

ICBM EAR, Prepared by Peter Huessy, :President of Geostrategic Analysis and Senior Fellow, The National Institute for Deterrent Studies

Week of February 24, 2025

Table of Contents: Quotes of the Week; Credon/Miller Nuclear Brief; Strategic & Administration Developments; ICBM News including test launch; Gen Bussiere's remarks; Amb Ford new study on disarmament community; Sources of Russian [BAD] Behavior; Western views of USSR/Russia; Consequences & Implication of taking down Ukraine nukes; AFSA study on needed USAF program spending; Professor on US Strategy: Just Wait; Deputy Defense Secretary Hearing; Is De-escalation a Good US strategy? Ukraine Corner examines strategic nature of the conflict and US options; & Huessy Essay on Six Lessons from Forty Years of Security Strategy

Quotes of the Week

Joseph DeTrani: "China's allied relationship with Russia, which invaded a sovereign and independent Ukraine, has adversely affected China's credibility with the European Union and other countries. Foreign direct investment in China fell \$168 billion in 2024. International companies are leaving China, and Chinese firms are moving money abroad for better returns."

Secretary of the Navy Nominee, John Phelan: Tells the SASC: "Committed to continuing to place the Columbia-class submarine program as the service's top priority. And the Navy's Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N) program is a "critical component" to the nation's defense.

Defense Minister Shoigu: "Russia can't afford to lose the information war. We must win by undermining the political, economic and social system, mass indoctrination of the population for destabilizing society and the state and forcing the state to take decisions in the interests of the opposing party." defencereport.com/ukraine-saved-the-west-what-everyone-should-know-about-ukraine/

Adm. Sam Paparo, Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, "The PLA military buildup is the world's largest expansion of armed forces since World War II.

Peter Huessy on Maven Warrior, "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' assured the troops "It's the economy, stupid."

Stephen Feinberg, Nominated to be Deputy Secretary of Defense: "There is great opportunity to improve our cost structure, our efficiency, our operations, to really save a lot of money that could be plowed into mission.

Tara Murphy Dougherty, CEO of Govini: "Legacy weapons systems and programs that have no business in the new American way of war," are the most appropriate targets...Part of this is modernizing the defense acquisition process so that it's more efficient and can better fund modernization programs."

Heritage Foundation Bob Peters: "Finally--going from a Triad to a Dyad, purely for budget reasons, sends exactly the wrong signal to our adversaries, when Russia is engaging nuclear coercion and China is the fastest growing nuclear power on the planet. 2/" / X

IAEA's Secretary General Grossi: "The pace of uranium enrichment had slowed slightly since the end of last year, Iran was still enriching at an elevated rate of around 7 kg of uranium per month to 60% purity. Iran denies seeking nuclear weapons but no other state has enriched to that level without producing them."

Quotes from the Historical Archives on Russia and Invasions:

1967:George Kennan: Yalta, whatever the future may bring forth, will always stand out as a gigantic step forward toward the ultimate establishment of a peaceful and orderly world. "George Kennan intoned in his memoirs, "The Russians don't want to invade anyone. It's not in their tradition."

1967: And British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart: “The Russians will not invade Czechoslovakia. They have changed too much since Hungary in 1956.” “It’s difficult to understand why the Soviets took this action,”

1979: President James Carter: (Briefing Members of Congress in a White House briefing on Moscow’s invasion of Afghanistan. ”I think they probably underestimated the adverse reaction from around the world.”

2008: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice: [“Re Georgia] “Everybody is now questioning Russia’s worthiness as a partner. They’ve come out of this badly. And I think it could help deter them from trying something like that again.

Event of the Week

Madelyn Creedon and Franklin Miller: An Update on the 2023 Strategic Posture Review Commission, February 28th NIDS Huessy Seminar

The Commission proposed no more CRs and no government shutdowns but not sure that message got to Congress.

However, the country has made real progress toward achieving the Commission’s objectives, especially within NNSA and with respect to the SLCM-N and the Navy. Better understanding of the strategic threat environment still required as well as the urgency of the nuclear enterprise modernization. The 2018 NPR could be updated but an entirely new assessment is not needed.

Once you have completed a life-extension of your current weapons, you must move to build new warheads as a second LEP not doable. NNSA’s pit production a success and now with that capability can move to new warheads.

That the current modernization totally necessary but not sufficient remains true. The US needs greater nuclear capability. Creedon not sure that it requires a larger stockpile or deployed force but Miller says we need incremental increase to deal with greater number of targets to hold at risk,

Without New START after early 2026, the US is entering uncharted waters. A Russian breakout is most worrisome. Creedon thinks an extension of some key limits would be helpful while Miller thinks the treaty helps Russia more than the United States. Miller proposes that we add warheads to both the ICBM and SLBM legs of the Triad and notes the positive test flight of a MMIII with more than one warhead.

The SLCM-N as well as new LRSM cruise missile both can enhance US theater nuclear capability, especially in the Pacific. The proposed enhanced tanker fleet has not been supported; but ship building adds are now recognized as needed; and integrated air and missile defense are moving forward with the administration’s Iron Dome proposal.

On Sentinel; both speakers highly supportive of the missile force as critically needed; the missile proceeding well.

Issue is the C3, launch facilities and silos and possible mismatch between the current silos and the missile itself. However, it would very dangerous to eliminate the missile system and its 400 silos as it would make pre-emptive attack on the US nuclear forces more likely and thus highly destabilizing. Miller explained that while we can launch under attack, there is nothing in US deterrent strategy that requires such a launch as the US has a robust assured second-strike retaliatory deterrent capability.

Strategic Developments

Britain Pledges to Increase Defense Spending

News story: Sir Keir Starmer’s announcement on February 25th that Britain will raise its defence spending from 2.3% of GDP to 2.5% by 2027, with the aim of hitting 3% after 2030 to meet a “generational” security challenge, was meant to grab attention—and not just in Britain. The prime minister was due to meet Donald Trump in the White House 48 hours later. He would now at least have something to show him.

Before WWII, Churchill once described Europe’s peace plan of building slow destroyers as akin to breeding slow racehorses. Five years from now in 2030 the Brits say they hope to spend 3% of their GDP on defense, from 2.3% today. But only will commit to 2.5% by 2027. Wow. Can they be any slower? Japan has doubled its defense spending in the last five years. Britain has a GDP of \$2.9 trillion. 2.3% of that is: \$67 billion. In 2027, if they hit 2.5%, the defense budget will be \$72.5 billion, or an increase of \$5.5 billion.

Seoul Still Considering Nuclear Option

At a National Assembly session in Seoul, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul said that developing nuclear weapons to counter North Korea is not “off the table” for the ROK and that the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula is also a possibility, while stressing that it is “premature” to discuss implementing such “Plan B” options.

Russia and Proliferation of WMD

Friends with Benefits: How Russia’s Opportunistic Partnerships Stymie Nonproliferation Efforts
Center for Strategic and International Studies, Feb. 27 | Astrid Chevreuil, Léonie Allard, and Nicholas Lokker

Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine has been at the root of its accelerating collaboration with North Korea, Iran, and China. While Moscow leans on these three countries to prop up its war effort, these mutually beneficial relationships **are simultaneously supporting the needs of its partners in the realm of weapons of mass destruction** (WMDs) and is going beyond its initial purpose to fuel a global arms race. These mutually beneficial ties include diplomatic support and technological transfers from Russia to North Korea (DPRK) and Iran, as well as more concrete cooperation such as the supply of highly enriched uranium from Russia to China.

Trump Administration Developments

OMB News

The White House's Office of Management and Budget **has named Thomas Williams as its associate director for defense**. Williams previously held a number of roles in the Pentagon, including serving as principal deputy assistant secretary of Defense for strategy, plans and capabilities during President Donald Trump's first term. He also spent two years at the National Security Council, in which he worked first as acting senior director for defense policy and strategy, followed by deputy assistant to the president and senior director for European affairs.

ICBM NEWS OF THE WEEK

ICBM test a work of human as well as technical coordination

https://www.yahoo.com/news/icbm-test-human-well-technical-150600641.html?fr=yhssrp_catchall

By: Algernon D'Amassa , Albuquerque Journal, N.M. for Yahoo News // Mon, February 24, 2025, 10:06 AM EST

Feb. 24—VANDENBERG SPACE FORCE BASE, Calif. — In tight confines 60 feet underground, Air Force missileers rotate 24-hour shifts at ICBM missile launch control centers in pairs, waiting for a message they hope never arrives:

An order from the president of the United States directing a nuclear strike. For a small group of journalists touring the missile range at Vandenberg Space Force Base in California last week, Air Force personnel demonstrated the sequence of actions involved in launching a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile. The process is designed to eliminate the possibility of an accidental launch, involving an extensive checklist of actions confirmed verbally at each step, to verify the authenticity of a message and quickly confirm a launch command by a unanimous vote of multiple personnel.

The mechanism to launch requires two operators to manipulate switches with both hands in unison. The demonstration took place in a nearly exact replica of launch control centers overseeing an arsenal of 400 ground-based nuclear arms in Wyoming, Montana and North Dakota. That day, the range prepared to launch an unarmed Minuteman III on a test flight to Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, 4,200 miles away from California's central coast. The successful mission lifted off at 1 a.m. on Feb. 19.

Among the airmen and officers on base to witness the launch, there was an air of excitement prompted not only by the feat of engineering and admiration at the performance of a technology dating back to the 1970s, but of the human teamwork behind the mission. The test was conducted by the Air Force's 377th Test and Evaluation Group, part of the 377th Air Base Wing headquartered at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. Among the observers of the launch was Kirtland's installation commander, Col. Michael Power.

ICBM test launches are scheduled three times per year, on dates selected five years in advance, which base officials said debunks any notion that the tests are ever a response to recent world events. As part of the process, an active missile from the arsenal is selected at random, disarmed of nuclear material, and transported to Vandenberg. The missile launched on Feb. 19 had been deployed at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming.

At a missile processing facility, housed in a windowless building sitting behind a locked perimeter fence, Staff Sgt. James Harris was at work on a missile to be launched this summer. The Minuteman III is a three-stage rocket measuring 60 feet in length. Over a period of months, missile handling technicians will equip the rocket with telemetry equipment, redundant navigation systems and explosives to destroy the missile in case the mission needs to be aborted mid-flight.

The process of outfitting the missile for a test launch takes months, Harris said. The missile that launched on Feb. 19 arrived at this facility last November. The team preparing the missile will then transfer it to another team, the missile maintenance technicians responsible for transporting the missile from this building to a launch facility on the range on large, specially outfitted trucks. The facility from which the Feb. 19 flight launched sits behind a fence close to a beach in waters patrolled by great white sharks.

An occasional wave crashed against the rocks and onto the concrete near the portal through which the missile would emerge. The first visitors to the scene after launch would be firefighters to extinguish any fires ignited by the rocket. Some visitors, military and civilian, observed the launch from an outdoor observation point at a distance overlooking the launch facility. Others observed it in a control room at the 377th Test and Evaluation Group's headquarters on base, through video monitors.

In that room, a large map showed the flight corridor defining the missile's intended path up to the exosphere and down to the ocean's surface near the atoll. The mission involved extensive coordination with other branches of the armed forces to make sure the path was clear of boat and airplane traffic as well as satellites, space debris and the International Space Station. The human coordination was highlighted by Gen. Thomas Bussiere, the Air Force's Global Strike Commander, hours before the Feb. 19 flight in an interview with the Journal.

He stressed that while the test launches are part of a nuclear deterrent strategy, its primary purpose was testing and evaluation of a weapons system more than 50 years old, to verify its reliability and accuracy. Then he turned focus to the airmen responsible for that technology. "It's all useless without our airmen," Bussiere said. "The most valuable weapon system we have comes with a Social Security number, not a tail number; and that is the underpinning of our deterrence force."

After a two-hour delay to assure its flight path was clear, the Minuteman missile burst from the launch facility at 1 a.m., a ball of light emerging from an amber gust of flame, with observers watching in rapt silence as the glow slowly disappeared with a distant growl. The uniformed airmen then burst into applause and cheers as many embraced one another — several of them shedding tears.

Commander of USAF Global Strike Command, General Tom Bussiere Speaks on Hill February 25, 2025

General Tom Bussiere, head of USAF Global Strike Command spoke Tuesday night on the Hill. The USAF General reminded his audience, hosted by Bechtel and ANWA and key members of Congress, that America's Triad elements are 55, 70, 40, 28, 42, 35 and 42 years old, respectively, and include MMIII, B52, B1, B2, ALCM, D-5 and Ohio.

[Editors note: the Triad elements are on average 45 years old or first deployed in 1980.]

And the General explained that for the first time ever, the US is going to have to recap the entire force simultaneously as well as maintain the old stuff we are also retiring and then operate the new stuff as it is deployed, in short simultaneously operating and deploying two systems, one legacy and one new. The United States has never done such an effort previously.

Nuclear Strategy, Nuclear History, Nuclear Arms Control

Ambassador Chris Ford: New Study on Disarmament Community

Ambassador Chris Ford authors a new report on the disarmament community, concentrating on the two times the US seriously considered adopting a zero nuclear objective and the different approaches adopted considering the nuclear weapons on the one hand and the underlying political conditions that give rise to such weapons. His new NIPP report is here:



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The History of the US Triad

By Peter Huessy

[The Editor is indebted to the Historian of the USAF who provided considerable material for this work.]

In a new essay the disarmament advocate William Hartung claims the US military developed the TRIAD out of inter-service rivalry and not because all the Triad elements were necessary. Actually, it was SAC Commander Curtis LeMay, while holding a monopoly on long range strategic nuclear forces, who pushed hard for the USAF to develop ICBMs, and by 1957-9 had tested and developed Titan, Atlas, Jupiter and Saturn. And it was LeMay who understood that early ICBMs would be launched from vulnerable above ground bases and would eventually need to be placed in underground silos. LeMay was constantly innovating. And while it was the Defense Secretary that approved giving the USAF the role to develop and deploy long range missiles, the Army Air Force would have developed the missiles in any case.

In the mid-1950's, LeMay, the SAC Commander told Congress the USSR could target US gravity bomb/warhead depots of which there are only 14. If destroyed the US would be out of the nuclear business. LeMay's objective: The US needed complimentary elements of our nuclear deterrent to improve survivability.

LeMay and his allies, most notably General Bernard Shriever, said we have to look at missiles including those launched from above ground platforms but then in silos as well and also being launched from subs.

The 1954 H-Bomb success allowed the US to build small warheads of very high yield—without which we would not have either Minuteman or Polaris. Which is why nuclear scientist and Manhattan member Oppenheimer opposed it. And which most of the current disarmament community does as well. An H-Bomb thought Oppenheimer would lead to an arms race. He assumed the Soviets wouldn't secure such technology either if the US didn't develop it. He did not understand the success gave the US an ability to build a much more effective deterrent, especially light-weight missiles able to quickly travel across the globe with small, very powerful warheads able to hold at risk the key assets of the bad guys.

The US didn't know what we could build after the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, but we had to go fast, and unable to know what technology would work, we went both toward sub-launched and silo launched missiles and in five years developed both Polaris and Minuteman. The latter President Kennedy said was his "ace in the hole" that settled the Cuban missile crisis peacefully.

Titan and Atlas were 100+feet long and would be tough to place in a submarine. [The current sub missile the D-5 is 48 feet long.] MM was solid fueled not liquid fueled, on alert 99% of the time and operationally highly cost-

effective. Leaving the US with only liquid fueled missiles or rockets would have led to (1) no submarine based fleet; (2) no ICBM fleet constantly on stable alert; and (3) high maintenance and operational costs and (4) less than required reliability.

We ended up with both the MMIII and Polaris because of the ingenuity of US defense department and the aerospace industry. But when we started, we had no idea we would be successful.

Relying on only one path for development would have been very risky.

Summary: The big ICBM missiles we first deployed were largely launched from above ground, liquid fueled and sitting ducks, sometimes dangerous to operate and failing to launch. The initial funding was in 1946-7, but even then, the program was significantly cut back due to budget restraints and technology uncertainties.

The ICBM test launches and deployments were initiated in 1957 and continued largely through 1962, when in October Minuteman was deployed—solid fueled, constantly on alert, easy to maintain, and safe in hardened silos. The USAF built more cost effective missiles and ones that could deploy small warheads but with very high yield. LeMay even as Vice Chief of Staff of the USAF encouraged the US to develop a Navy element of the Triad, hardly indicative of the USAF rivalry being the reason for the TRIAD development. Did each service want to get into the nuclear deterrent business? Of course they did. And thankfully they succeeded in their objectives.

The Sources of Russian Behavior

Part I: From the Historical Archives: Russia's Role As a State Sponsor of Terrorism:

In the 1970s, Ion Pacepa, head of Romanian foreign intelligence, visited General Alexander Sakharovsky, head of the KGB's First Chief Directorate (foreign operations). "Terrorism has to become our main weapon," he reportedly told Pacepa. Pointing to a world map bristling with red pins, each representing a hijacked airplane, Sakharovsky continued: "Airplane hijacking is my own invention."

In 1987, GRU (the military counterpart of the KGB) defector Vladimir Rezun (aka, Viktor Suvorov), laid out a scenario: two successive plane crashes into the White House, the second one timed to obliterate the first responders and command structure who arrived the scene after the first crash.

In 1997, having spent six months in Russia, al-Zawahiri decamped to Afghanistan, becoming Osama bin Laden's lieutenant and mastermind of 9/11. There promptly followed the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Africa, the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, the 2005 London bombings, and more. thehill.com/opinion/international/3593498-scary-links-russia-al-zawahiri-and-ukraines-destruction/ The attackers in every instance received training and assistance from Hezbollah according to former intelligence officer Ms. Clare Lopez, a top expert. .

Part II: Moscow, Washington & the World: Views on Ukraine & Implications for the Future & Understanding of Current Russian Strategy

President Obama, 2014

"We do very little trade with Ukraine and **geopolitically what happens in Ukraine doesn't pose a threat to us.**"

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov 1996 (then as Russia's UN representative), speaking of Ukraine.

"Historically, **our two nations lived together as good brothers in one Slavic house. . . . [O]ur peoples are predestined to live as brothers, in peace and consent.** We enjoyed almost 400 years of living in one state. Russians and Ukrainians . . . have never regarded each other as something different. Russia has repeatedly stated that it stands for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine."

Aleksandr Dugin, Foundations of Geopolitics, co-authored with General Nikolai Klokov of the General Staff Academy. 1997

“The continued existence of a sovereign Ukraine cannot be allowed. Ukraine’s sovereignty is a negative factor for Russian geopolitics. Ukraine as an independent state . . . is a huge danger for all of Eurasia, and without the resolution of the Ukrainian problem further discussion about the continental geopolitics [of Russia] is irrational. The existence of Ukraine within its current borders and with its status today of a ‘sovereign state’ is equivalent to a stunning blow against the geopolitical security of Russia”

Mykola Liubynski, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister at Brest-Litovsk Peace Conf, 1918

Ukrainian delegation’s warning to Georges Clemenceau, President of the Paris Peace Conference, February 18, 1919. (The delegation was refused participation.)

“[T]he Bolshevik Government of Russia has sent its troops against Ukraine and broken the Ukrainian front near the frontier of the Ukrainian Republic. Now they are advancing into the heart of our country and the Bolshevik Government has not only no intention of fulfilling the conditions laid down by the Peace Conference at Paris to establish a truce, to retire its forces and to cease all military action; on the contrary, **it has just developed its military offensive to destroy the independence of the Ukrainian Republic.**”

“One knows that the traditional history of Russia was always, and through the present, an imperial policy, and now she wishes to pass over the body of independent Ukraine to put one hand on the Dardanelles and Suez and the other on the Persian Gulf.”

Lancelot Lawton, House of Commons (London), 1935

“That so little has been heard of it [Ukraine] is not surprising; for suppression of Ukrainian nationality has been persistently accompanied by obliteration of the very word Ukraine and concealment of the very existence of Ukrainians.

“The deliberate policy of Russia was to avoid and discourage mention of Ukraine abroad. From the Middle Ages down to the eighteenth-century Ukraine figured largely in European literature. But after the first half of the nineteenth century the West was made to forget that there was or had been such a nation.

“So successfully was this erasure effected that over the greater part of the world, Ukraine only survived in poetry and legend, and invariably it was thought that if ever it existed, it had long been buried in the cemetery of dead and forgotten nations.”

Marc Raeff, historian 1992

“One is struck by the fact that at the moment of its subordination to Muscovite Russia, it was Ukraine that enjoyed and exercised a clear cultural predominance; much later, in the nineteenth century . . . Ukraine had the status of a peasant culture adjudged inferior and harshly repressed.”

Johann Georg Kohl, a German anthropologist 1830’s

“Before their subjugation, all Little Russians were freemen, and serfdom, they maintain, had never been known among them. It was the Russians, they say, that reduced one-half of the people to slavery. . . . Should the colossal empire of Russia one day fall to pieces there is little doubt but that the Little Russians will form a separate state. They have their own language, their own historical recollections, seldom mingle or intermarry with the Muscovite rulers”

Rafael Lemkin (coined the term “genocide” and author of the U.N. Genocide Convention) 1953:

“What I want to speak about is perhaps the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification – the destruction of the Ukrainian nation. As long as the Ukraine retains its national unity, as long as its people continue to think of themselves as Ukrainians and to seek independence, **so long the Ukraine poses a serious threat to the very heart of Sovietism.**”

Sergio Gradenigo, Italy’s vice-counsel in Kharkiv, in his dispatch to the Royal Italian Embassy in Moscow, titled The Famine and the Ukrainian Question 1933:

“The famine [“Holodomor”] was instituted with the intention of “teaching the [Ukrainian] peasants a lesson.” Quoting a top officer of the GPU, it was for the purpose of “changing the ethnographic materials”

because Ukrainians could not be changed over into “worthy communists.” The government’s “goal was to liquidate the Ukrainian problem in the course of several months by sacrificing 10 or 15 million souls. . . . the current disaster will accomplish the colonization of Ukraine, mostly Russian. And that (colonization) will change Ukraine’s ethnographic character. Perhaps, in the very near future, it will not be possible to speak about Ukraine, or about the Ukrainian nation, and particularly about a Ukrainian question, because Ukraine will become, in fact, a Russian colony.”

Lancelot Lawton, House of Commons (London), 1935

“It would be hypocrisy to deny that an independent Ukraine is as essential to this country as to the tranquility of the world. Very few attempts have been made to give justice to the Ukrainians and the continued neglect . . . may ultimately involve all Europe.”_ “On the solution of the Ukrainian problem will depend on the fate of Europe. . . . So great an event [as the independence of Ukraine] would most likely be accompanied by or cause remarkable changes elsewhere. It would influence, if not determine, the fate of Bolshevism and the Soviet Union.”

Jacik Kuron, leader in Poland’s Solidarity Movement, 1980’s

“Ukraine is the most important issue in Europe today.”

PUTIN 2015:

“I can tell you outright and unequivocally that there are no Russian troops in Ukraine.”

Part III: THE WEST & ITS VIEW OF USSR/RUSSIA

America’s diplomatic recognition of the USSR (during the “Holodomor”), November 16, 1933, via President Roosevelt’s exchange of letters with Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, predicated on Moscow’s commitment

“to refrain from . . . any act overt or covert liable in any way whatsoever to injure the tranquility, prosperity, order, or security of the whole or any part of the United States, in particular any agitation or propaganda.”

Aleksandr Dugin, Foundations of Geopolitics, co-authored with General Nikolai Klokov of the General Staff Academy, 1997

“It is particularly important to introduce geopolitical disorder into America’s internal activity, and to promote all kinds of separatist and ethnic, social and racial conflicts, actively supporting all opposition movements – extremist, racist, and sectarian groups, thereby disrupting internal political processes in the U.S. It would also make sense simultaneously to support isolationist tendencies in American politics. Russia should also work toward isolating Britain from Europe, introduce discord both within the EU and between the EU and US, and destabilize Turkey. Iran is to be a key player in a Russian-Islamic alliance against America.

NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoana, November 2021

“For the time being, Russia is turning down our invitations, but we hope that they realize the merit of having a solid, transparent, and honest dialogue with NATO.”

General Mark Milley, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Sept. 2021, after meeting with General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff:

“We need to put in place policies and procedures to make sure that we increase certainty, to reduce uncertainty, increase trust to reduce distrust, increase stability to reduce instability in order to avoid miscalculation, and reduce the possibility of great power war.”

General Valery Gerasimov, 2013:

“It is now possible to defeat the enemy [United States] through a combination of political, economic, information, technological and ecological campaigns.”

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu:

Cognitive warfare “undermines the enemy’s [America’s] political, economic and social system... destabilizing the society and the [state](#)” [and causes it] “*make decisions in the interests of the opposing party.*”

Rear Admiral Vladimir Pirumov 2010

Information warfare "allows us to reconstruct the enemy's psychic condition."

Information-Psychological War Operations: A Short Encyclopedia and Reference Guide (Moscow 2011)

Cognitive warfare "acts like an invisible radiation" upon its targets: "The population doesn't even feel it is being acted upon. So, the state doesn't switch on its self-defense mechanisms. It is less about methods of persuasion and more about "influencing social relations"

Putin (accusing the West) 2012:

"The notion of "soft power" is being used increasingly often. This implies a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levers of influence. Regrettably, these methods are being used all too frequently to develop and provoke extremist, separatist and nationalistic attitudes, to manipulate the public and to conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries.

Putin 2018:

"The American system is demonstrating its inefficiency and cannibalizing itself."

2021:

"Although they [Americans] think that we are the same as they are, we are different people. We have a different genetic and cultural-moral code."

OGPU officer Kartashov:

"I can kill people so that the shot won't be heard . . . The secret is this: I make them open their mouth and I shoot down their throat. I'd only be splashed by warm blood, like eau-de-cologne, and it doesn't make a sound."

Stalin:

"We shall annihilate every one of these enemies . . . We shall annihilate him and his relatives, his family. Anyone who in deed or in thought, yes in thought, attacks the unity of the socialist state will be mercilessly crushed by us. We shall exterminate all enemies to the very last man, and also their families and relatives!"

US Ambassador to Moscow, Joseph Davies, 1936

Stalin "gives the impression of a strong mind which is composed and wise. His brown eyes are exceedingly kind and gentle. A child would like to sit on his lap and a dog would sidle up to him." I find in him "a greatness of spirit that is absorbed in the cause that he is serving, and one who has the courage to dare and to do what he considers to be for the benefit of the common man."

Putin 2017

"Excessively demonizing Stalin is a means to attack Soviet Union and Russia."

Michael McFaul (after serving as ambassador to Russia under President Obama) 2017

"I had this theory back then [1983] – that if we just got to know these people better, that would help to reduce tension between our two countries, I have basically thought that ever since. . . . I thought we will be able to correct this misinformation, and now that I have left, I would say it was impossible.

Marquis de Custine, Empire of the Czar, 1839

"Everything is deception in Russia. Russian despotism not only pays little respect to ideas and sentiments, but it also denies the facts, wages war against the evidence, and triumphs! "To converse is to conspire, to think is to revolt; thought is not just a crime, it is a misfortune, also."

Friedrich Engels about Russian diplomats 1890: (Denied publication in The Bolshevik by Stalin in letter to the Politburo, July 19, 1934)

"It is this secret society, recruited originally from foreign adventurers, that has elevated the Russian empire to its present might. With iron perseverance, with eyes fixed on the goal, not shrinking from any breach of faith, any treachery, any assassination, any servility, lavishly dispersing bribes, never grown overconfident from victory, never discouraged by defeat . . . this gang, as talented as it is without conscience, rather than

all the Russian armies put together, that have contributed to the extension of Russian's borders . . . [It is this gang] that has made Russia great, powerful and feared, and has opened up for it the way to world domination.

Karl Marx 1853

"The ignorance, the laziness, the pusillanimity, the perpetual fickleness and the credulousness of Western Governments enabled Russia to achieve successively every one of her aims."

Third Guest Essay of the Week. At the end of the day, and with the same "but of course" assurance that is reserved only for the elements of the Periodic Table, we blithely accept as a given Russia's "legitimate interests," "fear of encirclement," its "backyard," a "common history" with Ukraine, etc. *ad nauseum*. Without breaking stride, we buy into a grotesque reversal of victim and perpetrator. It's Moscow's hammer drill to penetrate our psychosphere and empathetically mouth Russia's "fear of NATO." We become an accomplice to history's greatest predation, and unceremoniously flush our security, principles and morality as a nation into a cesspool. Such a complete, unadorned evisceration of reality becomes both the springboard and the bounds of our own thought processes, culminating, as it must, with merely so much pabulum. Victor Rud, Ukrainian American Bar Association
foreignpolicyblogs.com/2019/03/06/repurposing-the-human-brain-lessons-in-russian-and-our-own-reality-reversal/

Victor Rud: Chair, Committee on Foreign Affairs
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We forced Ukraine to surrender – to Russia --the world's then third largest nuclear arsenal, larger than of China, Britain and France, combined. For good measure, we then destroyed a good part of its conventional arsenal, including Manpads. If Ukraine didn't control the launch codes and wasn't able to maintain the nukes, why our apoplexy? These two impediments didn't apply to tactical nukes, yet were the first that we demanded Ukraine send to Russia. <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2019/04/23/op-ed-unreality-in-thinking-about-the-unthinkable/>

Related Essay from 2019: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/05/19/ukraines-independence-is-still-essential-to-u-s-security-and-stability/#4cbf22d9f738>

New Report on Defense Spending and the USAF

AFA Calls for \$45 billion more for the USAF per year, or roughly 200% of the total increase in defense spending approved by the House and Senate and proposed by Secretary of Defense Hegseth for the entire Department of Defense and some 600% of what the USAF would receive each year under a reasonable distribution of the \$25 billion increase being proposed by the Trump administration.

The "first priority" for President Donald Trump defense team to deliver "peace through strength" should be a major cash infusion to revitalize the Air Force and ensure the Space Force can deliver for all the other military branches, according to a new report from AFA's Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.

The cost to deliver on that promise: \$45 billion, according to retired Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula and retired Col. Mark A. Gunzinger, who co-authored the study. "We're providing a recovery plan," said Deptula, dean of the Mitchell Institute. "There are a lot of people out there saying, 'Oh my gosh, we can't do that. It's too expensive.' Well, the only thing more expensive than a first-rate Air Force is a second-rate Air Force."

- \$3-4 billion per year to fully fund the Next-Generation Air Dominance manned fighter
- \$3.7 billion per year to buy an extra 32 F-35A fighters, bringing the yearly buy to 74 as quickly as possible
- \$3 billion per year to buy an extra 24 F-15EX fighters, increasing the fleet size to 225 aircraft
- \$5.2 billion per year to buy 10 extra B-21 bombers, plus \$4-5 billion to set up a second B-21 production line and supply chain
- \$5-8 billion over the next five years to fund the new Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile, though that funding should be put in a separate "National Nuclear Deterrent Fund"

- \$4.95 billion per year to ensure combat fighter pilots can fly 200 hours per year
- \$11.15 billion per year to fully fund the Weapons System Sustainment account to support those flying hours
- \$1 billion, ramping up to \$2 billion, to increase munitions production
- \$1 billion for air base air and missile defense
- \$5.12 billion per year from 2028-2032 to fund at least 26 new E-7 Wedgetail aircraft for Airborne Early Warning and Control
- \$300 million per year in research and development for a new Next-Generation Air Refueling System tanker.

The Space Force needs sustained annual growth, increasing at a proposed rate of 15-18 percent initially, and then tapering to 10-13 percent in ensuing years. By 2030, the service's budget should be \$60 billion, or about double its current size, the report says, recommending:

- Raising from \$1.5 billion to \$5 billion a year USSF investment in advanced space control and counter-space systems
- Ramping up from \$750 million to \$3 billion a year, spending on space domain awareness and battle management
- Tripling from \$1 billion to \$3 billion a year investment in space access and launch
- Adding \$1 billion per year to add military manpower
- Initiating a \$250 million-per-year investment into developing capabilities to support operations in the cislunar region.

Stephen Feinberg, Deputy Secretary of Defense Nominee

WASHINGTON -- President Donald Trump's nominee for the Pentagon's No. 2 job indicated his willingness to chop legacy programs and called for the department to align itself more closely with the private sector during his confirmation hearing today.

If confirmed as deputy defense secretary, billionaire investor Stephen Feinberg said he would bring his private equity chops to work at the Pentagon, driving greater efficiency and financial accountability, improving the defense acquisition process by increasing competition, and working to ensure the US military has the cutting edge technology it needs.

He listed shipbuilding, aircraft development, nuclear modernization, cyber defense, hypersonics, counterspace capabilities and counter-drone platforms as key technology "shortages" needed to beat China, which he called the biggest and most challenging threat the United States.

"China is the first nation we've ever competed with that has both a great economy and a great military. China's entire private sector is fully committed in supporting that military development and as such, they effectively have unlimited funding," he said during his opening comments in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Not meaning to be too negative, but we really need to plug these shortages, focus on our priorities, get rid of legacy programs, be very disciplined, and while at the same time focusing on the economics."

"If we do that, given America's great innovative capability and entrepreneurship, we will defeat China," he said.

Feinberg is the co-founder and CEO of Cerberus Capital Management, a private equity firm whose holdings have included defense companies such as hypersonic testing firm Stratolaunch and which has a 70 percent stake in tactical wheeled vehicle maker Navistar Defense, according to Cerberus's website and news reports. Feinberg has not previously held a position in government, but during Trump's last administration he headed the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, which gives private citizens access to classified information so they can assess how the Intelligence Community goes about its normally cloistered business.

Trump tapped Feinberg for the deputy defense secretary job in late December, calling him "an extremely successful businessman." Typically, the deputy is a largely managerial position, overseeing matters related to the Pentagon's

budget, workforce and its overall bureaucracy — thus leaving the defense secretary free to focus on overarching strategy, policy and political matters.

“There is great opportunity to improve our cost structure, our efficiency, our operations, to really save a lot of money that could be plowed into mission. We do not have great financial accountability, financial metrics or systems — [there’s an] awful lot of low hanging fruit there,” Feinberg said. “This is in my wheelhouse, hopefully. I spent a career helping organizations improve and after doing it so many years, I certainly made sincere mistakes, but ... I think I can add some value there.”

The Pentagon could improve its supply chain by “working more closely with our private sector,” specifically by better understanding what drives their leadership boards or how they respond to shareholder pressure, Feinberg said. At a different point in the hearing, he said that the current acquisition system favors legacy defense contractors by incorporating “gold-plated” technical requirements and rigid regulations that holds commercial companies and nontraditional vendors back.

“[There’s] a lot we can do by getting into the program detail, line by line. My view is the deputy has to go program by program, line by line, not hand it off to somebody,” he said.

Throughout the hearing, Democrats interrogated Feinberg about a recently announced 8 percent spending cut — which Feinberg said would be reinvested inside the Pentagon to fund top spending priorities — as well as plans to reduce Pentagon’s workforce by at least 5 to 8 percent.

“Over the weekend, [Defense] Secretary [Pete Hegseth] announced that 5,400 probationary employees would be dismissed, and it apparently was not done with any analysis, it was just preemptive,” said Sen. Jack Reed, the committee’s top Democrat. “You run companies. Have you ever walked in and fired thousands of people without any analysis for the costs or benefits?”

To this question, and other similar ones from other lawmakers, Feinberg stated that layoffs were necessary when restructuring an organization to become more effective.

“Every person is significant, and these cuts are always hard. But I believe that most of the cuts that we will see will be from people that want to retire, people who would like to resign early,” he said. “There’s obviously over 900,000 civilians in the in DoD so while you can never, you know, not take one person seriously in these kinds of reorganizations, there’s always turnover. And without some turnover, you can’t become an efficient organization.”

Feinberg offered few specifics about any plans for individual weapons programs.

After Sen. Deb Fischer, R-Neb., pressed the nominee on whether the nuclear deterrent was the Defense Department’s “highest priority mission,” Feinberg offered that “it might be,” but added that he wanted to receive classified briefings before answering that more directly. He later said that **“there’s nothing that could be more important than our nuclear modernization,”** but noted that “we also need hypersonics.”

And when about whether the US Air Force needs a sixth-generation fighter by Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., Feinberg said it was a “controversial issue” and that he would offer his best advice to Hegseth — or even Trump, should the president get involved in the potential acquisition.

Last week, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., laid out concerns about Feinberg’s business dealings and financial interests in a 23-page letter sent on Feb. 17, which stated that his Cerberus holdings could pose a conflict of interest if not properly divested. (Warren did not ask Feinberg about this issue during the nomination hearing, instead pressing him on Cerberus’s ownership of several hospitals in her home state.)

“I have serious concerns about your qualifications and ability to take on the responsibilities of the role. You have serious conflicts of interest, with holdings in seven companies that do nearly \$16 billion in business with the Defense Department,” she wrote in the letter.

“As the Deputy Secretary of Defense, you will have to look out for what is best for the Department and the nation, not private backers, shareholders, or companies in your portfolio,” Warren said later in the letter.

In ethics documents submitted on Feb. 18, Feinberg said he would “divest all of my interests in Cerberus including, but not limited to, my equity interest, carried interest, incentive fees/allocations, and capital commitments” prior to assuming the role of the deputy secretary of defense.

From the archives:

GUEST ESSAY #1: FROM THE STRATEGIC STUDIES QUARTERLY FALL 2019 3 STRATEGIC STUDIES QUARTERLY – POLICY FORUM

Why De-escalation Is Bad Policy By Michael Guillot

The United States has often shown restraint and sought de-escalation when provoked by adversarial regimes.

For example, in 1968 North Korean naval forces attacked and captured the USS Pueblo in international waters.

In 2001 a People’s Liberation Army Air Force aircraft harassed and ultimately collided with a US Navy P-3 aircraft operating in international airspace, forcing it to land on Hainan Island.

More recently, on 7 June 2019, the United States did not escalate when a Russian destroyer approached within 100 feet of a US Navy ship and the two almost collided.

The latest event involved Iran downing a \$130 million drone reportedly in international airspace. Given these incidents and many others, one has to wonder if de-escalation has come to hurt the nation and whether our de-escalatory tendencies have made even greater provocations inevitable.

Today, de-escalation seems to be the goal of US policy and the default position to such an extent that many policy makers, lawmakers, and pundits are self-deterred by the thought of military escalation.

This kind of thinking is counterproductive for three reasons. It creates doubt about US credibility, undercuts assurance of allies, and precipitates adversarial actions against our forces and interests.

The United States should instead embrace escalation as a policy of prevention, particularly for low-level provocations, and at the same time say what it means and mean what it says. When leaders profess their desire to perpetually de-escalate provocations and crises, the message received by our adversaries is that the United States lacks credibility and fears confrontation.

During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the United States appeared too concerned about or fearful of escalation rather than showing conviction to solve a conflict on terms aligned with democratic interests and values. Recently, in response to Iran’s provocation, a senior US lawmaker stated that we must “do everything in our power to de-escalate.”

The same sentiment was evident in former secretary of state John Kerry’s response to Russian actions in Syria. This fear of escalation is also seen in interactions between US Navy ships in the South China Sea and the so-called China maritime fleet, which signals weakness in “respect based” cultures.

Another example is the US reaction to the situation in Ukraine. While this scenario continues to unfold, our initial response was to limit assistance to nonlethal aid for fear of escalation. In each of these examples, and many others, adversaries have learned to prey on US de-escalatory tendencies and rely on our timid reactions.

The result is a slow, insidious decline in perceived US credibility and resolve when it is confronted with clear violations of international law and threats of direct aggression. Some scholars argue that states should avoid confrontations that attempt to preserve their credibility while others argue in favor of it, particularly during noncrises.

A policy of escalation helps preserve credibility to avoid fighting wars. But US credibility is not the only casualty of de-escalation as policy; it also affects US alliances. A policy of de-escalation sends a negative message to our allies about US assurances—even more so than some current political messages. Such assurances are critical to the American alliance system, and research suggests that reliable nations make better alliance partners.

We have seen examples of negative assurances in the past, particularly whether the United States would live up to its nuclear commitments during the Cold War. Would we trade New York for Berlin? Without assurances from the United States, the system itself may well fracture, allowing for more of the types of aggression ongoing in the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe. To be sure, there remains a risk of entanglement in a crisis created by allies, but being willing to escalate seems more likely to help prevent its occurrence.

Without a willingness to escalate, alliances become meaningless commitments and the world becomes a more dangerous place.... Particularly in the Baltic States, de-escalation messages create doubt among our allies as to whether the United States considers escalation worth the risk, or cost. The same could be said for Chinese actions to forcefully reclaim Taiwan or control the sea-lanes of the Indo-Pacific.

Without question, the greatest problem with a policy of de-escalation is the impression it sends to our adversaries. Over the past few years, US policy makers have instinctively looked to de-escalate crises at all costs— from China to Syria to Iran. The result has been Russian aggression in Syria, Georgia, and Ukraine; Chinese island fortifications that threaten freedom of navigation; Iranian attacks in the Middle East; and North Korean threats in Southeast Asia.

Thus, the very word escalation seems to have created fear among some US decision makers and scholars. At the same time, Moscow has learned the value of escalation to a strategy of victory by incorporating it into its doctrine. Putin openly embraced escalation in 2014 during the invasion of Ukraine by warning against any outside intervention. This approach contrasts markedly with that of the United States. Likewise, China seems to have also learned the lesson of escalation.

Over the past 10 years, China has increased tensions with most of its neighbors over South Pacific territory. It has violated international law by claiming sovereignty over and establishing military installations on reefs in international waters. These and other escalation disputes have gone relatively unanswered by the United States. Our de-escalation policy has precipitated many of these aggressive, unlawful actions by our adversaries. The more we rely on de-escalation as the default policy, the more our credibility is diminished, our assurances are weakened, and our adversaries are emboldened.

So, what is a reasonable alternative? Thomas Schelling's ideas on deterrence are in a sense tangential to the argument, but they offer a useful insight. Schelling describes why deterrence works by using the analogy of driving down the center of a roadway, approaching your adversary from the opposite direction, and throwing the steering wheel out the window. In his words, this scenario creates a threat that leaves something to chance. De-escalation leaves nothing to chance. It signals to the adversary that the goal in any provocation or crisis is nonconfrontation.

This is the wrong signal. Our goal should be prevention and resolution on favorable terms— something a willingness to escalate may offer. The United States could enhance its credibility by eschewing de-escalation. It should not be the default position at the outset of adversarial challenges as seems to be the case today. Our declaratory policy should embrace escalation to the extent necessary to prevent crises, protect American interests, and support international law.

“Peace through strength” is a well-known mantra for maintaining US military power. But, to paraphrase former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, what good is a superb military if you don’t use it? The United States must be willing to use its wonderful military along with other instruments of power to escalate crises if necessary. Doing so would require clearly stating our intentions to respond to military aggression with greater military aggression, to harassment with lethal force, and to military challenges with military defeat—no matter the domain.

Aggression and harassment become the “red lines” and our escalatory response leaves something to chance. Declaring our intent to stand firm, with resolve and assurance, would unquestionably help prevent the lesser forms of insidious aggression and most certainly help deter the more explicit, dangerous provocations that could lead to war. Just as de-escalation should not be the default position, neither should automatic escalation. The danger may well be an ally unjustly drawing the United States into a conflict or a scenario where US escalation would unwittingly draw in a treaty ally.

Such seems to be the case between the United States and South Korea with respect to North Korean aggression. Escalation would certainly be appropriate to support a treaty ally suffering from explicit aggression. It would also be appropriate as an immediate self-defense measure. Furthermore, it seems that escalation can be most useful as a long-term preventive action if used mostly against lower-level provocations. Such instances might include aggressive actions against US forces or US flagged assets operating within the confines of established international law.

Of course, any attempt to escalate a crisis or challenge scenario comes with risks of spiraling conflict and second-order effects including greater violence and carnage. However, in many cases, the risks stem from a lack of any response and increase thereafter. The greater risk is in allowing our adversaries to believe their unlawful provocations will succeed. Thus, escalation is sometimes the best prevention. The theory here is to use a policy of escalation to prevent lower-level provocations from expanding to larger issues with greater stakes.

Adversaries should believe that their provocations will not be tolerated and their aggression will have serious implications. To be fair, de-escalation might be appropriate in certain crises where the United States is challenged as a third party in a situation where it had no interest at stake. This scenario could arise in a dispute between two non-US allies or nonformal treaty states.

Another case might be if escalation would adversely affect an immediate US response to save lives, prevent suffering, or mitigate great property damage. Then, the United States should not allow its position to drive out its interest. Some believe that a de-escalation policy is the safest form of response to crises, and critics will surely decry the argument for escalation as the more dangerous option.

However, the evidence from past decades indicates that such beliefs appear to be simply acquiescence to aggression rather than reliable prevention. Thus, a goal of de-escalation in one crisis begets the next. The key to long-term strategic stability is having the wisdom to decide when to escalate and when not to. Our adversaries should know and appreciate that the United States intends to say what it means and escalate as necessary to mean what it says.

We should not make idle threats; we must make promises. Those who ruffle the eagle’s feathers should expect to be squeezed by the talons and ripped by the beak.

Guest Essay #2 of the Week: Professor Mueller: The Case against Containment: The Strategy Didn’t Win the Cold War—and It Won’t Defeat China

Containment was not particularly successful during the Cold War, and it is also unlikely to work well against China today.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 • COMMENTARY

Editor’s Note: This article appeared on [Foreign Affairs](#) on September 21, 2023. It is a profound example of bad analysis and bad policy based on a profoundly wrong understanding of history. Although some smart analysts declare that containment won the Cold War, the successful US policy actually rejected containment. The Soviet Union was brought down with a strategy of **economic warfare, military challenges, and rollback, not containment.**

The best detailed history of this is Warren Norquist's 2003 essay "[How the United States Won the Cold War.](http://bugler-john.50megs.com/NorquistPagesfromINTELSpring03_FIXED.pdf)" http://bugler-john.50megs.com/NorquistPagesfromINTELSpring03_FIXED.pdf

Few people even know that while Truman did seek to roll back the North Korean attack against the ROK, George Kennan the supposed author of "containment" opposed what he considered an unnecessary "police action." And later opposed most of what President Reagan implemented against the USSR particularly US nuclear modernization.

Mueller proposes that we simply be patient and let China collapse much as the Soviet Union would have done-he claims-- even without any "push back." As the above quotes illustrate, the US did not usually push back re Soviet actions or now with respect to China and Russia, except post Ukraine 2022. The US misunderstanding of Soviet intentions and strategies were serious; most notably the idea that the Soviets are not in the invasion business as Kennan claimed in his memoirs in 1967. Here is the Mueller essay:

In the great debate over how the United States should respond to an increasingly assertive China, many commentators have advocated a ready-made solution: containment. Under this Cold War policy, Washington pushed back against Soviet (and Chinese) political and military advances wherever they appeared, seeking to prevent international communism from spreading. According to this accepted wisdom, containment won the Cold War, allowing the United States to check the power of the Soviet Union without engaging in a direct war with it.

Many argue that with a track record like this, the United States ought to dust off the containment playbook and apply it to today's rival superpower. The historian Hal Brands, for example, has [contended](#) that this "elegant" and "winning" strategy would prove effective against Beijing, writing, "To succeed against a rising China, the U.S. must relearn the lessons of containment." In *Foreign Affairs*, the political scientist Michael Mandelbaum likewise [deemed](#) Cold War containment a "success" and argued that it should be applied "once again, now to Russia, China, and Iran" although "modified and updated."

Such calls are certainly overconfident and probably misguided. Containment was not particularly successful during the [Cold War](#), and it is also unlikely to work well against China today. In reality, more than anything else, it was the Soviet Union's own errors and weaknesses that caused its downfall. The main problem with U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War was that it tried to do too much, not too little. And like the Soviet Union yesterday, China today is its own worst enemy. As with last time, the key now is not so much to search for ways to balance against the rising hegemon. It is to let this troubled and perhaps declining country make its own mistakes.

An Overrated Strategy

The quintessential intellectual presentation of containment remains "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947 under the byline "X," a pseudonym for George Kennan, then the State Department's director of policy planning. Although concerned about Soviet military strength, he argued that what made that strength threatening was that it was paired with a fundamentally expansionist ideology. Yet he concluded that there was a "strong" possibility that Soviet power "bears within it the seeds of its own decay, and that the sprouting of these seeds is well advanced."

These seeds included the exhaustion and disillusionment of the Soviet population, "spotty" economic development, difficulty maintaining control over the peoples of East Europe, and looming uncertainties in the impending transfer of power that would follow the death of the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin (something Kennan predicted might "shake Soviet power to its foundations"). Accordingly, Kennan argued that the "main element" of U.S. policy "must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." In the long run, he hoped, the Soviets would grow frustrated in their drive for ideological expansion and become less hostile and more accommodating.

Containment was not particularly successful during the Cold War, and it is also unlikely to work well against China today.

How long would this take? It was impossible to predict, of course, but in his article, Kennan opined that the process might take 10 to 15 years, strongly suggesting that things would change with the transfer of power in the Kremlin: Stalin was nearing 70 at the time. As it turned out, however, the Soviet regime managed to survive Stalin's death

(which took place in 1953) quite well, and for decades, it was able to maintain its control at home and over people in the middle of Europe.

But a bigger problem was to assume that opposing Soviet power everywhere would be feasible and effective. In the decades after the X article, containment, beyond inspiring such failures as the Bay of Pigs invasion and the [Vietnam War](#), seems to have prevented few countries from turning communist. It may have made a difference here and there—for example, when the CIA supported coups bringing down leftist governments in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954. But it is difficult to determine whether such perceived successes actually prevented a left-leaning country from toppling into the communist camp. Indeed, covert regime change has a lousy track record. As the political scientist Lindsey O'Rourke has found, most efforts have failed, very few worked out as planned, and most of the successes proved to be short-lived.

The clearest case of containment's success was when the United States and its allies turned back the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in 1950, in a war that then grew costly and ended in stalemate. At the time, the communists' invasion was almost universally held to be part of a grand Soviet scheme to dominate the world, rather than the opportunistic foray it really was. With the West's seeming success on the Korean Peninsula, containment policy became much more military, a development Kennan viewed with dismay. Central to this was military deterrence, leading the United States to make massive weapons expenditures focused on Europe. But as Kennan had already concluded, the Soviets did not need to be deterred: they sought to aid and inspire revolutionary movements around the world, but they never had an interest in waging anything like a repeat of [World War II](#). After scouring the Soviet archives, the historian Vojtech Mastny observed that all of Moscow's plans were defensive and that the huge military buildup in the West "was irrelevant to deterring a major war the enemy did not want to launch in the first place."

It is worth noting that containment played little role in communism's three biggest setbacks during the Cold War; each was substantially self-inflicted. In 1948, Stalin tried and failed to bring Yugoslavia, led by a loyal but independent Communist Party, under tighter control, resulting in a fracturing of the communist camp. In 1965, the Indonesian military cracked down violently on Chinese-linked communists who were apparently attempting to seize control, thereby preventing Indonesia from falling into the Soviet camp; the development undercut a chief justification for the entry of the [United States](#) into the war in Vietnam, given that Indonesia had been viewed as a prime domino. And in the 1960s, the communist movement was split by a self-induced and self-destructive theological dispute between China and the Soviet Union. In none of these setbacks was there an American hand.

Soviet Self-Destruction

As the Cold War neared its end, Soviet expansionism mellowed. But that change of heart owed less to containment's success than to its failure. If the Soviet system was as rotten at the core as Kennan said, logic might have dictated not containing it but letting it expand so that it might more readily self-destruct. To a degree, that actually happened. In 1975, Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos abruptly toppled into the communist camp. Then, partly out of fear of repeating the Vietnam experience, the United States went into a sort of containment funk as the [Soviet Union](#), in a remarkable fit of absentmindedness, opportunistically gathered a set of willing Third World countries into its embrace: Angola joined in 1976, Mozambique and Ethiopia in 1977, South Yemen and Afghanistan in 1978, and Grenada and Nicaragua in 1979.

At first, the Soviets viewed these acquisitions with glee, as they called it, had finally shifted in their direction. But almost all these states soon became economic and political basket cases. Fraught with dissension, financial mismanagement, and civil warfare, they turned expectantly to Moscow for sustenance. Most disastrous for the Soviets was the experience in Afghanistan. In December 1979, they sent a large contingent of troops there to establish order and to quash an anticommunist rebellion but soon found themselves bogged down in a protracted war.

With this array of disheveled dependencies, the Soviets were soon to realize that they would have been better off contained. The breakup of the Soviet Union in late 1991 can hardly be credited to containment. By that time, Washington had long deemed the Cold War to be over and had officially deserted the policy. Moscow, too, had called it quits.

Forty-one years after Kennan authored his article, the Soviets, plagued by economic, social, and military disasters, abandoned their threatening ideology as he had hoped. In late 1988, the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, called for “de-ideologizing relations among states.” The next year, when the Soviets still controlled most of Eastern Europe, President George H. W. Bush reciprocated. In a series of speeches about going “beyond containment,” he announced that the goal now was to integrate “the Soviet Union into the community of nations,” to welcome it “back into the world order.” In 1989 and 1990, Eastern European states left the Warsaw Pact and worked their way toward democracy and capitalism. The United States welcomed this change, but it also made a considerable effort to keep the Soviet Union itself from collapsing. Most notably, in 1991, Bush gave a speech in Ukraine in which he essentially urged the various Soviet republics to work it out and to remain within the country. If there was a Cold War raging at that time, the United States and the Soviet Union were on the same side.

Shortly after Bush’s speech, however, communist hard-liners in Moscow, intent on keeping the Soviet Union from falling apart, staged a coup attempt to remove Gorbachev. The attempt failed, but it shifted sentiment toward dissolution, particularly in Ukraine, and it resulted in exactly the breakup the conspirators were seeking to prevent. Without that development, it is possible that with some economic reform, including cuts in defense spending, the Soviet Union might have survived more or less intact.

As the analyst Strobe Talbott put it, the Soviet system went “into meltdown because of inadequacies and defects at its core, not because of anything the outside world has done or not done or threatened to do.” The historian Odd Arne Westad agreed: it came about primarily “because of weaknesses and contradictions in the Soviet system itself.”

Patience Is a Virtue

In determining whether to apply something like containment to China, it’s worth asking first if the country is anywhere near as menacing as the Soviet Union. China, now in second place in total GDP (although 78th in per capita GDP), does seem to be seeking a spot at center stage. As part of this quest, it is building up its military and has sought to gain influence by lending money through its Belt and Road Initiative to an array of other countries and by engaging in “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy, using economic and military muscle to badger and bully. Meanwhile, the Chinese leader [Xi Jinping](#) has been adept at working his way into unchallenged one-man rule in China and at embedding himself at the center of a compliant echo chamber.

But China doesn’t present the same kind of ideological challenge as the Soviet Union. It has sought to aid other authoritarian kleptocracies to better maintain their hold on power, but that is hardly the same thing as spreading an ideology. Moreover, China does not seem to have much in the way of territorial ambitions beyond reincorporating Taiwan at some point and settling disputes over parts of its border and over the seas around it.

Most troubling for China, as it was for the Soviet Union, is its growing set of domestic difficulties. Most of them derive from Xi’s determination to prioritize control by the antiquated and kleptocratic Chinese Communist Party over economic development. The list of resulting problems is nearly endless: endemic corruption, environmental degradation, slowing growth, capricious shifts in government policies (including the abruptly canceled “zero COVID” policy), inefficient enterprises, fraudulent statistical reporting, a rapidly aging population, enormous overproduction, huge youth unemployment, increasing debt, a housing bubble, restive minorities, protectionist policies, the alienation of Western investors, and a clampdown on civil liberties. There also seems to be something of a decline in confidence in, and in the credibility of, the Communist Party’s dictates, a change that could have dire long-term consequences for the regime.

Moreover, China’s efforts in recent years to be treated as a great power have been remarkably unproductive. Rather than generating admiration or obedience from countries that once wished it well, resentment and wariness have soared not only in the West but also in Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam, pushing some of these important neighbors further into the arms of the United States. And the much-touted Belt and Road Initiative is wallowing in unpaid debt, with loan outlays cut from \$75 billion in 2016 to \$4 billion in 2019.

Given China’s many weaknesses, a policy of containment is scarcely called for. Indeed, it would likely fuel, not allay, the common motivating belief among Chinese leaders that Washington is out to stop their country’s economic growth—something that many fear might cause them to lash out. Most of China’s expansionist moves have nothing

to do with force, however. As the former U.S. diplomat Chas Freeman has put it, “There is no military answer to a grand strategy built on a nonviolent expansion of commerce and navigation.”

The alternative is to wait (perhaps for a rather long time) for China to mellow; although currently in eclipse, there is a substantial liberal element in China. This policy of patience could be pursued while warily seeking to profit from China’s economic size and problems to the degree possible. The United States should also continue to maintain the decades-long charade in which Taiwan is effectively independent as long as it doesn’t say so. It might also humor China by welcoming it into the global leadership club as if that had some tangible meaning. If the United States can declare itself to be the one indispensable nation (suggesting that other nations are, well, dispensable), why should China be denied the opportunity to wallow in such self-important and essentially meaningless proclamations?

The lesson of the Cold War is not about the value of persistent containment in breaking your adversary’s will and sapping its power. It is about the wisdom of standing back, keeping your cool, and letting the contradictions in your opponent’s system become apparent. In a 2018 [article](#) in *Foreign Affairs*, Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner (both now members of the Biden administration) opened by observing that “the United States has always had an outsize sense of its ability to determine China’s course.” Instead of repeating that misguided approach, policymakers might keep in mind an apt maxim from Napoleon Bonaparte: “Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake

UKRAINE CORNER

Ukraine Corner—Given the strong connection between US policy on Ukraine and nuclear deterrence, the ICBM EAR will continue to provide relevant commentary. The Biden administration worried about escalation in Ukraine, particularly to the nuclear level. This led to major US restraint particularly with respect to what weapons NATO was willing to provide Ukraine as well as the strategy adopted to defend Ukraine. Having the Biden administration assume the US could not deter Russia from escalation, it is now a very challenging job to put deterrence back on the table, witness the current administration’s warning on February 28th that continuing the war under current conditions does indeed risk WWII, thus the administration’s push for a cease fire. This week we have four Ukraine related essays. Renaud Foucart discusses nuclear war gaming. Michael Evans discusses the French proposal to substitute its nuclear deterrent for that of the United States, while in two new essays, Victor Davis Hanson explains why we are where we are re Ukraine.

[Guest Essay #3: Ukraine war: game theory reveals the complexities \(and fragility\) of a nuclear deterrent](https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-game-theory-reveals-the-complexities-and-fragility-of-a-nuclear-deterrent-249995)
<https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-game-theory-reveals-the-complexities-and-fragility-of-a-nuclear-deterrent-249995>

By: [Renaud Foucart](#) for The Conversation // Published: February 25, 2025 11:30am EST

Since the cold war, **deterrence** has been a fundamental principle underpinning peace between global superpowers.

The idea is that if two sides have nuclear weapons, the consequences of actually using them mean the button never gets pressed. But the strategy goes beyond the countries which own the weapons. In practice, for instance, most of Europe relies on the US for a nuclear “umbrella” of deterrence. And any country with nuclear weapons can offer guarantees of peace to others. This is what happened in 1994 when Russia, the UK and the US signed the [Budapest memorandum](#).

In which Ukraine renounced its nuclear weapons from the Soviet era in exchange for [a promise to](#) “respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine”. This was [widely seen as a good idea](#) for Ukraine and the world, reducing the risk of a nuclear accident. But that memorandum has not served Ukraine well. As North Korea, India, Pakistan or Israel know, owning nuclear weapons – even against international agreements – ensures your protection. A piece of paper does not.

And now, across the world, the ability to offer the equivalent of a Budapest memorandum to other countries has vanished. A key part of the theory behind a successful nuclear deterrent has fallen away. This is described in game theory – the mathematical study of strategic interactions – as the idea of a [“credible commitment”](#). To deter a

military invasion, the country offering protection must be ready to do something that hurts its own interests if it happens.

In the case of Ukraine, this has so far involved allies sending costly military equipment, financial support and enduring the small risk of further escalation of the conflict. Being a trustworthy guarantor is [a matter of international reputation](#): a country that delivers is considered credible. But no one will trust a guarantor that breaks its promises. And while credible retaliation is important, so too is avoiding escalation. For it is also in everyone's interest to reduce the probability of a catastrophic outcome.

Over the years, the small number of countries with [internationally accepted nuclear arsenals](#) (the US, UK, France, Russia and China) have developed nuclear doctrines. These are sophisticated and [often deliberately opaque](#) rules for escalation and de-escalation. The Nobel prize-winning economist, Thomas Schelling, argues that the uncertainty around these rules is what makes them [so effective](#). It strengthens a system in which protection can be offered to other countries in exchange for them not developing their own nuclear capabilities.

War games

Game theory research has also shed light on the [complexity of these rules](#) of engagement (or non-engagement), such as the expectation (and necessity) of credible retaliation against an attack.

Imagine, for example, that China launches a nuclear bomb that completely destroys Manchester. A rational British prime minister may prefer to end hostilities and accept the destruction of a major city rather than retaliate and risk the total destruction of human life.

But for the deterrent to actually work, they must retaliate – or expect to see Birmingham and London disappear. Another difficulty comes in finding the appropriate response to varying levels of provocation. When Russian-affiliated soldiers were [found guilty](#) by Dutch courts of downing a Malaysian Airlines civilian flight with 298 people onboard, [including 196 Dutch nationals](#), there was no talk of proportional retaliation. No one seriously contemplated shooting down a Russian plane or bombing a small Russian city.

Nor was there any retaliation to [Russian interventions in European elections](#), or to the sabotage of [infrastructure in Baltic states](#), or to [murders](#) and [attempted murders](#) on European soil. And after the [full-scale invasion of Ukraine](#) in February 2022, the reaction of the west was consistent with principles designed to avoid escalation. Sanctions were imposed on Russia; military aid was sent to Ukraine. But to [abandon Ukraine](#) now, forcing it to cede territory after three years of fighting, death, and destruction, would be a significant shift. It would represent a clear and deliberate abandonment of the international guarantees Ukraine thought it had.

Arsenals and agreements

Game theory [also suggests](#) that the most likely consequence of abandoning those commitments is that no country will repeat Ukraine's mistake of giving up its nuclear capabilities. And no country will want to place their trust in [potentially unreliable](#) allies. Europe for instance, will [aim to develop](#) its own nuclear umbrella, potentially combining French and British capabilities. It will also hasten to integrate the next likely targets of Moscow's military ambitions.

This will include the parts of Ukraine not annexed by Russia, but also Georgia, [already invaded by Russia in 2008](#), and Moldova, [partly occupied by Russia](#). The second consequence is that the west will no longer have a good reason to convince countries to abandon their nuclear ambitions. That means no credible deal for North Korea, no convincing offer for Iran, and even fewer prospects to end the nuclear programmes of [Pakistan, India or Israel](#).

Looking at the ruins of Mariupol or Gaza City, and comparing them to Pyongyang, Tel Aviv or Tehran, many countries will conclude that a nuclear weapon is a better way to ensure security than any piece of paper. So, if the west does abandon Ukraine, game theory suggests that the world should expect a proliferation of nuclear powers. Each will need to learn, as Russia and the US have, to live on the threshold of disastrous confrontation. But [research shows](#) that establishing a situation of reduced risk takes time. And that could be a time filled with increased potential for events reminiscent of the [Cuban missile crisis](#) – and a growing belief that [nuclear war is inevitable](#).

Will it Work? France Offers Europe Its Nukes To Deter Russia

Michael Evans, former Defense Editor of the Times of London, in the American Spectator today.

However, the key to everything is deterrence credibility. Would Putin hesitate to order troops into Europe if he knew the European nuclear cover consisted of only a few hundred French and British warheads without the might of American #repower behind them? The accepted theology of nuclear deterrence is that if only a small proportion of nukes can get through [Russian] missile defenses, it would still pose a grave and, therefore, unacceptable risk. And yet, if Europe were to lose the US nuclear umbrella, might Putin take the gamble?

Trump's Righteous Criticism of Zelenskyy

[Victor Davis Hanson](#) | February 28, 2025

[President Donald Trump](#) is incurring a lot of criticism lately on the Ukrainian war. He's trying to negotiate an end to the war. Remember, there's probably somewhere around 1.5 million dead, wounded, missing, and captured on both sides, together. That is the largest casualty rate figure total in Europe since the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942 and 1943.

In his "Art of the Deal" style he came in and he said some things the last week that got people very angry. I'll just give you two examples. He said that [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) was a dictator and that he "should have stopped the war and never started it." That got people anguished because we know that Russian President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. So, why did Donald Trump say that? Of course, he doesn't believe that Zelenskyy started the war because he has campaigned himself on the following narrative:

Under George Bush, in 2008, Russia invaded Ossetia and Georgia. In 2014, under the Obama administration, they invaded the Donbas and Crimea. On Feb. 24, 2022, under Joe Biden, they tried to take Kyiv. However, of the last four administrations, there was one in which they did not leave their borders to invade another nation—my administration. Why? Because unlike the prior three presidents, I was able to establish deterrence.

How did I do that? I killed Qassem Soleimani. I killed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. I destroyed ISIS. I got rid of the Wagner Group. I did a lot of things that put the fear of God into [Vladimir Putin](#). So, Trump knows who started this war. So, why did he say it? And he's retracted it now. He said, "I didn't mean it that way."

What he's trying to say is that this war has been going on for three years. And the Europeans said they were going to come in and this exaltation when the Russian attack on Kyiv was thwarted. This guy in a T-shirt, ex-comedian, was a rock star. Everybody was going to pour weapons in and save Ukraine. We did more than any European power or NATO in aggregate. And guess what? It didn't work.

Three years later, 1.5 million casualties later, a quarter of the Ukrainian population gone, 600,000 Russians gone. A new alliance between Russia and China. Trump wants to stop it. And he says to Zelenskyy, "Don't tell me what I can do and what I can't do. Don't say you have to be in the negotiations. You guys have had three years. I'm coming in. We have funded you. So, here's what's going to happen. You are a dictator."

Now, that is an excessive term, but on the other hand, Zelenskyy has canceled opposition parties, suppressed opposition press, suspended elements of habeas corpus, and suspended elections. Now, some people on the right and left said, "Well, even [Winston] Churchill didn't have election for 10 years." Churchill came in and the first thing he did, in 1940, had a coalition government of enemies, rivals, and friends in the war cabinet. Zelenskyy hasn't done that. So, in some ways, yes, he is an authoritarian.

The other thing he's been criticized is he says, "We want natural resources and minerals." They said, "He's a colonialist. He's an imperialist." No, Donald Trump is saying that the United States is very tired of subsidizing and paying for far-distant problems when we're running a \$37 trillion national debt. This war was on the border of Europe. They said they were going to invest 2% of their gross domestic product as NATO powers in defense. They didn't do it. We have out funded all of them. And yet, we are very distant with an open border ourselves. If we want to be there, we want some compensation. You have valuable minerals, we'll come in and have a concession with you—a business deal.

But more importantly, there's a subtext to this. He's also saying, "We don't want you in NATO. Europe really doesn't want you in NATO. [Russia](#) doesn't want you in NATO. And you're scared to be in NATO yourself. So, this is what's going to happen. If you invite American business into Ukraine, to help rebuild it and to profit, thereby, with natural resources, you're going to have Americans there. And Putin will be less eager to attack you if he understands there's a thriving American concession there."

Where are we then? What is the solution? Donald Trump is saying what we all know is going to happen. No. 1, they're not going to be in NATO. But guess what? They're going to be better armed and better fighters than any of the 32 countries in NATO. Vladimir Putin knows that. No. 2, nobody ever said they were going to get back the Donbas, nor Crimea. That's not going to happen. No president said, "We're going to give you the military wherewithal to reclaim it." No. 3, if we have a negotiated settlement, the hinge, the critical point will be, can Donald Trump put Putin back where he was before he invaded this time? Can he go back to Feb. 23, 2022?

And Trump will tell him, "You're not going to be worried about Ukraine. It's not going to be in NATO. You can go tell all of your friends that you institutionalized the acquisition of Crimea and the Donbas. But we would like you to reenter the family of nations. We would like you to be able to sell and buy things if we drop sanctions. But for us to do that, it would be wise for you to go back and we'll make a Korea-like DMZ."

And that is the negotiation that's transpiring right now. If Donald Trump ends this bloodbath, all of this rhetoric and all of this hysteria will cease. And he will be a hero, both in Europe and the United States and in [Ukraine](#) and [Russia](#). And, final note. He was criticized by, "How dare you talk to a dictator?" Vladimir Putin is a dictator. And he's a violent dictator. And he's a corrupt dictator. And he's an aggressive dictator. But compared to Josef Stalin, who killed 20 million of his own people, he's an amateur. We had a formal alliance with the Soviet Union because they were the enemy of our enemy, Nazi Germany. Richard Nixon talked to Mao Zedong to try to play him off against the Soviets. Mao Zedong was the greatest mass murderer in history. He killed 70 million people. There's a long history of real politique of talking to odious dictators if it's in the U.S. interest and it lessens the chance of war.

Ukraine Commentary

Senior Fellow Victor Davis Hanson writes about the US diplomatic signals that he argues convinced Russia to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, how the war has gone these past three years, and the reasons for President Donald Trump's reversal of position and his overtures toward Russia. It's a complicated mess, Hanson writes, and he thinks Trump is guided by an overall desire to end the bloodshed, which he says is in every party's interest. "In sum, Trump can end the war to no one's satisfaction or let Europe and Zelensky negotiate and see the war continue endlessly to no one's satisfaction," Hanson writes. "Given geographical realities, the U.S. can live without a settlement, but eventually, all the other parties cannot."

US Future Security Strategy: 6 Lessons From Last 50 Years

The four decades since Ronald Reagan was elected President have seen five frameworks for pursuing US security and foreign policy objectives

PETER HUESSY - WARRIOR SENIOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS ANALYST · FEBRUARY 25, 2025

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?

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. This will require getting the future right but also correctly explaining the past and the present.

For example, 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.”

Our future security policy will require choices, but it has always been so. Keeping our eye on the ball is job #1 and that requires a correct appraisal of the world. George Kennan, in his memoir, said the agreement at Yalta was very successful. He wrote: “Yalta, whatever the future may bring forth, will always stand out as a gigantic step forward toward the ultimate establishment of a peaceful and orderly world.” He continued: “The Russians don’t want to invade anyone. It’s not in their tradition.”

British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart echoed these views: “The Russians will not invade Czechoslovakia. They have changed too much since Hungary in 1956.” And President James Carter: “It’s difficult to understand why the Soviets took this action.” Speaking to members of Congress in a White House briefing on Moscow’s invasion of Afghanistan. “I think they probably underestimated the adverse reaction from around the world.” And about Georgia, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice concluded: “Everybody is now questioning Russia’s worthiness as a partner. They’ve come out of this badly. And I think it could help deter them from trying something like that again

Iran Developments

Iran Has Enough Highly Enriched Uranium for Six Nuclear Weapons **[Iran Has Enough Highly Enriched Uranium for Six Nuclear Weapons - WSJ](#)**

Iran boosted stockpile of near weapons-grade fuel by 50% since late October, according to a United Nations report, amid U.S. silence on talks

By: [Laurence Norman](#) for the WSJ // Updated Feb. 26, 2025 4:42 pm ET

VIENNA—Iran has sharply increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium in recent weeks, according to a confidential United Nations report, as Tehran amasses a critical raw material for atomic weapons.

The increase in Iran’s holdings of uranium enriched to 60%, or nearly weapons grade, gives it enough to produce six nuclear weapons. Iran is now producing enough fissile material in a month for one nuclear weapon, according to the report, which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. Tehran’s strides come as the country has indicated an openness to negotiating with the U.S. on limits to its nuclear ambitions. The Trump administration has said it would return to a policy of “maximum pressure” on Iran but that it also wants to negotiate a nuclear deal.

Still, there hasn’t been significant direct contact between the two sides since President Trump took office. And Iran has said it won’t negotiate directly with Washington while under maximum pressure sanctions. In an interview Wednesday, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, warned that as Iran’s nuclear activities advance, “the problem becomes bigger, not smaller,” and urged Tehran and Washington to engage. “It is problematic that we are not moving” on talks, he said. “We believe it is necessary to move to action.”

The U.N. report said Tehran had amassed around 275 kilograms of 60% highly enriched uranium as of Feb. 8, up from 182 kilograms in late October. That’s a 50% jump in 15 weeks. The fuel could be converted to 90% weapons-grade material in days. Iran, which started producing 60% enriched uranium in 2021, has expanded its production since early December, after facing a censure resolution from Europe and the U.S. at the IAEA.

“The significantly increased production and accumulation of high enriched uranium by Iran, the only nonnuclear weapon state to produce such nuclear material, is of serious concern,” the IAEA said in its report. The head of Iran’s

atomic agency, Mohammad Eslami, said on Wednesday that Iran was cooperating with IAEA inspectors and that the agency should avoid putting pressure on Iran.

Tehran has made large advances on its nuclear work since Trump was last in office—when [he pulled the U.S. out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal](#), which placed strict but temporary restrictions on Iran’s nuclear work in exchange for relief from international sanctions. In 2019, Iran began revving up its nuclear program and officials from the U.S. and elsewhere now believe Tehran could develop some kind of nuclear weapon within a few months. Iran says its nuclear work is for peaceful civilian purposes.

U.S. intelligence reports in December said Iran hadn’t made a decision to build a nuclear weapon but there was a growing risk it might do so. U.S. officials have said that Tehran is working on research that could help it build an atomic bomb. Trump said this month Iran is “too close” to having nuclear weapons. In January, French President Emmanuel Macron said Tehran’s program was “close to the point of no return.”

The Trump administration has tightened economic pressure on Iran, vowing to slash Tehran’s oil sales to China through a stricter implementation of existing sanctions. The Treasury Department this week announced new sanctions on ships and people dealing in Iranian oil. Iran is at its most vulnerable position in years after its largest regional militia, Hezbollah, was badly damaged in a war with Israel, which in October also [took out Tehran’s most advanced air-defense systems](#).

Israel has warned it would take military action if Iran moves toward a bomb. Foreign Minister Gideon Saar told Politico this week that time was running out to pursue a diplomatic path. European countries have started a process that by October could lead them to reimpose all international sanctions on Iran that were lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal. Tehran has said if that happens it will quit the international treaty banning countries from pursuing nuclear weapons. The only country to have done that is North Korea, which [subsequently built nuclear weapons](#).

Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, earlier this month publicly warned against negotiations with the U.S., but Iranian officials have told their European counterparts they are keen for talks. “This confluence of pressure creates a window of opportunity to push for a nuclear and regional deal on Trump’s terms,” said Michael Singh, former senior director for the Middle East at the U.S. National Security Council. “But that window won’t last forever—Iran is closer than ever to nuclear weapons.”

Dan Shapiro, a senior Biden administration Pentagon official who was part of the Iran nuclear negotiation team, said Trump’s efforts at rapprochement with Russia could theoretically lead to a situation where Washington could get help from Moscow on containing Iran’s nuclear work although there have been no signs of that so far. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was in Tehran on Tuesday to meet with his Iranian counterpart. He met with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff, Trump’s Middle East envoy, in Saudi Arabia last week.

Shapiro said Washington needed to coordinate closely with Europe on the reimposition of sanctions on Iran, saying this could be endangered as “a yawning gulf has opened up between them and Washington on Ukraine.” Write to Laurence Norman at laurence.norman@wsj.com



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