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Feb. 19 | Song Sang-ho**

WASHINGTON -- A senior U.S. military official warned Wednesday that America can respond in an "overwhelming" way in the "time, place and manner of our choosing" in the event of a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) attack as he underscored the strength of the United States' nuclear deterrence system.

Maj. Gen. Jason Armagost, the commander of the Eighth Air Force and of the Joint-Global Strike Operations Center, made the remarks, responding to a question regarding what would happen to America's nuclear umbrella for South Korea when North Korea successfully acquires bombs capable of striking the continental U.S. "It is problematic for them (North Korea) to have an ICBM ... With current and imaginable capabilities, it is extremely difficult to attack that system of systems," Armagost said during a forum hosted by The Korea Society, a non-profit organization based in New York.

"What that system allows us to do is to say that use of an ICBM would not result in the benefit that you are seeking because we can respond in a way that is overwhelming in the time and place and manner of our choosing," he added. Armagost was referring to the U.S.' nuclear triad system consisting of ICBMs, strategic bombers and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) -- three key nuclear delivery vehicles.

"It's why we have a triad: ICBMs on alert, SLBMs for an assured second strike capability and bombers to be a forward and, or visible presence with regards to that ... what the triad does for a spectrum of capability for strategic deterrence," he said. A second strike capability refers to a nuclear retaliatory strike capability that remains alive even after a country sustains the first nuclear strike from an enemy. An SLBM is the centerpiece of that capability.

The official underscored the importance of maintaining a "resilient" triad system. "The numbers of ICBMs matter greatly. The numbers of on-alert submarine-launched capabilities matter greatly. And the numbers of bombers matter," he said. "Because unless you have a resilient system, the triad becomes a tricky thing." Pyongyang's push to have credible ICBM missile capabilities have raised concerns that the U.S. might dither on coming to the aid of its treaty ally, South Korea, as it could fear that continental American cities would become a target of a North Korean ICBM attack.

To dispel such concerns, Seoul and Washington have been working to strengthen the credibility of America's "extended deterrence" commitment to South Korea in recent years through a set of measures, including the Nuclear Consultative Group, the allies' key nuclear deterrence body. To further deepen deterrence cooperation, the allies have been pushing for a "conventional-nuclear integration (CNI)" initiative under which South Korea mobilizes its conventional military assets to back America's nuclear operations in a crisis scenario.

Whether such training cooperation would continue to develop remains to be seen as during his first term, President Donald Trump described military exercises between the two allies as "expensive." In a separate press event later in the day, Armagost described allied efforts to work together in an integrated manner as a "powerful" thing, while refusing to comment specifically on examples of CNI operations between Seoul and Washington.

"When I talk about habitual training and planning and exercise relationships, what we see is the ability to seamlessly integrate those operations across the spectrum of conflict all the way from competition activities through crisis and conflict," he said during the event hosted by the Foreign Press Center in New York. "That relationship of working together, planning together and operating militarily together is an extremely powerful thing to practice and to conduct. So that translates all the way from conventional operations to nuclear operations."

**US Foreign Assistance Last Three Years: On What to Spend Our Money**

**\$2.3B** to Somalia including **\$200,000** for global warming prep

**\$3.7B** for Afghanistan including **\$16 million** to promote "positive masculinity"

**\$3.4B** to Yemen including for an "art exhibition"

**\$700M** to Iraq including opening the first movie theater in Nineveh

**\$3.4B** to Syria including almost a million COVID masks

**\$1.1B** to Lebanon including or promoting “youth activism”

From the website Foreign Assistance.gov which has foreign assistance from 2021-24 by country. Three year total foreign assistance is \$168 billion or about \$58 billion annually, which is equivalent to three years of current expenditures for all our new nuclear platforms.....

**Elbridge Colby and Implementing American Foreign Policy**

**by Donald Trump, Jr.**

For years, my father has been trying to restore an American foreign policy that puts Americans first. Since he began his 2015 campaign and even before, he saw that the foreign policy we had pursued for decades had led us to unnecessary and costly wars, deindustrialized our country, and cost regular Americans their lives, wealth, and freedoms.

Yet for many years my father was essentially alone. In fact, in his first term he was surrounded by many who pretended to agree with him, only to work at cross-purposes behind his back. This is why he has repeatedly said that the biggest lesson for him of his first term was to get the right people to implement his America First foreign policy vision. These are people who *actually* believe in that foreign policy and have the integrity and strength of character to push it through in the face of the opposition of the failed establishment that has tried to use every tool to frustrate and even jail him.

No one fits this category better than Elbridge Colby. Colby has been described by both friend and foe of the MAGA movement as the leading thinker of an America First foreign policy. My father, when announcing his nomination, rightly described him as a “highly respected advocate for our America First foreign and defense policy.”

What are Colby’s views and why do they fit so well with America First? Well, he starts off in exactly the right place – with the concrete interests of the American people, not abstractions like “the rules based international order” or spreading democracy in the Middle East. In other words, his foreign policy approach *actually* puts Americans first.

This makes him a *realist*—a realist for America, like my father and Vice President J.D. Vance. Like a business leader thinking of his shareholders’ interests, Colby approaches foreign policy practically, trying to get the best results for the American people. This sometimes makes him harder line, and sometimes more open to negotiations. But this isn’t inconsistent. His goal, like my father’s, is to try to maximize the strength, wealth, and well-being of the American people while, wherever possible, avoiding war.

In the case of our territorial integrity and protecting America from drugs and an immigration invasion, he is hard line for restoring our border, ensuring our laws are respected, and combating the scourge of fentanyl.

In the case of China, he recognizes how uniquely powerful China is compared to other nations, so he urges us to focus our strength and attention on balancing China in Asia. He argues that we must focus our military—depleted after Biden’s inattention and frittering—on the PRC. But at the same time, he supports my father in his openness to negotiation with Xi Jinping and avoiding poking the dragon in the eye unnecessarily. This seems contradictory to some who are hostage to an ideological approach to foreign policy. But when you consider that the American people would benefit most from a balance of power with China that avoids war, it makes perfect sense.

In the case of Europe, Colby is exactly on the message that Vice President Vance and Secretary of Defense Hegseth gave to the Europeans earlier this month. America, Colby argues, does not have a permanent obligation to subsidize European welfare states, least of all to be hectored by censorious European leaders. Rather, he has consistently argued that the way to save NATO for the future is, as my father has always said, for Europeans to field real armies, not just fake it. And he supports the Administration’s approach to end the tragic war in Ukraine and avoid an unnecessary war with Russia.

In the case of the Middle East, Colby is a stalwart supporter of the U.S.-Israel alliance. He has strongly and consistently supported Israel publicly and privately, especially after the barbaric attacks of October 7th. He is completely in line with my father and his most pro-Israel administration in American history.

Colby is also fully in line with my father on the issue of Iran. Colby has repeatedly said he opposes a nuclear-armed Iran and fully supports my father's policy to prevent that. He knows that America must have good options to back up that threat and believes in providing Israel with the weapons and capabilities it needs to fight its own fights. But just the same Colby is also with my father in wanting to avoid a large Middle East war if at all possible. Like my father, he is not a fanatic, looking for a war; he is practical, tough but looking for a non-military solution if possible. After twenty years of failed wars in the Middle East, isn't that just common sense?

It is actually shocking that Colby's nomination is getting any pushback at all. His views are obviously and clearly deeply consistent with my father's and the overwhelming majority of Americans who supported him and his agenda. Colby is obviously qualified. The reason he is getting flak is because he is committed to advancing the America First vision and is eminently qualified to do so. In past years, Colby would be stabbed in a political dark alley. But now with the MAGA movement awake and alive to the deep state, we can – and must – fight back.

This is a crucial test. We cannot fail. Colby must be confirmed.

### **Trump's "Denuclearization" Is a Nonstarter – But There Is a Future for Arms Control**

**American Enterprise Institute, Feb. 14 | Kyle Balzer**

*On Thursday, President Donald Trump professed his desire to pursue arms control negotiations with China and Russia and achieve "denuclearization." Trump left unstated what, exactly, such an agreement would entail. Deep cuts to the respective nuclear armaments of the great powers? Total disarmament? What's clear, however, is that the president has long harbored a fear of nuclear Armageddon, and that he sees arms control talks as an opportunity to slash spending on potentially destabilizing military capabilities that have limited return on investment. As Trump claimed, "There's no reason for us to be building brand new nuclear weapons, we already have so many." "We're all spending a lot of money that we could be spending on other things that are actually, hopefully much more productive."*

No military capability is inherently destabilizing, and weapons themselves don't make war. Politics and diverging national interests between rivals are the chief drivers of armed conflict. Deterrence failure is rarely, if ever, the result of "miscalculating" madmen or "accidental" and "unintentional" behavior. Furthermore, if the history of great-power nuclear arms control suggests anything, it is that improving one's military capabilities – and pairing them with political incentives – is the surest route to success. During the Cold War, the United States signed several nuclear arms control agreements with the Soviet Union – all of which were the product of changing political circumstances that, at least in part, were induced by Washington's willingness to wage a long-term nuclear competition.

Consider the Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon administrations' pursuit – albeit grudgingly and in a limited fashion – of a ballistic missile defense system that convinced the Kremlin of America's technological prowess. Soviet fears of America's enduring lead in this area led to a 1972 treaty limiting anti-ballistic missile systems.

And consider another shrewd move by the Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter administration to develop highly accurate theater-range nuclear weapons capable of reaching into the Soviets' western military districts and upending their entire concept of military operations against NATO. [Editor's Note: No funds for acquisition of the Pershing II missiles were put in any defense budget prior to 1981 during the Reagan administration.] The Reagan administration subsequently deployed these weapons systems – a move that the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, said "was like holding a gun to our head."

Reagan further aggravated Soviet fears of America's technological wizardry by launching a research-and-development program for space-based missile interceptors. A desperate Gorbachev subsequently signed the landmark Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty to remove the metaphorical gun pointed at the Kremlin. The INF Treaty was the first arms control agreement to destroy an entire class of nuclear weapons, [Editors note: the class of weapons banned were missiles not warheads] and it was the direct result of America's bipartisan campaign to gain a competitive edge against the Soviets in the nuclear balance [Editors Note: The original deployment was by the USSR and included SS-20 missiles---the US only responded to Moscow's attempt to upset the nuclear balance,].

As Gorbachev warned the Soviet leadership in an October 4, 1986, meeting, “If we do not compromise on some questions ... we will be pulled into an arms race beyond our power, and we will lose this race, for we are presently at the limits of our capabilities.”

But why, exactly, did Gorbachev feel this way? Because military, according to two Soviet officials engaged in arms control negotiations, the Soviets suffered from “insufficient technological development vis-à-vis the United States.” And politically, Reagan exploited America’s newfound military advantages by conducting quiet but no less transformative diplomacy with the Kremlin to tamp down Cold War tensions. Gorbachev saw no point in another round of futile military competition with a rival seeking peaceful relations.

If Trump desires arms control, the United States will have to compete shrewdly in another round of military competition to help engender the political conditions conducive to arms control. Though there may be an opening for a simple extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia, it is difficult to see how this would be to the United States’ benefit. Extending New START leaves Russia’s theater nuclear weapons – weapons Moscow is currently wielding to paralyze NATO and advance its revanchist political ambitions in Ukraine – free from control.

Moreover, such a narrow arms control agreement with Russia does not address China’s massive buildup of strategic and theater nuclear weapons, which is enabling Beijing’s short-of-war coercion campaign against America’s political interests and allies in the western Pacific. Washington, of course, could always pull Beijing into trilateral negotiations with Moscow. But due to China’s revisionist national ambitions that clash fundamentally with America’s, and due to the fact that China’s nuclear weapons support these ambitions, trilateral arms control negotiations are likely a nonstarter in the near term.

The Trump administration, then, would be wise to disabuse itself of the notion that “denuclearization” offers an opportunity to halve the overall defense budget – quite the opposite. Détente is not on offer. And an extended period of military competition is likely. But Trump, like Reagan, can help reshape the political environment by ramping up defense spending to lock in a military edge against China and Russia.

*--Kyle Balzer is a Jeane Kirkpatrick Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where he focuses on great-power competition, US grand strategy, long-term strategic competition, US nuclear strategy and policy, and arms control. He specializes in Cold War nuclear strategy and the evolution of American deterrence theory. Dr. Balzer is currently working on a forthcoming book, *The Revivalists: James Schlesinger, the Competitive Nuclear Strategists, and the Rebirth of Cold War American Deterrence*. He is the author of “U.S. Military Diplomacy and the Imperial State of Iran,” in *Boots and Suits: Historical Cases and Contemporary Lessons in Military Diplomacy* (Marine Corps University Press, 2023); “National Styles, Strategic Empathy, and Cold War Nuclear Strategy” in *the Strategy Bridge* (November 2022); and “Policy, Perception, and Misperception: The United States and the Fall of the Shah” in *Expeditions with MCUP* (Fall 2019). He holds a PhD in history from Ohio University, an MA in history from Northern Illinois University, and a BA in history from the University of St. Francis.*

### **Time to DOGE the nuclear triad**

**The new massively over-cost 'Sentinel' nuclear weapon program is inefficient and a security risk to the United States**

**Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, Feb. 15 | William Hartung**

*The Pentagon is in the midst of a three-decades long plan to build a new generation of nuclear weapons, and it is not going well — so badly that the Air Force announced this week that it will pause large parts of the development of its new intercontinental ballistic missile, known officially as the Sentinel.*

The pause will impact design and launch facilities in California and Utah and is projected to throw the project 18 to 24 months off schedule.

The project has been troubled from the start, when Northrop Grumman received a sole source contract to develop the system after Boeing withdrew from the competition, charging that the bidding process was rigged against it. And last year the missile underwent a Pentagon review when it was revealed that it was projected to cost 81% more than original estimates, boosting the price of procurement alone to \$141 billion, with hundreds of billions more to operate and maintain the Sentinel over its useful lifetime.

Despite the runaway costs, the Pentagon decided to double down on developing the Sentinel, claiming that it was essential to deter other nations from launching a nuclear attack on the United States. In fact, at a time when “efficiency” is the watch word in Washington and other federal agencies are being dismantled as we speak, *canceling the new ICBM is an obvious place to find savings, as suggested in a recent research brief by myself and my colleagues Gabe Murphy of Taxpayers for Common Sense and Julia Gledhill at the Stimson Center.*

As enormous as the cost of the Sentinel is slated to be, that is not the only reason to put the system on the budgetary chopping block. Independent experts like former Secretary of Defense William Perry have argued, persuasively, that *the new ICBM will make us less safe by increasing the chance of an accidental nuclear confrontation sparked by a false alarm of an enemy attack.* The risk is grounded in the fact that the president would have just a matter of minutes to decide whether to launch U.S. ICBMs in a crisis.

Despite the costs and risks posed by the Sentinel program, it remains virtually sacrosanct in the view of the Pentagon and many members of Congress, on the theory that the nuclear triad — the ability to launch nuclear weapons from the air, land, and sea — is essential to U.S. security. But the triad was born out of bureaucratic politics, *dating back to the 1950s fight between the Navy and the Air Force to get their piece of the nuclear budget pie.* And it persists in major part due to pork barrel politics — the jobs and profits generated by spending inordinate sums developing and deploying new nuclear bombers, ground-based missiles, and ballistic missile submarines.

The ICBM lobby includes Northrop Grumman and its major subcontractors and members of the Senate ICBM Coalition, composed of members from states that host ICBM bases or major development and maintenance work on the Sentinel. The lobby has been remarkably successful in fending off any efforts to reduce the size of the ICBM force or even to study alternatives to a new missile.

Former Representative John Tierney of the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation has neatly summed up the problem:

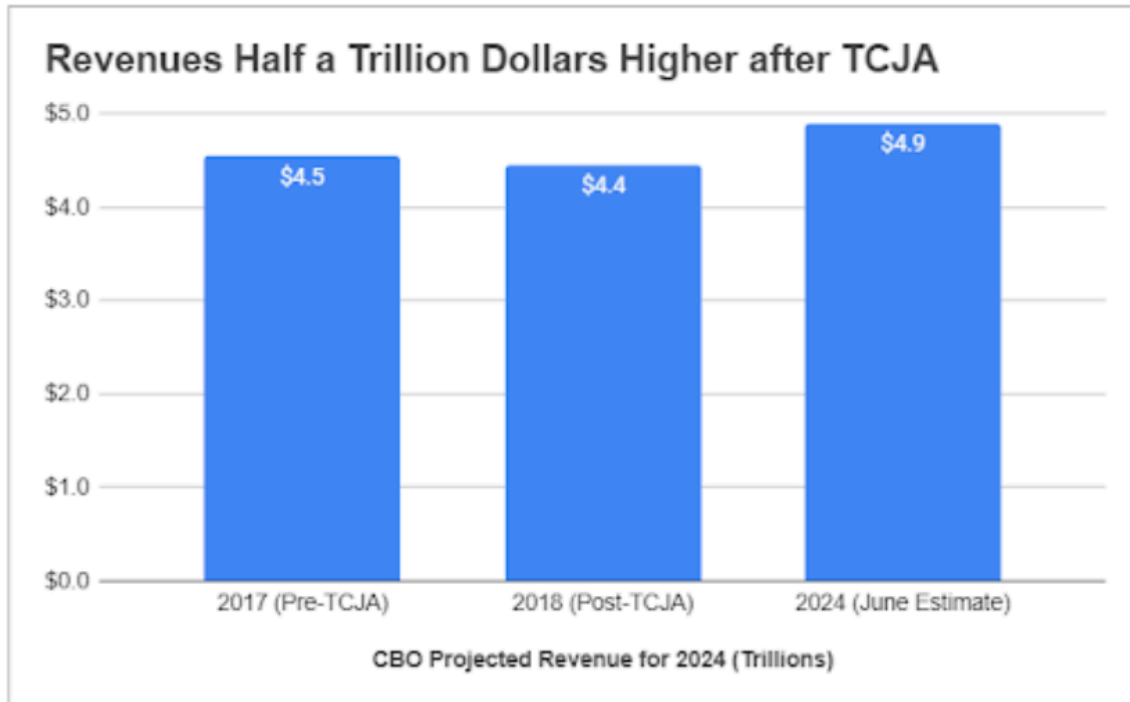
*“Not only are intercontinental ballistic missiles redundant, but they are prone to a high risk of accidental use. ... They do not make us any safer. Their only value is to the defense contractors who line their fat pockets with large cost overruns at the expense of our taxpayers. It has got to stop.”*

As President Trump and Elon Musk pledge to scour the Pentagon budget for potential savings, ending the Sentinel program and eliminating ICBMs from the arsenal should be at the top of the list, and a measure of whether the effort to streamline the Pentagon and end dysfunctional programs is serious.

*--William D. Hartung is a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His work focuses on the arms industry and U.S. military budget.*

### **CBO and Tax Rate Reductions**

CBO the Congressional Budget Office “scores” tax legislation which means they put all the assumed numbers into computers and outcomes they project they usually think will bring in lots of revenue if tax rates go up even if the government spends more money. In 2017, CBO projected that the year following the tax rate changes the US government would lose \$100 billion in revenue. And that over the next 10 years would lose \$5.7 trillion or over \$500 billion a year in revenue. When President Biden submitted a proposed budget in early 2021, the administration projected the eliminating the Trump tax cuts would generate the same \$5.7 trillion projected years ago by CBO, BUT the debt would still increase over the next 10 years by \$20 trillion, or by a record number. However, by 2024, the US economy generated \$4.9 trillion in revenue to Uncle Sam, an increase of \$400 billion from 2017 and some one half trillion higher than projected by CBO. Here is a chart from Tom Moore’s Prosperity Website.



<https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/recurringdata/51138-2017-06-revenueprojections.xlsx>

<https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2018-06/51138-2018-04-revenueprojections.xlsx>

<https://www.cbo.gov/publication/60419>

#### **Incorrect Vision of Current Russian Nuclear Strategy**

Dr. Ted Postol describes in gruesome detail what would happen if an 800 kiloton warhead was detonated one mile above Washington, D.C. However, instead of enlightening his readers on the nature of future nuclear war he simply tries to terrorize them.

The actual nuclear force execution policies of Russia include those to limit damage and control escalation. As they explicitly state they have a “Requirement to limit collateral damage commensurate with achieving military objective” and further that “Targeting of population and all industry is unnecessarily destructive and not effective.” Military targets would be targeted “...commensurate with achieving military objectives.”

But whatever you may think are Russian nuclear strategies, Postol doesn’t take into account the 1999 decree from Russian President Yeltsin calling for the development of very low yield, battlefield nuclear weapons and the implications for their possible use.

According to A. Mikhaylov, Former Russian Minister of Atomic Energy, nuclear weapons were so terrible that no one dared to use them... ”The [Russian] nuclear shield, which hundreds of billions of dollars were spent developing, has today become a useless, burdensome pile of metal.” Mikhaylov advocated the development of “10,000 highly accurate (<5 m), low yield (50-1,000 tons), ‘clean’ (low fission fraction) and tailored effects (EMP, X-Ray, Gamma) nuclear weapons” (confirmed by CIA 22 June 2000). Yeltsin signed a presidential decree authorizing development (29 Apr 99) which they have operationally tested (CIA 30 Aug 2000), to include tests against biological and space systems.

USAF General (Ret) John Hyten stated that "thousands have been deployed". Russia has a very different view of nuclear weapons than the US and these new capabilities have become enablers of Russia’s new nuclear doctrine/policy/strategy. As stated by Mikhaylov, “Nuclear weapons will once again become an effective instrument



of policy” and “Return Russia to superpower status by the threat of precision low yield nuclear strikes. “ thus, making such threats realistic.”

This force of nuclear weapons is **NOT** a demonstration force—it is a warfighting force, enabling Russia to become the dominant power in Europe, with Russia’s strategic forces used to deter the US. Russia theater nuclear forces could dominate Eurasia. And Russia’s modernized and expanded 2024 strategic nuclear forces could dominate the nuclear escalation ladder and deter the US as Russia can apply force consistent with conflict objectives and the US cannot.

As noted by Col-Gen Muravyev, Dep CINC of the RVSN -- **Strategic missile systems should be capable of conducting ‘surgical’ strikes... using both highly accurate, super-low yield nuclear weapons, as well as conventional ones...** “...groupings of non-nuclear MBR (ICBM’s) and BRPL (SLBM’s) may appear...” . Moscow Armeyskiy Sbornik, 1 Dec 1999. Russia reportedly has deployed precision nuclear WH w/50-200-ton yields on SLBM’s.

The Political/Military utility provided by advanced technology nuclear weapons was illustrated by some recent unpublished research which examined the consequences of a “limited objectives” nuclear attack on the US by Russian strategic nuclear forces. In a study conducted in 1986 of a hypothetical major attack on US strategic nuclear forces and their supporting forces by Soviet strategic nuclear forces there were 14.7-19.7 million fatalities from blast and fire and another 6.8-60.6 million fatalities from fallout (Note the fallout fatalities variability due to winds), for a total of 21.5-77.2 million fatalities. **In new research that replicated a very similar size attack against similar US nuclear targets using accurate, low-yield (300 ton-1 kt) air-burst weapons there were 12-16,000 (yes, thousand) fatalities from blast and fire and NO fatalities from fallout.**

In this new nuclear age being created by Russia, defenses become essential to reinforce deterrence, with an integrated offense/defense being the most cost-effective deterrent.

**Escalation Fears, Deterrence Credibility, Nuclear Proliferation and Ukraine by Vernon Frolick of the Center for Eastern European Democracy February 16, 2025**

**HAS THE PROJECTION OF AMERICAN FEAR EMBOLDENED THE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS:**

There is a problem here, in that former President Joe Biden may well have unintentionally encouraged the use of nuclear weapons by Russia against Ukraine by constantly broadcasting his fear of provoking Putin. If the US was too afraid of assisting Ukraine with the provision of arms – a support that United Nations rules clearly authorized – the underlying message is that Russia is free to use such weapons against Ukraine and the US, will simply stand by. **The US as head of NATO, would do nothing. If anything, rather than prevent the use of a nuclear weapon by Russia, America’s retreat into a corner for fear of such an outcome invites it.**

**NATO May Be Toothless:** Equally concerning is the fact that if fear of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia causes America to restrict its support for Ukraine fighting an existential war, **what assurance is there for Finland or Poland or Lithuania or any other state that Putin wishes to attack with conventional weapons through say an arial bombardment, that the US or NATO will support them? If it’s fear of nuclear weapons that prevents it from a robust defence of Ukraine, no NATO agreement is going to displace that same fear.**

**New Nuclear Arms Race:** Rather than projecting strength in unity and a resolve to stand up to bully tactics, the weaknesses that the Biden administration projected are certain to erode faith in NATO and will lead to a new nuclear arms race. There is no question but that Ukraine would not have been attacked and would not be in this terrible conflict had it not given up its nuclear weapons and trusted America and Britain to protect its territorial integrity and its sovereignty as they promised.

**Security Agreements:** The complete failure of the *Budapest Memorandum* to protect Ukraine from being attacked has demonstrated beyond any doubt that no international security agreement – even with two of the world’s most trustworthy partners – can be relied on. In the end one must provide one’s own security as... Israel has demonstrated. The importance of self-reliance and the necessity to be nuclear armed has not been lost on any nation watching the war. The message of deterrence through strength is surely not lost on South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and many other states who will no doubt proceed with haste to develop the weapons they need to guarantee their own safety.

The four decades since Ronald Reagan was elected President have seen five frameworks for pursuing US security and foreign policy objectives. Are there lessons we can learn from US security policy successes and failures, especially as we face the serious challenges of today? Today is the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a dinner held at the War College at Ft. McNair. General Keith Alexander, then the Director of the National Security Agency, warned an assembled group of senior American industry leaders at 2009 dinner that China was **then** stealing up to \$600 billion in US corporate intellectual property each year. That remains the case today, says the FBI.

From 1981-1991, the US made economic war on Moscow, backed up by a strong US military that challenged Moscow in Europe, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Angola. Our nuclear deterrent was rebuilt in the US and Europe. The US developed space and related technologies such as SDI that prompted the Soviet chief of the General Staff to conclude that much of the then existing Soviet military technology was rapidly becoming obsolete.

Unfortunately, after the collapse of the USSR to 9-11, the United States went through an age of neglect of our military as “General” Carville told the troops “It’s the economy, stupid.” In parallel many US leaders decided it was the end of history and great power conflict itself had been thrown into the dustbin of historical anachronisms, prompting the country to go on with what General Harencak characterized as a holiday from history, or paying little serious attention to our military capability. North Korea marched toward nuclear weapons and long range missiles, Iran did the same, Russia rejected START II and China embarked on a hegemonic rise.

Then the third decade gave us what President George Bush called the global war on terror that began right after the 9-11 attacks. Terror attacks against the US started much earlier with the 1993 WTC bombing, the Khobar Towers bombings in the KSA, the African embassy bombings in 1997 and the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen at the end of the decade. Iran was in part behind three of these attacks, and the nephew of the architect of 9-11 bombed the WTC in 1993. Two wars were waged in Iraq and Afghanistan, and though the initial military objectives were achieved in brilliant fashion, the United States lost sight of its objectives and eventually withdrew without a just or peaceful outcome. Russia embarked on an across the board nuclear modernization effort while China was admitted to the WTO and laid the groundwork for its own military buildup.

The fourth era starting in 2009 was an attempted reset, of a new red button strategy to be cashed in by Moscow and Washington, where we would cooperate against proliferation, climate change and terrorism. A new deal on nuclear arms with Moscow and a nuclear enrichment with Iran were concluded, all within the context of showing restraint and beginning a long march toward zero global nuclear weapons.

The 2017-2020 period reversed the prior security policies in part. While the US nuclear modernization continued, the decline in defense modernization was reversed overall. NATO was pushed hard to increase its resources devoted to defense. But Russia reneged on its INF legal requirements while Iran broke its JCPOA requirements. The US withdrew from both deals, while ending DPRK nuclear and long-range missile tests.

The fifth decade era began with the administration proposing to spend only 2.4% of GDP on defense, a lower effort than prior to WWII. Then followed a hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan and the removal of sanctions on Iran. Then came the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Going on in parallel was a “breathtaking” Chinese military buildup, as well as the accelerated proliferation of missiles and nuclear warhead developments in North Korea, advanced nuclear weapons fuel enrichment by Iran and Tehran’s accelerated terrorism against the US and Israel.

Now, looking forward from 2025, some half century since Reagan was elected, joined successfully by Thatcher, Pope John Paul and Kohl, taking down the USSR, the United States is facing all at once, four allied criminal enterprises, masquerading as nation states: (1) A militarized Russia; (2) A chief terrorist Iran; (3) A missile and nuclear proliferation agent in North Korea; and (4) An expansion seeking hegemonic China in the Pacific and the Middle East, Africa and in the Americas.

Having been challenged successively from 1981-2025 by the Soviet Cold War threat to Europe, the terrorism from Al Qaeda and Iran and their proxy agents, missile and nuclear proliferation threats from Pyongyang, and the economic and military rise of China, the United States now faces these same threats recreated simultaneously, and from these four nation-state criminal enterprises that are working together even as they seek more partners.

To meet these multiple challenges, the United States as the Posture Commission concluded, may have to rethink its needed capabilities and determine what lessons can be learned from the previous nearly five decades of US security policy that can guide us into the challenging future.

Lesson #1: The US having adopted peace through strength, did take down the USSR, irrespective of Max Boot's blithely wrong-headed new book dismissing Reagan, Thatcher, and Pope John Paul as having anything to do with that outcome.

Lesson #2: Despite near two decades of unprecedented economic growth culminating with welfare reform and a balanced budget, we took a holiday from sustaining our defense deterrent while ignoring the gathering terrorism storm that culminated in the attacks of September 2001. Secretary of State Rice put it well: they were at war with us but we didn't know it. And despite a heroic effort in taking down the Taliban and Al Qaeda and subsequently the Hussein regime in Iraq, we ended up 20 years later with the Taliban back in power and for a time Iraq/Syria being a center of the ISIS Caliphate.

Lesson #3: What may appear on the surface to be cooperative stances of our adversaries, it is dangerous for the United States to assume that is the case. Tyrannical or authoritative regimes have historically driven objectives that do not allow for a "win-win" outcome but seek results where their objective is that they win and we, the United States and the West, lose. As Admiral (Ret) Charles Richard has argued, along with Victor David Hanson, victory needs to be placed back into the US security narrative, and we might start with understanding what Israel has finally achieved, albeit after the horrors of October 2023.

Lesson #4: Neglect of our security loses time which you cannot get back. From 1986-1996, the United States lost over \$1 trillion in purchasing power in the Department of Defense, even if assuming that all we needed during that period was a flat defense budget not even adjusted for inflation. With the collapse of the USSR and "end of the Cold War" we assumed an endless "peace dividend" pot of money was there for the spending.

Lesson #5: The bad guys get to vote and although facing their own serious economic and demographic conflicts, these four partners in mayhem—Iran, North Korea, China and Russia-- are serious and ruthless.

Lesson #5: Putting together a sound security strategy takes time. Congress has to complete defense bills on time, irrespective of other spending bills. The annual DoD appropriations bill can no longer be held hostage to a broken budget process, as all appropriation bills have only been successfully completed four times since 1977.

Lesson #6: The West is in this together. And without everyone pulling their weight, we cannot succeed. Our allies should emulate the Republic of Korea, Israel, and Poland, for example, and step up in defending Western civilization, not the least of which also requires a halt to the massive largely unlawful migration including jihadis and criminal cartels into the West, both in Europe and the Americas.

Hopefully, as we look to re-establish deterrence, the United States should jettison what Israel missile defense expert Uzi Rubin has called "fortune cookie analysis" when putting together the country's security policy. Rollback, not "containment," broke apart the USSR. China's "rise" is not "peaceful." There is no "peace process" in the Middle East involving Iran or the "Palestinians." "Denuclearization" or Nuclear global zero is not just a pipedream but it pushes the US and its allies down blind dead ends seeking deals that are simply not in the making. "Globalization" has seriously harmed American interests no matter how many rich folks claim the opposite at Davos each year. Keeping your nation totally "vulnerable" to missile strikes is not the "cornerstone" of US security. Islam and sharia law do not represent "a religion of peace." There is no cooperate "climate and energy" road to travel with China given Xi is now building or approved for building 180 GW of coal fired power, more than the entirety the US now has in place. Similarly making energy scarce, expensive and hard to acquire doesn't make sense when half of Africa has no access to electricity. Moving our jobs to China is not "free trade."



X@Ramireztoons

michaelpramirez.com

