

WASHINGTON ICBM CONTRACTORS (ICons) GROUP



6 December 2020

Reminder
7 December 1941

PEARL HARBOR REMEMBRANCE DAY

DC ICons:

Location: Virtual

Date: 10 Dec

Time: 10:30 EDT

ADMINISTRATION/PROGRAM SPECIFICS

EXCLUSIVE: Details Revealed in Trump's Lame-Duck Pentagon Budget Draft

Some of the numbers are “fabricated,” says one official. But they shed light on GOP lines of attack awaiting Biden.

By KATIE BO WILLIAMS and MARCUS WEISGERBER DECEMBER 1, 2020

Despite losing reelection, President Trump is plowing ahead with plans to release this month a detailed Pentagon budget for the next fiscal year, plumping up proposed 2022 funding for its key defense priorities in what budget analysts say is an obvious and unorthodox effort to box in President-elect Joe Biden.

Most of the additional funds that administration officials at the White House's Office of Management and Budget, or OMB, are demanding that the Pentagon add to its budget request, are “fabricated,” if not outright impossible given America's modest GDP growth and growing national debt, said one defense official involved in crafting the budget plans who was not authorized to speak publicly. Biden will submit his own budget once he is in office, and the Trump administration's will be mooted, officially.

The lame-duck administration's unusually detailed request instead “is designed to create a fake appearance of generosity to fund Defense priorities” that will “set [the Trump administration] up to be able to heckle the Biden administration from the sidelines for all of the inevitable reductions that will be made when we redo the budget in January [or] February, and in subsequent years,” that person said.

Building a Pentagon budget is a year-long process. The Pentagon submits multiple drafts to the White House, and OMB replies with the president's desired edits, known as “passbacks,” which are incorporated into the final budget request eventually submitted to Congress. In presidential transitions dating back to at least 1992, the outgoing administration would turn over the prior years' work to the incoming team, without publicly releasing it, in what is a bit of a gentleman's agreement to let the new president tailor it to his own priorities. In early 2020, the Pentagon moved up its internal planning deadlines in an effort to improve the yearly process. After Trump's apparent Election Day loss, the White House [defiantly directed the Pentagon and other federal agencies](#) to proceed with planning next year's budget request anyway.

A copy of the most recent passback, obtained by *Defense One*, sheds light on specific avenues of attack Trump officials and supporters may launch when Biden submits his budget request early next year. The total budget — \$722 billion — is in line the Trump administration's five-year defense spending projections [released](#) earlier this year. But many of the most controversial defense spending and policy choices of the Trump administration are specifically addressed.

Among other things, the document shows a White House demand to “zero out” all funding for the counter-ISIS fight by 2022. It calls on the Defense Department to allocate funding to “determine new sites for EUCOM, SOCEUR, AFRICOM, SOCAF, and any other NATO moves” — referencing combatant and component commands for troops in Europe and Africa, currently located in Germany, where Trump [controversially ordered](#) a withdrawal of U.S. troops earlier this year, and where the Army last month ordered its commands to be combined and reorganized. It calls for a

military pay raise, a favored, if exaggerated, political [boast](#) of the president's. And it would grow the Space Force, the newest service branch of the military created under Trump.

"It's a ludicrous exercise, but its purpose is political, not planning," said Gordon Adams, who ran defense budgeting during the Clinton administration and worked on President Barack Obama's transition team. "What it allows the Republicans on the Hill to do is to claim that whatever Biden comes up with is a reduction from what the Pentagon should have. So they're really setting up a political argument."

A key architect of this budget maneuvering is National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, defense and administration officials say. Many of the OMB directives offer deeply specific prescriptions for Navy funding, a pet interest of O'Brien, who authored a series of wonkish columns on Navy policy gathered in his 2016 book *While America Slept*.

Longtime watchers of the budget process say the administration is taking an unprecedented step — at least in recent years — by creating such a detailed budget plan on its way out of the door. None of the last four presidents — George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama — submitted a budget in the waning days of their presidency.

"All [administrations] come in and get a finished budget handed to them, which they then make changes to. It's just normally one doesn't see the 'draft' one," said a congressional aide, who called the move a "stunt."

A spokesperson for the OMB described the passback as "a normal part of the process around this time" and said that the agency "[continues] our work to meet the urgent needs for our national security."

"I am extremely concerned that the integrity of this important process has been undermined by someone who is willing to sacrifice the trust between federal agencies for a misguided personal or political agenda," the spokesperson said in a statement. "As in any year, OMB has a responsibility to work with the Department of Defense to analyze and prepare a finished budget to meet the timelines established in law."

What Does OMB Want?

Even prior to Election Day, the Pentagon was [pushing to finish the 2022 budget earlier than normal](#).

The draft OMB passback, dated Nov. 27 with a deadline for responses of Dec. 1, is hardly the final word on what Trump's parting-shot budget may include. Pentagon officials are now preparing responses to specific OMB requests. And much of it is likely dead on arrival come Jan. 20 when Biden is inaugurated.

The proposed budget "seeks to achieve Administration objectives within the topline guidance by protecting strategic priorities and identifying savings and offsets to reallocate to higher priorities," the document states. "[The proposal] recommends increases for key Administration priorities, including shipbuilding, missile defense, the defense industrial base, and other investments focused on Great Power competition and, in particular, countering China."

Trump's proposed \$722 billion for the Pentagon is 2 percent higher than the military requested in current fiscal 2021, according to other internal documents reviewed by *Defense One*, but in line with [what defense officials projected](#) earlier this year when they sent their fiscal 2021 spending request to Congress. That total does not include additional national security money within the Energy Department and other federal agency budgets. In the passback, the White House orders the Pentagon to spend billions of dollars more on missile defense and to "accelerate development and testing" of interceptors that could counter fast-flying hypersonic weapons.

It also called for the Pentagon to spend at least \$150 million to demonstrate the "[Mobile Intermediate Range Missile](#)." The OMB document includes several spending increases to Navy projects. O'Brien has [pushed for a larger Navy](#), largely to bolster American forces in the Pacific to deter China, as had Mark Esper during his tenure as defense secretary. The Trump administration directs the Navy to overhaul five guided missile cruisers and two fast-attack submarines that it had planned to retire over the next five years. In all, the overhauls would cost the Navy \$2.6 billion over that same period. The White House also directed the Navy to "assess all Large Surface Combatants for maximum life extension opportunities." It also wants the Navy to spend \$5 million "for a feasibility study to place naval activities on American Samoa."

The Pentagon should increase spending on artificial intelligence, biotechnology and quantum information science research and development, OMB said in the passback.

It also instructs the Pentagon to conduct "site surveys to determine new sites" for troops based in Europe and Africa. "In order to assess the underutilized domestic infrastructure which could support the accelerated return of 6,400 personnel to U.S. bases with minimal military construction investments, please provide [the Office of Management and Budget] a copy of the force structure plans and infrastructure capabilities...no later than December 7, 2020," the document states.

OMB also orders a cap on F-35 stealth fighter buys at 85 jets per year. If the program needs more money due to cost increases, the Pentagon must cut the number of jets it intends to buy, the budgeting office said. The White House also asks for an analysis of how the F-35 and other warplanes would fare in a war with China between 2030 and 2040.

"[R]eductions to the planned fleet must be based on a strategic risk and capability analysis of the need for the F-35 in the most stressing contingency and that such an analysis is vital to obtain support for any proposed reductions to the fleet," the document states.

OMB also ordered \$2.3 billion in cuts to the Army and \$2.5 billion in cuts to Air Force operations and maintenance. The proposal also includes a 2.7 percent military pay raise in fiscal 2022 and proposes boosting the size of the Space Force, while cutting 5,000 active-duty Army soldiers. "The Army should adjust its end strength levels in accordance with reductions in presence that the Administration has made in [the Middle East] and [Europe]," the document states.

The passback also gives previously unreported insight into the Pentagon's priorities, some of which may outlast Trump. It reveals that, under Trump, the Pentagon wants to reduce its role in counter-drug support to other federal agencies and local law enforcement.

“OMB denies the proposed elimination of funding for the National Guard [counter-drug] Schools and reserve personnel intelligence analysis support to Federal law enforcement agencies,” the document reads. “If DOD would like to continue to pursue the elimination or transfer of CD activities in future budget cycles, OMB encourages DOD to fully coordinate proposals with impacted Federal agencies and submit such proposals to OMB in advance of agencies’ annual budget submissions to OMB.”

Y-12 achieves technology milestone in purifying uranium

<https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/y-12-achieves-technology-milestone-purifying-uranium> Home »

From the National Nuclear Security Administration // NOVEMBER 30, 2020

Y-12 achieves technology milestone in purifying uranium -- NNSA’s Y-12 National Security Complex is one step closer to implementing improved technology to purify uranium at the Oak Ridge, Tennessee, site. Y-12’s materials scientists and engineers recently produced the first production-quality uranium metal “button” using the newly installed electrorefining demonstration system.

The uranium metal button, first produced this September, provides a level of confidence that the electrorefining technology can be successfully deployed in the site’s production work environment. The buttons are used as feedstock for national security related work, including supplying uranium for the U.S. Navy and for research reactors that use enriched uranium fuel to produce radioisotopes for medical use and other purposes.

“Y-12 has successfully recovered and recycled uranium for more than 70 years,” said Geoff Beausoleil, Manager of the NNSA Production Office, which oversees operations at Y-12 and NNSA’s Pantex Plant in Texas. “Many hurdles were cleared during the scale up of this technology, which will lead toward the deployment of the electrorefining process at Y-12.” Uranium is a critical material in Y-12’s Production operations. The “electrorefiner,” a piece of technology for recovering purified uranium metal from byproducts of the site’s manufacturing, uses an electrochemical processes in molten salts to purify the uranium metal.

The end product is purified uranium crystals that are then melted in a furnace to produce uranium buttons of high purity for a variety of purposes and follow-on processing. The project has also procured identical electrorefining equipment for its development and production work. This equipment will allow chemical operators to train on and validate the technology using depleted uranium, a less hazardous surrogate material, to prove out the capability of the full-scale production deployment. Having overcome the impacts of COVID-19 to reach this production milestone, operators will now develop procedures and perform readiness activities before starting production processing. -- Y-12 is operated by Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC, for NNSA.

White House objects to proposed cuts in experimental weapons

InsideDefense.com, 1 Dec 20 Tony Bertuca

The outgoing Trump administration opposes several measures in the Senate version of the fiscal year 2021 defense spending bill, including proposed cuts to experimental weapons programs, according to a new letter from the White House Office of Management and Budget.

In the letter, which was sent Nov. 30 to the Senate Appropriations Committee, the administration registers a broad objection to a proposed \$2.1

billion in cuts to the Defense Department's research, development, test and evaluation account. It notes several provisions to which it "strongly objects," including one that would rescind \$150 million in FY-20 funds from the Pentagon's secretive Strategic Capabilities Office.

"This funding is critical to continue the development, demonstration, and transition of novel capabilities to counter threats and respond to the needs of combatant commands," the letter states.

The administration also strongly objects to a proposed \$389 million cut to the Conventional Prompt Strike program and a \$45 million reduction to the hypersonic prototyping program.

The cuts, according to OMB, would delay the development and fielding of sea-, land-, and air-based offensive hypersonic weapons "by a minimum of one year."

"In addition to delaying the deployment of Navy, Army, and Air Force hypersonic capabilities, these reductions would destabilize the design process for the hypersonic weapon system, negatively impact efforts to strengthen the hypersonic industrial base, and increase costs due to contract termination of existing efforts," the letter states. "This would delay vital warfighting capability and increase United States warfighting asymmetry for long-range hypersonic weapons with near-peer adversaries as a result of their rapid hypersonic development."

Additionally, the administration strongly objects to a proposed \$20 million reduction from the Rapid Prototyping program as it would "significantly delay" SCIFiRE, the Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment the United States recently launched with Australia.

"SCIFiRE provides the maturation vehicle for Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept with a partner nation's co-investment," according to OMB. "This reduction would create at least a two-year delay to this hypersonics program."

The administration also opposes the bill's proposal to cut \$50 million in procurement and \$136 million in research, development, test and evaluation from the Standard Missile-6 program.

The proposed reductions, according to OMB, would cause a "breach" in the current multiyear procurement contract with Raytheon Technologies, "which would lead to a renegotiation and probable loss of savings."

The bill would also add "significant and unacceptable schedule risk by delaying the delivery of the SM-6 Block IB capability by one year and, in the process, would also delay the Navy's ability to start addressing the DOD capability gap for long-range, hypersonic offensive strike weapons needed for near-peer adversaries," according to OMB.

Additionally, the administration strongly objects to \$123 million in proposed cuts to the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense programs.

"The reductions in the bill would delay critical ground and flight tests required to implement the administration's priority of achieving Layered Homeland Defense," the letter states.

Further, the administration strongly objects to a proposed \$50 million cut in precision strike missiles.

"The reduction would eliminate the program's ability to procure early operational capability missiles in FY 2021 and delay fielding to at least FY 2024, which does not meet the Army's requirement date to accelerate acquisition of enhanced long-range precision fires needed to counter emerging threats from near-peer adversaries by FY 2023," the letter states.

OMB also says it opposes cuts to the Navy's Large Unmanned Surface Vehicle program. The Navy is seeking \$438 million for the procurement of two LUSV prototypes in FY-21, but Senate appropriators do not support the request.

The administration strongly objects to a proposed \$24 million cut to National Background Investigation Services, saying it would cause a "12-month delay in the development and delivery of the new NBIS system and require continued sustainment of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) legacy information technology systems, at a cost of \$176 million annually to taxpayers."

Also, "a delay in unclassified Continuous Evaluation and Continuous Vetting support to customer agencies would jeopardize the Federal Government's ability to deliver a timely Trusted Workforce product," the letter states. "Further, this delay would also hamper [the Office of Personnel Management's] ability to focus on modernization of the agency's other legacy systems."

Meanwhile, the federal government is scheduled to shut down Dec. 11 if Congress cannot pass an FY-21 appropriations package. Staffers said House and Senate lawmakers are deep in negotiations on an omnibus FY-21 spending bill.

CSAF visits Hill AFB Airmen online

75th Air Base Wing Public Affairs, 1 Dec 20 Richard Essary

HILL AIR FORCE BASE, Utah -- Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr. told Hill Air Force Base Airmen in a virtual meeting that he wants them to voice their opinions and wants leaders to encourage the sharing of good ideas by asking the right questions in meetings.

Brown and his wife, Sharene, met with Airmen this past week over Zoom to participate in discussions about quality-of-life issues facing them and their families.

"Your feedback is invaluable to me and these forums are where I get a chance to engage with Airmen at all levels about what's on their mind," Brown said. "Often in my position, folks only want to bring me good news and sometimes I need the bad news to help you fix problems."

Brown was scheduled to visit Hill AFB for the first time last week since he took office in August but due to COVID-19, postponed the visit and moved part of it online.

"COVID-19 precautions have made in-person engagements with Airmen challenging. However, I'm grateful for the virtual opportunities taken to

connect,” Brown tweeted Nov. 18.

Brown also virtually met with the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent Systems Directorate, which is responsible for modernizing or replacing Minuteman III flight systems, weapon system command and control, and launch systems, including missile silos, control centers and other ground infrastructure.

“I’m excited to see what you’re doing, and excited to spend time with you,” Brown said. “I’m really going to be excited when I get a chance to come out to Hill (AFB) and see some of these things firsthand, and have a chance to engage with Airmen.”

The virtual visits were part of a series the Air Force’s top leader held in the past week to demonstrate his commitment to connecting with Airmen, even when he can’t in person. He also held online meetings with Offutt AFB, Nebraska, and Kirtland AFB, New Mexico.

“These virtual visits provided a great opportunity to ask questions and bring to the table some of the issues affecting our Airmen and their families,” said Col. Jenise Carroll, 75th Air Base Wing commander. “We look forward to hosting General and Mrs. Brown in person to show them the amazing work being done by our Airmen across Team Hill.”

Air Force moves up GBSD re-entry vehicle award deadline

InsideDefense.com, Dec. 2 | Sara Sirota

The Air Force released a notice today stating it will award a prime contract to develop the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent's Mk21A re-entry vehicle no later than the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2023 -- slightly earlier than previously anticipated.

The Mk21A re-entry vehicle will be capable of delivering warheads from the future GBSD intercontinental ballistic missiles that are slated to replace the military's decades-old Minuteman III ICBMs starting in the late 2020s. Lockheed Martin is the only company with a technology-maturation and risk-reduction contract to support the program -- all but ensuring it will receive the prime contract.

The Air Force published a request for information today notifying the defense industry of its plans to -- following a successful milestone B approval - award an engineering and manufacturing development contract by the new deadline. The service's FY-21 budget documents indicated the Mk21A program sought to make the award in October 2024, or the first quarter of FY-24.

Facing no competitors, Lockheed won \$108 million in October 2019 for the TMRR contract, and the program's FY-21 future years defense program shows a major jump in annual funding from TMRR to EMD -- from about \$80 million in FY-22 and FY-23 to well more than \$220 million in FY-24 and FY-25.

The Air Force expects to begin the new phase early despite slowdowns to many of the Defense Department's acquisition programs this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Service spokeswoman Leah Bryant told Inside Defense last month the coronavirus has not affected progress with the new re-entry vehicle, and the Air Force is on track to conduct a preliminary design review in March of Lockheed's Mk21A solution -- an important step on the path to the milestone B approval to start EMD. The service will also perform flight tests of two prototype re-entry vehicles before then.

Once the new phase of development begins in FY-23, "EMD objectives are to complete the development of a fully integrated [reentry vehicle] and all subsystems, complete full system integration with GBSD, develop affordable and executable manufacturing processes, and test and evaluate the system," according to today's RFI.

This work will help the Air Force achieve initial operational capability in FY-30, the notice states, one year after GBSD's IOC deadline in FY-29.

The ICBM system's requirements to meet this milestone do not mandate complete alignment with the Mk21A program. Rather, GBSD must have 20 converted launch facilities loaded with an in-silo missile and deployed with a legacy re-entry vehicle and warhead, according to a report the Air Force sent Congress earlier this year.

Meanwhile, the milestone B decision to begin developing the new Mk21A by the fourth quarter of FY-23 will solidify one of the Air Force's key efforts to modernize the land-based leg of the nuclear triad as a program of record. In addition to preparing new missiles, the service is also working on a new arming and fuzing assembly and the National Nuclear Security Administration is readying the W87-1 warhead for GBSD.

However, the program to replace the Minuteman III system continues to face resistance from House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA), who will still lead the influential panel once the new congressional term starts in January, as Democrats maintained control of the House in the latest elections.

Although President-elect Biden will also take over the White House in a few months and likely call for a new Nuclear Posture Review, Republicans gained seats in the House and denied Democrats a decisive win in the Senate, creating a political environment that makes it difficult to stop the new ICBM program, Smith said last month.

Two runoff elections in Georgia in January will determine whether Republicans maintain their majority in the Senate or if Democrats take control.

Despite Smith's opposition and regardless of these races' outcomes, both House and Senate appropriators have indicated their support for the new Mk21A reentry vehicle by recommending the final FY-21 defense spending bill fully fund the Air Force's \$113 million proposal -- nearly double the FY-20 budget. Conference negotiations to finalize the legislation have not yet begun.

Separately, President Trump has threatened to veto the FY-21 defense authorization bill unless it repeals Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act.

U.S. Commander Alarmed as China Makes Inroads in Americas

National Defense Magazine Online, Dec. 2 | Stew Magnuson

China continues to spread its influence militarily and economically throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, the head of U.S. Southern Command said Dec. 2.

“I think what they're doing [in the region] matches what they're doing globally. It's a full court press to have China become the world's dominant power,” Adm. Craig. S. Faller, Southcom commander, told reporters in a briefing.

The 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy identified the Asian nation as a great power competitor.

“China is working for their version of the world order globally,” said Faller, whose area of responsibility as head of Southcom includes much of the Americas.

Faller laid out a variety of means Beijing is trying to spread its influence, from potential naval bases to economics, politics and influence operations.

“They've come in with the same type of infrastructure deals, loans, that they have used globally to gain influence,” he said.

“There has got to be a role for China legitimately as an economic world power, but they've got to play by global rules. And so we don't see that. They have a playbook. They're exercising that playbook,” Faller said.

Politically, China attempts to undermine local and regional elections and pay off officials, he said.

Economically, “they come in with deals that no one can compete with because U.S. industry has to compete fairly by law,” he added.

Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese Communist Party's campaign to invest in foreign nations' infrastructure as a means to spread its influence, had one country in the region signed on four years ago. It now has 40, Faller noted.

China is particularly interested in seaport infrastructure and has signed 40 commercial port deals in Southcom's area of operations, he said.

China is looking for a deep water port in Mexico, Bahamas, El Salvador, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Panama, and possibly in Surinam or Guyana. “They're working lots of options — some farther south,” he said.

“What does it look like if China has a strategic control of the Strait of Magellan, or the Panama Canal, the approaches to the Gulf of Mexico through a Caribbean port? What does that look like in a global conflict?” Faller asked.

“The Panama Canal is a significant global choke point. We were concerned as we watched China working port deals on either side of the canal,” he added

The previous administration in Panama signed over 40 different deals with China, including one to outfit all the command-and-control centers in Panama with Chinese information technology, which by Chinese law, directly connects back to companies under the influence of the People’s Liberation Army, Faller said.

The new Panamanian administration of President Laurentino Cortizo has dialed back on these deals and is more open to U.S. influence, he said. Meanwhile, Southcom has conducted a yearly Panamax exercise with 20 partner nations with an objective of protecting the canal.

“Certainly in a global Chinese fight, that would be one of the key considerations: how do we defend that canal?” Faller said.

Southcom is required to produce a plan for the defense of that strategic location. “We review that plan and we test that plan on a continuous basis,” he said.

In the military realm, the People’s Liberation Army offers nations free equipment, free gear and free training with no strings attached. The training doesn’t include human rights training, “the things important to us,” Faller said.

“We’ve even found them teaching a course on why the U.S. is not a partner of choice for the military taught by the PLA to partner nation militaries here in the hemisphere. That I find alarming and shocking,” Faller said.

China is making significant progress in space-based intelligence in the region, Faller said, but he couldn’t elaborate.

The nation continues to invest in natural resources looking for strategic minerals such as rare earth elements and gold mines, both legal and illegal, he said.

“Look at what they’re doing as far as access to water,” he said. Latin America has good sources of fresh water and China continues to invest in agriculture in the region.

Southcom routinely shares data with nations whose waters are being exploited by Chinese fishing vessels, he noted.

“Illegal unreported, unregulated fishing are among the top two to three threats that the ... chiefs of defense bring up with me. And China is the biggest player in that space. And we have hard proof of violations. ... We share that information,” he said.

Along with Russia and Iran, China has “significant disinformation campaigns” in the region designed to influence populations and leaders, Faller said.

“They completely twist anything Southcom is doing, or what the U.S. government is doing, into a bold-face lie to try to draw the ire of our partner nations in their countries,” he said. “We have stepped up our efforts in the information space... and the public affairs arena to just amplify the facts as best we can to try to counter that negative narrative.”

He added: “I think our competitive edge of being the trusted partner [in the region] is eroding, particularly when it comes to the Chinese influence.”

As for other U.S. actions in the region, Southcom has been directly involved in hurricane relief after one of the most devastating storm seasons on record, he said.

The United States has also been the region’s largest donor when it comes to COVID-19 relief. “Not because China did it, because it’s the right thing to do,” Fallor said.

US Imposes Sanctions on Russian and Chinese Companies For Supporting Iranian Missile Programme

[US Imposes Sanctions on Russian and Chinese Companies For Supporting Iranian Missile Programme \(india.com\)](https://www.india.com/news/us-imposes-sanctions-on-russian-and-chinese-companies-for-supporting-iranian-missile-programme/)

The announcement was made on Friday as the US continues to take tough measures against Iran for continuing their activities related to nuclear arms.

By [PTI](#) | Updated: Sat, November 28, 2020 11:55am

Washington: The US has imposed sanctions on four companies from China and Russia for supporting Iran's missile programme that remains a "significant proliferation concern," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said.

The announcement was made on Friday as the US continues to take tough measures against Iran for continuing their activities related to nuclear arms. The US has sanctioned four entities in China and Russia for their support of Iran's missile programme, which remains a significant proliferation concern. We will continue to use all our sanctions tools to prevent Iran from advancing its missile capabilities, Pompeo said.

The companies are Chengdu Best New Materials Co Ltd and Zibo Elim Trade Co, Ltd. in China and Nilco Group, which is also known as Nil Fam Khazar Company and SanTERS Holding and Joint Stock Company Elecon in Russia for transferring sensitive technology and items to Iran's missile programme. President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the landmark Iran nuclear deal in 2018.

After withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear deal, Trump has asked all countries to reduce their purchase of oil from Iran to zero or face secondary sanctions. Iran insists its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes. Pompeo said all countries need to be vigilant to efforts by Iran to advance its missile programme. These measures are part of our response to Iran's malign activities. These determinations underscore the continuing need for all countries to remain vigilant to efforts by Iran to advance its missile programme, Pompeo said.

We will continue to work to impede Iran's missile development efforts and use our sanctions authorities to spotlight the foreign suppliers, such as these entities in the People's Republic of China and Russia that provide missile-related materials and technology to Iran. The sanctions imposed include restrictions on US government procurement, US government assistance, and exports and will be in effect for two years, he said. Pompeo said the imposition of sanctions against these foreign entities is consistent with the efforts of the US to use all available measures to prevent Iran from advancing its missile capabilities.

Inside America's newly revealed nuclear ballistic missile warhead of the future

Inside America's newly revealed nuclear ballistic missile warhead of the future (defensenews.com)

By: Aaron Mehta for Defense News // February 24, 2020

MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. — When the Trump administration's budget request rolled out Feb. 10, eyebrows shot up within the nuclear community at the mention of a previously unknown warhead, listed in documents as the W93.

Now the Pentagon is revealing details about the weapon, what it will replace and when it might be deployed. The labeling of the warhead as the W93 is important. Since the introduction of the W88 in the 1980s, all upgrades to warheads have been described as variants — for instance, the collapsing of several versions of the B61 gravity bomb into the B61-12. According to a senior defense official, the reason for the new designation comes from the reality that the warhead is largely a new design.

“The W93 doesn't [currently] exist. And so this is not a simple life extension,” said the official, who spoke to Defense News on condition of anonymity while traveling to Minot Air Force Base last week. Right now, there are two submarine-launched nuclear warheads in the arsenal: the W88 and the W76. The latter, which just completed a service life extension program, now comes in two varieties, the traditional W76-1 and a lower-yield W76-2. The W88, meanwhile, is in the early stages of a modernization effort.

However, each of those two systems will likely require additional modernization in 15-20 years, and their cores are increasingly older, even with efforts led by the National Nuclear Security Administration. Given that, the Pentagon believes now is the time to begin developing a future replacement. “These things take time. And so now we're beginning the normal process,” the official said. “We start now in a seven-phase process, from concept design to production and delivery. And we're starting now.”

The goal for the W93 is to base it “on existing designs,” according to the official. But other than that, all options that will work with the Trident II submarine-launched missile are on the table. The Nuclear Weapons Council, which includes a number of Department of Defense principals, is leading the analysis of what the W93 may look like. “You might move the secondary to where the primary was, move this around, you'll have new conventional components, you're going to make it safer,” the official said.

“It's going to be based on currently tested designs and components that are already in the stockpile. But it'll be safer.” The government's goal is to have the new design, which in size would be somewhere between the two existing ballistic missile warheads, fielded by 2040. The idea of a follow-on submarine launched warhead is not entirely new. In FY20 budget documents, the NNSA referred to a “Next Navy Warhead,” but estimated that the weapon would not need funding until 2023.

Why the agency moved the timeline forward by two years is unclear, but it comes at a time that the NNSA received a major increase in its budget request, increasing almost 20 percent from FY20 levels. While the NNSA will lead development of the warhead's internal parts, the official said the Pentagon will be involved “pretty quickly” in order to design the aero shell containing the weapon.

To that end, the fiscal 2021 budget request includes \$32 million for the DoD to begin working on the aero shell for the system, with \$480 million planned over the Future Years Defense Program for the effort. The Department of Energy has yet to put its detailed budget request online, but the Exchange Monitor reported last week that the NNSA requested \$53 million in FY21 for work on the warhead.

The department is trying to be careful in describing the W93 as a new “program of record” as opposed to a new warhead design, despite the work involved. While the official acknowledged that phrasing is unlikely to satisfy those concerned about nuclear expansion, the individual was adamant that the plan currently involves retiring older warheads as the W93 comes online in order to maintain current levels in the stockpile.

“We do not anticipate that fielding the W93 will increase the overall size of the U.S. strategic stockpile. Based on current projections, introduction of the W93 into the stockpile will be offset by corresponding reductions of older weapon quantities,” the official said. “So that’s a big deal.” That may mean the retirement of either the W76-1 or W88, but could also involve taking reserve warheads and disassembling those; the official said that trade-off is under discussion as the program develops, noting:

“We don’t have to decide today whether to retire them or not.” Additionally, there is no plan to do nuclear explosive testing for the W93. Kingston Reif of the Arms Control Association questions why the W93 needs to begin now, a year after the W76 refurbishment is completed and two years earlier than had been previously predicted in budget documents. “NNSA already has too much work on its plate to sustain. Accelerating development of yet another excessively ambitious program will only make that problem worse,” he said.

Reif also expressed skepticism about how much can be drawn from existing technologies if developing a new warhead design. “Claiming that the warhead is based on existing designs doesn’t provide much comfort given the significant changes being contemplated,” Reif said. “While I take the administration at its word that it has no plans to conduct a nuclear explosive test of the warhead, the scope of the changes under consideration could raise concerns about the reliability of the warhead and increase pressure to test down the road.”

The official said the NNSA and DoD expect pushback, particularly given the fact the W93 is the first “new” warhead design in decades. So the near-term focus of the department is going to be convincing pro-defense Democrats and dollar-focused appropriators that now is the time to begin the project. “We’ll have that debate,” the official said. “But it’s a very long process, and we want to get it started now.”

News & Opinion

Did The U.S. Forget About Nuclear Deterrence After the Cold War?

<https://defensemaven.io/warriormaven/global-security/did-the-u-s-forget-about-nuclear-deterrence-after-the-cold-war-IJKbslNhl0yxjLRrPNJj6w>

By Peter R. Huessy - Senior Warrior Maven Columnist // 12/2/2020

In Washington, D.C. America's capitol city, narratives are critical to sustaining our national security policies.

For example, to justify significant cuts to our nuclear deterrent funding during the 1970's, one could point to the American policy of "[détente and peaceful coexistence](#)" as the "rationale" for at least some restraint or appeasement. Similarly, some 20 years later, with the end of the Cold War, paying little attention to our nuclear deterrent was justified on the basis of accepting that a new "[end of history](#)" had arrived where serious nuclear threats to US security were considered a thing of the past.

Both détente and the end of history narratives became central to American security policy at the time. And these accepted doctrines were hardly questioned. In March 2009, then President Carter decried America's "[inordinate fear of communism](#)" (ironically just months before the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan), but his remarks at the time were applauded by foreign policy elites. His view fit with their acceptance of the assumptions behind the American adoption of détente.

Détente, the End of History and "The Bomb."

Each of these two narratives are largely false in their core assumptions. Détente led the Soviets to believe in the late 1970's the [correlation of forces](#) had moved so markedly in the direction of the USSR that victory of the United States was in sight. Détente appeased Soviet expansionism, so much so that nearly two dozen countries fell to Soviet aggression and wars of liberation in the decade of the 1970s.

In addition, in just a 2 year window, 1978-80, Iran fell to totalitarian Islam, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein came to power in Iraq and subsequently invaded Iran, the holy Islamic sites in Mecca and Medina were attacked, the President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, was brutally murdered by order of the Muslim Brotherhood for the crime of making peace with Israel, all the while Soviet deployments of INF range and nuclear armed missiles topped 2000 in Europe and Asia.

The "end of history" post 1991 narrative prompted the United States to fall fast asleep at the switch. A new totalitarian-minded leader arose in Russia and in 2000 [adopted a policy](#) of threatening the use of nuclear weapons early in a crisis even while successive administrations sought to "reset" relations or asked for space and flexibility to lessen American defenses. Islamic terrorists [attacked the United States](#) at the World Trade Center in 1993; Khobar Towers in 1996; the African embassies in 1998; and the USS Cole in 2000, even as terrorists sought nuclear weapons to kill ever more people.

In parallel development, the seeds of 9-11 were taking root as in 1996 the [Taliban took over](#) in Afghanistan, and Al Qaeda and Iranian terrorism [cooperated and expanded](#), even as America and her allies [remained wedded](#) to the "Oslo peace process." This twenty-year period after the end of the

Cold War also saw the near collapse of funding for our nuclear deterrent needs. Spending on nuclear sustainment in the United States dropped precipitously as the Cold War came to an end.

But nuclear armed powers [rose in Pakistan and India](#), while [North Korea](#) and [Iran secretly](#) sought nuclear weapons. In 2000, [Russia effectively killed](#) the START II treaty between Russia and the United States banning multiple-warhead land-based missiles, [by insisting that the US](#) keep its missile defense work in the laboratory and not deploy a missile defense system in Alaska to defend against North Korea. China continued its pro-nuclear proliferation policies adopted as early as 1982 by Chinese premier Deng, even as China was [admitted to the WTO](#) and later largely [dismissed as a security threat](#) by US intelligence.

Have We Learned Anything?

It is true that now for nearly a decade, since December 2010, the past two administration's and the Congress have firmly supported the modernization of our nuclear deterrent. Each leg of the nuclear Triad is scheduled to be fully replaced starting with deployments in the field at the end of the next decade. But with the Presidential election uncertain, what should be a continued bipartisan consensus could be weakened. A small but influential community is [pushing unilateral American reductions](#) in nuclear forces, including forestalling modernization of most of our nuclear deterrent, adopting a no first use nuclear doctrine, and weakening our extended nuclear deterrent or umbrella over our major NATO and Pacific allies.

The global zero alliance—the combined forces within academia, the entertainment and Hollywood complex, journalism and elements of a number of political parties—want the US to unilaterally curtail its nuclear forces. This campaign recently featured [a new film](#), “The Bomb”, shown continuously at the National Academic of Sciences in Washington. It contained an hour of continuous scary nuclear explosions and missile launches, rapidly sequenced together to thunderous music, in a highly depressing depiction of future nuclear deterrence probably failing, echoing the fears of such original bomb makers as Robert Oppenheimer whose notes about the “end of the world” were prominently displayed in the movie.

After the bomb sequences, then came video of thousands of sharply dressed marching soldiers with their weapons, especially nuclear armed missiles, from countries such as Russia, China, the United Kingdom, North Korea and the United States, as if all soldiers everywhere from democracies to totalitarian dictatorships, served the same fearsome objectives. After the film ended, and at a subsequent reception, a group of young college students were explaining how terribly depressed even near tears they were.

To which the head of Ploughshares, Joe Cirincione, a promoter of major unilateral cuts in America's nuclear deterrent, upon walking by and overhearing the worries, turned to the young college-aged women and exclaimed “You should feel really great. Look at all the people here who hate nuclear weapons!” As for “The Bomb”, the object of the movie was obvious—sharply reduce American support for nuclear modernization and return to some kind of detente. As the writer of the documentary exclaimed in subsequent remarks “there has to be a better way than deterrence ” of dealing with nuclear weapons. And the only alternative? Get rid of these weapons, unilaterally, she said.

The producer, while firmly embracing zero nuclear weapons, admitted some kind of deterrent was still necessary, but certainly not what was currently being proposed by the administration (although as one pro-deterrent panelist explained, the two most recent USA administrations had nearly identical nuclear deterrent programs.) Today, while Congress apparently still supports the modernization of our nuclear deterrent, and the

lessons learned about past mistakes apparently have now been adopted in our corrected security policy, there remain false narratives that seek like détente and the end of history to replace current US policy.

One is that détente in the 1970's was not a policy of appeasement that the Soviets took advantage of. The producer of "The Bomb" at the National Academy of Sciences complained that President James Carter was unfairly and unjustly criticized by then candidate Ronald Reagan for not modernizing our nuclear deterrent. Claimed producer Eric Schlosser, Carter "had a most robust and aggressive nuclear modernization effort."

In fact, during Carter's one term as President, the B-1 bomber was repeatedly cancelled, the Ohio class submarine was delayed and funding cut, the new land based ICBM "MX" missile was never funded as a mobile basing mode could not be agreed upon, while the promised ground launched cruise and Pershing missiles promised for deployment in Europe were never put in the US defense budget for acquisition. All in all, the Soviets produced and deployed over 17 key nuclear assets during the decade of détente while the USA successfully deployed simply an upgraded land based ICBM, the Minuteman III missile, which ironically remains with us today having been giving a life extension in the post-Cold War era despite attempts to unilaterally cut it out of the nuclear deterrent.

It is not only the push for zero nuclear weapons without any idea of how to get there that makes no sense. And it is not just the naïve opposition to maintaining two of the three legs of the nuclear Triad, contrary to the 60-year history of the nuclear age testifying to their irreplaceable value. Or even the foolish push to deploy only five of the twelve submarines now scheduled for our deterrent force of the future. It is more than anything else the adoption of four false narratives that are dangerous as they will undermine US security if adopted.

These are in sequence:

- (1) Don't use nuclear weapons even if attacked by nuclear weapons because that is nuclear warfighting;
- (2) The USA nuclear deterrent is too costly;
- (3) The US must take radical and unilateral nuclear reductions to prompt reciprocal action by other nuclear powers; and
- (4) The current administration doesn't care about nuclear arms control, so we have to punish the USA by reigning in the USA nuclear modernization program.

Let us explore what is wrong with each narrative.

First, because the use of nuclear weapons cannot be controlled, critics want the United States to respond to a nuclear attack on the United States only with conventional weapons. No "first use" of nuclear weapons is now "no use". But that is a prescription for inviting the bad guys to use nuclear weapons first as they might very well believe the US is serious about fighting only with tanks and artillery while our enemy uses nuclear weapons many tens of thousands of times more powerful as former USAF General and nuclear commander Kevin Chilton has explained.

Second, critics still claim modernizing our deterrent will cost \$1.2 trillion over the next three decades, when in fact the modernization of the force will cost less than one-third that number. The bulk of the future expenditures we will make will be simply to sustain the old legacy systems such as the B-52, the Minuteman land-based missiles and the Ohio-class submarines and their associated warheads, all of which are now approaching 40-70 years in service.

In fact, the new Columbia class submarine, the new GBSD intercontinental ballistic missile and the new B-21 strategic bomber with its LRSO cruise missiles now cost annually \$8.5 billion in a defense budget of \$740 billion. Third, the idea is that only an American push for a freeze on nuclear weapons—such as was pursued in 1979-83—or major unilateral cuts by America can set a proper example which would then compel our adversaries to agree to similar cuts on the way to zero.

Has this worked before? Congressman Mike Turner explained during a March 6 HASC hearing, while the United States has cut its deployed or in the field nuclear weapons by 75% since 2001, (and 90% since 1991), China, Pakistan, India, Russia and North Korea have expanded their nuclear forces, apparently oblivious to the good moral example set by the United States. Unfortunately, while the Soviet Union and now Russia have reduced their long-range deployed nuclear forces under START I, Moscow and New START agreements, their shorter-range nuclear weapons have dramatically expanded as well as certain long-range systems not captured by the terms of the current 2010 New START treaty between Russia and the United States.

And fourth, and finally, a new narrative is being pushed that claims America is against nuclear arms control and wants to end all arms control agreements. This argument started with the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear “agreement”. Although never dated or signed, the JCPOA, as it is called, allows Iran after a 10 year pause to build as many nuclear weapons as it wishes, while having used the interim decade to build what former DNI head General (Ret) Michael Hayden described as an “industrial strength nuclear capability”.

Being against the bad Iranian deal somehow was transformed into a general dislike of arms agreements, when in fact it was simply being against a terrible deal with Iran. For example, giving the mullahs \$150 billion in cash, largely oil escrowed funds, was not a good deal. Especially as the funds could have been used to pay compensation to the American victims of Iranian terrorism, including the 600 American soldiers killed by Iranian roadside bombs.

And not seeking any limits to Iran’s ballistic missile capability was not a good deal. Or stopping Iran’s continued terrorism which ranked it as the premier supporter of terrorism in the world today, that was not a good deal. Or throwing into the deal as a gift the end off the UN arms embargo that went away in October 2020. The next step in arguing the administration did not like arms control was to blame the Trump administration for the end of the INF treaty.

But once the Russian violations of the 1987 INF treaty became too serious to ignore, and when the US and our NATO partners called the Russians to account, to the administrations critics, such a declaration of finding Russia in serial violation of the INF treaty was again evidence of the administration’s animus against all arms control treaties! But as a new NATO study has just concluded, “at some point in the mid to late 2000s, the Russian Government decided to develop and later deploy a missile system—the SSC-8—which clearly violated the Treaty.”

And despite these major Russian violations concluded NATO, “Successive US administrations over a number of years have sought to bring Russia back into compliance, but each attempt has been met with flat denial and total intransigence.” The US has indeed announced it can no longer be bound by a treaty the Russians have abandoned, and here NATO “...has now come to a unanimous view in support of the US analysis and its determination to confront the issue.

Whilst at every point a diplomatic solution has been and continues to be sought, an essentially bilateral Treaty that has been rendered inoperative by its violation by one party should not be saved at any cost. As the British explain, “International arms control relies on adherence to reciprocal obligations and nations should not be required to subject themselves to unilateral observance of them. Arms control more generally is undermined by violation going unchallenged.”

It is not as if the United States has been a laggard on arms control. In fact, since 1981, the Reagan revolution in arms control achieved what many critics at the time said was impossible-- a marked and huge decline in strategic nuclear deployed forces by the United States and the then Soviet Union, (now Russia). The very large cuts in nuclear weapons already achieved by the United States were initiated by President Reagan who at his very first press conference in 1981 reiterated his opposition to the SALT treaties that allowed for the huge buildup in Soviet and American nuclear weapons.

He proposed then—as he had previously as a candidate as far back as 1975--that nuclear weapons be sharply reduced. This goal was reflected in the multitude of NSDD’s or national security defense directives his administration authored, and the strategy adopted to secure such reductions. In the 1987 INF treaty between the US and the Soviet Union, thousands of nuclear armed missiles were reduced to zero. In the 1991 START I agreement longer range deployed warheads were reduced by fifty percent, followed by a further 75% by the Moscow/SORT treaty of 2002 and then an additional notional 30% in the 2010 New Start agreement. .

But the current framework for arms control has serious problems that need correcting. The New Start treaty leaves the Russians with very large pathways to grow to 4500-5500 long range strategic nuclear warheads, to say nothing of the uncontrolled theater nuclear weapons that number at least 2000. And the current framework also leaves China out of the picture, free as it is to deploy its own nuclear weapons but also to continue its long-term policy of proliferating nuclear weapons technology to its friends in the poor parts of the world, including Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya through the remnants of the Khan network AKA “Nukes ‘R Us”.

Now the current administration declares the New Start treaty can be extended for a short time, but such action must be based on Russian treaty compliance, and Russian compliance with a nuclear freeze. And at some point, arms negotiations should include bringing China into a treaty arrangement and transparent regime and deal with Russian nuclear systems not now controlled. . Now US critics have derided these goals, dismissing them as false, disingenuous, and “poison pill” strategies, based in part on the implicit assumption that the current administration sought from the beginning to end the INF treaty and is opposed to arms control in principle.

On that score, a British assessment backs up the Trump administration. As the British just announced, “there are no straightforward options for saving the INF Treaty in its current form and any attempt to replace it must be underpinned by robust and continuing verification requirements. However, a change in Russia’s policy on adherence to such agreements would be a necessary prerequisite.”

Further said our British allies, “While the security situation in Asia is a factor in both Russian and American nuclear policy, we reject the claims that the US is content to see the Treaty collapse or has deliberately engineered this because it wishes to deploy missiles in Asia against a growing threat from China.” As to whether the INF treaty could be salvaged, the British are crystal clear on that as well: “The US has at every stage shown willingness to continue fulfilling its obligations under the Treaty if Russia returns to compliance. Indeed, even now the US has offered to halt the

economic and military steps it has begun taking, if Russia returns to compliance. If the Treaty fails, the sole responsibility for its failure will lie with Russia, and any Russian attempts to manipulate the narrative to suggest otherwise must be strongly resisted.”

Secretary of State Pompeo met with Russian President Putin to “negotiate new arms control accords that reflect current conditions and to bring in other nations, notably China.” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said [Moscow](#) wants to focus on extending the New START treaty, an arms control deal between [Moscow](#) and [Washington](#) which runs out in 2021. Ryabkov added that [Moscow](#) wants to focus on bilateral commitments first before bringing China into treaty negotiations.

When it comes to nuclear arms control, “China is great at playing hard to get” writes Aaron Kliegman. He correctly notes China in 1981 pledged to join arms control once the US reduced its nuclear arsenal by 50%. The US did reduce its deployed strategic systems by 50% but China moved the goal posts claiming the US had to get rid of more weapons. When that happened under the Moscow treaty of 2002, China moved the goal posts one more time, demanding that the US get rid of all its theater nuclear forces, end missile defense work, pledge a no first use policy and make even greater reductions of its strategic nuclear forces.

The Obama administration's Nuclear Posture Review, or NPR, states that “the lack of transparency surrounding [Chinese] nuclear programs—their pace and scope, as well as the strategy and doctrine that guides them—raises questions about China's future strategic intentions.” The Trump administration's NPR echoes the same point, arguing that, “while China's declaratory policy and doctrine have not changed, its lack of transparency regarding the scope and scale of its nuclear modernization program raises questions regarding its future intent.” China has, in effect, built a different kind of great wall around its nuclear arsenal, preventing others from even discussing what is behind it.”

As Mike Pillsbury details in his “The 100-year Marathon”, China seeks to supplant the United States as the world’s premier economic and military power. Russia under Putin seeks to restore the hegemonic power of the former Soviet Union over Eurasia, especially its energy resources., Putin has adopted a policy of the early use of nuclear weapons in a crisis, which China is beginning to echo. Deng Xiaoping in 1981 began a proliferation policy of arming its allies with nuclear weapons. At the same time, he called on China to “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities; bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; never claim leadership.”

The Trump administration is moving to challenge that Chinese and Russian strategies, and as Victor Davis Hanson has correctly remarked, restoring deterrence is tough to do when one’s predecessors had recklessly given much of it up through lack of attention. China and Russia and their American disarmament friends seek to cut US nuclear forces without having these two enemies of the US to reciprocate. That policy, so far, has been rejected by Congress and certainly by the Trump administration.

Throughout the past five decades of arms control with the Soviets and now the Russians, the disarmament community has threatened repeatedly to withhold support for nuclear modernization unless the respective administration in office seeks nuclear arms control. Now, finally, the supporters of “peace through strength” are turning the tables. New legislation in Congress authored by Senators John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Tom Cotton (R-AR) and Representative Liz Cheney (R-WY) calls for no money to extend the New Start treaty will be approved by Congress unless and until the “New START or successor agreement includes the People's Republic of China and covers all strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces of the Russian Federation”.

The 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review explains that "While the United States has continued to reduce the number and salience of nuclear weapons, others, including Russia and China, have moved in the opposite direction." The Review warns: "Russia has expanded and improved its strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces. China's military modernization has resulted in an expanded nuclear force, with little to no transparency into its intentions." In addition, notes the Review, "Russia is developing and deploying new nuclear warheads and launchers. These efforts include multiple upgrades for every leg of the Russian nuclear triad of strategic bombers, sea-based missiles, and land-based missiles. Russia is also developing at least two new inter-continental range systems, a hypersonic glide vehicle, and a new intercontinental, nuclear armed, nuclear-powered, undersea autonomous torpedo."

While China and Russia press on unfettered said Senator Cotton, "the United States should not be restricting its own nuclear arsenal" especially when "Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping continue to expand and modernize their nuclear arsenals" That requires explained the Senator that "Future arms-control agreements must take into account both the Russian and Chinese threats, while ensuring we don't place one-sided nuclear restrictions on ourselves," a point echoed by his colleague Senator Cornyn whose statement noted: "As we negotiate future arms-control agreements, we should take the current threat landscape into account. This legislation would ensure we can protect our country's national security interests as both China and Russia continue to make strategic expansions of their nuclear arsenals."

Peter R. Huessy – Mr. Huessy is the President of Geostrategic Analysis, a Potomac, Maryland-based defense and national security consulting business, and Director of Strategic Deterrent Studies at the Mitchell Institute, a Senior Fellow at ICAS, a senior consultant with Ravenna Associates, and previously for 22 years Senior Defense Consultant with the National Defense University Foundation at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C. He is and has been a Guest Lecturer at the School of Advanced International Affairs at Johns Hopkins University, at the Institute of World Politics, at the University of Maryland, at the Joint Military Intelligence College, at the Naval Academy and at the National War College.

The Real Nuclear Balance

RealClearDefense.com, Dec. 2 | Peter Pry

A President Joe Biden is likely to revisit the Nuclear Posture Review and fundamentally reimagine the U.S. nuclear deterrent as a much smaller, less diverse, less capable, and less expensive force.

Rep. Adam Smith, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), presently the most powerful Democrat shaping U.S. national security policy, speaking before the Center for a New American Security recently opined:

What I want us to have is a nuclear arsenal that is sufficient to deter anyone from thinking that it makes sense to start a nuclear war. We have a nuclear arsenal that still envisions 'winning a nuclear war'...That's what I find insane. It's worth having the debate to envision what our nuclear deterrence policy should look like, and what do we need to build to achieve it?" [i]

In March 2019, Chairman Smith held hearings before the HASC that called for unilaterally banning U.S. ICBMs and strategic bombers, replacing the nuclear Triad of land-based missiles, bombers, and ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) with a Monad of SSBNs reduced from 14 boats to 6 SSBNs. Radical anti-nuclear activists from such groups as Ploughshares, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Federation of American Scientists have testified before Congress as strategic "experts" advocating for such a posture of "Minimum Deterrence." [ii]

Thus, the longstanding consensus among Democrats and Republicans that prevailed through the Cold War that the U.S. nuclear deterrent should be “second to none” appears to be broken.

If the U.S. under a Biden Administration embarks on re-thinking the nuclear Triad, perhaps it will also be time to re-think other fundamentals driving U.S. nuclear strategy and policy, like how we measure “the nuclear balance.”

"Bean-counting" numbers of nuclear weapons is an obsessive focus of the U.S. intelligence community, policymakers, and academics that is fundamental to U.S. assessments about the likely and relative nuclear threat from Russia, China, and North Korea. Yet “bean-counting” is not really an objective measure of the nuclear balance, but a subjective fixation of a U.S. (and Western) strategic culture dominated by arms control theory that requires omniscience about U.S. and adversary nuclear arms in order for them to be limited and so supposedly "controlled."

Nor is “bean-counting” an accurate and reliable indicator of the nuclear threat, since potential nuclear adversaries, unlike the United States, do not accurately report their nuclear inventories, as these are regarded as vital state secrets. Nonetheless, “bean-counting” and arms control is such a strong strategic cultural imperative for the U.S. that estimates of the nuclear balance, which are probably largely fictional, are treated as gospel.

Perhaps it is time for a more mature and sophisticated approach to calculating the nuclear threat based on such metrics as adversary targeting requirements to achieve various damage goals against the United States—as is the focus in Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang.

The Nuclear Stockpiles

The press, both liberal and conservative press, and many equally uninformed Washington officials think of the nuclear balance as the "nuclear stockpile" as estimated by the anti-nuclear Federation of American Scientists (FAS). According to FAS nuclear stockpile estimates, the U.S. has 5,800 weapons, Russia has 6,370 weapons, China has 320 weapons, and North Korea has 35. [iii]

An enormous problem with measuring the nuclear balance by the “nuclear stockpiles” is that this includes thousands of U.S. weapons (over 4,300) that are not operational, are warehoused and retired, are awaiting dismantlement, have been cannibalized for spare parts, and would require months or years to be made operational, if possible at all. By counting non-operational U.S. weapons, the anti-nuclear FAS can greatly inflate U.S. nuclear strength relative to adversaries and inflate the global total of nuclear bombs FAS wants to ban.

Moreover, Russia, China, and North Korea’s “nuclear stockpiles” are unknown to the U.S. Government and to FAS. Credible estimates vary greatly, sometimes by tenfold. For example:

According to a recent highly controversial DoD estimate, China has only 200 nuclear weapons, making the anti-nuclear FAS estimate (320) look hawkish. Former senior DoD official, Dr. Mark Schneider, debunks the almost certainly erroneous DoD estimate and exposes DoD’s history of underestimating China in a recent article. Schneider notes: Russian General Viktor Yesin in 2012 estimated China had enough fissile material for 3,600 nuclear warheads and built 1,600-1,800. Russian General Vladimir Dvorkin in 2012 estimated China had 1,600 nuclear weapons. A three-year

study by former DoD analyst Phillip Karber assesses China could be hiding up to 3,000 nuclear warheads, including mobile missiles, in their Underground Great Wall. [iv]

How can China have only 200 weapons when they have deployed 32 DF-41 ICBMs capable of delivering up to 10-12 MIRVed warheads, which would give Beijing 320-384 warheads on the DF-41 ICBM alone? [v] China's "Underground Great Wall" comprising 5,000 kilometers of tunnels belonging to the PRC's Strategic Rocket Forces could conceal hundreds of mobile ICBMs. [vi]

U.S. senior arms negotiator Marshall Billingslea said in October 2020 that Washington is trying to end China's "great wall of secrecy" about its nuclear weapons. "Billingslea contrasted the more than 100-page document the United States has released on nuclear strategy to the five paragraphs China has publicly released on its nuclear programs and strategy." While DoD recently estimates China has 200 operational nuclear weapons, Billingslea notes China has "as many as 2,000 intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles." [vii]

Perhaps the truest thing ever said by FAS President Hans Kristensen is, "Only the Chinese Government knows how many nuclear weapons China has"—and this is also true of Russia and North Korea. [viii]

New START

A more accurate representation of the nuclear balance is the number of operational warheads that can be delivered by missiles and bombers, limited by the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) to 1,550 warheads for the U.S. and Russia. According to New START data as of September 1, 2020: the U.S. has 1,457 deployed warheads, and Russia declares 1,447 deployed warheads. [ix]

However, Russia is notorious for violating arms control treaties and commitments. For example, Moscow is violating the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (deploying prohibited INF missiles), the Presidential Nuclear Initiative (cheating its way to a tenfold advantage over the U.S. in tactical nuclear weapons), and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (developing advanced, new generation nuclear weapons). [x]

Although the State Department contends Russia is complying with New START, independent experts, like Dr. Mark Schneider, a former DoD senior official, make a compelling case that New START verification provisions are grossly inadequate. Russia could be far above New START levels, according to Schneider, having perhaps 3,300 deployed warheads. Usually, reliable, independent Russian analysts, Pavel Felgengauer and Sergei Rogov, estimate Russia could have, operational and stockpiled, 6,000 strategic nuclear warheads and 10,000 tactical nuclear weapons, noting "the number and readiness state" of these weapons "has never been disclosed." [xi]

Intelligence, arms control, and academic communities pretend to have omniscience about the numbers of nuclear weapons deployed by adversaries, despite often being wrong, and despite extraordinary efforts by Russia, China, and North Korea to conceal their nuclear forces. Prudent policymakers and military planners should have low-confidence in the intelligence community and other estimates of the nuclear balance—and prepare for the worst.

ICBM Warheads: Planning for the Worst-Case Scenario

As there are very significant unknowns and uncertainties about the number of adversary nuclear weapons, either “stockpiled” or supposedly “limited” by arms control, a better way of weighing the strategic nuclear balance may be by U.S. capability to respond to the worst-case scenario—an adversary “bolt from the blue” surprise attack. This amounts to the balance of ICBM warheads.

ICBMs, unlike U.S. strategic bombers and ballistic missile submarines, do not have to be generated to a survivable posture. All U.S. strategic bombers, none of which are maintained on strip-alert, and at least two-thirds of SSBNs, which are normally in port, would be destroyed in a surprise attack.

Because of their high alert rates and responsiveness, ICBMs are probably the only nuclear forces that would really matter in a worst-case scenario “bolt from the blue” surprise attack, which is likely to be an ICBM exchange. If U.S. ICBMs can deter or defeat the worst-case scenario, America may be safe from less challenging nuclear scenarios, and the unknowns about “nuclear stockpiles” and “operational warheads” unconstrained by arms control may not matter.

Russia probably greatly outnumbers the U.S., and China probably has at least parity in the crucial category of ICBM warheads:

- Russia, in addition to having silo-based and mobile ICBMs, has armed its submarines with ICBMs (unlike U.S. SSBNs that carry IRBMs) so they can strike intercontinental targets from their ports and have dockside C3 so they can launch while berthed.
- Russia, China, and North Korea have mobile ICBMs (the U.S. has no mobile ICBMs) because they are more survivable against a first strike, can better elude surveillance for “bean counting” and other intelligence purposes, and by launching from unexpected locations, can better execute a surprise attack.
- Russia, China, and North Korea favor ICBMs over bombers and submarines because of their high-alert constant combat readiness to respond to, or initiate, surprise attack.
- Russia and China favor MIRVed ICBMs, armed with multiple warheads having yield/accuracy combinations for destroying hard targets like missile silos, so one ICBM can destroy many targets in a surprise attack. North Korea paraded possibly the world’s largest MIRVed mobile ICBM. [xii]

Russia’s ICBMs like the SS-18 Mod 5 (10 warheads) and the Sarmat (Satan II, reportedly 10-15 hypersonic warheads) and China’s DF-41 mobile ICBM (10-12 warheads) are ideal instruments for surprise attack. [xiii]

If Main Street USA is right and the most likely scenario is a “bolt from the blue” surprise attack, then the nuclear balance that matters most, perhaps the only firepower that really matters, are the ICBM warheads.

We do not know how many operational ICBM warheads are deployed by Russia and China, but the balance might well look like this: United States 400, Russia 1,000-3,300, China 400-1,000. [xiv]

Since Russia and China, both have ICBMs that can achieve high (90%) single-shot kills against U.S. ICBMs silos, Russia has a preponderant advantage, and so might China, in what is arguably the most important dimension of the strategic nuclear balance. "Winning" a nuclear war, in theory, if not in fact, relies on having the capability to make disarming counterforce attacks very promptly.

By this thinking, a policy that unilaterally abolishes U.S. ICBMs and relies only on strategic bombers and SSBNs, or only on a Monad of SSBNs, invites aggression.

An adversary surprise attack would have to strike just five targets—the three U.S. bomber bases and 2 SSBN ports—to destroy all U.S. nuclear bombers and two-thirds of SSBNs. This is presently within the capability of even North Korea.

Exchange Modeling and Targeting Requirements

The strategic nuclear balance is best assessed by force-on-force exchange modeling under the widest range of plausible scenarios, simulating various possible nuclear wars. Often so complex that the calculations are done by computers, the construction, execution, and outcomes of nuclear wargames yield the most accurate and nuanced understanding of the relative capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses of the opposing sides. [xv]

As a practitioner of nuclear exchange modeling during the Cold War decades and afterward, the vast complexity so consistently results in the same outcomes that the following lessons learned are almost axiomatic:

- He who strikes first wins;
- The U.S. wins if it strikes first from a fully generated posture;
- U.S. force generation is highly visible and may result in the adversary striking first;
- The adversary (the USSR and now Russia) wins if they strike first and is postured to do so without generating forces, relying only on ICBMs.

These lessons learned from decades of exchange modeling probably also apply to nuclear war between the U.S. and China, either now or soon, when China deploys enough DF-41 ICBMs to make a disarming counterforce attack on the U.S. target set: 400 ICBM silos, three bomber bases, and 2 SSBN bases. China's DF-41 ICBM is like a mobile version of the U.S. Peacekeeper ICBM, the most lethal strategic missile ever deployed by the United States.

The lessons learned above might also even apply to a nuclear war between the U.S. and North Korea.

As noted earlier, North Korea can destroy about two-thirds of the U.S. Triad by a surprise attack destroying just five targets—the three U.S. nuclear bomber bases and 2 SSBN bases. North Korea probably has Super-EMP weapons (generating 100 kilovolts/meter or more) which could enable it to damage missile, command and control electronics, and so paralyze U.S. ICBMs (which during the Cold War were EMP hardened to 50 kvs/meter). [xvi]

These operational and technological realities suggest the real nuclear balance of capabilities between the U.S. and North Korea is much more dangerous than the “bean counting” comparisons often made in the press to dismiss the North Korean nuclear threat. The real nuclear balance between North Korea and the U.S. is not adequately or accurately captured by the ratio of North Korean operational warheads (30-60) vs. U.S. operational warheads (1,457), a 24-fold U.S. advantage; and much less so by the ratio North Korean operational warheads (30-60) vs. U.S. warheads in the nuclear stockpile (5,800), a 96-fold U.S. advantage.

Such false metrics may seem reassuring to the U.S. public and policymakers but are dangerously misleading. The 120-pound weakling, armed with a gun, is a potentially mortal threat to anyone, including a much bigger and better armed and trained policeman.

Even more dangerously misleading is the arms control notion that “parity” in numbers of strategic nuclear weapons between the U.S. and Russia is equal security and equal risk for the sides. No arms control agreement, including New START, takes account of the great disparity in targeting requirements between the sides.

For example, unlike the U.S., Russia has many thousands of underground command posts and thousands of nuclear-capable SAMs protecting everything. From the exchange modeling and nuclear targeting perspective, arms control “parity” between the U.S. and Russia in numbers of strategic weapons very significantly disadvantages the United States. The same is true, or soon will be true, for the nuclear balance between the U.S. and China.

The MADness of Minimum Deterrence

A Biden Administration that thinks like HASC Chairman Adam Smith may well reject all paradigms for assessing the nuclear balance and worry not at all about significant disparities and potential vulnerabilities. Or as Chairman Smith recently put it: “We have a nuclear arsenal that still envisions ‘winning a nuclear war’... That’s what I find insane.” [xvii]

Chairman Smith advocates replacing the Triad of bombers, ICBMs, and SSBNs with a Monad of submarines, perhaps reduced from 14 to 6 SSBNs, a posture of “Minimum Deterrence.” [xviii]

After an adversary surprise attack, residual U.S. nuclear forces for a fleet of 14 SSBNs would be the 4 SSBNs on patrol (240 warheads). Or if SSBNs are reduced to 6, residual U.S. nuclear forces would be the 2 SSBNs on patrol (120 warheads). This assumes the boats at sea are not destroyed or their EAM communications severed by EMP or other means.

Every SLBM fired in counterforce retaliation will subtract from the reserve intended to deter nuclear attacks on U.S. cities.

During the Cold War, the criteria for Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) against Russia required blasting 75% of industry and killing 25% of the population, supposedly achievable with 400 Equivalent Megatons (EMTs). [xix] MAD calculations did not include other nuclear capabilities necessary for counterforce attacks and warfighting, just the bottom-line for “city-busting.”

The hope was that, if the U.S. could assuredly execute MAD even after a surprise attack, Russia would be deterred from attacking, or at least would not escalate a nuclear conflict to attacks on U.S. cities. MAD was the Cold War “Minimum Deterrent.”

Today, if the U.S. Triad is reduced to a Monad of 14 or 6 SSBNs after a surprise attack, the residual 240 or 120 U.S. warheads are far short of the 400 EMTs necessary for MAD.

Chairman Smith, Ploughshares, Union of Concerned Scientists, and other anti-nuclear activists propose radical surgery on the U.S. Triad and unprecedented deep reduction of U.S. nuclear capabilities to dangerously deficient levels, offering no justification for their new “Minimum Deterrent”—except their conviction that nuclear warfighting is “insane.”

Yet Russia, China, and North Korea are nuclear warfighters in their military planning, exercises, force posture and other behaviors (like nuclear blackmail)—and they are the ones the U.S. must deter, not Ploughshares.

Chairman Smith and the anti-nuclear Left believe, with the fervor of a secular religion, that nuclear weapons are “unusable” and nuclear war “unthinkable” to everyone, including Russia, China, and North Korea. To them, all these complicated calculations about the nuclear balance and exchange modeling are pointless and obfuscate the essential truth that the mere existence of a small number of U.S. nuclear weapons will be enough to deter.

If a Biden Administration follows their path, it will break radically with consensus strategic thinking that enabled the U.S. to prevail in the Cold War while deterring a thermonuclear World War III, gambling U.S. survival on fantasies of the Ploughshares, Union of Concerned Scientists, and others of the “ban the bomb” Left.

The West has long nurtured in its universities and politics a radical minority cult that damns the United States for inventing the atomic bomb, the fruit of a social-political system they condemn as fundamentally evil. For the original sin of being itself, America must atone and suffer. 75 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, America’s nihilists are on the threshold of getting their wish.

--Dr. Peter Vincent Pry is Executive Director of the EMP Task Force on National and Homeland Security, served as Chief of Staff of the Congressional EMP Commission, and on the staffs of the House Armed Services Committee and the CIA

Notes:

[i] Abraham Mahshie, “HASC Chairman Foreshadows Change To Nuclear Posture And Modernization Delay If Biden Wins” Washington Examiner (November 3, 2020).

[ii] “Outside Perspectives on Nuclear Deterrence Policy and Posture” House Armed Services Committee (March 6, 2019).

[iii] Hans Kristensen and Matt Korda, “Status of World Nuclear Forces” (Federation of American Scientists: September 2020).

[iv] Office of the Secretary of Defense, Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China (Annual Report to Congress: September 1, 2020). Dr. Mark Schneider “The Chinese Nuclear Threat” RealClearDefense (October 24, 2020). Phillip Karber, Strategic Implications of China’s Underground Great Wall (Georgetown University: 2012). See also: “China May Have 1,600-1,800 Nuclear Munitions—Experts” Interfax (October 24, 2011). “Hunt for China’s Secret Nukes: Obama Orders the Pentagon to Find Ways to ‘Neutralize’ Store of Up To 3,000 Nuclear Weapons” Daily Mail (January 8, 2013).

[v] Ibid, Schneider. “DF-41 (Dong Feng-41/CSS-X-20)” MissileThreat CSIS estimates 10 MIRVed warheads. “DF-41” en.wikipedia 10-12 MIRVed warheads. See; John Grady, “U.S. Working to End Chinese Secrecy Around Nuclear Capabilities” USNI (October 15, 2020).

[vi] Karber, Strategic Implications of China's Underground Great Wall, see footnote 4.

[vii] John Grady, "U.S. Working to End Chinese Secrecy Around Nuclear Capabilities" USNI (October 15, 2020).

[viii] Hans Kristensen, "No, China Does Not Have 3,000 Nuclear Weapons" (Federation of American Scientists: December 3, 2011). On Russia, Dr. Mark Schneider, former senior Defense Department official, commenting on Russian Defense Minister Shoigu's recent statement that Russia has constructed 597 ICBM launchers: "It is not possible to have a number anywhere like this high without a covert undeclared ICBM force." Schneider correspondence (October 15, 2020). "Orenburg Formation of Russian Strategic Missile Forces to Prepare for Deployment of 2 Avangard Missile Complexes by Yearend—Shoigu" Interfax (October 13, 2020). On North Korea see: Dr. Peter Vincent Pry "Underestimating the North Korean Nuclear Threat" Secure Freedom Quarterly (2nd Quarter 2016).

[ix] "New START data as of 1 September 2020" http://russianforces.org/blog/2020/10/new_start_data_as_of_1_september_1.shtml

[x] Department of State, 2020 Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments (Bureau of Verification and Compliance: 2020). Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, "How To Lose A War Without Firing A Shot?" The Hill (April 27, 2020). Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, "Arms Control Addiction" Newsmax (August 25, 2020). Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, "The Case Against Arms Control" RealClearDefense (January 12, 2019). For the fullest record of Soviet arms control violations during the Cold War, see "GAC Report on Soviet Noncompliance Oct 1984" insidethecoldwar.org which is the summary of the still classified President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament, A Quarter Century of Soviet Compliance Practices Under Arms Control Commitments: 1958-1983 (The White House: 1984).

[xi] Dr. Mark Schneider, "Does Russia Have 2-to-1 Advantage In Deployed Strategic Nuclear Weapons?" RealClearDefense (January 12, 2019). Pavel Felgengauer, "Kremlin Overrides Own Defense and Foreign Policy Establishment on Arms Control" Eurasia Daily Monitor (October 22, 2020).

[xii] "North Korea Displays Huge New ICBM At Coronavirus-Defying Parade" AFP (October 10, 2020). Paul Crespo, "North Korea Displays New Long-Range ICBM at Low Key Parade" American Defense News (October 13, 2020).

[xiii] "Russia's Hypersonic Ballistic Missile And Laser Systems In Final Tests, Putin Says" Moscow Times (April 11, 2019) describes Satan II as carrying "multiple hypersonic warheads" and "up to 15 warheads." Dan Stefano, "Russia Tests New 'Satan 2' ICBM To Replace Original" wky.com (March 30, 2018) Putin describes Satan 2 as carrying "a bigger number of nuclear warheads" and "more powerful."

[xiv] 1,000 Russian ICBM warheads assume they are complying with New START. Hans Kristensen and Robert Norris estimate Russia has 1,040 ICBM warheads in "Russian Nuclear Forces, 2016" Nuclear Notebook (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists: 2016). Franz-Stefan Gady, "Russian General: Russia Now Fields 400 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles" The Diplomat (December 16, 2016). 3,300 Russian ICBM warheads (includes SLBMs of intercontinental range) could be deployed now if Russia is cheating on New START, see excellent analysis of Dr. Mark Schneider, "Russian Nuclear Force Expansion and the Failure of Arms Control" RealClearDefense (October 24, 2019). Schneider, "Does Russia Have 2-to-1 Advantage In Deployed Strategic Nuclear Weapons?" in footnote 11. Correspondence with Dr. Schneider (October 11, 2020). 400-1,000 ICBM warheads for China, the range assumes a small clandestine force or larger clandestine force, both entirely plausible since 32 deployed DF-41 ICBMs alone can carry 320-384 warheads, and each DF-41 ICBM launcher is supposed to have at least one missile re-load (640-768 warheads). Alternatively, only 68 DF-41s would have to be hidden in China's Underground Great Wall, combined with the 32 deployed DF-41s, for 1,000 warheads.

[xv] Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, Nuclear Wars: Exchanges and Outcomes (Crane Russak, Taylor & Francis: 1990), once used as a textbook at National Defense University, is still a good introduction to the calculations and techniques of force-on-force nuclear exchange modeling.

[xvi] "Threat Posed By Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack" Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee (January 10, 2008). EMP Commission, Chairman's Report (July 2017) pp. 23-25, all the unclassified EMP Commission reports are available at www.firstempcommission.org

[xvii] Mahshie, see footnote 1.

[xviii] "Outside Perspectives on Nuclear Deterrence Policy and Posture" see footnote 2. Bruce Blair, who starred in the hearings, is credited with converting Rep. Adam Smith, Chairman of the House Armed Service Committees, to his extreme views on U.S. unilateral nuclear disarmament see: Jessica Sleight, Zia Minn, Frank Von Hippel, "Blair: Challenging The Accidental Nuclear War Machine" Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (August 11, 2020).

[xix] Robert S. McNamara, The Fiscal Year 1969-1973 Defense Program and the 1969 Defense Budget, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee (DoD: 1968) p. 50. Lawrence Friedman, The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (1981) pp. 246-247. Russia can destroy 90% of U.S. industry and 40% of the U.S. population with 100 EMTs because of their greater concentration in large urban-industrial areas. See Pry footnote 15 p. 222. Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, "Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) No Longer Mutual: U.S. Unilaterally Vulnerable" Family Security Matters (March 14, 2018).

Chinese have global military ambitions

Washington Times, 2 Dec 20 Bill Gertz

China's military is rapidly expanding the ability to project power globally and in the coming decade will be capable of waging war far from the homeland, according to a major congressional report.

The People's Liberation Army has made recent advances in missiles, bombers, transport aircraft, at-sea replenishment and logistics in ways that "significantly improved the PLA's ability to project power and deploy expeditionary forces far from China's shores," the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission concluded Tuesday in its annual report.

"China's power projection capabilities are developing at a brisk and consistent pace, reflecting the civilian leadership's determination to transform the PLA into a global expeditionary force in a matter of decades," the report's authors said. "By mid-century, the PLA aims to be capable of rapidly deploying forces anywhere in the world."

China's growing military might is most advanced in East and Southeast Asia but is moving quickly into the Indian Ocean and as far as the Caribbean and South America.

Carolyn Bartholomew, co-chair of the commission, told reporters during an online meeting on the release of the report that research, including testimony from American intelligence officials, revealed that China over time intends to project military forces far beyond the Indo-Pacific region.

"Within the next 10 to 15 years, Chinese leaders aim to be capable of fighting a limited war overseas to protect its interests in countries participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative," she said.

The ruling Communist Party's adversarial approach toward the United States reached new levels of intensity this year "as China's leaders have grown increasingly aggressive and antagonistic," she said, and Beijing is no longer even pretending to abide by international laws and norms.

The 587-page report examines Chinese economic and security threats and makes several recommendations for Congress to counter the challenges. However, the report's most detailed section focuses on China's increasing military reach, which involves advanced missiles, warships and warplanes, along with a logistics and basing system stretching from China's coasts to Southwest Asia, Africa and South America.

'Serious threat'

The increasing capacity "now presents a serious threat to U.S. allies in East and Southeast Asia, with whom the United States has defense treaties or is required to defend as a result of other security obligations," the report said.

Any U.S. military response on behalf of allies in the aftermath of a PLA attack must prepare for "the possibility of a costly and protracted conflict," the report said. "Moreover, growing PLA capabilities will enable the force to contest U.S. interests across the globe."

"It may not be so farfetched to imagine the PLA someday deploying to defend [Belt and Road] infrastructure, support Beijing's preferred elites in a coup on an island nation, or prop up authoritarian allies."

The report also warned that Chinese companies operating in the United States may be buying elements for the PLA logistics network that would enhance Beijing's military power and ability to wage war overseas.

In the Western Hemisphere, China is seeking military bases and access that could be used to disrupt or distract the U.S. military during a conflict in Asia.

China also is building up space warfare and cyberattack capabilities as part of its global power projection. The report cited the case of a Chinese satellite tracking station in Argentina, built ostensibly for civilian use, that could identify American satellites for targeting by the PLA's anti-satellite warfare missiles and lasers.

Although retaking the island of Taiwan remains a priority, China's global ambition is to have the military resources to secure assets and Chinese nationals posted overseas and to protect its access to foreign markets, natural resources and advanced technologies, the report said.

The report warned that significant increases in Chinese military training and patrols near Taiwan are part of intensifying military pressure on the independence-leaning government in Taipei. Recent military flights and warship transits north of Taiwan "suggest the PLA could attack Taiwan from the north or the east, compounding the threat of an invasion on the island's western side," the report said.

China also has stepped up aggressive military activities near Japan's Senkaku Islands, which Beijing claims are part of China.

"China has considerably increased the number of aircraft operating near Japanese territory, ramping up military pressure on Japan during peacetime and improving the PLA's ability to carry out a range of potential campaigns involving the seizure of the Senkakus," the report said.

Larry Wortzel, a member of the congressionally authorized commission, said China's power projection is most pronounced in Asia but is expanding with the growth of China's military capabilities.

"Those challenges will increase as China masters [weapons] technologies for which the U.S. has been very slow to develop defenses," he said, including space weapons capable of knocking out satellites, cyberweapons that can disrupt battle management networks and hypersonic missiles that can strike targets rapidly.

Copycat transport

One key indicator of China's growing military strength is the development of the Y-20 military transport, which the PLA deployed in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Y-20 is based on U.S. C-17 transport technology stolen from Boeing Co. during a PLA hacking operation in 2010, according to court documents in the case of Chinese agent Su Bin, who was convicted of the document theft.

The C-17 is the workhorse of U.S. military power projection, and nearly 300 have been built.

China has only 10 Y-20s, first introduced in 2016, but also is using American-made Boeing 777s for military transports, according to the report. The low number of Y-20s currently limits the reach of the PLA's expeditionary forces, but China is rapidly building more and could have 100 to 400 by 2030, the report said.

China's precision strike capabilities are improving by the day and will be the "key enabler" of power projection, the commission survey said. China's force of 1,300 ballistic and cruise missiles already poses a major threat to U.S. forces that would respond to American allies in the region.

China's first hypersonic missile, the DF-17, was disclosed last year. It has a maximum range of 1,500 miles and "would play an important role in a

regional contingency and may already have entered service with PLA operational units in 2020,” the report said.

For its overseas basing network, China has a two-track strategy of using purely military bases and some of the 94 Chinese-owned civilian ports around the world that can double as military facilities.

Its current military bases outside China include just one traditional base at Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, and new military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea.

Beijing planners are considering sites for additional bases, possibly in places such as Cuba and Venezuela, the report said.

A land base for the Chinese military is expected to be set up in Cambodia, which could further shift the balance of power in the region in favor of Beijing. Cambodian officials say the PLA will soon be given access to the country’s Ream naval installation on the Gulf of Thailand, near the massive Chinese-financed Dara Sakor resort and commercial project where China is building an airport.

“If China is able to deploy fighter jets from Dara Sakor in the future, it would enable the PLA to contest U.S. air superiority over the Malacca Strait and into the eastern Indian Ocean,” the report said.

Commission co-Chair Robin Cleveland said China faced its first economic contraction since the 1970s this year as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak but has continued its large-scale theft of intellectual property and data. Ms. Cleveland warned that U.S. investment could be used to bail out sectors of the Chinese economy.

The commission recommended that Congress legislate reciprocity for the bilateral relationship and challenge Beijing’s efforts to exploit the United Nations to support its international economic policies.

The panel also called for making the director of the American Institute in Taiwan the de facto ambassador to the island democracy, a Senate-confirmed position.

Hypersonic Missile Coming Five Years Faster Thanks to Acquisition Reform

https://www.airforcemag.com/hypersonic-missile-coming-five-years-faster-thanks-to-acquisition-reform/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2012.04.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

By John A. Tirpak for Air Force Magazine // Dec. 3, 2020

A rewrite of the Pentagon’s acquisition rulebook is allowing the Air Force’s AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW) to progress five years faster than it would have under previous procedures, the service’s top uniformed acquisition officer said Dec. 3.

The missile will achieve operational capability before the end of 2022, he said. “If we had planned this as a traditional program, it would have taken an additional five years,” Lt. Gen. Duke Z. Richardson, military deputy to Air Force service acquisition executive Will Roper, said in a National

Defense Industrial Association online program on acquisition reform. The ARRW “started in May of ’18,” and, although it has experienced “some hiccups,” it will achieve an early operational capability “by the fourth quarter of ’22,” he said, with “a residual capability once that’s done.”

The ARRW is the Air Force’s “hallmark rapid prototyping program,” he said. The Pentagon, at the direction of acquisition and sustainment chief Ellen M. Lord, undertook a rewrite of the 5000-series acquisition rulebook, which was signed off by Deputy Defense Secretary David L. Norquist in September. Pieces of the rules changes—abetted by congressional authorities to skip some non-value-added reports and steps in the interest of speed—have been applied over the last few years.

Once the ARRW rapid prototyping phase is complete, “we’ll make a decision ... whether to roll into a rapid fielding or do a major capability acquisition,” Richardson said. “Thankfully, that’s not a decision we need to make today.” Richardson praised a new series of Pentagon “pathways” to identify the type of program or service to be acquired, which requires program managers to “think critically” about the optimal method of contracting and use a tailored approach.

“Our DOD acquisition workforce is very compliance-based; very prone to follow the rules as they’re written,” Richardson said. When he was a program executive officer on four programs, only rarely would programs request a tailored approach to contracting, even if they were well suited to such an approach. “I would ask them, ... ‘why didn’t you ask me to tailor it?’ ... They said, ‘We weren’t sure you’d say yes,’ or, ‘Could you just approve it, sir, we’ve done the work, approve it so we can move on.’”

Richardson faulted himself for not “giving them PEO intent before they started the process.” The new system demands that program managers tailor their contracts. “You’re not going to get past the first page unless you make decisions” about how the contract should be uniquely structured, he noted. The new regulations “do a good job of forcing you to look at the risk, the urgency, the complexity of exactly what you’re buying and figure out which of these pathways you’re going to follow,” each of which have unique approaches and timetables.

Software, for example, forces an iterative process under the new rules. The new playbook also likely ensures that a single contracting method won’t hold for the duration of a program, he said. The rules compel the workforce to “think and not just follow recipes.” Lord said the six pathways are: urgent, medium, major, software, business systems, and acquisition of services. She noted that nearly half of the Pentagon’s annual \$124 billion expenditures on contracts is for services, and 80 percent of that is for sustainment.

The Air Force used the new rules to deliver a needed capability swiftly under the “urgent” pathway as it looked to find a means to transport COVID-19-infected personnel, Richardson said. The department received a Joint Urgent Operational Need statement “at the end of March, and we shipped the first ones in June,” he said. The choice of pathway affects the timelines of things like testing and product support, which are all spelled out in the new rules, he said.

In addition to Lord’s six pathways, Richardson told her during the event that the Air Force plans to request a seventh, “for space, because it’s different.” The Department of the Air Force doesn’t buy a lot of space systems, and their product support strategies are “quite different from everything else,” he said. While the service will first explore whether it can use the existing pathways, “We need to get after how we do space acquisition.” Lord did not respond to the comment.

Another benefit of the new regulations is that documentation can be plugged into the process in a more sensible way, where and when it's truly needed, Richardson said. A great deal of time can be saved by not having to produce a "cataclysmic Milestone B"—the start of a major program—with acres of paperwork that must be read, commented on, and refined for a program to advance. The F-15EX is another example of a program following the new rules, Richardson noted. As a rapid fielding program—without the need for rapid prototyping—the F-15EX could take advantage of development work already done by allies.

"We've already awarded the Lot 1" contract, he noted. However, the program will likely shift to a "major capability pathway" once it gets underway. Richardson said Congress and the Pentagon should give the acquisition workforce some slack on possible mistakes, which he said there will be over time. "If we react in a negative way and start firing people" over mistakes that are honest, in the spirit of going fast, then the workforce will say, "'OK, I see how this works, this is why I used to be risk-averse,'" he said. On the whole, there will be "more good than mistakes," Richardson predicted.

U.S. Navy's Ohio Class Submarine To Get New Hypersonic Weapons

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/12/u-s-navys-ohio-class-submarine-to-get-new-hypersonic-weapons/>

The U.S. Navy's four Ohio Class SSGNs may soon receive new hypersonic missiles which could transform their capabilities. H I Sutton explains why.

By: [H I Sutton](#) for the Naval News // 02 Dec 2020

They are by far the [most heavily armed conventional strike platforms](#) in the undersea battlespace.

The U.S. Navy's four Ohio Class cruise missile submarines (SSGNs) can carry a total of 154 Tomahawk Land Attack Cruise Missiles (TLAM Block-IV) in their missile silos. When added to the torpedo room, this gives a total of 176 full-size weapons. This quantity of weapons is already unparalleled, even by the latest Russian Navy SSGNs. And the submarines may soon receive new hypersonic missiles which could transform their capabilities.

The new missile, being developed under the **Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) program**, will also reaffirm the U.S. Navy's lead at a time when other navies are also rearming with hypersonic weapons. The new missile will be able to hit targets with cruise-missiles like precision at extended ranges. And because of its incredible speed, greater than five times the speed of sound (Mach 5), it can do so within minutes of the target being identified. Its speed and maneuverability will also make it much harder to counter.

The U.S. Navy expect to deploy the new hypersonic weapon on Ohio-class SSGNs. The head of the Navy's Strategic Systems Programs, Vice Admiral Johnny Wolfe, recently said that submarines will get the [hypersonic strike weapon by 2025](#). It will employ the Common Hypersonic Glide Body (CHGB) which is the same design as the U.S. Army will use. This will be married to a booster which can fit within the Ohio Class' vertical launch tubes.

These tubes are left over from when the submarines performed nuclear deterrence patrols with the Trident missile. Each of the massive silos can carry seven Tomahawk cruise missiles. It is currently unclear how many of the new missiles will fit in each silo, but a reasonable assumption at this

stage is two to three. Provided all 22 tubes currently used for missiles are able to accept the weapon, this would give a maximum load of 44 or 66 missiles. The Tomahawk will still remain relevant, maybe preferable in many scenarios, so a mixed load is likely to be carried.

So the new missiles will not increase the number of weapons, but they do increase the potency and versatility. Russia is also developing hypersonic missiles for its submarines. The new 3M22 Zircon missile (also Romanized Tsirkon) is an anti-ship weapon which fits into the same space as a cruise missile. The Mach 8 missile will equip the Pr. 855M Severodvinsk-II Class submarines and possibly upgraded Oscar-II class boats. Maximum weapons loads would be 32 and 72 respectively.

There are indications that the test program for Zircon has suffered some complications but a [November 30 test launch](#) from a surface warship was reportedly successful. China's plans for submarine launched hypersonic weapons are less clear. They already have ground-based and air-launched weapons, and a version for surface ships is expected. It has to be considered within the Chinese Navy's (PLAN) capacity to develop submarine launched versions if they make it a priority.

The Navy version of the CPS missile is likely to find itself onto the enlarged Virginia Block-V submarines and surface ships. But thanks to their incredible missile payload the Ohios will remain a major platform until they are retired. The new generation of weapon will greatly increase the tactical and strategic options available to U.S. commanders.

Posted by : [H I Sutton](#) -- H I Sutton writes about the secretive and under-reported submarines, seeking out unusual and interesting vessels and technologies involved in fighting beneath the waves. Submarines, capabilities, naval special forces underwater vehicles and the changing world of underwater warfare and seabed warfare. To do this he combines the latest Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) with the traditional art and science of defense analysis. He occasionally writes non-fiction books on these topics and draws analysis-based illustrations to bring the subject to life. In addition, H I Sutton is a naval history buff and data geek. His personal website about these topics is Covert Shores (www.hisutton.com)

Deterrence in Space: Requirements for Credibility

Deterrence in Space: Requirements for Credibility | RealClearDefense

By Christopher M. Stone for Real Clear Defense // December 01, 2020

Introduction

To deter, the United States must be able to attribute an attack on its satellites... to justify a punitive response elsewhere... -Michael Gleason and Peter Hays Aerospace Corp Center for Space Policy and Strategy Even in a relatively peaceful period, under circumstances where a hostile relationship is unclear, the presence and development of one side's space systems and the boosting of its space [weapons] capability, still can potentially influence and constrain the military activity of other nations and generate a certain deterrent effect.

-Sun Zhaoli

People's Liberation Army's Science of Strategy

China has an active, attack to deter, approach to space deterrence. It is one grounded in a first-mover advantage, escalation dominance framework. It is not an approach based on mutual vulnerability, space security, or space environmental concerns. As such, the U.S. framework for assessing and developing a credible deterrence posture must be focused on who the adversary believes they are, not what we want them to be. Towards this end, a reality-based approach to deterrence in space requires a tailored framework that takes this vital context into account.

The Deterrence Through Attribution Concept

In recent years, space policy writers have attempted to re-define space deterrence in a way that is not deterrence at all. Recently, for example, two space analysts proposed a concept that can be described as deterrence through attribution. [1] The authors correctly assert that space is “an offensive dominant arena, meaning it is considered materially easier and less costly to attack a satellite than to defend a satellite.”[2] It is therefore imperative to deter attacks against critical U.S. space infrastructure.

The concept they posit relies not on a credible space warfare-winning capability to deter aggression but on being able to attribute an attack on satellites and demonstrating the resilience of non-weapons space capabilities.[3] In other words, the ability to keep absorbing attacks while being able to identify the perpetrator is the key to deterring the attacks one is enduring. Does that make sense?

Attribution “refers to the ability to determine the actor(s) responsible for creating certain effects and, in many space scenarios, can be difficult to determine.”[4] This can be difficult depending on the type of an attack, such as electronic warfare (i.e. jamming), where the effects can be similar to naturally occurring phenomena like “geomagnetic storms which can interfere with satellite operations...”[5] In order to deter an attack by an aggressor, it is imperative for deterrence strategies to be able to attribute interference or attacks to the correct perpetrator.

While attribution and tracking of ground-based or orbital anti-satellite (ASAT) strikes is important, by itself it is not a deterrent. Deterrence, as described by classical deterrence theorists such as Herman Kahn and Thomas Schelling, is typically achieved in one of two ways: punishment or denial. In the concept of deterrence by attribution, a “deterrence by punishment strategy has more stringent attribution requirements.”[6]

To deter, “the adversary must perceive that it will not be able to escape responsibility for an attack in space due to the United States’ inadequate ability to confidently attribute the attack.”[7] This threat of attribution must be communicated through a declaratory policy that the adversary can understand.[8] Moreover, while the deterrent enhancement comes from attribution “threats,” the retaliation itself is assumed to be a “punitive response elsewhere” implying a reliance upon horizontal escalation, meaning a response in a domain other than space.

This is an indirect reference to the declaratory policy currently found in the 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America and 2018 National Space Strategy, both of which state that aggression in space “will be met with a deliberate response at a time, place, manner, and domain of our choosing.”[9] In order for deterrence by punishment to be effective, the attribution information must be “credible and available to share with [a] broad range of stakeholders” such as allies and commercial partners.[10]

By contrast, “deterrence by denial emphasizes the ability to absorb an attack” and to communicate the “resilience of U.S. space capabilities” through “disaggregation, diversification, deception, protection, proliferation, and distribution” of space assets that will convince “the adversary that it will be unable to achieve its objective.”[11] Comparing Deterrence by Attribution with Classical Deterrence Theory and Practice

Since the end of the Cold War, the idea of space warfare, especially kinetic engagements in space, has been viewed by some as “unthinkable.”[12] This view is rooted in fear of the negative environmental impact of debris generation that would threaten “space

security.” However, the focus of deterrence or national defense policy should be the protection and defense of the nation’s critical space infrastructure, not the space environment.

When the United States, or any country for that matter, declares a deterrent threat to an adversary state, in any domain, that threat must be underpinned by a credible resolve to use force, not merely the capability to attribute and absorb attacks.[13] The risk of deterrence failure increases when the threat to respond is not taken seriously. Some commentators have argued that rhetoric and statements that appear to be threatening are “dangerous” and destabilizing to an already tense situation.[14] However, to be credible, deterrence must be based on more than just words. It relies on armed capability and the perceived willingness to use it.[15]

If a state is willing to retaliate regardless of escalation risk, then most likely the status quo can be maintained through deterrence. If, however, a state is perceived as unwilling to follow through on its threats, then the credibility of the threat is degraded, risking deterrence failure.[16] Appearing to do nothing in response to an act of aggression by an enemy demonstrates a lack of will. Standing firm and being willing to assume the costs and risks associated with that threat displays determination.[17] Declaratory policy serves as the mechanism to convey U.S. determination, capability, and will to deter aggression.[18]

China appears to recognize the importance of acting proactively and decisively as a way of bolstering its deterrence threats. Beijing has been taking actions to exert its sovereignty and expand its terrestrial land and sea claims in the South China Sea and East China Sea by establishing Economic Exclusion Zones, Air Defense Identification Zones, and building up island military bases throughout the first and second island chains.

There are concerns that the rapid deployment of Chinese counterspace capabilities and its aggressive behavior in the Pacific could lead Beijing to assert it has the legal right to attack foreign spacecraft overflying Chinese territory.[19] This would have serious repercussions on current customary norms such as freedom of overflight that have existed since Sputnik 1.

China’s View of Space Deterrence and Warfighting

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) space forces and their political leadership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) do not subscribe to the aforementioned deterrence through attribution concept, or the horizontal escalation methodology of retaliation in “a domain of their choosing.” Instead, they have a well-developed space deterrence concept undergirding general deterrence, which is supported by a rapidly growing, deployed space weapons capability.

As one Chinese document highlights, simply an infringement upon China’s perceived rights and interests could be viewed as an attack in and of itself: ...when another state conscientiously infringes upon China’s space rights and interests and causes harm to national space security, China [may] implement space deterrence against the enemy, and launch a space counterattack.[20] In the PLA’s writings on space warfare and deterrence, the development of “real capabilities” for space attack are considered an “integral part of battle planning by the People’s Liberation Army in any future conflict.”[21]

This not only includes states of war, but also “periods of tension.”[22] Space forces, unlike nuclear forces, are considered by Chinese military leaders to be subject to a much lower threshold of use and therefore “space strategic power must not only have a deterrent effect, but real warfighting

potential.”[23] In the Chinese language, the definition of deterrence is different than that of the West. While the United States views deterrence as the prevention of war through cost/benefit calculation and attempts at controlling perceptions, the Chinese term *weishe* is a combination of coercive, pro-active force and self-defense responses.[24]

The focus of space deterrence operations is to deter behavior that endangers China’s own interests by enhancing deployed military capabilities.[25] To do this requires “powerful comprehensive national power” in space that supports the overarching general or “integrated-whole” deterrence strategy.[26] While space support capabilities have become very important to the PLA space strategy, they alone are not what creates a deterrent effect. For the Chinese, having a credible “attack to deter” capability in space to threaten other nation’s space capabilities is where their deterrence of the adversary’s space capabilities resides.

“In this way, both sides would be reluctant to attack the other’s space assets lest they also come under attack.”[27] In addition to having credible space attack weapons for effective deterrence and warfighting in space, the Chinese advocate that they should reveal “firm resolve to dare...and use this capability” in order to create “certain psychological pressure on and fear in the adversary, and [force] the adversary to dare not conduct space operations with initiative.” PLA strategists argue for conducting “limited space operational activities” that include “warning and punishment as goals.”[28]

The overarching objective of space deterrence is to “choose appropriate deterrence means to display the horribleness, severity, and urgency of the consequences.”[29] This type of space deterrence (which might be called “space deterrence with Chinese characteristics”) suggests how China views space warfighting, as the Chinese have written about how the United States will have to deal with the “grave aftermath” that “rapid and destructive” space warfare will have upon its space-enabled society and armed forces.[30]

A Suggested Path towards Credible Space Deterrence for the United States

Deterrence is a fundamentally a cognitive issue. The mind of a potential aggressor must be as clearly understood as possible in order to have any chance at achieving deterrent credibility by design. Attribution, while important, is not the “capability” most needed to achieve a deterrent threat. As noted above, China has an active, attack to deter, approach to space deterrence. As such, the U.S. framework for assessing and developing a credible deterrence posture must be based on a realistic assessment of what an adversary believes, not a mirror-image of our own views based on what we think they should believe.

This requires innovative thinking and development of a tailored framework for implementing reliable space deterrence. Such a framework requires acknowledging four key items. First, American strategists should recognize that effective deterrence requires the ability to understand an adversary’s decision-making process. This can be facilitated through observation and analysis of its strategic culture, doctrine, and behavior.[31]

Second, strategists and policymakers must acknowledge that space is an offensive dominant medium.[32] As a result, in order to provide effective deterrence in space, the United States must actively protect its space systems through a credible offensive, counterforce capability.[33] Next, any future national security space posture should acknowledge that damage limitation measures such as active defense of critical U.S. space and terrestrial infrastructures are vital to ensure credible deterrence.[34]

Deployment of active defenses supports the view expressed by deterrence scholars such as Keith B. Payne, who argues that to exercise force projection requires management of risk to the U.S. homeland and deployed forces. This includes damage limitation measures such as “offensive capabilities for counterforce strikes; active defenses such as air and ballistic missile defenses; and passive defenses such as physical protection” and hardening against space-borne electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attacks.[35]

Finally, policymakers and strategists must view space systems as a critical infrastructure of the United States and not just a support structure for force enhancement and terrestrial operations.[36] Though this concept has been evident in national strategy and doctrine for years, it has never received a commensurate level of funding or support by senior leadership.[37]

Conclusion

According to the Department of Defense, China is rapidly developing a multi-layered attack architecture to make its military space doctrine a reality.[38] This array of space forces includes “kinetic-kill missiles, ground-based lasers, and orbiting space robots, as well as expanding space surveillance capabilities, which can monitor objects in space within their field of view and enable counterspace actions.”[39]

While some are still in development, such as space electronic warfare jammers, offensive cyber capabilities, and directed-energy weapons, China has deployed ground-based anti-satellite missiles “intended to target low-Earth orbit satellites,” with assessments indicating Beijing’s intention to pursue additional ASAT weapons capable of “destroying satellites up to geosynchronous Earth orbit.”[40]

Doctrines are being developed at Chinese service academies and schools that stress the necessity of “destroying, damaging, and interfering with the enemy’s reconnaissance and communications satellites, “ in order to “blind and deafen the enemy.”[41] Because of these developments, the United States must have the ability to achieve an escalation dominance-based approach to space deterrence. It does not possess sufficient capability at the present time.

The Chief of Space Operations’ Planning Guidance for 2020 mentions many of the above threats posed by Chinese space forces; however, it does not suggest the United States is developing credible, survivable, ASAT forces of its own. It does, however, mention the importance of “investments in orbital warfare, space electronic warfare, and tactical intelligence portfolios to enable effective defensive options and prompt offensive capability to deter adversaries from initiating conflict....in space.”[42]

This is a good start, but deterring and, if deterrence fails, defeating potential adversaries like China will require the United States to develop and deploy a much more robust space posture in order for its deterrent threats to be credible. The safety and security of Americans and American interests depend upon the U.S. ability to employ and defend its space assets. This should be a priority of the President and the next Congress..

Christopher M. Stone -- Christopher Stone is Professor of Space Strategy at Missouri State University’s Graduate Department of Defense and Strategic Studies in Washington DC. He is the former Special Assistant to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy at the Pentagon. The views reflected here are his own.

Russia waits warily to chart new U.S. course

There may be more head scratching in the Kremlin than anywhere else in the world right now as Russian leaders try to get used to the idea of a President Biden.

President Trump was accused of being too close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, but his administration also saw a major U.S. military buildup, stepped-up offensive arms sales to Ukraine and the scrapping of major multilateral agreements on nuclear arms, surveillance flights and Iran's nuclear programs. Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden and his team are talking about taking a tougher line on Russia but also of quickly negotiating an extension of a major arms control deal that Mr. Trump has left dangling.

Mr. Putin is one of the most prominent international holdouts among world leaders who have yet to formally congratulate the Democrat a full month after the U.S. election. Mr. Trump spoke repeatedly about the desirability of better U.S.-Russian relations. Mr. Biden, whose experience dealing with Moscow dates back to the days of the Soviet Union and who once referred to Mr. Putin as a "KGB thug," and his top aides have sounded a far more skeptical note, particularly on human rights and the state of democracy in Mr. Putin's Russia.

Mr. Putin, "like most autocratic rulers, attributes pivotal importance to personal ties, yet he apparently cannot find a way to connect with Biden," Pavel K. Baev, a senior researcher at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, and longtime analyst of the Russian political system, wrote this week in an analysis for the Jamestown Foundation. In some of his most extensive public remarks since the election, Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Antonov told a **Brookings Institution** forum Wednesday that Moscow is seeking "to have pragmatic relations, friendly relations with the United States" under the new administration.

"We are two great powers," he said. "The whole world depends upon the relations between the United States and Russia." Although Mr. Antonov sidestepped questions about Russia's acknowledgment of Mr. Biden's victory, Mr. Putin has tacitly appeared to welcome a Biden administration over a second Trump administration. The former vice president has appeared more open to striking a deal to extend the New START arms control treaty, set to expire barely two weeks after Mr. Biden takes office.

Mr. Biden said last year that if elected, he would pursue an extension of the 2010 treaty, which he called "an anchor of strategic stability between the United States and Russia, and use that as a foundation for new arms control agreements." The last remaining arms deal between the two nuclear powers, New START limits the number of deployable U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons at 1,550.

"Our country needs New START as much as the United States," Mr. Antonov said. "We have time," he said. Mr. Putin isn't the only Russian wary of what the change in power at the White House will bring. A poll by Russia's Levada Center this week found that a majority of Russians don't believe that bilateral relations will improve under a Biden administration. A mere 12% of Russians who responded to the poll said they believe relations will improve during Mr. Biden's tenure.

The results paint a stark contrast to a 2016 poll when 46% of respondents said ties would improve during the Trump administration. By contrast, 45% of Russian respondents polled in November said relations would not change materially under Mr. Biden, while 30% predicted they would get worse. The recent presidential battle hasn't helped the U.S. image in Russia, either: 51% of those polled in November said they view the U.S. in a "bad" or "very bad" light, up from 46% in the summer.

As the U.S. and Russia navigate their ever-changing relationship, the secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization urged both parties to continue renewed talks. "We welcome the dialogue between [the] U.S. and Russia to find a way forward because we should not want to find ourselves in a situation where there is no agreement regulating the number of nuclear warheads," Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday.

During a meeting this week of the foreign ministers of the NATO alliance, the pact discussed "Russia's continued military buildup in our neighborhood, as well as arms control," Mr. Stoltenberg said. "We should not find ourselves in a situation where there is no agreement regulating the number of nuclear warheads," he said, referencing New START. Mr. Trump's team has been notably skeptical of arms accords, ending the Cold War-era INF Treaty on intermediate range nuclear weapons with Russia and pulling out of the multilateral Open Skies Agreement on oversight surveillance flights.

Mr. Antonov said such resistance has led to a "further degradation of arms control." He said the U.S. pullout from the Open Skies Treaty put the entire agreement "on the brink of collapse" and that the White House made "erroneous steps" with regard to the INF Treaty. U.S. officials counter that Mr. Trump acted because Russia failed to meet its obligations under both accords. In October, the U.S. and Russia appeared to be on the verge of a short-term deal to preserve New START after Moscow offered to freeze part of its nuclear arsenal in exchange for an extension.

But the negotiations appeared to have stalled after Mr. Biden's victory as Moscow waits to attempt to quickly ratify a new agreement. "We see that the United States does not intend to ratify the treaty, at least for now," said Mr. Antonov, expressing optimism with a new administration. Mr. Biden and many of his top advisers are veterans of the Obama administration's ill-fated "reset" of U.S.-Russian relations that ended definitively with Mr. Putin's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

Mr. Baev said Mr. Biden's foreign policy team will likely be more predictable and unified than Mr. Trump's, but perhaps no easier for Mr. Putin to deal with in the long run. "The last four years saw a deep deterioration in Russian-U.S. relations and plenty of frustration in Moscow regarding the setbacks in the much anticipated high-level bilateral dialogue," he wrote. "The incoming Biden administration only adds to this frustration because its promise of a coherent and predictable foreign policy is set to reduce Russia's space for maverick maneuvering in a disorganized international arena.

4 looming foreign policy crises that could derail Biden's agenda early on

<https://www.vox.com/21726445/iran-north-korea-russia-afghanistan-joe-biden-foreign-policy>

Iran, North Korea, Russia, and Afghanistan could cause short-term problems for Biden's long-term global agenda.

By Alex Ward@AlexWardVoxalex.ward@vox.com Dec 1, 2020

President-elect Joe Biden may want his administration to focus on long-term issues like the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, rebuilding alliances, and America's relationship with China, but some key near-term foreign policy problems will likely require his attention first.

After the assassination of its top nuclear scientist by an unknown attacker, Iran might be less willing to engage in diplomacy with America and instead seek revenge by targeting US officials. North Korea could test an intercontinental ballistic missile early in Biden's term to try to gauge the new administration's response. The last remaining nuclear arms control deal between the US and Russia is set to expire just over two weeks after Biden takes office.

And the reduced number of American troops in Afghanistan could derail sputtering peace talks and worsen the country's security situation. Such a dilemma wouldn't be unique to Biden. Every new president comes in with ideas on how to handle larger global problems, only to have the colloquial "tyranny of the inbox" monopolize their time. "If you assume that foreign policy is less than half, and maybe a quarter, of the president's time, then that really shines a light on how serious this inbox problem is," said Christopher Preble, co-director of the New American Engagement Initiative at the Atlantic Council think tank.

Once he's in the Oval Office, then, Biden will likely find his hopes of tackling grander foreign policy challenges dashed by the effort he'll have to expend cleaning up more immediate messes. What follows is what four of those messes could look like.

Iran could try to assassinate Israeli or American officials

The 2015 nuclear agreement among Iran, the US, European powers, Russia, and China put tight restrictions on Tehran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The Obama administration's goal was to block Iran's path to a nuclear weapon diplomatically instead of by military force. But President Donald Trump withdrew America from the deal in 2018, reimposed financial penalties on Iran, and asked European countries to cease their business with the country.

That kicked off a years-long cycle of escalations that, among other things, has seen Iran stockpile 12 times the amount of low-enriched uranium the deal allowed and the assassinations of two prominent Iranian officials. The first took place in January, when the US killed Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's paramilitary forces and one of the most powerful men in the country. Iran promised to exact a "harsher revenge" in response; so far, that revenge has consisted mostly of attacks on US forces and assets by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq.

The second killing happened last Friday, when the mastermind behind Iran's nuclear program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was fatally shot inside his vehicle near Tehran, reportedly with a remote-controlled weapon. No one has publicly claimed responsibility for the attack, but Israel has been suspected of orchestrating similar assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists in the past. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has already blamed Israel for it — and added his own threat.

"Iran will surely respond to the martyrdom of our scientist at the proper time," he said in a Saturday speech. If Iran were to respond to these assassinations by escalating attacks on US personnel in Iraq or by attempting to assassinate US or Israeli officials, it would pose a major challenge for a Biden administration. "Certainly a retaliation that led to the killing of an American in a theater like Iraq would create serious complications for the Biden team," said Dalia Dassa Kaye, a Middle East expert at the RAND Corporation.

The president-elect has often stated that America's commitment to Israel will remain "ironclad" under his presidency. If Iran were to directly or even indirectly attack Israel, Biden would be under a lot of pressure to support Jerusalem in some way. All of this, of course, would lead the US and Iran further down the path toward war and away from a possible diplomatic resolution. "Such responses are likely to undermine the chances for diplomacy with Biden and easing of US sanctions," Ellie Geranmayeh, an Iran analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told me.

However, Iran could use the threat of an attack as a pressure tool, she continued. "Iran could instead hold back its retaliatory moves — maintaining it will respond at a time and place of its choosing. This way Iran has some more bargaining chips when it comes to potential future talks with the Biden administration and Europeans." What Iran does or doesn't do in the coming months, then, could greatly impact Biden's grander foreign policy plans. As the oft-quoted saying goes: "The enemy gets a vote."

North Korea could test its most powerful missile yet

Within the first few months of Barack Obama's presidency, North Korea tested a long-range missile and a nuclear device. And in Trump's first year in charge, Pyongyang test-launched its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and tested its most powerful nuclear bomb to date. Some experts warn that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un may make similar provocative moves in the early stages of a Biden administration.

"North Korea is one of those challenges that no one really wants to deal with right now, since there are no easy solutions or pathways to slowing down the growth of the program. But Kim has a way of putting himself back on the high-priority list," said Vipin Narang, an expert on North Korea's nuclear program at MIT. There are many ways Kim could do that, but one in particular stands out: He could conduct the first test of the new ICBMs he displayed during an October parade.

Those missiles were not only the biggest ever seen in North Korea's arsenal, experts also said they were the largest road-mobile missiles with their own truck-based launchers in the world. In case of a war, then, North Korea's military could roll these missiles out of underground bunkers, place them somewhere on land, and shoot them at the United States. A test simulating that kind of launch would rank among the most threatening actions ever taken by Pyongyang — surely ratcheting up tensions with the US in the process.

The new missiles haven't been tested yet, though, and they may have issues North Korea still needs to fix. That's why many experts predict Pyongyang will probably test one in early 2021, in part to see how it goes and in part to send a message to Biden: North Korea is a nuclear power, and you can't do anything about it. Such a provocative move would require some sort of response from the Biden administration. That doesn't necessarily mean war, said Elizabeth Saunders, a US foreign policy expert at Georgetown University.

But it could mean more sanctions on North Korea, reinstating US military drills with South Korea, sending more US warships to the area, or all of the above. Figuring out the best response could take up a lot of time and energy early in Biden's term, leaving less time and energy to address some of his longer-term policy objectives.

Russia could play hardball on arms control

New START, short for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, is a nuclear arms control agreement signed between the US and Russia in 2011. The pact limits the size of the two countries' nuclear arsenals, which together account for 93 percent of all nuclear warheads on earth. The problem is that

the deal — the last major arms control accord between Washington and Moscow still in effect — is set to expire on February 5, 2021. That gives Biden just 16 days after becoming president to extend the pact.

Biden has committed to extending New START, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he wants to extend it for at least one year. Most experts believe Biden and Putin will swiftly extend the agreement before the deadline. “My impression is that Russia still regards an extension of New START as being in their interest,” said Sarah Bidgood, an expert on Russia’s nuclear program at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies.

But the short timeline could give Moscow an advantage to extract some early concessions from the Biden administration before greenlighting an extension. The Kremlin, experts say, could demand Biden lift Trump-imposed sanctions on the country, or ask that the US make a statement praising Russia’s military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh to keep the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It’s unclear if such requests would truly be of the take-it-or-leave-it variety. Moscow might want to see what it could get, if anything, before agreeing to an extension. Still, such a move could take the US and Russia to the brink of losing New START and decades of arms control efforts along with it. What’s more, Bidgood said, a tough negotiation could follow after the extension, especially if Washington and Moscow don’t prolong New START for the full five years allowed under the deal.

The potential for nuclear-related trouble with Russia right at the start of a new administration, then, could be a time suck for the Biden administration. Fewer US troops in Afghanistan could derail peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban. With just two months left in office, the Trump administration is rushing to wind down the 19-year US war in Afghanistan by cutting the number of US troops in the country from 4,500 to 2,500 by January 15 — five days before Biden is to be sworn in.

But while many on both the left and the right in the US support bringing that war to an end, experts worry such a quick withdrawal will harm America’s interests in the country. “It’s hard to imagine a less responsible way to withdraw,” Jason Dempsey, a former Army infantry officer who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, told me earlier this month. The main concern is what leaving so abruptly means for America’s diplomatic pact with the Taliban.

The deal both parties signed earlier this year said all US troops had to leave by May 2021, assuming conditions in the country are relatively peaceful and the Taliban has upheld its end of the deal, which includes engaging in peace talks with the Afghan government and not attacking international forces. Those peace talks began in September but are not going very well — not least because Taliban fighters have increased their attacks on Afghan security forces and civilians across the country in recent months.

US Army soldiers during NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s visit to the Italian-run military base “Camp Arena” on November 7, 2018, in Herat, Afghanistan. Antonio Masiello/Getty Images Dempsey, who’s now at the Center for a New American Security think tank, said pulling more US troops out of the country as those negotiations proceed could hurt Kabul’s negotiating position and encourage even more Taliban attacks. “Giving away any leverage you have as you leave is a pretty stupid way to go about it,” he told me.

The question is what Biden would do with the forces Trump plans to leave him with. The president-elect has said he wants to keep at least some troops in Afghanistan to serve as a counterterrorism force, so it's possible he may not change anything when he takes office in January. But if the smaller US presence emboldens the Taliban to ask for more in diplomatic talks with the Afghan government, or even attempt a forcible takeover of the Afghan government — as it did in 1996 — then the Biden administration might have to scramble to back its ally in Kabul. That could potentially lead the new president to escalate the war in the country, thereby turning much of his time and attention away from other projects to focus on an old one.

The rise of military space powers

<https://www.axios.com/military-space-powers-770ad3ab-54ee-4387-adae-6e00bc69b099.html>

By: [Miriam Kramer](#), for Axios // Dec 1, 2020 -

Nations around the world are shoring up their defensive and offensive capabilities in space — for today's wars and tomorrow's.

Why it matters: Using space as a warfighting domain opens up new avenues for technologically advanced nations to dominate their enemies. But it can also make those countries more vulnerable to attack in novel ways. "Space has already been weaponized by just about any definition," Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic & International Studies told me, citing work his organization has done to quantify the problem. "The question is, 'How are we going to respond?'"

Driving the news: From anti-satellite tests to establishing military branches dedicated to space, it is becoming an integral theater for militaries around the world. U.S. Space Command issued a rare [statement](#) in July calling out what it called an "anti-satellite weapons test" after a Russian satellite appeared to release a projectile near another Russian satellite. China reportedly has the technology to blind enemy satellites, according to a [March 2020 report](#) from CSIS.

The U.S. and other nations rely on satellites to keep soldiers safe and get the lay of the land on the ground. The state of play: More countries are relying on space in ways that benefit their societies, economies and militaries, so in some ways it's logical for them to create tools to help ensure access to orbit, Victoria Samson of the Secure World Foundation told me. The Space Force — which will have its one-year anniversary this month — was created in part to deter nations that threaten the U.S. in space.

"While we will extend and defend America's competitive advantage in peacetime, the ultimate measure of our readiness is the ability to prevail should war initiate in, or extend to space," Gen. John Raymond, the Space Force's chief of space operations, wrote in a planning document in November. France and Japan have also recently created their own military space divisions, showing how key space is becoming to military operations around the world today.

Yes, but: Some experts believe the U.S. is [falling behind](#) in efforts to secure its space infrastructure. While the U.S. is ahead of every other nation in its capabilities from orbit, the country's national security satellite infrastructure — which depends on a relatively small number of extremely expensive spy satellites — is vulnerable to attack. China, for example, sees its stance toward national security space in part as a way to counteract U.S. supremacy in orbit, according to a [report](#) from the Defense Intelligence Agency.

The catch: While wealthy nations can use space to their advantage in a variety of ways, doing so also creates new vulnerabilities. Establishing infrastructure in space is expensive, but destroying it is relatively easy. So far, countries have largely steered clear of destroying enemy satellites in part because of the far-reaching geopolitical implications of that kind of attack. And creating more space junk affects everyone in orbit, not just your enemies.

But some experts are concerned that could change if new norms aren't established as nations work to build out military assets in orbit. The bottom line: The future of warfighting will continue to rely on space as more nations recognize its importance as the highest ground.

THE NEXT NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/the-next-national-defense-strategy/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2012.01.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief
By: [BENJAMIN JENSEN](#) AND [NATHAN PACKARD](#) for War On The Rocks // NOVEMBER 30, 2020

The Biden-Harris administration is inheriting a defense strategy undermined by a mix of [Jacksonian](#) populism manifest in President Donald Trump's political base, and COVID-19, a once-in-a-hundred-years pandemic.

Certainly, [no plan survives first contact](#), but it is increasingly apparent that the U.S. defense strategy has neither altered Chinese foreign policy nor found a way to navigate polarizing domestic political divisions, racial tensions, and the economic dislocation brought on by trade wars and disease. The question then is: What should come next? Which aspects of the 2018 [National Defense Strategy](#) should the Biden-Harris team retain and which should they adjust?

How should the administration balance defense initiatives with the reality of a global pandemic and [diminished American standing](#) in a multipolar world? We argue that the Biden-Harris team should continue focusing on great-power competition, but in a manner that prioritizes rebuilding America's security architecture and alliance interoperability. The new defense posture should [engage China not as a rival, but as a competitor](#), and focus more on diplomacy, rebuilding international institutions, and addressing [systemic human security](#) issues manifest in the pandemic, global income inequality, cyber security, and climate change. [Great powers have great responsibilities](#) in an uncertain world.

Below, we take stock of the 2018 [National Defense Strategy](#). While the 2018 strategy called for investing in alliances, the Trump administration failed to implement this aspect and adjust as the pandemic changed international relations. The strategy, along with the new U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff concepts on [competition](#) and [integrated campaigning](#), is sound overall. But the Biden-Harris administration should ensure that it doubles down on partners and allies. The focus should shift from increasing lethality and defense modernization to rebuilding America's competitive advantage: a global alliance architecture.

The National Defense Strategy Theory of Victory: Expand the Competitive Space

Military strategy is a blueprint for translating military power into political objectives. Every military strategy articulates a [theory of victory](#). The theory specifies a [competitive logic](#), describing what produces military power, possible confrontations, and how to best employ forces to achieve national security objectives consistent with political interests. In simpler terms, it frames the problem, describes a preferred future, and begins to outline how a state can apply available resources to get there.

The initial problem definition and solution set in the 2018 [National Defense Strategy](#) was concise and clear: “[A] more lethal, resilient, and rapidly innovating Joint Force, combined with a robust constellation of allies and partners, [would] sustain American influence and ensure favorable balances of power that safeguard the free and open international order.” This combination of forward-deployed forces, alliances, and defense modernization formed a competitive strategy that would deter states like China and Russia from challenging the international order.

Furthermore, this competitive strategy called for integrating defense with other instruments of power to shape the international system:

A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power — diplomacy, information, economic, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military. More than any other nation, America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength.

This emphasis on integrated instruments of power is not unique to the United States. The character of strategy is changing. [Military strategy in the 21st century](#) involves the global circulation of ideas and influence as much as it does carrier strike group deployments. Even [China](#) and [Russia](#) are increasingly operating in [gray zones](#), employing what Herman Kahn called [sub-crisis maneuvering](#) and George Kennan labeled [political warfare](#).

The reality is that setting the conditions and shaping the environment by leveraging multiple instruments of power and managing escalation risks are key aspects of 21st-century statecraft.

Despite trying to set up U.S. defense strategy for global competition, the 2018 plan struggled. Two things went wrong: the Trump administration and the pandemic. President Trump and his national security team did not implement the strategy in a way that put allies and partners front and center as the plan originally intended. The United States did not invest in the advantage that America has and China lacks: a global alliance architecture.

Implementation also incentivized the worst aspects of the modern defense bureaucracy. Military services raced to spend money America didn’t have, while generals and civil servants focused on narrow operational plans at the expense of larger strategy. Ends, ways, and means became unglued. In addition to this tragedy of implementation, there was a failure to adjust. Already on life support, the plan never fully adjusted to the 2020 global pandemic, a domestic political situation that could be described as a dumpster fire, and shifting international attitudes toward American power.

What Went Wrong, Part I: A Tragedy of Implementation

Three tragedies undermined implementation of the 2018 National Defense Strategy. First, given the emphasis on increasing lethality and defense modernization in the plan, each military service raced to cash in on what multiple senior leaders referred to as the [Trump bump](#) in a buying spree that would leave President Dwight Eisenhower rolling in his grave. Sadly, many of these initiatives — from the U.S. Army’s [Project Convergence](#) to the U.S. Marine Corps’ [Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations](#) — have sound ideas, but do little to address a broken defense modernization

bureaucracy wrought with inefficiencies and subject to diminishing marginal returns. The fact is, the Department of Defense failed its [first](#) and [second audits](#).

The costs of innovation are starting to eclipse the expected gains at a time when America has systematically failed to balance its budget. Worse still, these investments favor increasing American lethality over alliance interoperability. Washington is buying toys its friends won't be allowed to play with, like [hypersonic weapons](#). If the enduring American advantage is its global alliance architecture, then investing in capabilities that increase military power across the alliance is a form of competitive strategy, a finding echoed by [recent war games](#) for U.S. Army Futures Command hosted by the Atlantic Council.

Second, generals, appointees, and civil servants focused more on the narrow tactical and operational aspects of an increasingly bold U.S. military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region than the larger defense strategy itself. Daily news reports discuss yet another [freedom of navigation operation](#) or [military exercise](#) to deter China. Yet have they? The fundamental question is whether any of these activities alter Chinese behavior. While state behavior is often complex and overdetermined, rarely subject to a single cause, evaluating the deterrence value of defense strategy is a central foreign policy question. Based on China's [2019 defense white paper](#) and increased [defense spending](#), Beijing does not appear deterred.

Instead, it is expanding [joint military exercises with Russia and Iran](#) and countering U.S. naval drills with [massive missile exercises](#) that signal its ability to target U.S. carriers. What is even more concerning is that China has doubled down on its coercive activities in the political, informational, and economic spheres, as evidenced by recent events in [Hong Kong](#) and [renewed military pressure on Taiwan](#).

There appears to be a mismatch between ongoing U.S. military operations that pressure China by demonstrating an ability to escalate and a strategic end state of deterrence. In their now classic study of military innovation in the lead-up to World War II, [Allan Millett and Williamson Murray](#) rightly observed, "No amount of operational virtuosity or strategic wisdom redeemed fundamental flaws in political judgment," and thus, "it is more important to make correct decisions at the political and strategic level than it is at the operational and tactical level. Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever."

At present, the U.S. military is busy working away on tactical and operational challenges, but largely missing the bigger political picture. In other words, the generals and civil servants tend to focus on the operational trees and miss the strategic forest. China is not deterred. Continuing to increase military pressure absent a clear escalation management framework or political end state is a dangerous gamble that also risks further alienating allies.

What Went Wrong, Part II: Failure to Adjust

In addition to failures in implementation, policymakers failed to adjust to the economic realities of 2020 and domestic politics. The budgetary environment radically shifted following the onset of COVID-19. In addition, even before the pandemic, neither party seemed interested in balancing the budget. With a federal budget deficit totaling \$3.1 trillion, the United States' budget gap in Fiscal Year 2020 was roughly 16.1 percent and the largest it's been since the last year of World War II, per the bipartisan [Deficit Tracker](#).

The balance of economic power does not favor aggressive competition, and the U.S. [business community](#) seems to be in different place from the defense establishment. The [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) and [two dozen industry associations](#) have pressured Congress to slow the implementation of anti-China prohibitions. A defense strategy predicated on increasingly lethality doesn't work if it breaks the bank and creates a domestic backlash.

In light of present economic realities, it is noteworthy that some proponents of a “get tough” approach with China point to the latter years of the Cold War as an analogy. In the 1980s, so the story goes, President Ronald Reagan invested heavily in defense, the Soviets couldn't keep up, and the Soviet Union crumbled. The lesson for today being that the United States should invest heavily in defense and stay the course until the Chinese system fractures.

However, as Dan Coats, Trump's former Director of National Intelligence, has made clear, this analogy is a “[dangerous myth](#)” and fails in light of the fact that the Chinese economy in 2020 is far larger and more dynamic than that of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Furthermore, [falling oil prices](#) and [people power](#) as manifest in brave dissidents likely did as much, if not more, to undermine the Soviets than the U.S. defense budget.

Sadly, while the United States remains enamored with the military instrument of power, China is inking both multilateral and unilateral trade deals around the world. On Nov. 15, 2020, China, along with 15 other nations in the Asia-Pacific region, including U.S. allies Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand, signed the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership \(RCEP\)](#). Washington's refusal to participate leaves the United States outside a free trade zone that comprises a third of the world's economy. The fact that Washington also chose not participate in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a similar agreement that does not include China, means the United States is a nonplayer in the two most important economic forums in the region.

A recent [RAND report](#) on influence — the ability to shape the actions of others — concludes that the United States is falling behind in nonmilitary forms of persuasion. U.S. policymakers should recognize that the economic landscape is shifting, both domestically and internationally. Any strategy that does not take economic realities into account runs a higher risk of failure. Finally, U.S. policymakers do not have a clear appreciation of the impact of domestic politics on strategy, both in China and at home. With respect to the former, the [Trump administration](#) is convinced that it can drive a wedge between the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party. This interpretation misses the degree to which the party is integrated into Chinese society.

Sure, one can argue that [Chinese Communist Party members](#) are a minority at 200 million or so out of 1.4 billion, but one needs to extend that number out to friends, family, associates, and so on. There is not as much daylight between the Party and the people as China hawks would like to believe, particularly on core interests, such as Taiwan and perceived threats to Chinese sovereignty. Here again, Washington fails to take into account the economic dimension. Under the Chinese Communist Party's leadership, millions of Chinese families have been lifted out of [poverty](#). While Chinese citizens might chafe against restrictions on their civil liberties, one can expect the majority to support their government, provided living conditions continue to improve.

Conclusion: Bring Allies Back in the Next Four Years

The 2018 [National Defense Strategy](#) focused correctly on great powers like China. Yet its implementation left much to be desired and undermined the secret to American success: partners and allies. At the strategic level, the only way to affect China's decision-making calculus is to work with

allies and partners to create collective positions of strength. That requires investing less in exquisite U.S. military capabilities and spending the marginal defense dollar more on alliance interoperability and efforts like the [Pacific Deterrence Initiative](#) that create the coalition missile defenses, expeditionary airfields, and ports needed to move modern militaries. These infrastructure investments should also include expanded cyber cooperation as envisioned by the 2020 [U.S. Cyberspace Solarium Commission](#).

Bringing allies back in also requires changing the tone of America's relationships abroad. The preferred U.S. approach to working with allies and partners over the last four years has been one of seeking maximum short-term leverage at the expense of long-term trust and confidence. Relationships take work. Unfortunately, the Trump administration has taken a day trader mentality. U.S. leaders tended to present things as binary, rather than on a spectrum. The United States did not give allies much choice between complete embrace and total rejection. This approach is dangerous, considering that allies and partners justifiably view the United States as a basket case right now.

Investing in partnerships should also involve new thinking about [alliance networks](#) in a [digital age](#) and how to create collective goods in a multipolar system. Defense alliances aren't limited to stopping land invasions. They actively shape interactions in an [anarchical society](#), creating [security communities](#) and providing flexible options to help states address issues like [migration](#), [disinformation](#), and [countering violent extremism](#).

Great-power competition in the 21st century will indirectly involve all of these dimensions, creating a need for new thinking that transcends counting [armored division equivalents](#) and enemy submarines. The national security community needs to retire Cold War-era security discourse and develop new ideas that incorporate diverse perspectives, critical analysis, and evidence-based arguments. As [Christopher Layne](#) points out in a recent Foreign Affairs article, "The trouble is that although supporters of increased confrontation are making their case loudly and clearly, opposition to such policies has been surprisingly muted within the foreign policy establishment."

The new arms race should be the quest for allies and shaping of the international order in a manner that promotes stability and prosperity as collective goods in an [interconnected world](#). Based on China's actions with respect to international organizations, it would appear that China is more adaptable at present, building new trade pacts and pledging, unlike America, to deliver a vaccine to nations in need. Contrast that with repeated hard-line and tone-deaf speeches on China, such as National Security Adviser [Robert O'Brien's](#) recurrent attempts to paint China as an existential threat. The fact that other nations are dissatisfied with China does not mean they agree with the United States.

A multipolar world is not binary. As former George W. Bush administration official [Kori Schake](#) points out, countries may not like China, but they also don't trust America right now, a conclusion supported by [survey data](#) that shows most countries hold negative views of both China and the United States. Sadly, it would appear the outgoing Trump administration is telling a story that only the U.S. military-industrial-congressional complex finds compelling. Thus far, the only thing that has saved America's inept diplomacy is [China's tone-deaf approach to international relations](#).

Unless the next National Defense Strategy brings allies back in, the United States is at risk of being left out of the international order it built with partners after World War II and reinforced after the Cold War. The last four years risk being more than an interlude if American doesn't reinvest in its partners and allies. The key to moderating China's behavior is creating positions of strength through building larger networks of partners and allies. By working with others, America presents a unified front that limits Beijing's authoritarian instincts and freedom of maneuver.

Benjamin Jensen, Ph.D. holds a dual position as a professor at the Marine Corps University, School of Advanced Warfighting, and as a scholar-in-residence at American University, School of International Service. He is also a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve. He recently served as the senior research director and lead author for the U.S. Cyberspace Solarium Commission. The views expressed are his own and do not reflect official policy.

Nathan Packard, Ph.D. is an assistant professor at the Marine Corps University, Command and Staff College, and an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. He spent the last year at the National War College. The views expressed are his own and do not reflect official policy.

Russian-American Relations: From Trump to Biden

<https://www.nipp.org/2020/11/23/katz-mark-n-russian-american-relations-from-trump-to-biden/>

By: [HON. DAVID J. TRACHTENBERG](#) Editor, [DR. MICHAELA DODGE](#) Assistant Editor, [AMY JOSEPH](#) Managing Editor // Issue No. 470 November 23, 2020

The incoming Biden Administration will inherit the same concerns about Russia that the Trump Administration had with it.

These include arms control issues; Russian activity in Ukraine, Georgia, and other former Soviet republics; Russian involvement in conflicts in Syria and Libya; increasing European energy dependence on Russia despite European security concerns about it; Russia's close relations with several authoritarian regimes which Washington finds problematic (such as Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, and most especially, China); and Russian interference in the domestic politics of many countries—including the United States.

Further, these concerns about Russia that Biden is inheriting from Trump (who inherited them from Obama) are occurring at a time when rising Chinese power and influence have been affecting international relations more broadly. There will, though, be some important differences between how the Biden Administration approaches Russia compared to how the Trump Administration did so.

First and foremost among these is that while the Trump Administration did not want to renew the 2011 Obama era Russian-American New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) that expires in February 2021 (but which can be renewed for five years by the two presidents without legislative approval), Biden has already signaled that he intends to renew this agreement. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who repeatedly sought without success to renew New START with Trump since shortly after the latter's 2017 inauguration, has expressed satisfaction with Biden's willingness to renew this agreement even though he has not yet (unlike Beijing) acknowledged Biden's election.

One of Trump's objections to simply renewing New START was that it did not include China which is increasing its own strategic nuclear arsenal. While the bilateral U.S.-Russian New START agreement is highly likely to be renewed after Biden's inauguration, Moscow and Washington will sooner or later have to confront the issue of China's growing strategic nuclear arsenal. One of three paths forward will have to be chosen:

- 1) Washington and Moscow will persuade Beijing to join them in what will be a trilateral strategic arms control process which up to now China has unequivocally expressed its unwillingness to enter into;
- 2) failing this, Washington and Moscow will have to agree to a common approach to dealing with the growing Chinese strategic nuclear arsenal which may involve Moscow and Washington increasing their own arsenals; or
- 3) Biden or whoever is elected in 2024 will have to consider well before the 2026 expiration of the extended New START agreement whether continued U.S. adherence to it allows the U.S. to adequately respond on its own to China's growing strategic nuclear arsenal if Russia will not join it in doing so.

Further, while Biden might want to revive arms control agreements with Russia that Trump pulled out of such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement and the Open Skies Treaty, he will have to confront the main reason that led Trump to withdraw from them: Russian non-compliance with their terms. Withdrawal from these treaties may not have been an effective means of altering Russian behavior, but the U.S. rejoining them without somehow ensuring Russian compliance with their terms won't be either.

Similarly, just as Biden is likely to share Trump's and (where applicable) previous presidents' disapproval of Russian military involvement in Ukraine, Georgia, Syria, Libya, or anywhere else, Biden is likely to be just as unable to induce Putin to change his behavior in them. In addition to maintaining sanctions against Russia imposed during the Obama and Trump administrations, Biden will probably maintain security assistance to Ukraine in order to discourage Putin from trying to take any more Ukrainian territory than he already has.

But any attempt to induce Putin to return territory to Ukraine is unlikely to succeed. And just like under Trump, Russian support for anti-American authoritarian regimes in Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and Venezuela will continue under the Biden Administration. Even if Putin finally acknowledges that the rise of China has negative security implications for Russia, he is less likely to join with the U.S. in countering Beijing than to "buck pass" by hoping that Russia can either benefit or just not get hurt from Sino-American hostility.

It is doubtful that Biden's opposition to Russian propaganda aimed at voters in the U.S. and elsewhere will result in Moscow ceasing them. On the other hand, Biden's 2020 electoral victory when it was believed that Moscow still favored Trump like in 2016 may actually help improve Russian-American relations since whatever efforts Moscow made to help Trump in 2020 were obviously ineffective.

Putin's anti-American policies led House and Senate Republicans to pass, despite Trump's initial objections, the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) with specific provisions aimed at Russia in 2017. On the other hand, if Putin decides that Biden might revert to what Putin saw as U.S. efforts under the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations to promote democratic "color revolution" seeking to overthrow authoritarian governments allied to Moscow and even his own regime in Russia, then Russian-American relations are likely to grow worse after Biden becomes president.

Indeed, the Trump Administration's attempt to persuade Venezuela's Maduro to leave office did not bolster Putin's confidence that Trump could be counted on to abstain from supporting color revolution if he thought there was an opportunity for one. Whatever differences there are between Biden's approach to Russia and Trump's, Putin might well see their policies as more similar than different. While Putin might not welcome Biden's election, in truth Trump was a disappointment to him.

For if Trump's praise of Putin while on the campaign trail in 2016 raised Putin's expectations that Trump would be a friendlier toward Russia than previous presidents, Trump disappointed Putin on this many times after he took office: Trump would not renew New START. Trump did not lift U.S. economic sanctions against Russia imposed under Obama as a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for secession in eastern Ukraine. Indeed, U.S. sanctions against Russia increased under Trump.

Trump even gave military assistance to Ukraine that Obama would not. Nor would Trump agree to provide reconstruction assistance to the Assad regime in Syria despite how (in Putin's view) preserving Assad was better for America and for Russia than the most likely alternative to it—a hostile jihadist regime—that would be a threat to everyone. Further, Putin probably sees Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran not as resulting in the happy prospect of forcing Tehran to rely more on Moscow, but on Beijing instead.

Is this, Putin may ask himself, what Washington really wants? Even the Trump-brokered "Abraham Accords" between Israel on the one hand and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan on the other undercut Putin's pretensions about Russia now being a better Middle East peace negotiator than an America which Trump had hitherto given the impression was withdrawing from the region.

Still, despite all Moscow's disappointment with Trump as well as his unwelcome unpredictability (which would have continued if Trump had been reelected), Moscow regards Biden's becoming president with foreboding in one important regard: Russia much prefers it when the U.S. is at odds with its allies as it has been under Trump than when the U.S. cooperates closely with them as Biden and other Western leaders have all said will occur.

Indeed, if U.S. cooperation with its major Western allies is restored under the Biden Administration, this will help America deal more effectively with Russia in conjunction with them. But whatever differences occur in Russian-American relations as a result of the change from the Trump Administration to the Biden Administration, one thing will remain the same: Russia will continue to be ruled by Vladimir Putin, just as it has since he first came to power at the turn of the century.

And with Putin having overseen changes in the Russian constitution that allow him to extend his rule until 2036, he could continue to rule Russia until well after even a two-term Biden presidency. And as long as he is in power, Putin is unlikely to deviate from his long-established pattern of seeing the U.S. as Russia's principal adversary. Biden cannot change this, just as Trump and previous presidents could not either.

The best that may be hoped for is to avoid the illusions that previous incoming presidents have had about how they could somehow improve U.S.-Russian relations, take actions that contain Russia's aggressive behavior as well as limit the damage from it, and yet engage in cooperation with Moscow on those occasions where there are mutual interests that can be advanced. Nothing more may be possible.

Mark N. Katz - Mark N. Katz is a Professor of Government and Politics at the George Mason University School of Policy and Government, and a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council. He blogs at <https://marknkatz.wordpress.com/>.

Israel may have killed top Iranian nuclear weapons scientist to avert dangerous threat

The Jewish state may fear the Biden administration will urge an end to such Israeli strikes

<https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/fred-fleitz-israel-may-have-killed-top-iranian-nuclear-weapons-scientist-to-avert-dangerous-threat>

By [Fred Fleitz for Fox News](#) 28 Nov 2020

Iran's scientist tied to Iran's nuclear weapons program killed; Benjamin Hall reports. The announcement by Iranian state TV that Mohsen Fakhrizadeh — the father of the Islamic Republic's nuclear weapons program and its top nuclear scientist — was shot and killed Friday in Tehran is a huge setback for [Iran's](#) secret nuclear weapons program.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif tweeted: “Terrorists murdered an eminent Iranian scientist today. This cowardice—with serious indications of [Israeli](#) role—shows desperate warmongering of perpetrators.” At least five Iranian nuclear scientists were killed between 2010 and 2012. Iran blamed Israel for all these killings. If it turns out that Israel is behind the killing of Fakhrizadeh, the strike may reflect the Jewish state’s worry about a major shift in U.S. policy toward Iran under the administration of Joe Biden when he becomes president Jan. 20 (barring a reversal of the election outcome that President Trump is seeking).

Given the obsession by Democrats to rebuke President Trump and rejoin the Iran nuclear deal and Iran’s stated refusal to reopen the agreement for renegotiation, it is likely the U.S. will quickly rejoin the agreement and drop U.S. sanctions on Iran after Biden takes office. Israel knows such a development would be a huge boon to Iran’s military and nuclear programs and likely also would embolden Iran to step up its meddling in regional conflicts and sponsorship of terrorism.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may have concluded that the threat from Iran’s nuclear weapons program was becoming too dangerous and Israel therefore had to take action to deny Iran the benefit of Fakhrizadeh’s expertise in constructing a nuclear weapon. Israel may also have wanted to deter other Iranians from working on this effort. Israeli officials remember that President Barack Obama’s administration pressed their nation hard in 2014 to [stop](#) assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists and to not attack Iran’s nuclear facilities while the Obama administration was engaged in diplomacy that amounted to appeasement of Iran.

The Jewish state may have staged the killing of Fakhrizadeh now in the belief that a Biden administration will begin a new round of Iran appeasement and again press Israel not to take provocative actions against Iran’s dangerous nuclear program. Israel reportedly recently put its military on alert because of the possibility that President Trump may order an attack against Iran’s nuclear facilities before he leaves office.

I believe Trump may have considered such an attack but will not order one, because of his commitment not to start unnecessary wars. It is more likely that Israel put its military on alert due to actions it was planning against Iran’s nuclear program — like the Fakhrizadeh assassination — in anticipation of Iranian blowback. Fakhrizadeh was a nuclear physicist and head of Iran’s Physics Research Center. He oversaw the Amad Plan — Iran’s secret research program to develop nuclear weapons.

The Amad Plan was started in the late 1990s or the early 2000s. It included a nuclear warhead design program, modification of a Shahab missile to carry a nuclear warhead, and aid to Iran’s nuclear program from the Pakistan-based A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network and from a former Russian nuclear scientist. According to the [Iran Nuclear Archive documents](#) that were stolen in a daring raid by Israeli intelligence in 2018, an infrastructure was in place under the Amad Plan by 2003 for a comprehensive Iranian nuclear weapons program.

The program was scaled-back in 2003 into a secretive and highly compartmented program. According to Israel and the International Atomic Energy Agency, Fakhrizadeh continued to head the covert Iranian nuclear weapons program after 2003. The program was renamed the SPND (Sazman-e Pazhouhesh-haye Novin-e Defa’ei), which translates into English as the Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research.

Iran engaged in extensive efforts to hide its nuclear weapons program and deceive the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and the world about the Islamic Republic's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons after 2003. For example, Iran reassigned nuclear-related projects from its military to the nation's civilian nuclear agency, in an effort to make it appear these activities were part of a peaceful nuclear program.

Israel discovered "deception folders" in the Iran Nuclear Archive documents that recorded the lies Iran told to International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and helped Iranian officials keep their stories straight. The United Nations Security Council imposed a travel ban and financial sanctions on Fakhrizadeh and his fellow scientists for their nuclear weapons work in March 2007. These sanctions were terminated in January 2016 by the Iran nuclear deal.

That agreement was signed in July 2015 by Iran, the U.S., the European Union, Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany. Based on the Iran Nuclear Archive documents, Iran's [cheating](#) on the nuclear deal — formally titled the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — is now indisputable. Moreover, since Iran ceased complying with all of its obligations under the agreement by early this year, it now has enough low-enriched uranium for two nuclear weapons (if further enriched to weapons-grade).

The nuclear deal was supposed to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, and was hailed as triumph by President Barack Obama and his administration. But according to the Iran Nuclear Archive, the SPND's nuclear weapons work continued under Fakhrizadeh despite the nuclear deal. President Trump wisely withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear deal in 2018 and reimposed U.S. sanctions on Iran that had been lifted under the agreement.

"We cannot prevent an Iranian bomb under the decaying and rotten structure of the current agreement," [Trump said](#) in May 2018. He called the agreement "a horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made." Fakhrizadeh's death may be a blow not just to Iran but to North Korea as well, because he may have collaborated with North Korea's ongoing nuclear weapons program. London's Sunday Times reported in 2017 that he [traveled](#) to North Korea in February 2013 to observe the third North Korean nuclear test.

There likely have been other interactions by North Korean and Iranian nuclear scientists that have not been made public. Iranian leaders are clearly angry by the death of Fakhrizadeh. The New York Times [reported](#) that Michael P. Mulroy, the former top Middle East policy official in the Defense Department, said the death of Fakhrizadeh could spark an Iranian military response. "He was their senior-most nuclear scientist and was believed to be responsible for Iran's covert nuclear program," Mulroy told the newspaper. "He was also a senior officer in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and that will magnify Iran's desire to respond by force."

Fred Fleitz, president of the Center for Security Policy, served in 2018 as deputy assistant to the president and to the chief of staff of the National Security Council. He previously held national-security jobs with the CIA, the DIA, the Department of State, and the House Intelligence Committee staff. Twitter [@fredfleitz](#).

How close is Iran to producing a nuclear bomb?

[EXPLAINER-How close is Iran to producing a nuclear bomb? \(yahoo.com\)](#)

VIENNA, Nov 28 (Reuters) - A 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers is being eroded and efforts to revive the pact face a new challenge with the killing of Tehran's top nuclear scientist.

The accord's restrictions on Iran's atomic work had one objective: to extend the "breakout time" for Tehran to produce enough fissile material for a bomb, if it decided to make one, to at least a year from about two to three months. Iran maintains that it has never sought nuclear weapons and never would. It says its nuclear work only has civilian aims. Tehran began breaching the deal's curbs last year in a step-by-step response to President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the deal in May 2018 and the reimposition of U.S. sanctions.

This has shortened the breakout time but reports by the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which polices the deal, indicate that Iran is not moving ahead with its nuclear work as fast as it could. European states have sought to save the nuclear deal, pressing Tehran to comply even as Washington has tightened sanctions, and holding out hopes of a change in U.S. policy once President-elect Joe Biden takes office on Jan. 20. Biden was part of the U.S. administration under Barack Obama that negotiated the 2015 deal.

WHAT HAS IRAN DONE TILL NOW?

Iran has contravened many of the deal's restrictions but is still cooperating with the IAEA and granting inspectors access under one of the most intrusive nuclear verification regimes imposed on any nation.

- **Enriched uranium** - The deal limits Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium to 202.8 kg, a fraction of the more than eight tonnes it possessed before the deal. The limit was breached last year. The IAEA report in November put the stockpile at 2,442.9 kg.
- **Enrichment level** - The deal caps the fissile purity to which Iran can refine uranium at 3.67%, far below the 20% achieved before the deal and below the weapons-grade level of 90%. Iran breached the 3.67% cap in July 2019 and the enrichment level has remained steady at up to 4.5% since then.
- **Centrifuges** - The deal allows Iran to produce enriched uranium using about 5,000 first-generation IR-1 centrifuges at its underground Natanz plant, which was built to house more than 50,000. It can operate small numbers of more advanced models above ground without accumulating enriched uranium. Iran had roughly 19,000 installed centrifuges before the deal.
- **In 2019**, the IAEA said Iran had begun enrichment with advanced centrifuges at an above-ground pilot plant at Natanz. Since then, Iran started moving three cascades, or clusters, of advanced centrifuges to the underground plant. In November, the IAEA said Iran had fed uranium hexafluoride gas feedstock into the first of those underground cascades.
- **Fordow** - The deal bans enrichment at Fordow, a site Iran secretly built inside a mountain and that was exposed by Western intelligence services in 2009. Centrifuges are allowed there for other purposes, like producing stable isotopes. Iran now has 1,044 IR-1 centrifuges enriching there.

HOW CLOSE IS IRAN TO HAVING A BOMB?

The breaches lengthened the breakout time but estimates still vary. Many diplomats and nuclear experts say the starting point of one year is conservative and Iran would need longer. David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector who tends to have a hawkish position on Iran, estimated

in November that Iran's breakout time could be "as short as 3.5 months", although this presumes Iran would use 1,000 advanced centrifuges that were removed under the deal.

WHAT MORE WOULD IRAN NEED TO DO?

If Iran accumulated sufficient fissile material, it would need to assemble a bomb and probably one small enough to be carried by its ballistic missiles. How long that would take exactly is unclear, but stockpiling enough fissile material is widely seen as the biggest hurdle in producing a weapon. U.S. intelligence agencies and the IAEA believe Iran once had a nuclear weapons programme that it halted. There is evidence suggesting Iran obtained a design for a nuclear weapon and carried out various types of work relevant to making one. Tehran continues to grant the IAEA access to its declared nuclear facilities and allow snap inspections elsewhere. Iran and the IAEA resolved a standoff this year that had lasted several months over access to two suspected former sites.

Israel's Gamble: If Assassination Fails to Set Back Iran's Nuclear Program, Blowing Up Deal Is Easy

[Israel's Gamble: If Assassination Fails to Set Back Iran's Nuclear Program, Blowing Up Deal Is Easy \(dnyuz.com\)](#)

By: By [David E. Sanger](#) for DUNYNEWS // [November 28, 2020](#)

WASHINGTON — The [assassination of the scientist who led Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon](#) for the past two decades threatens to cripple President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s effort to revive the Iran nuclear deal before he can even begin his diplomacy with Tehran.

And that may well have been a main goal of the operation. Intelligence officials say there is little doubt that Israel was behind the killing — it had all the hallmarks of a precisely-timed operation by Mossad, the country's spy agency. And the Israelis have done nothing to dispel that view. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long identified Iran as an existential threat, and named the assassinated scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, as national enemy No. 1, capable of building a weapon that could threaten a country of eight million in a single blast.

But Mr. Netanyahu also has a second agenda. "There must be no return to the previous nuclear agreement," he declared shortly after it became clear that Mr. Biden — [who has proposed exactly that](#) — would be the next president. Mr. Netanyahu believes a covert bomb program is continuing, until yesterday under Mr. Fakhrizadeh's leadership, and would be unconstrained after 2030, when the nuclear accord's restraints on Tehran's ability to produce as much nuclear fuel as it wants expires. To critics of the deal, that is its fatal flaw.

"The reason for assassinating Fakhrizadeh wasn't to impede Iran's war potential, it was to impede diplomacy," Mark Fitzpatrick, a former State Department nonproliferation official, [wrote on Twitter on Friday](#). It may have been both. Whatever the mix of motives, Mr. Biden must pick up the pieces in just seven weeks. The question is whether the deal the president-elect has outlined — dropping the nuclear-related sanctions Mr. Trump has imposed over the past two years if Iran returns strictly to the nuclear limits in the 2015 accord — was shot to pieces along with Mr. Fakhrizadeh's S.U.V. in the mountain town of Absard, east of Tehran.

The answer lies largely [in how Iran reacts in the next few weeks](#). Three times since the start of the year, Iran has been on the receiving end of highly visible, highly damaging attacks. First came the killing of [Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani](#), the Iranian commander who ran the elite Quds force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, in a drone strike in Iraq, where the Trump administration said he was planning attacks on American forces.

Then, in early July [came the mysterious explosion at a centrifuge research and development center at Natanz](#), a few hundred yards from the underground fuel-production center that the United States and Israel attacked more than a decade ago with a sophisticated cyberweapon. And now the killing of Mr. Fakhrizadeh, a shadowy figure often described as the Iranian equivalent of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientist who oversaw the Manhattan Project more than 75 years ago in the race for the United States to develop the world's first nuclear weapon.

The chief of staff of Iran's armed forces, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri, described Mr. Fakhrizadeh's killing as "a bitter and heavy blow to the country's defense system" and said there would be "severe revenge." The commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guards, Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, said "the assassination of our nuclear scientists is a clear, violent war against our ability to achieve modern science."

He carefully avoided mention of the overwhelming evidence that Mr. Fakhrizadeh taught physics once a week at the Guards' own university, but spent the rest of his time keeping alive the option of building nuclear warhead that could fit atop one of Iran's growing fleet of missiles. The Israelis may well be betting that they win either way. If Iran holds off on significant retaliation, then the bold move to take out the chief of the nuclear program will have paid off, even if the assassination drives the program further underground.

And if the Iranians retaliate, giving Mr. Trump a pretext to launch a return strike before he leaves office in January, Mr. Biden will be inheriting bigger problems than just the wreckage of a five-year-old diplomatic document. Both those options seem fine with Mr. Trump's departing foreign policy team, which is trying to lock in the radical reversal of Iran policy that has taken place over the past four years.

"The Trump administration's goal seems plain," said Robert Malley, who leads the International Crisis Group and was a negotiator of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. The administration's plan, he said, was "to take advantage of the time remaining before it heads to the exits to solidify its legacy and make it all the more difficult for its successor to resume diplomacy with Iran and rejoin the nuclear deal." Mr. Malley expressed doubts that "it will in fact succeed in killing diplomacy" or the deal.

"The center of gravity in Iran is still with those who want to wait until Biden is president," said Mr. Malley, who has known Mr. Biden's pick for secretary of state, Antony J. Blinken, since they attended high school together in Paris. Mr. Biden and Mr. Blinken have made clear that returning to the [deal Mr. Trump pulled out of](#) is one of their first objectives in the Middle East. But as Jake Sullivan, the newly appointed national security adviser, who served as one of the secret emissaries to begin the negotiations that led to the deal, put it on Wednesday at an event at the University of Minnesota, "that's really up to Iran."

"If Iran returns to compliance, for its obligations that it has been violating, and is prepared to advance good-faith negotiations on these follow-on agreements," Mr. Biden is willing to do the same, he said. (While Mr. Biden supported the 2015 deal, [he was also in on the decision-making in 2010 as the cyberstrike against Natanz unraveled.](#)) Before the assassination, there was considerable evidence that the Iranians were laying low, avoiding provocations that might give Mr. Trump a pretense to strike before he leaves office.

Iran's leaders have made clear that regime survival is their No. 1 goal, and they have been careful not to take risks that could upend their hopes of lifting sanctions, and restoring the deal, after Mr. Trump's term ends. After the killing of General Suleimani, there was a brief rocket attack on an

American facility that miraculously killed no American troops (though there were many cases of traumatic concussion injuries that Mr. Trump [dismissed as “headaches.”](#)) De-escalation followed.

There was no real response to the explosion at Natanz, also attributed to Israel, other than the subsequent installation of some advanced centrifuges to make the point that Iran’s program would move ahead, slowly and methodically. Attacks aimed at American forces in Iraq, many by Iranian proxies, have diminished in recent weeks, and Iran’s feared cyberattacks on the American election system seemed more like amateur hour — emails to some voters purporting to be threats from a far-right group, the Proud Boys.

But the hard-liners are angry, and some experts fear that the combined loss of Iran’s most revered general and its most revered nuclear scientist is too much. Pressure is already mounting for some response — either a calculated one, presumably on the orders of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, or an unscripted lashing out, perhaps by a rogue element of the Iranian military or an Iranian-sponsored militia that does not get the memo to wait for Inauguration Day.

That may be exactly what Mr. Netanyahu — and Mr. Trump and his advisers — is betting on. Any retaliation could result in American military action, exactly what [Mr. Trump contemplated, and was argued out of, two weeks ago](#) when news came that Iran was continuing to produce nuclear fuel above the limits of the 2015 accord. (That move, of course, was in response to Mr. Trump’s decision in mid-2018 to break out of the agreement himself.)

And a cycle of military action could make it all but impossible to reconstitute the Iran nuclear deal, much less negotiate a bigger, longer-lasting diplomatic arrangement. If the response to the killing of Mr. Fakhrizadeh is a cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation, the nuclear program will go deeper underground — quite literally — where bombs and saboteurs cannot reach it, and cyberstrikes may be ineffective.

“We should not exclude the use of force, but military strikes won’t bring us a long-term shutdown of the program,” said R. Nicholas Burns, a former under secretary of state and the Iran nuclear negotiator from 2005 to 2008 under President George W. Bush. “Our goal is to roll back and shut down its nuclear program for decades to come,” said Mr. Burns, who now teaches diplomacy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, and “achieving that through tough-minded diplomacy is still a smarter and more effective option than a military strike that could provoke a wider war in the Middle East.”

U.S. lacking focus on partnership between Iran and North Korea regimes

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/nov/28/us-lacking-focus-on-partnership-between-iran-and-n/>

Attention must be directed to root problems, not nuclear weapons data points

By Lamont Colucci for the Washington Times // Saturday, November 28, 2020

President Trump’s administration gave great attention to two toxic triangles that this author highlighted, though ignored by the mainstream media.

They dubbed the first of these the “Axis of Resistance,” a self-declared malevolence of [Iran](#), Syria and Hamas. The second underscored by then-National Security Adviser John Bolton was the “Troika of Tyranny” calling out Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. These were categories of evil that

share duplicity, violence, atrocity, dictatorship and terrorism. We are now witnessing the debate of U.S.-[Iran](#) relations reach another fever pitch about [Iran](#)'s nuclear weapons program.

This has always been a morass that deviates one's attention from the actual story. As important as [Iran](#)'s weapons program's issue is, it fundamentally misses the more significant point: the Iranian regime itself. The root problem is the Iranian regime. The symptom is their nuclear weapons program. However, not addressing the root problem leaves in place [Iran](#)'s Shiite empire-building in the Middle East, their collaboration and alliance with Syria and Russia, their state sponsorship of terrorism, their atrocities against their own people and their missile program.

Related to the media's misdirection over the Iranian situation is the relationship between [Iran](#) and North Korea. This relationship began with the fall of the shah's government in 1979, when [Iran](#) joined North Korea as an enemy of the United States. In the 1980s, [Iran](#) purchased ballistic missiles from North Korea, often facilitated by China. As North Korean missile technology and nuclear weapons research amplified, so did Iranian missile capability, which evolved from missiles with a range of 300km in the '80s to a breakthrough in 1995 when [Iran](#) received the Nodong missile with a range of 1,300km, allowing [Iran](#) to hit Israel.

This relationship was a two-way street as [Iran](#) provided North Korea with oil and missile test data. North Korean and Chinese teams frequently were in [Iran](#) to train and test, illustrating this toxic relationship. In 2010, [Iran](#) received 19 BM-25 missiles with a range of 2,000 miles (3,218 km), placing NATO countries under threat. North Korea's ability to use [Iran](#) as a testing opportunity enhanced its own ability to develop long-range ballistic missiles.

Thus, [Iran](#) and North Korea created a synthesis of production, experimentation, testing, development and deployment that allows both to become a nuclear weapons power with ICBM capabilities ultimately. The vaunted and now resurrected JCPOA did nothing to stop this. This relationship is currently helping both parties develop submarine and cruise missile technology. The relationship has fostered cooperation and exchange in the realms of intelligence, underground facility production and special operations warfare.

Both nations seem incredibly interested in potential EMP strikes against the United States. Further, this partnership extends to dangerous state and non-state actors such as Syria and Hezbollah. The dark possibilities range the gamut from Iranian and North Korean officers training Syrians arming ballistic missiles with their own chemical weapons to the scenarios where one day Hezbollah has a nuclear device are not as far fetched as wishful thinking would desire.

The nuclear threat looms large as another two-way street developed over centrifuge, enrichment, uranium and plutonium. It is clear that North Korea is facilitating [Iran](#), becoming a nuclear weapons power while the United States and Europe debate an agreement dead before it was created. One of the easiest paths of deception is to become obsessed with statistics rather than intent. Experts from all sides can have logical debates about when North Korea and [Iran](#) will have a deployable ICBM or when a "break-out" on a particular nuclear timeline will occur.

These are not relevant for the serious policymaker. We have understood the strategic intent of the North Korean and Iranian regimes for decades. There is long-standing proof of a toxic partnership directed at the heart of the American people. Future policies need to address the root of the problem, not become sucked into a vortex of never-ending debates about data points leading nowhere.

Lamont Colucci, a professor of politics and government at Ripon College, is the author of “The National Security Doctrines of the American Presidency: How they Shape our Present and Future” (Praeger, 2012).

The war with China, as I saw it

[The war with China, as I saw it \(airforcetimes.com\)](http://airforcetimes.com)

By: David Poyer for The Air Force Times // 20 hours ago

Ten years ago, as China’s rise accelerated, I sounded out several fellow authors of informed military fiction, proposing that we collaborate on a World War Three-style series about a new Pacific conflict. I would handle the action at sea, they the land, air, and space aspects. I thought such a series might serve as a warning, in the same way fiction had alerted us in advance of previous dangers.

They begged off, one saying there was zero possibility of such hostilities. Unconvinced of that, I proceeded to craft “The War With China” on my own. **This six-book series** was published by St. Martins/Macmillan. It recounts how a near-future war might unfold, on land, at sea, in the air, in space, cyberspace, and on the all-important home front. Today, a decade later, the likelihood of such a conflict is the topic of everyday discussion and, no doubt, of detailed planning. Force structures, acquisition, and training are all being hastily revised against just such a contingency.

I lay no claim to clairvoyance. But I’ve spent many years researching how such a conflict might evolve. I had my scenario development and defense analytical experience to call on, but based everything on open-source materials, buttressed by historical studies. I was also helped by dozens of serving and retired military members, both junior and very senior, who contributed ideas and vetted my drafts.

A host of scenarios could push China and the United States into some kind of conflict. Todd South, Philip Athey, Diana Stancy Correll, Stephen Losey, Geoff Ziezulewicz, Meghann Myers, Howard Altman To begin with, I assumed such a war would start much as all America’s wars have: with surprise, unreadiness, and disaster. The United States would blunder into it, preoccupied with domestic discord, over-generated, under-resourced, and equipped for the last war, not a new one.

The first book recounted the transition from tense peace to the heat of battle. “Tipping Point” began with a terror attack retriggering conflict between India and Pakistan. When it escalated to a tactical nuclear exchange, China intervened to prevent Pakistan’s defeat, while the United backed India. In a replay of 1914, nation after nation was sucked in. The U.S., Vietnam, and India lined up against China, Pakistan, and Iran, along with various puppet states created as China rampaged through Asia. Japan, Europe, and the Philippines chose the sidelines, while Russia sold energy and weapons to both sides. The surprised and destabilized Allies were blinded by a takedown of satellite and surveillance assets, sending them reeling back on all fronts.

In the second volume, “Onslaught,” China lashed out again. Directed by a seemingly omniscient strategic AI named Jade Emperor, an explosive offensive overwhelmed Allied forces. The first Pacific island chain was conquered. American and Korean forces crumpled as Chinese troops fought their way across the strait to invade and conquer Taiwan. Cyberattacks and other sabotage crippled the United States’ ability to regenerate forces.

In “Hunter Killer,” my central protagonist, Daniel V. Lenson, commanded an antisubmarine task force, fighting marauding enemy wolf packs in the central Pacific. Meanwhile, the Allies, including ground forces from Vietnam and Indonesia, advanced in the South China Sea. That counteroffensive, a CIA-supported revolt in Xinjiang, and a raid on North China derailed the Opposed Powers’ plans for a second wave of expansion.

In “**Deep War**” both antagonists traded body blows. The U.S. government cracked down on separatism and revolt. The insurgency in western China grew into an incipient revolution. Japan joined the Allies, and the ground campaign began with an invasion of North Korea and a landing in Taiwan. The invisible battle in cyberspace between the two opposing AIs, Jade Emperor and the U.S. Battle Eagle, reached a climax.

The fifth novel, “Overthrow,” detailed the titanic final campaigns, with an Allied thrust into Hainan and Hong Kong and a massive Chinese riposte as both antagonists strove to finish the war without a massive nuclear exchange.

The final volume will be released this November. “**Violent Peace**” depicts the aftershocks of battle as China and the United States, both deeply wounded, struggle with revolt, famine, and disease. At the same time, new actors — Indonesia, Vietnam, a newly united Federated Republic of China, Russia, and a rightward-lurching Germany — compete for the spoils, commencing a new rivalry for regional and world hegemony.

The many lessons I’ve taken away from a decade of research and thought are set forth in the books themselves. If I were forced to summarize them, I’d say we’ll probably stumble into war through miscalculation or foolhardiness, rather than intent on either side. When hostilities begin, we’ll lose many early battles, for a simple reason — no enemy will attack unless what **Machiavelli** calls “the distempers of a State” signal weakness.

It will take years to rebuild our industrial and military infrastructure, which has decayed to near irrelevance. Allies will be essential to our effort. Though, as we saw in 1860 and 1914 and 1939, wars tend to spiral out of control, sucking all the belligerents down into mutual destruction. At the end of that spiral lies the ultimate horror. No one yet knows how a war between two nuclear powers could be brought to an end short of a central strategic exchange.

My overall impression, as this long project nears its completion, is that if the U.S. and China should go to war, raw staying power may count far more toward final victory than whatever force is in being at the commencement of hostilities. Weapons will swiftly become outmoded, if history is any guide. Technology will make astonishing leaps. Tactics and strategy will advance under forced draft.

Therefore, if I have any takeaways to impart, perhaps we should be paying more attention to:

- Growing smart diplomats as well as smart generals
- • Revitalizing our defense industrial base with commercial-sector prime contractors
- • Integrating civilian science and technology, rather than segregating defense from the rest of our economy
- • Developing rapid prototyping and acquisition, using digital twinning and decentralized manufacturing
- • Cementing strong relationships with traditional coalition partners, and attracting new allies through trade agreements, development and military assistance, and other mechanisms of multinational cooperation
- • Reconstituting a robust civil defense program (perhaps under FEMA, to enhance resilience against natural disasters as well)
- • Cyberproofing domestic transport, communications, and energy infrastructure
- • And finally, preparing a larger portion of our youth to serve through universal military training and universal health coverage, while making the military more inclusive and attractive as a career.

I'll admit to enjoying the long process of imagining and writing this series. If the books serve as nothing more than entertainment, I'll be satisfied. And if they're taken as a warning? Well then, so much the better.

Capt. David Poyer's military career included service in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Arctic, Caribbean, Middle East, Pacific, and the Pentagon. He holds a bachelor's in naval engineering from the Naval Academy and a master's in defense analysis from George Washington. His novels are available in St. Martin's Press hardcover, trade paper, ebook, and audiobook formats. Poyer's work has been required reading in the Literature of the Sea course at the U.S. Naval Academy, along with that of Joseph Conrad and Herman Melville. He currently teaches in the MA/MFA writing program at Wilkes University, and lives in Virginia with fellow writer Lenore Hart. More at www.poyer.com. ----- **Editor's note:** This is an Op-Ed and as such, the opinions expressed are those of the author. If you would like to respond, or have an editorial of your own you would like to submit, please contact Military Times managing editor Howard Altman, haltman@militarytimes.com.

NATO Report: Prepare For a Strategic Rivalry With Russia and China

New York Times, 1 Dec 20 Steven Erlanger

BRUSSELS -- A high-level look at NATO's next 10 years recommends significant changes to confront the new challenges of an aggressive Russia and a rising China, urging overhauls to fortify the alliance's cohesion and to better coordinate with democratic allies around the world.

NATO did well boosting military deterrence after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014, the report commissioned by the alliance says. But with a similar challenge to the West arising from an ambitious and authoritarian China, it says the alliance now needs to make similar advances on the political side, including reaching out more consistently to Asian allies anxious about Beijing's ambitions.

Covering 138 specific recommendations in some 60 pages, the report will be a major source of discussion on Tuesday, the start of a two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers that is likely to be the last for Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The report is scheduled to be released Tuesday evening, but its contents were described in advance to The New York Times by several people familiar with them.

The report was requested by the NATO secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, after President Emmanuel Macron of France said a year ago that NATO was experiencing "brain death" because of a lack of strategic coordination and American leadership.

According to a diplomat from a NATO country, the report is a kind of riposte to Mr. Macron but also an effort to respond to his legitimate criticisms of an alliance that has been slow to adapt its structures and its reach, and where decision-making is a cumbersome and often arduous process that hinders quick reaction.

A co-chairman of the 10-member group of experts, A. Wess Mitchell, told NATO ambassadors in a private briefing that the report showed that "NATO is alive and kicking both in its cerebral function and its muscle tissue."

In an interview, Mr. Mitchell, a former U.S. assistant secretary of state for Europe, acknowledged that the quotation was accurate. He said that the report was aimed at the future for an alliance whose last formal strategic concept was written a decade ago, when a different kind of relationship with Russia was hoped for and in which China was not even mentioned.

"Our intention is to be candid about the challenges to NATO, with a tone of well-grounded optimism," Mr. Mitchell said. The main message, he said, is that "NATO has to adapt itself for an era of strategic rivalry with Russia and China, for the return of a geopolitical competition that has a military

dimension but also a political one."

NATO, he added, is "first and foremost an alliance of Euro-Atlantic democracies, and must evolve politically to match its military evolution."

In this new world, internal division is damaging, Mr. Mitchell said. "That strategic competition makes schisms inside potentially more dangerous, because they can be exploited. So it also puts an emphasis on political cohesion."

To that end, the report does not recommend the scrapping of NATO's principle of consensus, but suggests ways to speed up decisions. For example, numerous NATO partnership decisions with countries like Israel and even Austria are being held up by one country, in this case Turkey. The report suggests that such disputes be raised to the ministerial level, not left with the anonymity of ambassadors.

China is a significant part of the report, and it recommends setting up a consultative body to coordinate Western policy toward Beijing and to highlight Chinese activities that could affect Western security. Those include issues like spying, supply chains, information warfare and arms buildups.

With its technological ambitions, military expansion and trade policies, China can no longer be seen as simply an Asian player, the report argues, and NATO has been slow to respond to the challenge.

The report urges the creation of analytical centers better able to study disruptive and emerging technologies and to better use artificial intelligence, so the alliance can enhance its security and deterrence against cyber and hybrid warfare, beyond the traditional battlefield.

It should also use those capacities to improve the fight against terrorism and to better coordinate policies that defend NATO's southern members, which are less worried about Russia than about Islamist terrorism and state-sponsored wars, like in Libya, that create uncontrolled migration.

The report is also blunt about the problems of democratic adherence inside the alliance, arguing that with ideological rivals like Russia and China, the political health of the alliance matters more.

It recommends creating a Center of Excellence for Democratic Resilience and recommitting all members to the principles of the NATO founding treaty, whose prologue commits them to uphold "the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."

The report also urges closer coordination with the European Union and its own military efforts and ambitions. It recommends a permanent staffing link and a more explicit encouragement by NATO of E.U. efforts toward a more capable European defense, so far as they strengthen the alliance, contribute to fairer burden-sharing and do not exclude non-E.U. allies.

A senior diplomat from a NATO country called the report comprehensive, a foundation from which Mr. Stoltenberg can build recommendations to political leaders from the alliance for their next summit meeting, expected early next year. NATO is expected, as the report urges, to approve the preparation of a new strategic concept to replace the one of 2010.

The European Union has already begun preparations to work with a new Biden administration. The European Commission and the European Council are studying proposals to work together with the United States on issues like health and pandemics, trade, climate, data protection and antitrust enforcement and screening of sensitive foreign investments, aimed particularly at China.

For the NATO report, Mr. Mitchell and his co-chairman, Thomas de Maizière, a German legislator and former defense minister, were joined by other experts from various NATO countries, including Hubert Védrine, a former French foreign minister; Marta Dassu, a former Italian deputy foreign minister; and Tacan Ildem, a senior Turkish diplomat and NATO's former assistant secretary-general for public diplomacy.

The group met virtually in scores of sessions with politicians, diplomats and experts and approved the report by consensus.

Chinese have global military ambitions

https://washingtontimes-dc.newsmemory.com/?token=c555484a5a2a1369befb616bad722c28_5fc7b061_d3019ac&selDate=20201202

Projection of power surging BY BILL GERTZ for THE WASHINGTON TIMES // 02 December 2020

China's military is rapidly expanding the ability to project power globally and in the coming decade will be capable of waging war far from the homeland, according to a major congressional report.

The People's Liberation Army has made recent advances in missiles, bombers, transport aircraft, at-sea replenishment and logistics in ways that "significantly improved the PLA's ability to project power and deploy expeditionary forces far from China's shores," the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission concluded Tuesday in its annual report. "China's power projection capabilities are developing at a brisk and consistent pace, reflecting the civilian leadership's determination to transform the PLA into a global expeditionary force in a matter of decades," the report's authors said. "By mid-century, the PLA aims to be capable of rapidly deploying forces anywhere in the world."

China's growing military

might is most advanced in East and Southeast Asia but is moving quickly into the Indian Ocean and as far as the Caribbean and South America. Carolyn Bartholomew, co-chair of the commission, told reporters during an online meeting on the release of the report that research, including testimony from American intelligence officials, revealed that China over time intends to project military forces far beyond the Indo-Pacific region.

"Within the next 10 to 15 years, Chinese leaders aim to be capable of fighting a limited war overseas to protect its interests in countries participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative," she said. The ruling Communist Party's adversarial approach toward the United States reached new levels of intensity this year "as China's leaders have grown increasingly aggressive and antagonistic," she said, and Beijing is no longer even pretending to abide by international laws and norms.

The 587-page report examines Chinese economic and security threats and makes several recommendations for Congress to counter the challenges. However, the report's most detailed section focuses on China's increasing military reach, which involves advanced missiles, warships and warplanes, along with a logistics and basing system stretching from China's coasts to Southwest Asia, Africa and South America.

The increasing capacity "now presents a serious threat to U.S. allies in East and Southeast Asia, with whom the United States has defense treaties or is required to defend as a result of other security obligations," the report said. Any U.S. military response on behalf of allies in the aftermath of a PLA attack must prepare for "the possibility of a costly and protracted conflict," the report said. "Moreover, growing PLA capabilities will enable the force to contest U.S. interests across the globe."

"It may not be so farfetched to imagine the PLA someday deploying to defend [Belt and Road] infrastructure, support Beijing's preferred elites in a coup on an island nation, or prop up authoritarian allies." The report also warned that Chinese companies operating in the United States may be buying elements for the PLA logistics network that would enhance Beijing's military power and ability to wage war overseas.

In the Western Hemisphere, China is seeking military bases and access that could be used to disrupt or distract the U.S. military during a conflict in Asia. China also is building up space warfare and cyberattack capabilities as part of its global power projection. The report cited the case of a Chinese satellite tracking station in Argentina, built ostensibly for civilian use, that could identify American satellites for targeting by the PLA's anti-satellite warfare missiles and lasers.

Although retaking the island of Taiwan remains a priority, China's global ambition is to have the military resources to secure assets and Chinese nationals posted overseas and to protect its access to foreign markets, natural resources and advanced technologies, the report said. The report warned that significant increases in Chinese military training and patrols near Taiwan are part of intensifying military pressure on the independence-leaning government in Taipei.

Recent military flights and warship transits north of Taiwan "suggest the PLA could attack Taiwan from the north or the east, compounding the threat of an invasion on the island's western side," the report said. China also has stepped up aggressive military activities near Japan's Senkaku Islands, which Beijing claims are part of China. "China has considerably increased the number of aircraft operating near Japanese territory, ramping up military pressure on Japan during peacetime and improving the PLA's ability to carry out a range of potential campaigns involving the seizure of the Senkakus," the report said.

Larry Wortzel, a member of the congressionally authorized commission, said China's power projection is most pronounced in Asia but is expanding with the growth of China's military capabilities. "Those challenges will increase as China masters [weapons] technologies for which the U.S. has been very slow to develop defenses," he said, including space weapons capable of knocking out satellites, cyberweapons that can disrupt battle management networks and hypersonic missiles that can strike targets rapidly.

One key indicator of China's growing military strength is the development of the Y-20 military transport, which the PLA deployed in response to the COVID19 outbreak. The Y-20 is based on U.S. C-17 transport technology stolen from Boeing Co. during a PLA hacking operation in 2010, according to court documents in the case of Chinese agent Su Bin, who was convicted of the document theft.

The C-17 is the workhorse of U.S. military power projection, and nearly 300 have been built. China has only 10 Y-20s, first introduced in 2016, but also is using Americanmade Boeing 777s for military transports, according to the report. The low number of Y-20s currently limits the reach of the PLA's expeditionary forces, but China is rapidly building more and could have 100 to 400 by 2030, the report said.

China's precision strike capabilities are improving by the day and will be the "key enabler" of power projection, the commission survey said. China's force of 1,300 ballistic and cruise missiles already poses a major threat to U.S. forces that would respond to American allies in the region. China's first hypersonic missile, the DF-17, was disclosed last year. It has a maximum range of 1,500 miles and "would play an important role in a regional contingency and may already have entered service with PLA operational units in 2020," the report said.

For its overseas basing network, China has a two-track strategy of using purely military bases and some of the 94 Chinese-owned civilian ports around the world that can double as military facilities. Its current military bases outside China include just one traditional base at Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, and new military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea. Beijing planners are considering sites for additional bases, possibly in places such as Cuba and Venezuela, the report said.

A land base for the Chinese military is expected to be set up in Cambodia, which could further shift the balance of power in the region in favor of Beijing. Cambodian officials say the PLA will soon be given access to the country's Ream naval installation on the Gulf of Thailand, near the massive Chinese-financed Dara Sakor resort and commercial project where China is building an airport.

"If China is able to deploy fighter jets from Dara Sakor in the future, it would enable the PLA to contest U.S. air superiority over the Malacca Strait and into the eastern Indian Ocean," the report said. Commission co-Chair Robin Cleveland said China faced its first economic contraction since the 1970s this year as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak but has continued its large-scale theft of intellectual property and data. Ms. Cleveland warned that U.S. investment could be used to bail out sectors of the Chinese economy.

The commission recommended that Congress legislate reciprocity for the bilateral relationship and challenge Beijing's efforts to exploit the United Nations to support its international economic policies. The panel also called for making the director of the American Institute in Taiwan the de facto ambassador to the island democracy, a Senate-confirmed position.

Cold War II has begun

https://washingtontimes-dc.newsmemory.com/?token=c555484a5a2a1369befb616bad722c28_5fc7b061_d3019ac&selDate=20201202

It's with China, and to win it will require bipartisan consensus

By Clifford D. May Contributor to the Washington Times // 02 Dec 220

Not long before a virus born in China began spreading around the globe, destroying lives, devastating economies and, oh yes, shutting down the Washington social scene, I attended an elegant, off-the-record dinner hosted by a wellfunded think tank of the libertarian persuasion.

The guest of honor, a senior figure in the Trump administration, excused himself before dessert, citing pressing matters of state. At that point, a distinguished professor from a prestigious university held forth, posing a question to those around the table: “Who here is in favor of starting a new Cold War with China?” Scattered chuckles but no other responses followed, so I chimed in: “With respect, Professor, that horse has left the barn. China has been waging a Cold War against America for years.

The current administration has recognized that reality and outlined a response, notably in the National Security Strategy. If you haven’t read it, I recommend you do so soonest.” The ensuing conversation was lively — OK, maybe it was acrimonious. But over the months since, it’s become increasingly clear that I was right, and the distinguished professor from a prestigious university was wrong.

Abundant evidence in support of this conclusion is presented in “The Elements of the China Challenge,” a 50-page document (with 22 pages of footnotes) issued last month by the Policy Planning Staff of the Office of the Secretary of State. A word about Policy Planning: This is the State Department’s fabled in-house think tank, first headed by George Kennan, whose 1946 “Long Telegram” provided a conceptual framework for American strategies and policies in what we now might think of as Cold War I.

National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien calls the two documents “similar,” noting two differences: “First, unlike Kennan’s case, written by an envoy at post [Moscow], this book contains the words and policies of the President and his most senior officials. Second, given China’s population size, economic prowess, and historic global ambitions, the People’s Republic of China is a more capable competitor than the Soviet Union at its height.”

For decades, the foreign policy elite held to theory that as China grew wealthier, it would inevitably liberalize, becoming a responsible stakeholder in the “American-led liberal rules-based international order.” Key figures in the Trump administration — including National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategy Nadia Schadlow, Deputy National Security Adviser Matthew Pottinger (a China expert and fluent Mandarin-speaker), and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo — perceived that this theory had proven incorrect.

In December 2017, they produced the aforementioned National Security Strategy, which identifies China’s rulers as America’s most determined and dangerous adversaries. The conduct of those rulers since — including but not limited to their obfuscations and deceptions regarding the coronavirus, their imprisonment of millions of Muslim Uighurs in “re-education” camps, their takeover of Hong Kong in egregious violation of their treaty obligations, and their continuing massive intellectual-property thefts — have reinforced that reappraisal.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in the words of the Policy Planning paper, aims to “fundamentally revise world order, placing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) at the center and serving Beijing’s authoritarian goals and hegemonic ambitions.” In addition: “The party today wields its economic power to co-opt and coerce countries around the world; make the societies and politics of foreign nations more accommodating to CCP specifications; and reshape international organizations in line with China’s brand of socialism.

At the same time, the CCP is developing a world-class military to rival and eventually surpass the U.S. military.” The Policy Planning Staff, led by director Peter Berkowitz, offers 10 recommendations to resist this global transformation. Among them: The United States “must maintain the world’s

most powerful, agile, and technologically sophisticated military while enhancing security cooperation, grounded in common interests and shared responsibility, with allies and partners. A strong military depends on a strong economy. ...

At the same time, a strong economy depends on a strong military – to ensure the open seas, safe skies, and secure communications networks that enable international commerce to thrive. For the sake of security and prosperity, moreover, the United States must rededicate itself to preserving its status as the world’s leader in technological innovation.” Policy Planning concludes that China’s rulers pose a challenge and threat that “is likely to dominate American foreign policy across many administrations.”

Joe Biden’s view of China’s rulers has conformed to that of the foreign policy establishment. You may recall him saying they are “not bad folks” and certainly “not competition for us.” On the campaign trail last year, he scoffed: “China is going to eat our lunch? Come on, man.” However, his announcement that he plans to appoint Antony Blinken as secretary of State suggests his views may be evolving. In July, Mr. Blinken told an interviewer:

“There is a growing consensus across parties that China poses a series of new challenges and that the status quo was really not sustainable.” Of course, Mr. Biden is doubtless also getting an earful from those committed to soft-pedaling Beijing’s malign behaviors and hostile ambitions. Among them, investors who have been making fortunes in China, and at least one distinguished professor from a prestigious university.

Mr. Biden probably hasn’t read “The Elements of the China Challenge.” I’d recommend he do so soonest. As a former chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he surely understands how important it was that, during the First Cold War, there was something close to bipartisan consensus vis-à-vis the Soviet empire. The same is necessary in regard to those who rule China’s 21st century empire. If we can’t manage that, we really don’t stand a chance.

Clifford D. May is founder and president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and a columnist for The Washington Times.

3 Nuclear Deterrence, Missile Defense Initiatives the Next Administration Should Continue

Nov 25th, 2020 3 min read

Commentary By [Patty-Jane Geller](#)

Policy Analyst, Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense

Noah Levin

Fall 2020 member of the Young Leaders Program at The Heritage Foundation

KEY TAKEAWAYS

It’s incumbent upon the next administration to protect American citizens and interests from these rising threats.

The next administration should continue modernizing U.S. nuclear forces.

While it may be tempting for the next administration to simply agree to extend New START for another five years, it must continue pushing for a better deal.

In a revived era of great power competition, the United States must face revisionist powers and rogue regimes with advancing nuclear forces and a greater willingness to use them than we have experienced in the past.

It's incumbent upon the next administration to protect American citizens and interests from these rising threats.

Under the Trump administration, U.S. nuclear and missile defense capabilities have progressed, improving our deterrence and defense against the increasingly sophisticated threats posed by adversaries.

Three initiatives pursued by the Trump administration that the next administration should continue are nuclear force modernization, arms control negotiations with Russia and China, and advanced homeland missile defense.

First, the next administration should continue modernizing U.S. nuclear forces. The nuclear warheads and delivery systems that we have now have been around since the 1970s and are long overdue for replacement.

For example, the intercontinental-range ballistic missiles deployed throughout the United States entered service in 1970 with only a 10-year intended lifetime. Now, they will remain in service through 2030. That's fully half a century longer than they were meant to last.

The Obama administration initiated the effort to recapitalize the United States' aging nuclear delivery systems, warheads, and infrastructure, and the Trump administration in turn made significant progress in advancing those projects.

It's imperative to replace old systems before they introduce reliability issues and simply age out. Doing so requires requesting the funding necessary to complete nuclear modernization programs in a timely manner.

Second, the next administration should continue pursuing an improved arms control agreement with Russia and China.

New START, the current agreement between the United States and Russia, is seriously flawed. Of particular significance, New START does not constrain Russia's growing stockpile of tactical nuclear weapons. Russia could dangerously deploy these weapons on the battlefield as part of its strategy to escalate conflict with a limited nuclear strike to force the United States to back down.

To address that concern, the Trump administration has pursued a deal with Russia to temporarily extend New START in exchange for a freeze on all nuclear warheads, including these tactical weapons. Despite having initially agreed, the Russians have since soured on that compromise.

While it may be tempting for the next administration to simply agree to extend New START for another five years, it must continue pushing for a better deal.

Third, the next administration should continue work on the Next-Generation Interceptor to ensure protection of the homeland from missiles fired by malign actors such as North Korea.

The United States currently deploys 44 ground-based interceptors to defend the homeland from missile attack. But having been around since 2004, those interceptors will eventually lose their efficacy in dealing with North Korea's increasingly sophisticated weapons program.

Last year, the Pentagon initiated the Next-Generation Interceptor program to both replace the current ground-based interceptors and increase the number of interceptors up to 64, starting in 2028. The Next-Generation Interceptor is envisioned to have advanced capabilities able to reckon with the increasingly complex North Korean threat.

Continued support for the Next-Generation Interceptor by the next administration will be crucial to ensuring the United States is protected by a missile defense technology built in the era of 5G and the iPhone 12, instead of with technology from the era of the iPod and flip phone.

National defense should not be a partisan issue. To continue down the path of advancing deterrence and defense against aggressive adversaries, the next administration must continue efforts to modernize the nuclear triad, pursue a comprehensive arms control agreement, and upgrade the nation's homeland defense system.

How the U.S. Military Can Compete with Russia and China's New Weapons

National Interest Online, 1 Dec 20 Kris Osborn

The pace at which China is adding carriers, destroyers and amphibious ships is staggering, the Russians reportedly already operate hypersonic missiles and possibly even satellite-launched missiles and both Iran and North Korea seek advanced nuclear weapons such as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and tactical nuclear-armed rockets.

China is already working on a second and third indigenous carrier and plans to double its fleet of destroyers within just the next five years. Russia and China have both made fast progress modernizing their respective nuclear arsenals.

All of these well-known realities continue to provide new urgency to the longstanding refrain that the U.S. military is in desperate need of more effective acquisition reform. The idea, which has actually circulated for decades as a huge, yet largely unrealized priority, may actually be happening now thanks to computer simulation, digital engineering and rapid prototyping.

The Pentagon has, finally, actually re-written its famous Defense Department 5000 acquisition procedural and legal manual. The specifics of the rewrite might not as of yet be available, yet the development is likely a welcome move for many who have been seeking to streamline lengthy acquisition milestones often unnecessarily set apart by years.

While no one is advocating any move to cut corners or decrease the effectiveness of weapons development, the idea is to leverage newer technologies, realize the competitive global environment, and move new platforms to completion on an expedited, massively accelerated basis. This is already happening, as the Air Force's prototype sixth-generation stealth fighter has taken to the sky years ahead of schedule.

The intent is not so much to circumvent essential procedures, safeguards and certifications, but rather to concurrently accomplish numerous

functions, which have previously been spaced years apart and often stalled by cumbersome, bureaucratic and sometimes unnecessary traditional acquisition procedures.

How is all this happening? Rapid advancements in digital engineering, for example, enable the Pentagon's weapons developers to assess multiple design models of new systems such as new ICBMs, stealth fighters or even armored vehicles through digital computer modeling without having to spend years building and testing multiple competing prototypes. This technique is not only gaining traction but already producing substantial results.

It is on the way to being used in an even greater capacity, Alan R. Shaffer, the Pentagon's Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, said at the National Defense Industrial Association's virtual Interservice/Industry Training (I/ITSEC), Simulation and Education Conference, according to a Pentagon report.

"The same technologies . . . you investigate at I/ITSEC (Simulation and Training) are the ones that will allow us to move to an agile and adaptive acquisition framework and be much more agile," Shaffer said in the essay. "Digital engineering, digitization, modular open systems architecture and model composability are all key within the I/ITSEC community. They're also the bedrock for an agile acquisition framework and will provide us the tools we need to cut development time," he said.

Shaffer went on to explain that simulation can also assist weapons development through wargaming and threat assessments, the kinds of exercises that test and assess advanced Red (enemy) forces against Blue (friendly) forces.

"We should be able to do a much better job in assessing to be fit for purpose by use of simulation and the performance of red versus blue systems and simulators to really understand how what we are going to buy in the Department of Defense will operate in a real world," he said.

--Kris Osborn is the defense editor for the National Interest. Osborn previously served at the Pentagon as a Highly Qualified Expert with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army—Acquisition, Logistics & Technology. Osborn has also worked as an anchor and on-air military specialist at national TV networks. He has appeared as a guest military expert on Fox News, MSNBC, The Military Channel, and The History Channel. He also has a Masters Degree in Comparative Literature from Columbia University.

Russia waits -- warily -- for Biden to chart course on relations

The Washington Times, 2 Dec 20 Lauren Toms

There may be more head-scratching in the Kremlin than anywhere else in the world right now as Russian leaders try to get used to the idea of a President Biden.

President Trump was accused of being too close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, but his administration also saw a major U.S. military buildup, stepped-up offensive arms sales to Ukraine and the scrapping of major multilateral agreements on nuclear arms, surveillance flights and Iran's nuclear programs.

Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden and his team are talking about taking a tougher line on Russia but also of quickly negotiating an extension of a major arms control deal that Mr. Trump has left dangling. Mr. Putin is one of the most prominent international holdouts among world leaders who have yet to formally congratulate the Democrat a full month after the U.S. election.

Mr. Trump spoke repeatedly about the desirability of better U.S.-Russian relations. Mr. Biden, whose experience dealing with Moscow dates back to the days of the Soviet Union and who once referred to Mr. Putin as a “KGB thug,” and his top aides have sounded a far more skeptical note, particularly on human rights and the state of democracy in Mr. Putin’s Russia.

Mr. Putin, “like most autocratic rulers, attributes pivotal importance to personal ties, yet he apparently cannot find a way to connect with Biden,” Pavel K. Baev, a senior researcher at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, and longtime analyst of the Russian political system, wrote this week in an analysis for the Jamestown Foundation.

In some of his most extensive public remarks since the election, Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Antonov told a Brookings Institution forum Wednesday that Moscow is seeking “to have pragmatic relations, friendly relations with the United States” under the new administration.

“We are two great powers,” he said. “The whole world depends upon the relations between the United States and Russia.”

Although Mr. Antonov sidestepped questions about Russia’s acknowledgment of Mr. Biden’s victory, Mr. Putin has tacitly appeared to welcome a Biden administration over a second Trump administration. The former vice president has appeared more open to striking a deal to extend the New START arms control treaty, set to expire barely two weeks after Mr. Biden takes office.

Mr. Biden said last year that if elected, he would pursue an extension of the 2010 treaty, which he called “an anchor of strategic stability between the United States and Russia, and use that as a foundation for new arms control agreements.”

The last remaining arms deal between the two nuclear powers, New START limits the number of deployable U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons at 1,550.

“Our country needs New START as much as the United States,” Mr. Antonov said. “We have time,” he said.

Wary of Biden

Mr. Putin isn’t the only Russian wary of what the change in power at the White House will bring. A poll by Russia’s Levada Center this week found that a majority of Russians don’t believe that bilateral relations will improve under a Biden administration.

A mere 12% of Russians who responded to the poll said they believe relations will improve during Mr. Biden’s tenure. The results paint a stark contrast to a 2016 poll when 46% of respondents said ties would improve during the Trump administration.

By contrast, 45% of Russian respondents polled in November said relations would not change materially under Mr. Biden, while 30% predicted they would get worse.

The recent presidential battle hasn't helped the U.S. image in Russia, either: 51% of those polled in November said they view the U.S. in a "bad" or "very bad" light, up from 46% in the summer.

As the U.S. and Russia navigate their ever-changing relationship, the secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization urged both parties to continue renewed talks.

"We welcome the dialogue between [the] U.S. and Russia to find a way forward because we should not want to find ourselves in a situation where there is no agreement regulating the number of nuclear warheads," Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday.

During a meeting this week of the foreign ministers of the NATO alliance, the pact discussed "Russia's continued military buildup in our neighborhood, as well as arms control," Mr. Stoltenberg said.

"We should not find ourselves in a situation where there is no agreement regulating the number of nuclear warheads," he said, referencing New START.

Mr. Trump's team has been notably skeptical of arms accords, ending the Cold War-era INF Treaty on intermediate-range nuclear weapons with Russia and pulling out of the multilateral Open Skies Agreement on oversight surveillance flights.

Mr. Antonov said such resistance has led to a "further degradation of arms control."

He said the U.S. pullout from the Open Skies Treaty put the entire agreement "on the brink of collapse" and that the White House made "erroneous steps" with regard to the INF Treaty. U.S. officials counter that Mr. Trump acted because Russia failed to meet its obligations under both accords.

In October, the U.S. and Russia appeared to be on the verge of a short-term deal to preserve New START after Moscow offered to freeze part of its nuclear arsenal in exchange for an extension. But the negotiations appeared to have stalled after Mr. Biden's victory as Moscow waits to attempt to quickly ratify a new agreement.

"We see that the United States does not intend to ratify the treaty, at least for now," said Mr. Antonov, expressing optimism with a new administration.

Mr. Biden and many of his top advisers are veterans of the Obama administration's ill-fated "reset" of U.S.-Russian relations that ended definitively with Mr. Putin's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Mr. Baev said Mr. Biden's foreign policy team will likely be more predictable and unified than Mr. Trump's, but perhaps no easier for Mr. Putin to deal with in the long run.

"The last four years saw a deep deterioration in Russian-U.S. relations and plenty of frustration in Moscow regarding the setbacks in the much-anticipated high-level bilateral dialogue," he wrote.

“The incoming Biden administration only adds to this frustration because its promise of a coherent and predictable foreign policy is set to reduce Russia’s space for maverick maneuvering in a disorganized international arena.”

How close is Iran to producing a nuclear bomb?

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/12/01/explainer-how-close-is-iran-to-producing-a-nuclear-bomb/>

From Pakistan Today - BY AGENCIES

VIENNA: A 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers is being eroded and efforts to revive the pact face a new challenge with the killing of Tehran’s top nuclear scientist.

The accord’s restrictions on Iran’s atomic work had one objective: to extend the “breakout time” for Tehran to produce enough fissile material for a bomb, if it decided to make one, to at least a year from about two to three months. Iran maintains that it has never sought nuclear weapons and never would. It says its nuclear work only has civilian aims. Tehran began breaching the deal’s curbs last year in a step-by-step response to President Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the deal in May 2018 and the reimposition of US sanctions.

This has shortened the breakout time but reports by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which polices the deal, indicate that Iran is not moving ahead with its nuclear work as fast as it could. European states have sought to save the nuclear deal, pressing Tehran to comply even as Washington has tightened sanctions, and holding out hopes of a change in US policy once President-elect Joe Biden takes office on January 20. Biden was part of the US administration under Barack Obama that negotiated the 2015 deal.

WHAT HAS IRAN DONE TILL NOW?

Iran has contravened many of the deal’s restrictions but is still cooperating with the IAEA and granting inspectors access under one of the most intrusive nuclear verification regimes imposed on any nation.

Enriched uranium -- The deal limits Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium to 202.8kilogram, a fraction of the more than eight tonnes it possessed before the deal. The limit was breached last year. The IAEA report in November put the stockpile at 2,442.9kilogram.

Enrichment level -- The deal caps the fissile purity to which Iran can refine uranium at 3.67 percent, far below the 20 percent achieved before the deal and below the weapons-grade level of 90 percent. Iran breached the 3.67 percent cap in July 2019 and the enrichment level has remained steady at up to 4.5 percent since then.

Centrifuges -- The deal allows Iran to produce enriched uranium using about 5,000 first-generation IR-1 centrifuges at its underground Natanz plant, which was built to house more than 50,000. It can operate small numbers of more advanced models above ground without accumulating enriched uranium. Iran had roughly 19,000 installed centrifuges before the deal. In 2019, the IAEA said Iran had begun enrichment with advanced centrifuges at an above-ground pilot plant at Natanz. Since then, Iran started moving three cascades, or clusters, of advanced centrifuges to the underground plant. In November, the IAEA said Iran had fed uranium hexafluoride gas feedstock into the first of those underground cascades.

Fordow -- The deal bans enrichment at Fordow, a site Iran secretly built inside a mountain and that was exposed by Western intelligence services in 2009. Centrifuges are allowed there for other purposes, like producing stable isotopes. Iran now has 1,044 IR-1 centrifuges enriching there.

HOW CLOSE IS IRAN TO HAVING A BOMB?

The breaches lengthened the breakout time but estimates still vary. Many diplomats and nuclear experts say the starting point of one year is conservative and Iran would need longer.

David Albright, a former UN weapons inspector who tends to have a hawkish position on Iran, estimated in November that Iran's breakout time could be "as short as 3.5 months", although this presumes Iran would use 1,000 advanced centrifuges that were removed under the deal.

WHAT MORE WOULD IRAN NEED TO DO?

If Iran accumulated sufficient fissile material, it would need to assemble a bomb and probably one small enough to be carried by its ballistic missiles. How long that would take exactly is unclear, but stockpiling enough fissile material is widely seen as the biggest hurdle in producing a weapon. US intelligence agencies and the IAEA believe Iran once had a nuclear weapons programme that it halted.

There is evidence suggesting Iran obtained a design for a nuclear weapon and carried out various types of work relevant to making one. Tehran continues to grant the IAEA access to its declared nuclear facilities and allow snap inspections elsewhere. Iran and the IAEA resolved a standoff this year that had lasted several months over access to two suspected former sites.

To promote human rights and democracy, Biden should start with China

*<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/528011-to-promote-human-rights-and-democracy-biden-should-start-with-china>
BY JOSEPH BOSCO, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 12/01/20 10:00 AM EST*

The so-called "Taiwan question" — i.e., Taiwan's future status in the international community— is often described by China's communist leaders, and by Western academics, as "the unfinished business of the Chinese civil war."

That is why Henry Kissinger presses Taiwan to accept Beijing's rule by warning that "China will not wait forever." And it is why Chinese leader Xi Jinping echoes that the matter "cannot be passed from one generation to another." But, inevitably impacting Taiwan's fate is China's own future, because the continued rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in fact represents the larger unfinished business of the Cold War.

In the late 1980s, as the Moscow-imposed communist regimes in Eastern Europe were falling and the Soviet Union itself was teetering, the people of China were peacefully calling for major political reform to match Deng Xiaoping's economic opening up. But Deng lost his nerve and the historic opportunity to lead the great Chinese civilization to a brilliant democratic future. True communist that he was, and with the world watching, he defaulted to Mao Zedong's teaching that "political power grows from the barrel of a gun" and unleashed the People's Liberation Army against the Chinese people. That disastrous decision on June 4, 1989, tragically forfeited for at least the next couple of generations China's enlightened evolution as a normal country.

Nor did Deng or his successors pay a significant price economically, diplomatically, or in world public opinion. After the Tiananmen massacre, the first Bush administration and the Clinton, Bush II and Obama administrations all proceeded with engagement policies that had reaped for China the

economic and diplomatic benefits of inclusion into Richard Nixon's "family of nations." Only the Trump administration has mustered the will and formulated the strategy to insist that, in return, China play by the same international rules as all other countries.

The Trump White House has confronted, and refused to accept, China's ingrained inclination to "nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors," as Nixon aptly put it. Ironically for some, it has demanded normal behavior from China. The Trump team has challenged Beijing not only on its trade cheating — which the president took on as a personal challenge — but also on its maritime aggression in the South and East China Seas and its economic, diplomatic and military pressures on Taiwan.

The incoming Biden administration cannot afford to backslide in any of those areas without opening the door to increased militant Chinese opportunism. Already during the transition period, there are hints of a softening position as Biden appointees signal an overriding desire to return to smoother relations with China — that is, to be the anti-Trump administration. The president, for example, calmly defied Beijing by accepting a congratulatory telephone call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen within 24 days of being declared the winner in 2016.

Biden, after a longer comparable period, so far has declined to extend that courtesy to America's democratic friend and security partner, even as he accepts calls from other national leaders, both democratic and authoritarian. Clearly, the motivation is to avoid provoking or confronting Xi Jinping, with whom Biden touted his years of warm personal relationship as vice president but, as a presidential candidate, he called "a thug" to demonstrate his "toughness" on China. Xi, however, knows well that actions, and inaction, can speak louder than name-calling — at which Trump excelled and for which he was roundly criticized by his political opponents and media critics.

Biden's moderate approach, like Obama's, Bush's and Clinton's, will be seen by the Chinese communist leaders not as self-confident steadiness but as timidity and weakness — and they will continue their adventuristic probing. Accepting Beijing's self-serving definitions of what constitutes Western "provocations" and "containment" is a fool's errand and a prescription for policy paralysis. From China's perspective, Taiwan as a democratic governing alternative and de facto independent state is a continuing provocation justifying the use of force to rectify.

The most significant legacy Trump is leaving his successor is a commitment to work with the Chinese people and the international community for peaceful political reform in China. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a July speech at the Nixon Library, declared "[C]hanging the CCP's behavior cannot be the mission of the Chinese people alone. Free nations have to work to defend freedom."

Given the Biden team's proclaimed intentions to emphasize human rights and collaboration with friends and democratic allies to differentiate the new administration from the incumbents' alleged shortcomings, the Pompeo declaration provides a solid rhetorical starting point. The West's success in supporting the earth-shaking, yet largely peaceful, political revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union offer, if not a roadmap, at least a model for effective strategic communications. Information warfare — which China long has waged incessantly against the West — is far preferable to the kinetic alternative that will become inevitable if Washington reverts to earlier accommodationist policies.

Taiwan is a normal — indeed a model — democratic country but is treated as a diplomatic pariah. Communist China, by definition, is an aberration in the modern civilized world, but is dealt with as a normal state. The international community needs to get its priorities straight. For decades, the

conventional resolution of that paradox called for pressing Taiwan, which had painfully thrown off its anti-communist tyranny, to submit instead to a communist dictatorship.

More recently, however, as Beijing expanded its assault on international norms and triggered a global pandemic, and as the Trump administration drew a strategic and values-based line in the sand, more governments in Asia, Europe, Africa and elsewhere followed the U.S. lead, consciously or implicitly. The Biden administration can take the passing baton and show Xi Jinping a collaborative glide path to a democratic future and peaceful coexistence with Taiwan.

The first step would be for Beijing to stop inciting artificial nationalism on “reunification” (Taiwan has never been part of the People’s Republic of China) and then using that “patriotic” fervor as the pretext for its aggression. A democratically-elected government in China would not need that dangerous tactic to establish its popular legitimacy — which it had and squandered at Tiananmen. Xi needs to start over.

Joseph Bosco served as China country director for the secretary of Defense from 2005 to 2006 and as Asia-Pacific director of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief from 2009 to 2010. He is a nonresident fellow at the Institute for Corean-American Studies and a member of the advisory board of the Global Taiwan Institute.

THE REAL NUCLEAR BALANCE

How much is too Little???

By: Dr. Peter Vincent Pry, Task Force on National and Homeland Security

December 7, 2020

Key Judgments

1. --If the U.S. under a Biden Administration embarks on re-thinking the nuclear Triad, perhaps it will also be time to re-think other fundamentals driving U.S. nuclear strategy and policy, like how we measure “the nuclear balance.”
2. --“Bean-counting” numbers of nuclear weapons is an obsessive focus of the U.S. intelligence community, policymakers, and academics, that is fundamental to U.S. assessments about the likely and relative nuclear threat from Russia, China, and North Korea.
3. --Yet “bean-counting” is not really an objective measure of the nuclear balance, but a subjective fixation of a U.S. (and Western) strategic culture dominated by arms control theory, that requires omniscience about U.S. and adversary nuclear arms in order for them to be limited and so supposedly “controlled.”
4. --Potential nuclear adversaries, unlike the United States, do not accurately report their nuclear inventories, as these are regarded as vital state secrets.

5. --Intelligence, arms control, and academic communities pretend to have omniscience about the numbers of nuclear weapons deployed by adversaries, despite often being wrong, and despite extraordinary efforts by Russia, China, and North Korea to conceal their nuclear forces.
6. --Prudent policymakers and military planners should have low-confidence in intelligence community and other static estimates of the nuclear balance—and prepare for the worst.
7. --The strategic nuclear balance is best assessed by force-on-force exchange modeling under the widest range of plausible scenarios, simulating various possible nuclear wars.
8. --A Biden Administration that thinks like HASC Chairman Adam Smith may well reject all paradigms for assessing the nuclear balance and worry not at all about significant disparities and potential vulnerabilities.
9. --Dismantling the Triad for a “Minimum Deterrent” Monad of SSBNs would be an unprecedented deep reduction of U.S. nuclear capabilities to dangerously deficient levels, breaking radically with consensus strategic thinking that enabled the U.S. to prevail in the Cold War while deterring a thermonuclear World War III.
10. --The West has long nurtured in its universities and politics a radical minority cult that damns the United States for inventing the atomic bomb, the fruit of a social-political system they condemn as fundamentally evil. For the original sin of being itself, America must atone and suffer. 75 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, America’s nihilists are on the threshold of getting their wish.

Stop the budgetary bleeding to get the Air Force we need

https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/11/25/stop-the-budgetary-bleeding-to-get-the-air-force-we-need/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2011.30.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

By: Douglas Birkey for Defense News

In 2018, then-Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson sounded the alarm regarding the size of her service:

“The Air Force is too small for what the nation expects of us.” Her response was direct: The service needed to grow from 312 to 386 operational squadrons. Given the concurrent demands presented by China and Russia at the high end of the threat spectrum, Iran and North Korea in the middle, and the continued danger posed by nonstate actors at the lower threat tier, this imperative for growth was grounded in clear requirements.

However, instead of marking a positive turning point for the service, subsequent years saw the Air Force grow smaller, older and more fragile. The burgeoning security environment demands that this downward spiral end now. This is exactly why the Senate’s version of the fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act includes specific aircraft inventory floors for the Air Force. With positive intentions having fallen short year after year, it is time for legislation to stop the bleeding.

No form of power projection is possible without the capabilities afforded by the Air Force. Ships at sea, forces on land and rear echelon operating locations will not survive long if not defended from aerial attack. Long-range strike affords the unique ability to hit critical targets deep behind

enemy lines. Air mobility empowers joint force operations. Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance was the most in-demand mission area over the past two decades, and remains so today. Added to this, the Air Force also provides two-thirds of the nuclear triad.

Despite the value provided by these missions, the Air Force has struggled to earn its fair share of the defense budget. It absorbed the largest fiscal cuts out of all the services in the years after the Cold War. Between 1989 and 2001, the Air Force saw procurement funding drop by over 52 percent — nearly 20 percent more than the other services. FY13 saw aircraft procurement funding hit the lowest levels in Air Force history.

To add insult to injury, the Air Force also sees nearly 20 percent of its top-line budget diverted to the intelligence community — enough money to buy over 400 F-35 fighter jets a year. No other service gets hit like this. With budget pressures a perennial problem, the Air Force has continually sought to divest aircraft to free up cash. The problem is that the demand for Air Force missions never went away.

Quite the opposite, it increased. In 1990, the Air Force had 2,893 fighters; today it has around 1,800. This same period saw bombers drop from 327 to 157. Combat operations have been unending since 1991, which means a smaller number of aircraft and crews simply get spun harder to meet demand. This is an unsustainable pattern, with the B-1B bomber standing as a cautionary tale. It has been flying combat missions on a nonstop basis since the 9/11 attacks.

The Air Force retired a third of the B-1B inventory in the 2000s to save money that could be reinvested in the remaining aircraft. Budget pressures in subsequent years saw these savings evaporate, maintenance dollars run too thin and the aircraft pressed to the limit. They hit the breaking point last year, with less than 10 percent of the Air Force's B-1Bs mission-capable. With nearly every mission area in the Air Force inventory labeled as "high demand, low density," expect to see similar challenges proliferate.

These stresses are also a major driver behind the pilot crisis. Shrinking the Air Force in the hopes that expected savings could fund modernization has served as a continual mirage for Air Force planners. Indeed, the Air Force's answer to funding the Advanced Battle Management System and other priorities in the FY21 budget submission was to retire more aircraft. Better networks are of little use without the ability to complete the kill chain, and that takes aircraft.

Presumed areas of growth hang precariously years into the future. There's little chance that cash will remain protected given COVID-19 budget pressures. The problem is that even when divestiture plans appear plausible on internal spreadsheets, service officials are not the ultimate arbiters of their resources. The broader Department of Defense, Office of Management and Budget, and Congress each have a vote on how funds are managed.

This pattern clearly has not worked for the Air Force for the past 30 years. Playing this losing hand again will break the force at fundamental levels. That is why the Senate's proposed aircraft floor is not just a good idea — it is a necessity. A prudent negotiator does not enter a meeting with a high-risk position as the starting point, but that is exactly what the Air Force has done for far too long. The time has come to openly articulate what is required to meet national security requirements.

That is what the 386 operational squadron goal is all about. It comes down to acknowledging what airmen will need to fly into harm's way, get the job done and come home safe. This takes both capability and capacity. It is time to rebuild the Air Force we need.

Tough but Necessary Road Ahead for Arms Control

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/16798/arms-control-new-start>

by [Stephen Blank](#) and [Peter Huessy](#) for the Gatestone Institute // November 30, 2020 at 4:00 am

Russia's strategy with nuclear weapons, as outlined in official documents and many analyses, leans towards what **General John Hyten**, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has referred to as **"escalate to win."**

Moreover, the absence of China as a party to any arms agreements, including New START, gives China a total "free ride" on nuclear issues in that there is no requirement for China to limit any of its nuclear weapons, even if the US could verify such an agreement. Such calls for one-sided cuts to the US arsenal, particularly during a serious negotiation such as the current one with Moscow, simply undercut America's negotiating leverage.

The fact is that no matter what the US does, both Moscow and Beijing will continue to build nuclear and other high-tech weapons, including space weapons and hypersonic-capable weapons.... If these adversaries cannot compete on the conventional level, they have no choice, given their ambitions, but to go nuclear to assert themselves against the interests and values of the US and its allies, and carry out their aggressive and hegemonic designs.

Moreover, as inherently imperial autocracies, they are driven from within to states of siege, if not war, with the US, as well as imperial probes across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. For these reasons, the Trump Administration has correctly focused on ending China's "free riding" regarding arms control talks and on placing all of Russia's nuclear programs on the table, coupled with far better verification.

Many of those opposing such a strategy apparently have forgotten that the first reason a great power such as the US engages in arms control is not altruism. Rather, and as the fathers of deterrence theory understood, arms control is an action that states undertake primarily to advance their own interests and security and that of their allies. Thus, from a US perspective, perpetuating the status quo would hardly be a satisfactory outcome for Washington and its allies.

The New START Treaty will expire in February 2021. The next administration will therefore have only weeks to decide on how to proceed regarding arms control negotiations with Russia. Although some negotiations with Russia are already taking place, the complexities of the issues make it most unlikely that the current dialogue will lead to a new treaty by February. Responding to this dilemma, many arms control experts have argued that the next administration should immediately [extend the treaty](#) for another five years.

Other observers have privately over the past weeks suggested that the next administration should, instead, still propose an extension for 1-2 years and continue negotiating to obtain a new treaty. The current negotiations, thus, duly reflect President Donald Trump's guidance that there should eventually be a new treaty, but for now there should be only a limited extension accompanied by a freeze on existing deployed force levels. While Russia has not accepted such a deal, the American proposal makes sense.

Regardless of the eventual election results, it is important to understand what extending the current treaty means. The record of the last decade confirms that the New START Treaty is [seriously flawed](#), particularly when it comes to issues of verification. Among those many flaws are bizarre counting rules and a failure to prevent Russia from circumventing the treaty in its building program (as was underway during those negotiations).

Thus, many of the new programs announced by Moscow as part of its overall nuclear weapons program are not counted by the treaty. In fact, as [noted by Mark B. Schneider](#), since the New START treaty went into force, Russia has been building at least 20 new types of strategic nuclear weapons systems, that comprise countervalue, counterforce, and long-range weapons, some not regulated by the current treaty.

Indeed, since the formation of the Russian Federation in 1991, it has built 25 new types of strategic long-range nuclear weapons systems, and due to its current building program is [on track](#) to have available some seven to ten thousand nuclear weapons in its overall stockpile this decade, many of which are [not covered](#) under the existing treaty, including short range, regional or battlefield nuclear weapons.

Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that President Vladimir Putin has [stated](#) that Russia has nuclear superiority over the US. Russia's strategy with nuclear weapons, as outlined in official documents and many analyses, leans towards what General John Hyten, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has referred to as "[escalate to win](#)." Such a strategy could more accurately be described as being able to dominate and control the escalation ladder, irrespective of what level of conflict emerges.

This plan includes first-strike and [war-fighting strategies](#) -- in some instances, nuclear preemption. Thus, from a US perspective, perpetuating the status quo would hardly be a satisfactory outcome for Washington and its allies. In addition, merely extending this treaty without attending to its defects of verification would also perpetuate the policy of giving Russia a high degree of camouflage, specifically in hiding Russia's extremely large breakout capability.

Moreover, the absence of China as a party to any arms agreements, including New START, gives China a total "free ride" on nuclear issues in that there is no requirement for China to limit any of its nuclear weapons, even if the US could verify such an agreement. Since the US Defense Intelligence Agency now [estimates](#) that China will double its nuclear arsenal over the next decade, continuing the New START treaty without including China in some form, or fixing its weak verification proposals, gives China and Russia together tremendously dangerous running room in managing their respective nuclear expansions.

The leverage the US has historically used, for example, to push Russia into arms deals is that the alternative of an unimpeded US technological capability to produce nuclear weapons and build defenses would result in a worsening strategic environment for Russia and China, especially if the US also secured its own allied support for a US strategy. President Ronald Reagan made it work through an all-of-government effort to secure a 70% verifiable cut in Russian and US deployed long-range nuclear weapons.

In the absence of such deals, however, the US has to maintain a deterrent at least second to none. As successfully negotiating stringent, credible verification procedures that are mutually compatible is a long, painstaking affair, it is obvious that this will not lead to a treaty before February 5, 2021, when the treaty expires. Simply extending the treaty without major improvements in verification would be highly detrimental to US and allied interests, to say nothing of excluding China from any discussions.

These hard facts seem to elude those calling for a simple extension. Indeed, many of the disarmament advocates who are calling for sustaining the New START treaty have been utterly silent about Russian and Chinese nuclear developments and seem excessively focused on pushing unilateral cuts to the American arsenal. Such [calls for one-sided cuts](#) to the US arsenal, particularly during a serious negotiation such as the current one with Moscow, simply undercut America's negotiating leverage.

The fact is that no matter what the US does, both Moscow and Beijing will continue to build nuclear and [other high-tech weapons](#), including space weapons and hypersonic-capable weapons, because neither state can accept that the US has conventional superiority. If these adversaries cannot compete on the conventional level, [they have no choice](#), given their ambitions, but to go nuclear to assert themselves against the interests and values of the US and its allies, and carry out their aggressive and hegemonic designs.

Moreover, as inherently imperial autocracies, they are driven from within to states of siege, if not war, with the US, as well as imperial probes across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. For these reasons, the Trump Administration has correctly focused on ending China's "free riding" regarding arms control talks and on [placing all](#) of Russia's nuclear programs on the table, coupled with far better verification.

Many of those opposing such a strategy apparently have forgotten that the first reason a great power such as the US engages in arms control is not altruism. Rather, and as the [fathers of deterrence theory](#) understood, arms control is an action that states undertake primarily to advance their own interests and security and that of their allies. Thus, from a US perspective, perpetuating the status quo would hardly be a satisfactory outcome for Washington and its allies. Many of those now demanding cuts and the extension of treaties without improving their shortcomings appear to have forgotten this point. We can be sure that neither Moscow nor Beijing has ever failed to grasp it. And neither should we.

Stephen Blank is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Peter Huessy is President of Geostrategic Analysis.

ARTICLES AGAINST CREDIBLE, CAPABLE NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Biden expected to re-examine SCS factory (W87-1)

<https://www.thestate.com/news/local/environment/article247423950.html>

Is jobs-rich nuclear plant in jeopardy?

[BY SAMMY FRETWELL](#) for The State // NOVEMBER 27, 2020 06:00 AM, -- UPDATED NOVEMBER 27, 2020 01:26 PM

Earlier this month, efforts to build a jobs-rich nuclear weapons component factory in South Carolina reached a milestone that boosters hoped would keep construction plans on track over the next decade.

The **National Nuclear Security Administration** finalized a study that said the factory would not have a major effect on the environment at the [Savannah River Site](#), the 310-square mile weapons complex near Aiken that would house the plant. But the Nov. 5 announcement occurred at

virtually the same time Joe Biden was in the process of winning the presidency — and as Biden prepares to take office in January, questions are surfacing about the factory's future.

President Donald Trump's plans for the pit factory almost certainly will be reviewed by Biden to see if it's worth continuing the effort as envisioned, say national defense experts and others who track issues at SRS. Depending on Biden's priorities, plans for the SRS pit factory could be scaled back, slowed down or abandoned. The SRS factory could generate 1,000 jobs or more, preliminary estimates show.

Key concerns about the pit factory, as proposed, include whether the United States needs all of the plutonium pits that would be produced at SRS, whether the work could be done at a more experienced nuclear site in New Mexico and whether the project is too expensive. While President Barack Obama had expressed support for production of new pits during his administration, the Trump Administration had taken a more aggressive posture toward increasing and updating the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal, according to Bloomberg News and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

Among the priorities are newly designed weapons that would need a fresh supply of plutonium from a factory like the one proposed for SRS, federal officials say. "This is one of the pieces of the overall modernization program that the new administration will have no choice but to take a very hard look at," said Kingston Reif, who tracks nuclear weapons issues for the Arms Control Association. "The United States needs to have and should have the capability to make plutonium pits for nuclear warheads.

But the question is whether the current plans are necessary and executable." The pit factory is expected to cost at least \$4.6 billion. It would be established at the site of SRS's unfinished [mixed oxide fuel factory, a failed project](#) that cost taxpayers at least [\\$5 billion](#) before the federal government quit the effort about two years ago. The incomplete mixed oxide fuel plant would be converted for use as the pit plant. The converted fuel plant would be one of two pit factories that would serve the country, with the other near Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The more than 1,000 jobs the pit factory would create in South Carolina are on the minds of SRS backers. The site needs new missions, and manufacturing pits to keep the nation safe is a good way to add to the capabilities at SRS, supporters say. "Once this place is operational and producing the pits, it would probably be a few thousand jobs that would go on in perpetuity," said Jim Marra, executive director of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness.

Efforts to reach the Biden transition team for comment were unsuccessful. But SRS boosters, including Danny Black of the Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance, said they wouldn't be surprised to see Biden slow down the project. Even under Trump, the pit factory at SRS was an ambitious effort, Black said. "Changing administrations certainly brings this back into question," Black said. "I was under the impression the incoming administration may not be as hip to do it."

Representatives of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness and the SRS Community Reuse Organization said they want to know more about how the change in administrations would affect plans for the pit factory in South Carolina. "It seems like SRS is still in the works to be considered; it's just will they change the direction here with the new administration?" said Rick McLeod, director of the Community Reuse group.

Congress is still debating how much funding to provide for the SRS pit factory in the next fiscal year. Including the Los Alamos project, the overall expected request for funding tops \$10 billion in the next five years, according to budget data examined by the the [Arms Control Association](#) in Washington. Reif and other experts say they can't imagine the plant could be constructed for \$4.6 billion by 2030, when the government wants to begin producing 50 pits each year at SRS. Another 30 pits would be produced at the Los Alamos nuclear weapons site, a facility that already has some limited ability to produce plutonium pits. The cost to upgrade facilities at [Los Alamos](#) would be about \$3 billion.

EXPLOSIVE 'BOWLING BALLS'

Plutonium pits are the triggers for many nuclear weapons. They're spheres about the size of a bowling ball that are made of plutonium, the deadly radioactive metal. Many aging pits are stored at the Pantex defense site in Texas. In addition to its effectiveness in nuclear bombs, plutonium can cause cancer in people exposed to even small amounts. Environmentalists are concerned about the amount of radioactive waste that would be produced at the new pit factories.

If the pit factories in South Carolina and New Mexico are built, material would be sent from Pantex to the Savannah River Site and Los Alamos. The material would be reprocessed, and fresh pits would then be sent back to Pantex for insertion into nuclear weapons, according to the National Nuclear Security Administration. Nuclear weapons critics estimate 7.5 tons of plutonium could be brought to South Carolina alone. That follows years of efforts to get rid of plutonium that had been left there because the mixed oxide fuel plant had failed.

Hans Kristensen, a nuclear arms analyst with the [Federation of American Scientists](#), said he expects Biden to develop his own plan that will review nuclear policies and set priorities, which would affect the pit plant effort. That could come in the form of a new Nuclear Posture Review, a plan typically put together each time a new president comes into office. Or it could be an alteration of the existing Trump review, he said.

"Whatever format it is going to take, I think he wants to take a fresh look at what the nuclear posture should be," Kristensen said. "All administrations do that, but I think we can expect he might want to trim some of the requirements in the Trump Administration" plan. That includes reviews of the need for new nuclear weapons, he said. None of that means Biden won't ultimately follow through with plans for a pit plant at Los Alamos and the Savannah River Site.

Many experts agree the United States needs to keep its nuclear weapons arsenal fresh and reliable, and pits can essentially become stale years after they are made. Reif and Kristensen said they expect the Biden administration will support some effort to produce more pits, but that doesn't necessarily mean the SRS pit factory would be developed as proposed. For now, plans are moving ahead. The government has 285 people working on the project design and SRS plans to send 25 people to Los Alamos to learn about pit production over the next few years.

The site already has sent five people to New Mexico, said Jeff Allison, a top Nuclear Security Administration manager at SRS. Los Alamos is the only place in the country that makes pits, although not on a large scale. Facilities there would be upgraded to make more pits. "We've never actually made a pit (at SRS), so we don't have that skill craft, per se," Allison told the Governor's Nuclear Advisory Council in October.

During his presentation, he said SRS staff members will "basically stand beside the people who are operating their facilities out there and learn how to make pits." Even with that effort, gaining the expertise for large-scale pit production won't be easy. The Department of Energy's inspector general

recently said the agency, which manages the Savannah River Site, [“faces challenges”](#) in pit production because the nation hasn’t produced pits in large scale in decades.

“Due to the significant lapse in pit production, the nation lost much of its expertise in pit manufacturing following the closure of Rocky Flats,” the now shuttered national production facility, the inspector general’s Nov. 18 report said. One question about the need for the factory — at least as proposed — centers on how long it takes pits in nuclear weapons to become stale. Kristensen said pits can last capably for up to 100 years, if not longer. Most of the pits in the United States arsenal were made in the 1970s and 1980s, records show.

“There’s no doubt we need them,” Kristensen said of pits for nuclear weapons. “But there’s nothing that indicates that plutonium pits are wearing out” rapidly. Some officials and Savannah River Site supporters say the government needs to start planning for their replacement now. By the time a U.S. plant is at full production capacity, some of the existing pits will be nearing the end of their useful lives and existing weapons will need to be replenished, some experts say. The U.S. has nearly 4,000 nuclear warheads.

The government has been discussing how to replace aging plutonium pits for much of the past 20 years. In the early 2000s, the Bush Administration also entertained plans for a pit plant at SRS. “The need to produce 80 pits per year has been echoed by multiple administrations since 2008,” U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-SC, said in a statement. “Current studies show growth in primary performance uncertainty at pit ages greater than 80-100 years old. It would be irresponsible to continue using aged plutonium pits whose safety and surety attributes may be unpredictable and time is of the essence.”

Wilson, whose district includes SRS, said he’ll work with the new administration but will emphasize that the Savannah River Site is more than capable of producing plutonium pits for the first time. The site produced tritium and plutonium during the Cold War for use in nuclear weapons. “The Savannah River Site has decades of experience in manufacturing and handling of nuclear materials, accompanied by a proven record of safety,” Wilson said.

Efforts to reach U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham’s office for comment were unsuccessful. The South Carolina Republican, a Trump ally, has been a staunch supporter of SRS missions. Another key reason to build the plant at SRS — aside from the more than 1,000 jobs it would generate — centers on the need to develop new types of nuclear weapons, boosters of the plant say.

NEW WEAPON DRIVES PLAN (W-87-1)

Updated weapons on the drawing boards would need a fresh supply of plutonium pits. One that is being pushed is the **W-87-1**, a modernized weapon that is supposed to be safer to handle and more efficient, experts say. “We do need to modernize our weapons program and our weapons capabilities,” SRS supporter Marra said. “This serves a purpose of deterring other nations and keeping our nation safe.”

A Nuclear Security Administration spokesperson said the SRS pit factory is necessary because the United States has not had the ability to manufacture large numbers of pits since 1992, when the Rocky Flats weapons site closed in Colorado. Concerns have arisen about whether the nation needs two pit production facilities. But Shayela Hassan, the NNSA spokesperson, said the United States plans to build pit factories at SRS and at Los Alamos for security reasons. Having a factory in more than one place “supports resilience from external threats and hazards,” Hassan said.’

It also allows flexibility that will keep production going if one plant experiences a shutdown, Hassan said. Hassan noted that the shell of the mixed oxide fuel plant makes SRS a good spot for one of the two pit factories. The MOX plant “provides the opportunity to achieve pit production in a facility designed for the security and safety requirements required for plutonium operations,” Hassan said.

Still, some politicians and nuclear watchdogs say converting the mixed oxide fuel plant, known as MOX, to a pit plant may not be as simple or cost-effective as it sounds. “This isn’t like ... remodeling a bowling alley into a restaurant,” U.S. [Rep. Adam Smith said](#) in a Bloomberg story earlier this year. During an Armed Services Committee meeting, the Washington state Democrat said he was concerned that “we are going to spend billions of dollars, just like we did on the MOX facility, to get nothing,” Bloomberg reported.

The MOX plant was years behind schedule and as much as [\\$12 billion dollars over budget](#) before the government pulled the plug. The shutdown reinforced concerns that surplus weapons grade plutonium brought to SRS from across the country as feedstock for the plant would be stranded in South Carolina. Ultimately, after years of disputes, the U.S. Department of Energy agreed this past fall to pay the state more than \$500 million and move all of the plutonium to an out-of-state disposal area in the next 15 years.

Tom Clements, who heads Savannah River Site Watch, said South Carolina could face the same problem if any plutonium is brought to the state and the pit plant is never completed. He estimates 7.5 tons of plutonium would be brought into South Carolina for the pit facility. Like other nuclear safety groups, Clements opposes the plutonium pit factory, saying it is dangerous to build and not needed. Clements’ organization and others spoke against the plant at a [hearing last year in Aiken County](#).

“South Carolina could be left holding the plutonium bag,” Clements said in a recent news release. “It’s clear that the plutonium bomb plant at SRS is being driven by contractors and boosters who stand to profit by making South Carolina ground zero for an unacceptable new nuclear arms race that endangers national security and that places our state at environmental risk.” Mixed Oxide fuel factory at Savannah River Site. The federal government quit construction before the nuclear fuel factory project was completed because of the expense.

Sammy Fretwell has covered the environment beat for The State since 1995. He writes about an array of issues, including wildlife, climate change, energy, state environmental policy, nuclear waste and coastal development. He has won numerous awards, including Journalist of the Year by the S.C. Press Association in 2017. Fretwell is a University of South Carolina graduate who grew up in Anderson County. Reach him at 803 771 8537.

Iran's Mullahs Want the "Nuclear Deal", So Does Biden

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/16812/iran-mullahs-want-nuclear-deal>

by [Majid Rafizadeh](#) for the Gatestone Institute // December 3, 2020 at 5:00 am

- Iran's mullahs love the nuclear deal because of its fundamental flaws, especially the sunset clauses that remove restrictions on Iran's nuclear program after the deal expires soon. The nuclear deal, rather than preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, as it was falsely touted to do, in fact paves the way for Tehran to become a legitimized nuclear state.
- With the nuclear deal, the regime would gain global legitimacy, making it even more difficult to hold Iran's leaders accountable for any malign behavior or terror activity across the world.
- Finally, Iran's ruling clerics want immediately to rejoin the nuclear deal because it would again alienate other governments in the Middle East and inevitably lead to a worsening of relations between the US and its traditional allies, especially Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

- This flawed deal, in favor of Iran, failed to recognize the rightful concerns of other countries in the region about Iran's potential nuclear capability, missile proliferation or funding of violent proxies -- both within and next door to their territories.

Iran's ruling mullahs, who are celebrating presumptive President-Elect Joe Biden's possible presidency in 2021, are already [calling](#) on him to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal, which, incidentally, [Iran never signed](#).

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani -- already [urging](#) the next US administration, which he hopes is the Biden administration -- also [pointed](#) out, [according](#) to the state-run IRNA agency: "Now, an opportunity has come up for the next U.S. administration to compensate for past mistakes and return to the path of complying with international agreements through respect of international norms."

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif also [advised](#) Biden on Twitter to abandon President Trump's Iran policy of maximum pressure and rejoin the nuclear deal. The Trump administration, after pulling out of the nuclear deal, imposed significant pressure politically and economically on the Iranian regime and re-imposed sanctions on the mullahs. Iran's leaders are excited about the prospect of resurrecting the nuclear deal for several reasons.

First, the return to the nuclear deal means that the current sanctions against Tehran will be lifted and the regime will [join](#) the global financial system. Through the nuclear deal, the Iranian regime will again buy itself a blank check to advance its aggressive and fundamentalist policies across the Middle East as it did after the nuclear deal was reached in 2015.

The 2015 nuclear deal allowed the [flow of billions of dollars](#) into the Iranian regime's treasury, thereby providing the revenues for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that they needed to escalate their military adventurism in the region.

That project included financing, arming and supporting their terror and militia groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Gaza Strip, as well as in South America ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). After the nuclear agreement, Iran's meddling, interventions in the region and funding of militia groups [escalated](#). Iran also increased its deliveries of weapons to its militias, as the number of ballistic missiles [deployed](#) by Iran's proxies rose to an unprecedented level. Now, however, due to the current administration's policies, a cash-stripped Iran is at least unable [fund](#) its mercenaries and proxies, including Hamas and Hezbollah.

Second, Iran's mullahs love the nuclear deal because of its fundamental flaws, especially the [sunset clauses](#) that remove restrictions on Iran's nuclear program after the deal expires soon. The nuclear deal, rather than preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, as it was falsely touted to do, in fact [paves](#) the way for Tehran to become a legitimized nuclear state. Under the [nuclear](#) deal, Iran's military sites, such as Parchin, which is reportedly where nuclear development and research is [conducted](#), is out of the reach of International Atomic Energy Agency's inspectors. In addition, the nuclear deal that Iran cherishes [has](#) no reference to Iran's ballistic missile program, a core pillar of its foreign policy and, as the delivery system for nuclear weapons, closely linked to the nuclear program.

Third, with the nuclear deal, the regime would gain global legitimacy, making it even more difficult to hold Iran's leaders accountable for any malign behavior or terror activity across the world. Finally, Iran's ruling clerics want immediately to rejoin the nuclear deal because it would again alienate

other governments in the Middle East and inevitably lead to a worsening of relations between the US and its traditional allies, especially Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

The 2015 nuclear deal needlessly excluded Israel and Gulf states from negotiations with Iran, despite those countries living on Iran's doorstep and feeling the consequences of Iranian proxy action more acutely than any of the Western JCPOA nations. This flawed deal, in favor of Iran, failed to recognize the rightful concerns of other countries in the region about Iran's potential nuclear capability, missile proliferation or funding of violent proxies -- both within and next door to their territories. The Iranian leaders are not alone in desiring to resurrect the nuclear deal: Biden has [said](#) that that rejoining the JCPOA is a top priority. After all, the deal was reached when Biden was the Vice President in the Obama administration.

Additionally, in an opinion piece for CNN, Biden [wrote](#):

"I will offer Tehran a credible path back to diplomacy. If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations. With our allies, we will work to strengthen and extend the nuclear deal's provisions, while also addressing other issues of concern."

Both the ayatollahs and Biden, it appears, want to resurrect the dangerous nuclear deal. It would not only empower Iran's predatory proclivities and terrorist groups, but also provide a glide path for Iran to [obtain](#) its long yearned-for nuclear bomb.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a business strategist and advisor, Harvard-educated scholar, political scientist, board member of Harvard International Review, and president of the International American Council on the Middle East. He has [authored](#) several books on Islam and US foreign policy. He can be reached at Dr.Rafizadeh@Post.Harvard.Edu

Why the Pentagon must think harder about inadvertent escalation

Defense News Online, 2 Dec 20 Ankit Panda and James Acton

In a paradox worthy of the nuclear age, the conventional capabilities that have enabled the United States to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons have also increased the risk of misperception that could spark a nuclear war.

The United States now bases its war plans around using its exquisite conventional forces to sever the connections between an adversary's leadership and its military forces. But in an escalating conflict on the Korean Peninsula, such operations could look to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un like an attempt at regime change — even if the United States did not seek to depose him — and thus induce him to gamble on nuclear use to try to terrify the United States into backing off.

In a war against Russia, meanwhile, the United States might try to protect its satellites by attacking the radars that Russia uses to track space assets. Such radars, however, are also used to detect attacks on Russia's nuclear forces, thus giving Moscow the ability to launch those forces before they are destroyed. As a result, Moscow might wrongly conclude that attacks on those early-warning radars were the opening salvo of a U.S. campaign to destroy its nuclear forces. Again, a nuclear war could be the result.

Concerns about so-called inadvertent escalation have now reached Congress. As part of the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act,

Congress requested that the undersecretary of defense for policy prepare a report “detailing the Department’s efforts to develop and implement guidance to ensure that the risks of inadvertent escalation to a nuclear war are considered within the decision-making processes with regard to relevant Department activities.”

The Pentagon’s newly released response is titled “Managing Risks of Nuclear Escalation.” Note the (presumably deliberate) absence of the word “inadvertent” in the title. This document is deeply concerned with one particular escalation risk: that the United States’ nuclear-armed adversaries — Russia, China and North Korea — may underestimate U.S. resolve or capabilities. This danger is real, but it has a flipside: that an adversary may assess U.S. war aims to be more ambitious or expansive than they actually are.

Even if one views the United States as the “good guy,” an honest assessment of escalation risks needs to understand the potential perceptions of both sides. The report does not even try to do this.

It rightly notes, for example, the need for U.S. military forces to be survivable, but fails to recognize that stability hinges on mutual vulnerability: that is, in a war between two nuclear-armed states, the risks of an unintentional nuclear escalation are lowest when both sides are convinced that their nuclear forces are highly survivable.

The report’s myopia is again reflected in its final section, which espouses the potential value of dialogues with adversaries, and rightly chides China, Russia and North Korea for various failures to engage. The U.S. interest in increasing “understanding,” however, appears to be monodirectional. Russia, for example, is chastised for seeking “primarily to reduce U.S. power,” yet Moscow’s concerns over the potential for U.S. homeland missile defenses to negate its nuclear deterrent go unaddressed — signaling to Moscow that the United States is uninterested in accepting outcomes short of primacy. The irony here is that even though such defenses are not designed to intercept Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles, and are not capable of doing so reliably, there is scant interest in Washington for even attempting to address Russian concerns.

Going forward, defense planners should reject the idea that the onus falls exclusively on America’s adversaries to take steps to address the risk of inadvertent escalation. The reality is that both the United States and its adversaries may behave in ways that increase the chance of nuclear war’s occurrence. U.S. defense decision-makers have an interest in mitigating this danger by factoring inadvertent escalation risks into decisions about acquisitions, planning, strategic communications, and crisis and conflict management to reduce the risk of U.S. operations generating unintended but highly escalatory threats to an opponent’s regime or nuclear forces.

To be fair, despite the recent report, there are some signs that the Pentagon is growing more aware of the risks of inadvertent escalation. In 2019, for instance, the Defense Department’s report on Chinese military power acknowledged for the first time that “adversary attacks against Chinese conventional missile forces-associated C2 centers could inadvertently degrade Chinese nuclear C2 and generate nuclear use-or-lose pressures.” Notably, the unnamed “adversary” here is the United States.

This observation was not followed by any guidance for American war planning — indeed, policy advice was beyond that report’s purview. But such insights must inform defense planning.

Most importantly, the Pentagon should reflect on how the United States might seek to credibly signal restraint in a crisis. Conveying that the United States does not seek to eliminate China's or Russia's nuclear forces or to topple the North Korean regime may mean the difference between de-escalation and unlimited nuclear escalation.

CONGRESSIONAL

By Susan Cornwell

CONTINUING RESOLUTION

- **December 11:** Current CR (HR 8337) will end

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

SASC and HASC have passed their respective Bills

- *ALL ICBM PEs at PB*

AUTHORIZATION CONFERENCE

- **December 2:** markup of conference bill/report completed
 - From Defense News article
 - It DOES NOT repeal section 230 which provides protections to social media sites like Twitter.
 - It DOES contain language to rename several bases named after Confederate leaders (proposed by Sen Elizabeth Warren)
 - President Trump has threatened a Veto of these 2 provisions in the past
 - ***SEE ICBM funding in separate funding package (dollars & language)***

DEFENSE APPROPRIATION

HAC

- **July 8:** HAC-D Marked up the FY21 Defense Bill
 - *GBSD lost \$60M*
 - *Missile Repl/Eq Ballistic lost \$1.53M*
 - *ICBM Fuze Mod lost \$3.458M*
 - *MM Mods lost \$23.684M and transferred \$4.173 to another line*

SAC

- **November 12:** SAC Marked up the FY21 Defense Bill
 - **RDT&E**
 - *MM Squadrons lost \$25.6 M for concurrency of FT3 Development and 1.5M for Schedule slip of APTR*
 - *ICBM Fuze Mod lost \$10M listed as Improving funds management: forward financing*
 - *GBSD lost \$15M listed as Restoring Acquisition accountability; Acquisition Strategy for planning and design*
 - *This was for converting MM III launch facilities and centers into GBSD facilities*

- *Committee suggested construction funds should not be in RDT&E but rather military construction*
- **SAC LANGUAGE ON GBSD** (page 212 of Explanatory Statement)
- Use of Research, Development, Test and Evaluation Appropriations. —The fiscal year 2021 President’s budget request includes \$15,000,000 in Research, Development, Test and Evaluation, Air Force funding to be used as planning and design for construction associated with the GBSD program. The Committee does not agree with this proposed use of research and development funds, nor the associated legislative proposals, and recommends a reduction to the budget request accordingly. Further, the Committee directs that none of the funds appropriated in this act for research, development, test and evaluation may be used for military construction activities, unless expressly allowed in this act.
- **Procurement**
 - *MM Mods had a transfer: \$4.173 in AF Initial spares was transferred to line 18 (Missile Spares Repair Parts)*

NDAA Defense bill sets up major clash with Trump

https://washingtontimes-dc.newsmemory.com/?token=34fb72382b29d2c257dcd5d85ad15f72_5fca50a9_d3019ac&selDate=20201204

Veto threat over Big Tech legal shield puts must-pass legislation on the line

BY LAUREN TOMS for THE WASHINGTON TIMES // 04 Dec 2020

Two big streaks are on the line as Congress debates a massive defense policy bill in the final days of its lameduck session.

Lawmakers have passed the annual National Defense Authorization Act, setting the Pentagon’s budgetary and policy guidelines, for 59 years in a row, typically with substantial bipartisan support. But President Trump has issued strong veto threats against the NDAA for fiscal year 2021 while trying to become the first president since Lyndon B. Johnson to serve a full term in the White House without a single veto being overridden on Capitol Hill.

Something has to give. The House and Senate agreed on compromise language this week for a final version of the bill, which largely dismisses the president’s concerns and has passed both chambers with veto-proof majorities. Despite Mr. Trump’s threats, including one issued as recently as Thursday afternoon, the final bill includes a provision to rename military bases that honor Confederate leaders and does not have language to end legal protections for social media companies. Mr. Trump said the legislation must include the two provisions.

Mr. Trump doubled down on his latest veto threat on Twitter, accusing “certain Republicans” of “getting cold feet” for bluntly rejecting his demand to repeal the so-called Section 230 provision that offers a legal shield to social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter about the content on their sites. “The termination of Big Tech’s Section 230,” Mr. Trump said, is “a national security and election integrity must.”

But key Republicans have rejected the White House’s demand, saying the tech issue is not something that should be included in a defense policy bill. As one of the few must-pass measures before Congress adjourns, the NDAA has become a tempting target for other pet projects. The \$740.5 billion bill includes a number of attractive features for lawmakers, including a 3% pay raise for military troops, funding for new weapons systems, new policies to deter China and Russia, and increases in housing protections and standards for military families.

It rescinds Mr. Trump's emergency declaration to obtain funding for the Mexican border wall, puts at least a temporary hold on plans to draw down more troops in Afghanistan, Germany and South Korea and orders a Government Accountability Office study of U.S. backing for Saudi Arabia in Yemen's civil war. The final bill also ignores a veto threat Mr. Trump issued this summer on the base-renaming issue.

The House originally pressed for the Pentagon to rename nearly a dozen bases and facilities named for Confederate figures, but agreed to a proposal by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Massachusetts Democrat, to effectively extend the deadline to three years. Despite bipartisan opposition, it's not clear who holds the better hand. "I'm not sure if [lawmakers] have the votes to override his veto," Todd Harrison, the director of budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in an interview.

"So what they may have to do is just wait him out, wait till he leaves, and then pass the bill again." He said the rhetoric from Republican allies "is really just designed to put pressure on the president because Congress wants to get this done before they close out the session." Although other presidents have threatened to veto the defense bill over policy differences, Mr. Harrison said this year is different "because the veto threat now is based on things that aren't a defense issue."

Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act protects companies that can host trillions of messages from being sued by anyone who feels wronged by content someone else has posted — whether their complaint is legitimate or not. "It just doesn't fit on the NDAA has nothing to do with [the] military and nothing to do with the issue," Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe, Oklahoma Republican and usually a strong supporter of the president, told reporters on Capitol Hill on Thursday.

Mr. Trump has reportedly been pushing to include the provision to repeal Section 230 for weeks despite having gone public with his demand only this week. Lawmakers say a straight repeal without a substitute regulation brings other complications and should not be done without a legislative markup in perhaps the last days of Mr. Trump's tenure. "He's been president for four years and has never done anything [legislatively] on the issue ... until literally three weeks ago, when [White House Chief of Staff] Mark Meadows called me up and said he wanted to stick it on the defense bill," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, Washington Democrat, told Defense News.

"I think this is an issue we need to look at," he said. "This is not the place to look at it. "If the president is foolish enough to veto it, I think they've staked out their ground very clearly," Mr. Smith told the publication of his Republican colleagues. "They're not going to vote for [earlier versions] going out [of the House and Senate] and then change because it's an override." Despite Republicans' show of support for the repeal of Section 230, Mr. Inhofe said including it would threaten the legislation's passage because many Democrats do not back such a policy.

"My mission is to make sure we get a defense authorization bill that is good," the Oklahoma Republican said. "And we have one that's good, it's ready to go, and we are collecting signatures and the House is going to do the same thing." Mr. Inhofe is far from alone among his Republican colleagues in resisting the Section 230 language. The panel's second-highest-ranking Republican, Sen. Roger F. Wicker of Mississippi, told reporters that repealing Section 230 "seems to be a complete nonstarter" among Democrats. "And, of course, it's not a defense related matter," he added.

He told reporters that Mr. Inhofe may seek to come up with a compromise to please the president but acknowledged that such a move is a “very tall order.” The Senate’s second-ranking Republican, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, said in a speech on the Senate floor that “failing to pass this legislation would send the wrong message to our troops and our allies and to our adversaries.”

“While this may not be a perfect bill, it contains a lot of important provisions to rebuild our military and give our men and women in uniform the tools that they need to defend our nation,” he said. “We need to pass it as soon as possible.” The pushback among allies of Mr. Trump signifies a stark shift after years of steady support from top Republican lawmakers. Mr. Trump has previously threatened to veto the crucial legislation. But unlike this year, Republicans have quickly moved to strike a compromise with the president on his key criticisms.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Kentucky Republican, has said repeatedly that he saw no point in sending bills to the White House that Mr. Trump had vowed to veto. Mr. Trump has vetoed eight bills during his four years in office, and Congress has not managed once to assemble the two-thirds majority in each chamber needed to override him. If the defense bill is not signed into law by the time the next Congress is sworn in, then lawmakers will face the daunting task of rewriting the legislation virtually from the ground up.

However, the bulk of the policy bill has seen substantial bipartisan support for including a host of provisions that advance military readiness. Mr. McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat, are expected to soon bring the legislation to the floor in both chambers for a vote in the coming days. “The [NDAA] is about making sure our troops are cared for,” Mr. Inhofe said on the Senate floor this week. “If we don’t have this defense authorization bill passed by Dec. 31, our pilots are not going to get flight pay. The kids are not going to get hazard pay. The whole thing will fall apart. ... It’s got to be done.”

Lawmakers Decide Against Nuclear Weapons Test Funding in Annual Defense Bill

No Nuclear Weapons Testing Funding in Annual Defense Bill | Union of Concerned Scientists (ucsusa.org)
From the UCS // Published Dec 3, 2020

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) applauds lawmakers for deciding not to authorize funds to prepare for the first U.S. nuclear weapons test in nearly three decades, an outcome UCS experts worked diligently to ensure because any move to resume explosive, underground nuclear weapons testing would undermine U.S. security.

Today, Congress released the conference report on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Senate version had contained \$10 million to lay the groundwork for a nuclear weapons test if the White House chose to move forward with one. The House took the opposite course, voting to prohibit funding for a nuclear test explosion in fiscal year 2021. The conference report includes neither provision.

“By refusing to give the test a green light, lawmakers are wisely avoiding the risk of an explosive nuclear test setting off a new round in the nuclear arms race,” said Dr. Laura Grego, senior scientist in the UCS Global Security Program. A dozen premier American scientists with expertise on nuclear weapons issues sent a letter to Congress strongly opposing the resumption of explosive testing of U.S. nuclear weapons, saying it was unnecessary for technical or military reasons and that doing so would have negative security consequences for the United States.

The Department of Energy has been evaluating the safety and reliability of nuclear weapons for the past two decades through computer simulations and testing weapon components without producing a nuclear chain reaction. Every year, the Department of Energy and Department of Defense confirm that the U.S. nuclear arsenal remains safe, reliable and militarily effective and that explosive nuclear testing is unnecessary.

The Trump administration reportedly considered resuming testing to pressure Russia and China to negotiate a comprehensive nuclear arms control treaty. But, according to the scientists' letter, resuming testing could prompt Russia and China, and possibly North Korea, India and Pakistan, to resume their own explosive testing, while also causing some of the 185 non-nuclear weapons states to reconsider the commitments they made to forgo nuclear weapons when they signed onto the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

While the risks of atmospheric nuclear tests are obvious, even the underground testing that the Trump administration was contemplating can be dangerous. Previous U.S. underground tests, such as Sedan in 1962 and Baneberry in 1970, released large amounts of radioactive fallout. Many Americans continue to deal with the devastating environmental and health impacts caused by previous testing.

The U.S. government has not adequately compensated victims of testing, and there is still no method for cleaning up the plutonium and other long-lived radionuclides that were left underground at the test sites. "As a Downwinder, it came as a huge relief to learn that funding for new nuclear testing is not included in the budget," said Mary Dickson, who grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, downwind of past nuclear weapons testing at the Nevada Test Site. "My hope would be that we never see a push for resumed nuclear testing again. We know too well what it did to too many Americans."

Congress directs DoD to build interim homeland missile defense interceptor

https://www.defensenews.com/land/2020/12/03/congress-directs-dod-to-build-interim-homeland-missile-defense-interceptor/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2012.04.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief
By: Jen Judson for Defense News

WASHINGTON — Congress directed the Pentagon to build an interim homeland intercontinental ballistic missile defense interceptor, a weapon that is not in the Missile Defense Agency's current plans to counter threats from North Korea and Iran.

The fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act released Dec. 3, gives the Pentagon, through the Missile Defense Agency, 30 days to "commence carrying out a program to develop an interim ground-based interceptor capability" once the bill is signed into law. The Pentagon's solution "should address the majority of current and near- to mid-term projected ballistic missile threats to the United States homeland from rogue nations" and "at a minimum, meet the proposed capabilities of the Redesigned Kill Vehicle program," the language of the bill states.

The interim interceptor should use existing kill vehicle booster technology, according to the bill. Lawmakers were unhappy with the sudden cancellation of the RKV program, which would have improved the current ground-based interceptors that make up the Ground-based Midcourse Defense System at Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. The Pentagon, instead, decided to start from scratch with a new Next-Generation Interceptor development program that wouldn't be ready until the 2030s, although the Missile Defense Agency director has since said it's possible to field the NGI by 2028.

The Senate Armed Services Committee's version of the defense policy bill included a provision requiring the agency to develop an interim interceptor for the GMD system. The NDAA will require 20 interim interceptors be delivered by 2026 after a rigorous test program. The MDA director must ensure that the interim GBI meet, at a minimum, vehicle-to-vehicle communications; kill assessment capability and the ability to counter advanced countermeasures, decoys, and penetration aids; should be producible and manufacturable; use mature technology and have options to integrate the new kill vehicle onto other missile defense interceptors other than GMD system GBIs, the NDAA language lays out.

The language includes waivers to get out of development effort. These include if the technology isn't feasible, if the capability is not in the national security interest of the United States and if an interim system can not be fielded at least two years earlier than NGI would be fielded. To seek a waiver, the defense secretary must issue a report to the relevant congressional committees explaining why the waiver is needed along with an updated schedule. The defense secretary will also not be allowed to delegate authority to carry out the program below the level of an under secretary of defense, the bill states. Unless there is a waiver, the defense secretary is required to include budget justification to Congress with the FY22 defense budget request.

Next-Generation Interceptor called into question

In the House version of the defense policy bill, lawmakers did not ask for an interim interceptor but required that MDA notify congressional defense committees within a week if any changes are made to the requirements for the NGI. The agency would also be required to brief congress within two weeks of awarding a contract for the interceptor. Those provisions made it into the final bill where the NGI is addressed.

Congress is also requiring an independent cost assessment of the NGI program be conducted through the director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) and should make those findings available to the MDA director and the under secretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment and the under secretary of defense for research and engineering to inform the award of a contract for the NGI's design or development — or both.

The Pentagon released a request for proposals for the NGI program in April. The competitors are a Lockheed Martin and Aerojet Rocketdyne team, a Boeing, General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems and Aerojet Rocketdyne team, and a Northrop Grumman and Raytheon team. The bids are in and teams are waiting for MDA's decision on which two teams will be selected to compete to build the interceptor. The NDAA would also bar the MDA director from making a decision on initial production until the NGI has two successful intercept flight tests and congressional defense committees are briefed on the details to include the degree of operational realism.

Missile defense underlay paused

Congress is also forcing the MDA to take a pause on its plans to move out on a layered homeland defense system that would include regional missile defense capability already resident with the Navy and Army to bolster homeland defense against ICBMs. MDA wants to establish layers of defensive capability relying on the Aegis Weapon System, particularly the SM-3 Block IIA missiles used in the system, and a possible Aegis Ashore system in Hawaii.

The underlay would also include the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System. The Army is already operating a THAAD battery in South Korea and Guam. The layered approach would buy time while the Pentagon scrambles to field a new interceptor to replace older GBIs after canceling the RKV program, but the agency conveyed little detail in its FY21 budget request on what the underlay would really look like.

The Senate Armed Services Committee was looking to limit half of the funding appropriate for the underlay development until a report was submitted on a strategy to build the architecture. And the House Armed Services Committee wanted an analysis of alternatives on using THAAD and Aegis for homeland missile defense. In the NDAA, Congress is planning to withhold 50 percent of the funding designated to develop the plan until the defense secretary submits a detailed report on the proposal for a layered homeland missile defense architecture along with budget justification materials that would go along with the FY22 budget request. That report would be due March 1, 2021.

The report should include a description of the requirements for the architecture that are “based on an assessment by the intelligence community of threats to be addressed at the time of deployment of such a system and validated by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council,” the NDAA language reads. An assessment of how the proposed architecture requirements are or are not addressed by the existing GMD system including deployed GBIs and planned upgrades should also be included in the report. Lawmakers want an analysis of the interceptor solutions proposed for the underlay including Aegis, SM-3 Block IIA and THAAD and the number of locations required for deployment as well as required production numbers.

This would include what modifications might need to be made to the THAAD system. The report also must include a description of any upgrades needed for the command-and-control, battle management and communications systems that would support the underlay as well as required sensors for tracking and discrimination. Lawmakers want to know how the postponement of the discrimination radar that was planned for Hawaii might impact the underlay plans.

The effect on the Navy’s Arleigh Burke class destroyers should SM-3 Block IIA missiles be used in the underlay would be required in the report as well. Congress wants a list of specific possible locations for interceptors and radars and should include environmental or permitting considerations. Policy considerations, life-cycle cost estimates and industrial base assessments should also be a part of the report, the bill text notes.

The director of the Defense Intelligence Agency is also given homework in the NDAA. A report would be due to congressional defense committees no later than Feb. 28, 2021, that discusses how the development and deployment of regional THAAD systems and Aegis BMDS “to conduct longer-range missile defense missions would be perceived by near-peer foreign countries and rogue nations” as well as “how such near-peer foreign countries and rogue nations would likely respond to such deployments,” the NDAA reads.

Congress advances NDAA defense bill

https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/12/02/congress-advances-defense-bill-bucking-trumps-veto-threats/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Air%20Force%20DNR%2012.2.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Air%20Force%20-%20Daily%20News%20Roundup

By: [Joe Gould](#) for Defense News // 4 hours ago

WASHINGTON — Congress is moving ahead with its [annual defense policy bill](#) without repealing a prized [legal shield](#) for social media companies, testing President Donald Trump’s threat to veto the bill.

The compromise version of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act does not include legislative language addressing the protections, enshrined in Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, three congressional aides confirmed Wednesday. “We worked hard to craft a bipartisan

defense bill that actually focuses on national defense. It would be irresponsible of President Trump to hold the well-being of our troops hostage because he doesn't like what's trending on Twitter.”

Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a statement to Defense News. Section 230's protections have served as a bedrock for unfettered speech on the internet, but Trump and other politicians, including Democrats (though for different reasons than Republicans) argue that Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms have abused that protection and should lose their immunity from lawsuits.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., reportedly said that while he agrees with Trump on Section 230, the provision “has nothing to do with the military.” “You can't do it in this bill. That's not a part of the bill,” Inhofe told [Politico](#), adding that he has conveyed that belief to Trump. The bill finalized Wednesday contains language [requiring several bases named after Confederate leaders be renamed](#), something Trump previously threatened to veto, according to an aide to Massachusetts Democrat Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who crafted the Senate version of the renaming provision.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., plan to bring the defense authorization bill for a vote in both chambers, [Bloomberg Government](#) reported. The Senate on Wednesday morning agreed to proceed to conference on the defense bill by unanimous consent. Pelosi was ready to bring the bipartisan bill to the floor, said a senior Democratic aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss sensitive plans.

The \$740.5 billion authorization bill cements decisions about troop levels, new weapons systems and military personnel policy. Senate Republicans tried to find a compromise that would see a change to Section 230, short of a wholesale repeal. Trump's 11th hour demand came just as lawmakers were finalizing a compromise on the 60th NDAA in a row. It's unclear whether Senate Republicans have persuaded Trump not to veto the bill, which would create a politically fraught showdown ahead of a Senate runoff elections in Georgia that will determine control of the chamber during the first two years of President-elect Joe Biden's tenure.

The House and Senate passed their bills by veto-proof margins.

Senate Majority Whip John Thune, R-S.D., objected to Trump's veto threat, telling reporters at the Capitol on Wednesday: “I don't think the defense bill is the place to litigate that.” Close observers say that if McConnell is bringing the bill to the floor, it's likely Trump has backed off his veto threat. “Leader McConnell is very, very consistent. He doesn't believe in putting bills on the floor that the president is not going to sign, which he's said as recently as this week,” said Pete Giambastiani, a former Pentagon legislative affairs official in the Trump administration.

“If Leader McConnell believes President Trump will not sign the NDAA, I'm not sure why he would waste the precious floor time he has left in the 116th Congress.” A veto and override vote could not only eat up floor time congressional leaders needed to pass federal spending legislation and avoid a government shutdown, but demonstrate a level of disarray that might damage Republicans in Georgia.

“I think a veto could be overridden, but the amount of political capital that would have to be expended by all parties just isn't worth the headache right now,” said Mackenzie Eaglen, a national security expert with the American Enterprise Institute. “You have other things that need to get done,

and Georgia hangs over everything.” In a tweet thread Tuesday night, Trump threatened to veto the NDAA unless it contained a repeal — his latest move in a long-running feud with social media companies. He argued the shield was a threat to national security and election integrity.

“Therefore, if the very dangerous & unfair Section 230 is not completely terminated as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I will be forced to unequivocally VETO the Bill when sent to the very beautiful Resolute desk. Take back America NOW. Thank you!” But industry groups are wary of efforts to erode protections, and both lawmakers and congressional aides said this week that the issue was too complicated practically and politically to solve on the fly and drop into a bill without full vetting from Congress.

Congress set for chaotic year-end sprint

https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/527348-congress-set-for-chaotic-year-end-sprint?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=35180

BY [JORDAIN CARNEY](#) for THE HILL // 11/29/20 06:00 AM EST

Congress is set for a chaotic two-week sprint as lawmakers try to wrap up their work for the year.

Both chambers are returning Monday with just 10 working days before the House is set to leave town again and no plans to return until early January. Lawmakers have to tackle a lengthy to-do list while factoring in the looming wild card of [President Trump](#), whose focus on score-settling on his way out of office has sparked speculation that he could emerge as a major roadblock on must-pass legislation such as government funding before Dec. 12 to avoid a shutdown.

“I don’t think we’re going to get this done by the 11th of December. I’ve told everybody, ‘Look, I know that’s supposed to be the last day.’ I think we’re going to be here until the 20th of December or something,” said Sen. [Tim Kaine](#) (D-Va.). Here are five areas to watch amid the year-end fights.

Government funding

Congress is facing a Dec. 11 deadline to fund the government and prevent a holiday shutdown, which would be the third of Trump’s presidency. [Behind-the-scenes negotiations](#) among congressional leadership and the Appropriations committees culminated over the Thanksgiving recess in a deal on spending levels for the 12 fiscal 2021 appropriations bills. The deal allows committee staff and the White House to haggle and finalize each of the spending bills that would need to be included in a year-end omnibus.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman [Richard Shelby](#) (R-Ala.) said shortly before the Thanksgiving break that he would sit down once Congress returned with House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman [Nita Lowey](#) (D-N.Y.). Negotiators are looking at giving Trump \$2 billion for his border wall, though he would have less than two months to use that funding. One question hanging over the negotiations is whether Trump will agree to sign a full-year funding package for all 12 bills instead of a continuing resolution (CR), which would maintain funding at current levels until early next year.

Shelby and Senate Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R-Ky.) have said they believe the White House’s preference is to get an omnibus, even though the president has previously vowed he would not sign a mammoth spending bill again. Shelby also floated that year-end negotiations could slip past

Dec. 11, setting up a scenario where Congress would initially need to pass a days-long CR while they try to work out a larger deal. “We’ve got time, but we’ve got to move,” said Shelby.

Coronavirus relief

Prospects for another coronavirus relief measure have been stalemated for months amid deep divisions on everything from the price tag to key components such as unemployment insurance and help for state and local governments. Both McConnell and Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) say they want a deal this year on additional aid as COVID-19 cases climb across the country and states and cities are beginning to reinstate some restrictions in an effort to limit the spread of the virus.

McConnell, who is taking the lead on year-end negotiations, has said Senate Republicans want a “targeted” bill similar to the \$500 billion GOP proposal blocked twice already by Democrats in the Senate. That package, according to Republicans, would include another round of Paycheck Protection Program help for small businesses, more money for schools and coronavirus testing, and McConnell’s demand for protections against coronavirus lawsuits.

But Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader [Charles Schumer](#) (D-N.Y.) are pointing to a sweeping \$2.2 trillion House-passed coronavirus relief bill as the “starting point” for any negotiations. That bill includes more help for state and local governments and another round of stimulus checks — both of which were left out of the Senate GOP bill. One potential wrinkle is if President-elect [Joe Biden](#) pushes congressional Democrats to accept a smaller deal now, an idea that is supported by some rank-and-file Democrats.

Biden and Democratic leaders have spoken post-election about the need for a coronavirus deal before the end of the year. The New York Times reported that Biden wants a deal in the lame-duck even if it is smaller than the top-line figure backed by Pelosi and Schumer. However, Biden spokesman Andrew Bates said it was “incorrect” that the president-elect is pushing for them to pass a pared-down bill. Biden has said he wants a deal this year but hasn’t said what he believes the price tag should be.

Confederate-named bases

Lawmakers need to resolve a fight over a plan to rename Confederate-named bases as part of a massive military policy bill. Both the initial House and Senate versions of the annual National Defense Authorization Act included language that would force the Pentagon to rename relevant base and military installations. Under the House bill, the Pentagon would have one year to make those changes, while the Senate bill would allow three years.

The language for making changes of any kind prompted a veto threat from Trump, putting the fate of the must-pass bill in limbo. Trump said Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman [James Inhofe](#) (R-Okla.) has pledged that the legislative text on bases will be removed from the final version of the bill. The White House also floated that Trump could drop his veto threat if Congress [agrees to repeal](#) a legal shield for internet companies, a Democratic House aide confirmed, while characterizing the swap as “highly unlikely ... [to] gain any traction.”

Opponents are unlikely to get the base language removed, [though there are signs](#) of division among Democrats on strategy amid the risk of a veto. “What we are insisting — this is the irony — the House is insisting that the conference report accept the Senate language,” said Rep. [Adam Smith](#) (D-Wash.)

Arms sale

A bipartisan group of senators will force votes [to try to block](#) the Trump administration's \$23 billion arms package to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during Congress's final stretch of 2020. Senate Foreign Relations Committee ranking member [Bob Menendez](#) (D-N.J) and Sens. [Rand Paul](#) (R-Ky.) and [Chris Murphy](#) (D-Conn.) have introduced four separate resolutions that would nullify the administration's plan to sell the UAE F-35 fighter jets, armed drones, missiles and bombs.

The administration [notified Congress](#) earlier this month that it approved selling the UAE up to 50 F-35s worth \$10.4 billion, up to 18 MQ-9B drones worth \$2.97 billion, and a package of air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions worth \$10 billion. That kicks off a 30-day period in which Congress can block the sales with resolutions such as the ones introduced earlier this month. The resolutions need only a simple majority to pass, and McConnell, though he'll likely vote against it, can't prevent a vote.

Election fallout

The fallout from the presidential election and limbo status of the Senate majority battle are casting a long shadow over the year-end agenda. The two runoff elections in Georgia on Jan. 5 will decide which party controls the Senate for the next two years. But before then, Arizona is set to certify Sen.-elect [Mark Kelly](#)'s (D) win as soon as Monday, which will allow him to be seated in the Senate as soon this week.

That would narrow the Senate GOP majority to 52-48, likely quashing any chance of Republicans confirming Judy Shelton, Trump's controversial Federal Reserve nominee, before the 117th Congress is sworn in. Republicans tried to confirm Shelton before the recess but fell short due to coronavirus-related absences and some GOP opposition. With three Senate Republicans opposed to Shelton — [Susan Collins](#) (Maine), [Mitt Romney](#) (Utah) and [Lamar Alexander](#) (Tenn.) — that leaves her short of the support needed to be confirmed once Kelly is seated.

Sen. [John Thune](#) (S.D.), the No. 2 Senate Republican, said the Arizona seat was a "complication" to the chances of confirming Shelton. Beyond the direct implications to the Senate's party breakdown, Democrats are also likely to try to clear the barn for the incoming Biden administration and increasingly turn their focus to next year's agenda. Biden announced his first tranche of Cabinet picks, setting up battle lines that will deepen as he wades into departments and agencies that Republicans are critical of such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Meanwhile, Trump's posturing on the way out the door and how willing Republicans are to buck the president will likely color any legislative action over the next few weeks. Trump frustrated Republicans with recent decisions on Afghanistan troop levels and a post-election personnel shake-up with speculation swirling that Trump could ax officials such as CIA Director [Gina Haspel](#) on his way out. Though McConnell hasn't yet spoken to Biden, a growing number of senators have acknowledged the former vice president's White House victory, and Trump has said he will leave the White House if the Electoral College makes Biden's win official.

AROUND THE WORLD



RUSSIA:

Russian latest nuclear-powered sub successfully test-fires cruise missile from White Sea

<https://tass.com/defense/1229591> From Russian Defense Ministry/TASS // November 30 2020

MOSCOW, November 30. /TASS/. The nuclear-powered submarine Kazan successfully test-fired a cruise missile from the White Sea as part of the final stage of state trials, Russia's Defense Ministry reported on Monday.

"Today, the Project Yasen-M lead nuclear-powered underwater missile-carrying cruiser Kazan successfully fired an anti-ship cruise missile against a sea target," the statement reads. "The target position was successfully struck by the warhead of an Oniks cruise missile," the Defense Ministry said. The fire was conducted in the second half of the day, it specified. The vessels of the Northern Fleet's Belomorsk naval base provided security of the water area during the test-fire, the statement says.

The submarine entered the final stage of state trials with the crew and the acceptance team on its board on November 21. At combat training naval ranges, the submarine's crew will practice maneuvering in the surface and submerged positions at various depths and check the operation of the sub's basic systems. During its deployment to the sea, specialists will check the sub's systems and assemblies and shipborne armament.

The Project 885M lead nuclear-powered submarine Kazan was laid down on July 24, 2009 and floated out on March 31, 2017. The sub is currently undergoing trials and is expected to join the Russian Navy in late 2020. The nuclear-powered sub Kazan will operate in the Northern Fleet. The Project 885 and 885M nuclear-powered subs carry Kalibr-PL and/or Oniks cruise missiles as their basic armament.

It is only nuclear weapons that can save Russia from the West

[Putin believes Russia needs more nuclear arms \(pravdareport.com\)](https://pravdareport.com)

From Russia - Pravda18. // 11.2020 18:20

Russian President Vladimir Putin called the nuclear triad a guarantee of Russia's military security and global stability.

During the recent meeting with the leadership of the Russian Defense Ministry, heads of federal departments and defense industry companies, Putin said that despite the changing nature of military threats, it is the nuclear 'triad' that remains the most important, key guarantee of Russia's military security. "If you take a broader look at the problem, it guarantees global stability too. Maintaining such a balance of power negates the threat of a large-scale military conflict, in fact, it makes any attempts to blackmail or put pressure on our country pointless," Putin said.

For Russia, it is still important to take into account potential and external threats to the country, such as the expansion of NATO's military presence near the Russian borders. "In Europe, NATO's military presence has been expanding closer to the Russian borders. The alliance did not react at all to our proposal to reduce military activity during the pandemic. Moreover, the frequency of aviation and naval operations of NATO countries has increased," Putin stressed.

He added that Russia will continue to modernize its nuclear forces and strengthen their elements. The nuclear triad consists of strategic aviation, nuclear-capable submarine missile carriers and intercontinental ballistic missiles. During the meeting, Vladimir Putin said that the arms control system in the world was degrading and shaking. He also reminded that the START Treaty expires in February 2021.

Читайте больше на https://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/145281-nuclear_weapons/

Putin's New Assured Survival Nuclear Bunker

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/12/01/putins_new_assured_survival_nuclear_bunker_651424.html#

By Mark B. Schneider for Real Clear Defense // December 01, 2020

In August 2016, Bill Gertz reported, "Russia is building large numbers of underground nuclear command bunkers in the latest sign Moscow is moving ahead with a major strategic forces modernization program."

In November 2020, Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed Gertz's report about a new deep underground nuclear command and control bunker. He stated: First of all, we need to work seriously to boost the survivability of the control systems. We all realize this, and we are aware that a lot depends on the survivability of these systems and their ability to continue operating in a combat environment. In fact, we have to guarantee this even in the event of a nuclear strike.

They have told me that the creation of an absolutely secure facility for controlling strategic nuclear forces, among others, is nearing completion and that it will have a very high safety margin. Secondly, we should constantly check the efficiency of the main components of the systems for controlling strategic nuclear forces during command post exercises and other events, including unexpected challenge inspections for assessing the triad's combat readiness that has already become regular.

Thirdly, we have to continue developing advanced systems for controlling strategic forces. What we are talking about is that we are doing the right things today, and these systems are in a good state. However, no matter how modern and advanced they may be today, we cannot remain idle, and we all realize this. We need to think about what happens tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Please report on long-term working plans in this field at this meeting.

According to state-run TASS, Putin said, "Russia has considerably expanded the analytical and operational capabilities of the strategic nuclear forces' command and control systems..." It added, according to Putin, Russia, "...has considerably modernized stationary and mobile command and control centers, expanded their analytical and operational capabilities, including information provision, monitoring and situational analysis." Resistance of the system to electronic jamming has also been increased.

The reason why Putin spent very great sums to build a new nuclear bomb-proof deep underground bunker for nuclear command and control (not to mention Gertz's report that Russia is building "large numbers of underground nuclear command bunkers") is of great concern. Like most dictators, Putin places a very high value on protecting his own skin. The contrast of Russian capabilities and their current activities to improve them greatly and the U.S. lack of capability and action is rather striking.

In a great Freudian slip, the U.S. refers to its nuclear command and control system as the "Thin Line." This is seriously worrisome in light of recently announced Russian interests in using nuclear hypersonic missiles to attack the U.S. National Command Authority. The Soviet-era deep underground bunkers have enormous survivability. Putin himself just said that the existing Russian systems "are in a good state."

In 2014, the Chief of the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate, Lieutenant General Andrey Kartapolov, said the newly operational National Defense Management Center in Moscow was safe from a nuclear strike. In 2012, Lieutenant General Ronald L. Burgess, Jr, then-Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, stated, "Russia is upgrading massive underground facilities that provide command and control of its strategic nuclear forces as well as modernizing strategic nuclear forces as another top priority."

These facilities are depicted in the 1988 edition of Soviet Military Power, which noted that the latest round of construction in the 1980s "...coincided with intensified Soviet preparation for the possibility that a nuclear war could be protracted." There is an enormous difference between modernizing Soviet-era facilities and building completely new, very expensive ones which "will have a very high safety margin" against nuclear attack, according to President Putin.

In 1988, then-Defense Secretary Frank C. Carlucci said the Soviet Union had built an "enormously expensive" network of underground facilities capable of surviving for months and that, "There can be only one purpose for these shelters--to provide the Soviet leadership the ability to fight a protracted nuclear conflict." While this was not exactly a popular view in the 1980s, he was correct. Indeed, Putin's November 2020 statement quoted above confirms Carlucci's assessment. Putin said the nuclear command and control system must "...continue operating in a combat environment...even in the event of a nuclear strike" and that its capability must be tested by "...command post exercises and other events, including unexpected challenge inspections for assessing the triad's combat readiness that have already become regular."

The U.S.' ability to threaten these deep underground facilities is critically important for deterrence. Our capability to do so has dramatically declined due to a vast reduction in the number of our deployed nuclear warheads and the elimination, largely due to ideology, of the most effective U.S. strategic nuclear forces (e.g., the Peacekeeper ICBM, the stealth cruise missile) and the complete lack of strategic force modernization since 1997. Because of the great difficulty in destroying hard and very deeply buried facilities, high-yield gravity bombs and high-yield earth penetrating nuclear bombs have been used in military planning. In 2015, this author pointed out:

The U.S. is not funding life extension of the B-61 Mod 11 [B61-11] earth penetrator warhead (designed against hard and deeply buried targets); the B-83 [B83] bomb (a "megaton-class weapon" and our best general use weapon against hard and deeply buried facilities); and all of the higher yield versions of the B-61 bomb. Absent earth penetration, yield is the critical factor in destroying HDBTs. Thus, there will be a serious reduction in U.S. capability against HDBTs if the Obama Administration goes forward with the existing plan.

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review made useful but inadequate changes to the Obama administration's program relating to hard and deeply buried targets. The B61-11 and the B83 will continue in the U.S. stockpile, but they will not be life extended. The effect of this policy will be to continue our existing capability for a while, but eventually, it will die as the weapons age out. If what Putin says about his new nuclear war command and control bunker is true, neither of these weapons will have sufficient capability against it. Moreover, the number of U.S. nuclear bombs is being reduced by 50%, diminishing our ability to destroy hard and deeply buried targets with multiple nuclear strikes.

The B61-12, according to the Obama administration's statements, has a maximum yield comparable to the lowest maximum yield of earlier versions of the B61. Also, it is not an earth penetrator. Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists says its maximum yield is 50-kilotons. Such a yield would not have capabilities against hard and deeply buried facilities remotely comparable to those of the B61-11. According to Kristensen, the B61-11 has a yield of 400-kt. It is also is an earth penetrator that dramatically enhances capabilities against hard and deeply buried facilities.

The B83 bomb reportedly has a yield of 1.2 megatons. The B61-11 was developed as a replacement for the multi-megaton B53 bomb because both the B53 and the B83 were not adequate against hard and very deeply buried targets. The U.S.'s ability to deliver any of these bombs with our strategic bombers will decline until nuclear-capable B-21 bombers are available, optimistically, after 2025. The last B-2 was produced over 23 years ago.

The recent termination of its B-2 defensive systems upgrade will degrade B-2 penetration as more and more Russian air defense missile systems such as the S-400s, and then the new S-500s are deployed. Testing of the S-500 will be completed in 2021. The B-2 has no standoff nuclear capability other than the rather modest ability that will be provided by the B61-12 JDAM capability. That is not enough. In July 2017, General Herbert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, then-Commander of Air Force Air Combat Command, stated, "The Air Force also must have a follow-on to the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) satellite-guided bomb that is stealthy and maneuverable enough to survive the last few miles of an attack on ever-improving air defense systems."

The B61-12 is a nuclear JDAM. The only bomber standoff capability we have is the B-52, which carries the very old (1982) AGM-86B, which is inadequate and declining. As early as 1982, the Air Force recognized that the AGM-86B was too vulnerable to advanced Soviet air defenses. Russian defenses are now two generations beyond what the Soviets had in the 1980s. In June 2017, General John Hyten, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, said replacing the existing AGM-86B Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) is particularly needed because it is so old, "It's a miracle that it can even fly," and its reliability was "already unacceptable" and would get worse every year.

Before the AGM-86B is replaced by the new nuclear ALCM, the LRSO (assuming this program actually goes forward), will have to deal with the SA-10, SA-12, SA-20, S-350, S-400, S-500, new Russian short-range defenses, and probably one or more Russian air defense systems that Russia has not talked about yet. The LSRO may be able to suppress defenses in the Moscow area, but it can't destroy hard and very deeply buried facilities.[1]

The reported yield of its W-80 warhead is much less than that of the B-83. It will not be available until the early 2030s. Nor is there any indication that the LRSO missile is supersonic, so it is not ideal for attacks directly against advanced air defenses where both supersonic speed and stealth may be necessary. Since leadership bunkers are very important targets for deterrence, Russia can deploy air defenses directly with them.

The stealthy, supersonic F-35 will be operational with a nuclear capability in 2023. However, its combat radius is only 590 miles. Since it is being based initially in the U.K., it will require air-to-air refueling to reach targets in the Moscow area and beyond on a two-way mission. Since it will only be able to carry the B-61-12, it will be unable to destroy many of the even older Soviet-era bunkers..

In my opinion, Vladimir Putin is the most likely head of state of a nuclear power to start a nuclear war. In November 2020, he said, “I want to emphasise that, despite the constantly changing nature of military threats, the nuclear triad remains the primary, key guarantee of Russia’s military security.” His assertion that Russian strategic nuclear capability “neutralises the threat of a large-scale military conflict” is another way of saying that he plans to initiate the use of nuclear weapons in any major conflict. His new nuclear bomb-proof bunkers could very well contribute to his decision to initiate the use of nuclear weapons. In June 2020, he signed a decree adopting a very low threshold of nuclear weapons first use. His actual nuclear weapons first-use threshold is probably lower than what is contained in the public decree. The implications of the new nuclear bomb-proof bunkers should be seriously examined regarding our nuclear deterrence requirements.

Dr. Mark B. Schneider is a Senior Analyst with the National Institute for Public Policy. Before his retirement from the Department of Defense Senior Executive Service, Dr. Schneider served in a number of senior positions within the Office of Secretary of Defense for Policy including Principal Director for Forces Policy, Principal Director for Strategic Defense, Space and Verification Policy, Director for Strategic Arms Control Policy and Representative of the Secretary of Defense to the Nuclear Arms Control Implementation Commissions. He also served in the senior Foreign Service as a Member of the State Department Policy Planning Staff.

What would World War 3 actually look like? (The Russian View)

[What would World War 3 actually look like? - Russia Beyond \(rbth.com\)](http://rbth.com)

By: DMITRY LITOVKIN for Russia Beyond // DEC 03 2020

Humans will be far away from the front line, with machines taking over and fighting our battles for us. Meanwhile, the prospect of a devastating global nuclear war remains as high as ever.

The armed conflict in [Nagorno-Karabakh](#) has aptly demonstrated what future warfare will look like, with its swarms of kamikaze drones constantly on their enemy's tail. Their targets are tanks, anti-aircraft missile systems, various other weapons units and groups of soldiers. The entire process is streamed via video and uploaded online. It all takes place as if in a computer game, where each mission can be rehashed over and over to achieve better results. In fact, this has already become our new reality: man kills man without even looking him in the face.

Cyber-war

The proliferation of high-tech electronics and other cutting-edge technologies has had an immeasurable influence on the way we wage war. Conquering a country, installing a new regime - all of that is doable today, even without employing violence: it's enough to activate the mechanism of a "color revolution" on social media and the people will go out onto the streets, demanding a power change.

Similar hive-mind mechanisms can be employed on the battlefield. But there, they act first and foremost as a way to unify man and machine. At the annual 'Amiya' expo outside Moscow in August 2020, the Russian Ministry of Defense demonstrated for the first time a tablet-sized computer that acts as a modern command center for an entire artillery battery. Using encrypted channels, the miniature device links up to a central command system, receives maps of the terrain, reveals enemy positions and communicates with a whole array of field-based technologies.

Meteorological complexes, ballistic stations - all of them 'talk' to the small tablet. The artillery commander only needs to use a stylus to point to the target on the touch screen and give the command to eliminate it. In the olden days, artillery operators would have to use a notepad, scribbling coordinates with a pencil. 'Tactical tablets' come installed with all modern Russian tanks - the T-72B3, T-90MS and the T-14 'Armata'. They are also found in mobile artillery units - the 'Msta-S' and 'Koalitsiya-SV' and even aboard Russia's bomber planes.

The latter uses a system called SVP-24 'Gefest'. It links to a soldier on the ground, who keeps an eye on what's going on in the sky. Similar to the artillery, tank and other operators, the soldier has a tablet. The difference is that he uses it not to receive - but to send instructions to the bomber. The screen tells him not only of the position of enemy units in the area, but also the weapons they're carrying. Then it's all a matter of - again - pressing a button, selecting the appropriate bomb for the task, sending the target's coordinates and away we go.

It is thanks to this system that the Russian SU-24 bombers were so effective in zeroing in on terrorist positions in Syria. Digital warfare is also about radio-electronic jamming of enemy systems. The Russian army boasts more than 18 versions of such systems: the 'Krasukha', 'Borisoglebsk-2', 'Apurgit', 'Infauna' and others. All of them are capable of both defending Russian equipment and soldiers from high-precision rockets and bombs and carry out attacks in 'invisibility mode'.

Meaning that all its users use radio comms and exchange data with machines in the field, while rendering enemy radar systems pointless in the process. The Krasukha system, for example, has been in use by the Russian Khmeimim Air Base in Syria since 2016. Not one enemy kamikaze drone has been able to get even close.

An eye for an eye

Such dominance is, however, only possible in countering a technically inferior enemy. Nagorno-Karabakh is a case in point. The Azeri forces, armed with Turkish and Israeli drones were clearly superior to the lesser-equipped Armenian forces. But in case of a war between the powerful Moscow and Washington, for example, in Syria, electronics and gadgets don't really count. With both sides having access to field control systems and various robots, the conflict would quickly spiral into 20th-century classical ground warfare, using tanks and artillery, before an exchange in nuclear strikes begins.

Americans themselves make this clear in 'Nuclear Posture Review' on NPR, published in February 2018. There, they outline clearly the methods they would use to counter Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. For such purposes, small-yield, 5-kiloton nuclear bombs would be used. While also employing ordinary tanks, artillery and tactical aviation, the aforementioned tactics would also prevent a local conflict from becoming a global one. For instance, by destroying an air carrier, or a strategically important or cultural object, before offering to sit down at the negotiating table and talk out a favorable peace deal.

One of the signs of an unresolved non-nuclear conflict with a possibility of nuclear escalation may be the U.S. tactic of rolling out its armored brigade in Eastern Europe, as well as the delivery of F-16 Eurofighter and brand new F-35 Lightning squadrons to Poland and Finland. It's not like Russia is taking all of that sitting down, either. In anticipation of a global conflict on its doorstep, Kaliningrad Region (the Russian semi-exclave in Western Europe) could get the tactical 'Iskander-M' complex, which uses 9M729 rockets. The area already contains Russian high-altitude MiG-31BM interceptors, which take the hypersonic 'Kinzhal' missiles.

The fearsome and devastating Cold War-era cannons and mortars - the 203-mm 2S7M 'Malka' and the 240-mm mobile 2S4 'Tyulpan' mortar - have been brought back from Russia's reserves. In the past, they have been used to fire nuclear mines and it is those weapons that served to emphasize Soviet regional superiority on the border with Western Germany, putting on hold NATO plans of attacking the USSR. Finally, President Vladimir Putin has signed off on Russia's nuclear deterrent policy, which states in no uncertain terms that the Kremlin reserves the right to use nuclear weapons if serious threats to Russia bring about an escalation of tensions.

'Dead Hand'

Despite that, there are no guarantees either player will hold back. Washington recently backed out of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which regulated the amount of equipment and manpower stationed on NATO's borders with Russia. The same fate befell the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Now, the Americans can place their 'Tomahawk' cruise missiles in Poland and Romania. Russia, meanwhile, will threaten this deployment with its land attack 'Kalibr' 9M729 cruise missiles, stationed in Kaliningrad Region.

There is, likewise, no more Treaty on Open Skies, which allowed Western and Russian militaries to perform aerial surveillance flights over the entire territory of the treaty's signatories. The scariest part about all of this is that using ordinary arms by superpowers invariably leads to a spillover of local conflicts across borders. Put simply, they may result in a conflict where it's impossible to defeat an enemy, without using much stronger weapons.

Meanwhile, both sides of the Atlantic have more than enough devastating missiles for mutually assured destruction (MAD). But the interesting part is that they are all robotized, as well. At the latest meeting between Russia's defense command and the military-industrial complex in mid-November 2020 in Sochi, Putin announced the near-completion of a state-of-the-art heavily defended nuclear force command center.

The facility ups the ante in terms of the capability to analyze the situation in the field and more resistant to radio interference in the area of accurately relaying commands to use force, delivered between the various command centers and units stationed in the field, even if one sustains a nuclear attack. The West has likened the announcement to the Cold War-era 'Perimeter' system, also known as 'Dead Hand'.

It exists in case there's a communication break between a head of state and the country's strategic missile arsenal. In the event of this happening, the task will be taken over by artificial intelligence. The computer will launch rockets stationed across Russia's territory using set coordinates. Warfare is being continuously digitized. The human element is being pushed further and further to the sidelines, taking on the role of spectator. The machines are taking over calculations, while the outcome of the battle often depends on land-based and airborne robots. Meanwhile, the prospect of conflict spillover leading to a global nuclear war annihilating all life on Earth remains dangerously high.

The article was authored by the editor of an independent military publication --- If using any of **Russia Beyond's** content, partly or in full, always provide an active hyperlink to the original material.

There's still time to extend New START – Russian envoy to US

We are still in dialogue, we hope that we will continue it for the foreseeable future, Anatoly Antonov said
TASS (Russia), Dec. 3 | Not Attributed

WASHINGTON -- There is still enough time to extend the Russian-US Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START), Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said Wednesday at a videoconference organized by Washington's Brookings Institution.

He was asked whether there is any time left for the countries to extend the treaty. "We have time. We can get it [extension] very quickly. If anybody can call me now from State Department or White House, I am ready to come. I am ready to continue such negotiations," he noted. The diplomat also highlighted that Russia has "an excellent team in Moscow" tasked with arms control issues.

The envoy added that Russia is still in talks with the current US administration to secure a possible extension of the treaty. "Yes, we are in close contact with [US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control] Marshall Billingslea who is a key negotiator from the American side," Antonov added. According to him, the parties are exchanging proposals on the New START extension.

"We are still in dialogue, we hope that we will continue it for the foreseeable future," the Russian ambassador concluded.

New START

Moscow and Washington signed the Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms in 2010. Under its terms, either country must reduce its strategic offensive arms in such a way that at the end of the seventh year following its entry into force and later on their overall amounts should not exceed 700 units of deployed inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and heavy bombers, 1,550 warheads and 800 operational and non-operational missile launchers and strategic bombers.

The treaty was concluded for a period of ten years (until February 5, 2021). It can be replaced by a follow-up agreement before the deadline expires, or prolonged for no more than five years (until 2026) by mutual consent.

On October 16, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed extending New START by at least a year without any additional conditions. According to him, this will provide time to conduct substantial talks. In turn, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that Russia is ready to freeze its nuclear arsenals with the US in case the treaty is extended, and no additional demands are put forward by Washington.

2+2 talks with US

Antonov has voiced hope that the Russian-American dialogue between heads of diplomatic and defense agencies can be resumed.

"We [Russia and the US] need to restore channels of communication. I am dreaming to see the minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation and the minister of defense of the Russian Federation to come to Washington in order to restore the 2+2 channel. It is an excellent channel to exchange views on various issues. Everybody can raise any issue of interest, but at the same time we can restart it and we can find a wider base for potential cooperation between the United States and Russia," Antonov told a videoconference organized by Washington's Brookings Institution.

Missile defense

Moscow was hoping to hold discussions with Washington on missile defense, hypersonic weapons and other emerging systems after extending the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START), however, the US did not support the Russian approach, trying to essentially prefigure the result of such potential talks, Antonov said.

Open Skies Treaty

The decision of Western countries to not follow the US lead in exiting the Treaty on Open Skies demonstrated that problems of implementing this agreement can be resolved, Antonov said.

"I am a little bit surprised why nobody from Western countries decided to withdraw from the treaty, why they decided not to follow suit of the United States. It means that they are sure that all problems can be possible solved by the special commission that we have in Vienna," the Russian diplomat assured when commenting on the recent Open Skies Treaty developments.

At the same time, Antonov underlined that Moscow is concerned by potential scenarios when Western countries, who remain in the treaty, feed data to Washington about Russia.

The US quit the treaty on November 22.

According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Treaty on Open Skies, developed with Moscow's active cooperation, is a major trust and security building measure. Together with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the Vienna Document 1999, the treaty effectively completed the creation of the trust building and transparency regime in the conventional forces field in the European-Atlantic space.

From a practical standpoint, the treaty allows the member states to conduct flights over any territory of each other to survey the military activity in compliance with the established quota. The treaty outlines flight procedures, treaty compliance verification mechanism, requirements for surveillance planes and restriction on composition and parameters of the surveillance hardware.

Washington was accusing Russia of selective compliance with the treaty and violation of a number of the treaty clauses for several years. Russia has its own complaints to Washington regarding the treaty implementation. In 2017, Washington announced introduction of certain restrictions against Russian surveillance flight over the US territory, causing Russia to respond in a mirror-like fashion.

Arctic

Russia wants to cooperate in the Arctic and opposes the efforts to turn this region into a zone of international cooperation, Antonov said.

"The Arctic is a zone of friendship and cooperation between the United States and Russia. I can say right away that we are against any competition in high latitudes," he noted. "We support the principle of pragmatism in cooperation in the Arctic, including in the bilateral relations. We know the need for joint active work to address the problems of the Arctic."

The Russian envoy underlined that there is a "huge agenda for a potential cooperation between the United States and Russia." According to him, Moscow is ready for cooperation and is waiting for "any reaction" from Washington on this issue.

US election winner

Russia will follow the state protocol and will congratulate the US presidential election winner after all the necessary guidelines and procedures are followed and official results are announced, Antonov said.

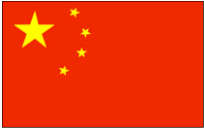
He was asked when Russian President Vladimir Putin will offer congratulations to US Democratic nominee Joe Biden for his presumptive victory. "Firstly, I am not working in the Kremlin, I am not in close contact with Mr. Putin. But, of course, I am aware of the position of the Russian Federation on this issue. We consider that it's American people who decide themselves who will run this country. We will recognize any choice that your people make," Antonov responded.

"As I understand, we need to wait [for the end] of some legal procedures in your country, when all official results will be announced. It goes without saying that after this moment or this event, everything will be done in accordance with the state protocol," the envoy concluded.

Last week, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted that the Kremlin deems it wrong to consider the decision to wait for official results of the election and resolution of the legal challenges put forward by incumbent President Donald Trump as Putin's rejection of the Biden victory. He also added that the messages of congratulations that had already been sent by other world leaders to Biden are not influencing Putin's plans.

The United States held the presidential elections on November 3. Though the vote count is still underway, major US media outlets project that the Democratic contender has presumptively won the presidential election. Both Fox News and Associated Press have put Biden over the top, beyond the needed 270 vote threshold.

The US General Services Administration (GSA) practically recognized Biden's victory and notified him in writing about the readiness to provide budget funds necessary to launch transition of power. The inauguration ceremony will take place on January 20. Nevertheless, Trump is challenging the current outcome, claiming irregularities in the ballot processing in key swing states, and has filed lawsuits to fight his case in court. Latest reports show that Biden secured more than 80 million votes, while Trump racked up 74 million ballots.



CHINA:

China-US power competition brings a Cold War arms concept back into fashion

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3112305/china-us-power-competition-brings-cold-war-arms-concept-back>

- Military and foreign policy specialists at Xiangshan forum in Beijing discuss need for arms control structures to be repaired after Trump era, and updated
- But China is reluctant to join US-Russian nuclear negotiations without Washington and Moscow reducing their larger stockpiles

By: Catherine Wong for the South China Morning Post // Published: 12:00pm, 3 Dec, 2020

Military tensions between China and the United States have led to calls for a new “strategic stability” and new arms control regimes covering nuclear weapons , cyberspace and artificial intelligence

As dozens of Chinese and international military and foreign policy specialists gathered for this year’s Xiangshan forum, conducted by video conference, the biggest question looming was: “As the world’s two biggest powers descend into a new cold war, how can China and the US restore trust and stabilise relations under a new US administration ?” During the two-day regional security forum in Beijing, which ended on Wednesday, it was argued that the arms control structure put in place at the end of the Cold War between Russia and the US was “crumbling” following the Donald Trump administration’s withdrawal from a major arms control agreement, and was outdated.

“It is widely accepted [that] the arms control architecture developed at the end of the Cold War is inadequate in today’s multipolar world,” Evgeny Buzhinskiy, a former director of the international treaties department of Russia’s defence ministry, said during the forum on Tuesday. The top secret mine that fuelled China’s nuclear program Another major concern was that Beijing – which has been fast narrowing the gap in its military technologies with Washington and has in recent years replaced Russia as America’s biggest strategic competitor – represented a threat without any limits imposed by treaty on its nuclear development.

With the US-Russia 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) ending next February pending an extension, the Trump administration has insisted on including China in future nuclear negotiations. Beijing has rejected the call , citing its much smaller nuclear arsenal, and made clear that it first needs to see substantial reductions in the stockpiles of both the United States and Russia.

Ken Jimbo, a professor at Keio University in Japan and a special adviser to Japan’s defence minister, called on Chinese leaders and experts to “seriously pursue new types of arms control” with the US to produce a strategic stability. “I do understand it might be difficult for the current China to be part of the New START negotiation or even the multilateral [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty], but it is extremely important for China to achieve a strategic stability [with the US].”

Chinese military advisers and academics have said renewed discussions on arms control are needed to achieve this strategic stability – a Cold War-era concept defined as the absence of incentives for any country to launch a first nuclear strike – with great power competition having returned to

global politics. They also agree with the international arms control community that such discussions should include emerging theatres of competition such as cyberspace, AI and outer space. But they have viewed the US push for trilateral nuclear arms control with suspicion

“It is impossible that we would join the INF negotiation because short and intermediate-range missiles form a crucial part of our nation’s defence capabilities,” Li Daozhong, a former Chinese military official and an expert with the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, said on the sidelines of the forum on Wednesday. “We would only agree to such a negotiation if the US [were] to include air and sea-launched missiles, but the US would not agree to that because they hold great advantage in that aspect.”

The INF treaty, signed by the US and the Soviet Union in 1987, banned all ground-launched ballistic and cruise missile systems with ranges of 500 to 5,500km (311 to 3,418 miles). The US withdrew from the treaty last year.

Chinese team test jet engine ‘able to reach anywhere on Earth within 2 hours’

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3111985/chinese-team-test-jet-engine-able-reach-anywhere-earth-within-2?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2012.01.20&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

- *Prototype flown in hypersonic wind tunnel simulating flight conditions at nine times the speed of sound*
- *The ‘sodramjet’ engine could offer the biggest hope so far of commercial flight reaching hypersonic speed, the scientists say*

By: [Stephen Chen](#) in Beijing for the South China Morning Post // Published: 6:00am, 1 Dec, 2020

Scientists in China have built what they claim is a revolutionary plane engine for Mach 16 flight. An aircraft powered by the engine could reach anywhere in the world within two hours, they said.

The test flight of a prototype in a hypersonic wind tunnel in Beijing suggested unprecedented performance in terms of thrust, fuel efficiency and operational stability. The engine could also serve “reusable trans-atmospheric planes [that will] take off horizontally from an airport runway, accelerate into orbit around the Earth, then re-enter into the atmosphere, and finally land at an airport,” said the scientists, led by Professor Jiang Zonglin of the Chinese Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Mechanics in a peer-reviewed paper published in the Chinese Journal of Aeronautics on Saturday.

The futuristic engine has a relatively simple design. It consists of three major components without any moving parts: a single-stage air inlet, hydrogen fuel injector and combustion chamber. The chamber’s mouth opens to the upper end of the air inlet. “It is easily mistaken for a sliding board,” said a Beijing-based hypersonic flight researcher who was informed about though not involved in the study.

Jiang’s team put the engine in a powerful wind tunnel that simulated flight conditions at nine times the speed of sound. As high speed wind hit the inlet, it generated shock waves with extremely high temperature and pressure. The shock waves met hydrogen fuel at the combustor and produced an explosion that pushed the engine forward. As the engine fired up, the mouth of the combustion chamber glowed like a Star Wars spaceship, according to video footage provided by the research team.

In theory, the air-breathing engine could take a flight up to 16 times the speed of sound, but the only wind tunnel on Earth capable of simulating such flight is still under construction in Beijing, according to the Beijing-based researcher. Jiang and colleagues called it the “standing oblique detonation

ramjet engine”, or sodramjet for short. They said the engine could offer the biggest hope so far of taking commercial flight to hypersonic speed, or five times the speed of sound. Existing hypersonic flight engines, known as scramjets, are too weak, too fuel-hungry and too unstable.

“Seventy years’ exploration in hypersonic propulsion indicates that the revolutionary concept is really in need for hypersonic air-breathing engine development. The sodramjet ... can be a very promising choice,” their paper said. The United States has often accused China of stealing its ideas, allegedly ranging from the lawnmower to the stealth fighter jet. The sodramjet was an American idea, too.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Nasa encountered a series of setbacks in its scramjet experiments. The scramjet engine had no moving parts and was predicted to perform better than ordinary jet engines at hypersonic speeds, but it often faltered during operation. One reason was that the shock waves generated by high-speed air could put out the flame in a puff. An engineer named Richard Morrison came up with a radical solution.

If the shock waves carried so much energy, he thought, why not use them as a lighter to detonate the fuel and keep the combustion alive and constant? He presented the idea in a 1980 paper that can be downloaded from Nasa’s website. But the US government shifted the bulk of hypersonic research from Nasa to private companies such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin, and Morrison’s idea was largely if not completely forgotten by the American defence industry.

The contractors put all their resources into scramjet design and continued to suffer setbacks that eventually caused them to trail other countries. Russia and China have deployed various types of hypersonic weapons in recent years, whereas the US military was not expected to receive them until next year, even if everything goes to plan. Jiang and colleagues said they were fed up with scramjets’ fatal design weakness. The scramjet could barely generate any thrust at the speed of Mach 7 or beyond.

The fuel consumption was so high that no commercial aviation company could possibly foot the bill. And the pilots – not to mention passengers – could suffer heart attacks if they were required to restart the engine from time to time during a flight. The team found Morrison’s idea intriguing, but the paper contained only a few rough sketches; no one has actually built such an engine. It would require extensive redesign, a special alloy that could withstand the high temperature and pressure, powerful wind tunnels and an enormous amount of investment that would likely lead to nothing.

It turned out that the sodramjet beat the scramjet by almost every measure. Turning the shock wave from their enemy to their friend helped them sustain and stabilise combustion at hypersonic speed. The faster the engine flew, the more efficiently the hydrogen fuel burned. The new engine was also much smaller and lighter than previous models. A Shanghai-based researcher studying hypersonic aerodynamics said the experiment was probably conducted “a while ago”.

China’s hypersonic programme is much shrouded in secrecy because of its potential for military application, and the studies published in academic journals have been vetted carefully, he said. In September, China test-flew an unmanned space plane that possibly landed in a secret military airport in the Gobi Desert. Details of the engine used in the experiment remained classified. Jiang and colleagues said the sodramjet could mark an advance similar to the first flights by the Wright brothers in 1903 and the first supersonic passenger flight by Concorde in 1969.

It is “the dream for human beings to fly faster, higher and further than ever”, they said. But Dr Uzi Rubin, founder and first director of the Israel Missile Defence Organisation, who is an expert in hypersonic missiles, said the new design was very still “very experimental” and its advantages still remained uncertain. “Even if promising ... it will take about a generation for it to be used commercially,” he said. “I believe that hypersonic human flight is not imminent, if at all.”

[Stephen Chen](#) -- Stephen Chen investigates major research projects in China, a new power house of scientific and technological innovation. He has worked for the Post since 2006. He is an alumnus of Shantou University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and the Semester at Sea programme which he attended with a full scholarship from the Seawise Foundation

China Thinks Its Hypersonic Missiles Can Beat U.S. Missile Defenses

China Thinks Its Hypersonic Missiles Can Beat U.S. Missile Defenses | The National Interest

Beijing claims it is not impressed, but American missile defense has come a long way.

by Kris Osborn for The National Interest // November 25, 2020

A Chinese newspaper is criticizing the recent successful intercept of a mock nuclear missile, in this case, a simulated ICBM, by a U.S. Navy destroyer using an SM-3 IIA missile.

The Beijing-backed paper alleged that the ship-launched missile defense capability would not prove effective in a “real-war” scenario or have any chance of stopping a maneuvering hypersonic missile. The claim in the paper, which quoted a Chinese defense analyst, was not supported by any technical data, operational context or evidence-based information. Rather the article argued that the United States “only used a mock missile and was done under an optimal scenario in which the defending side knows where and when the missile would come from.”

Essentially, the Chinese-government backed Global Times newspaper says the U.S. demo did not approximate a “real-battle” scenario and went on to claim that both Russia and China have mobile launchers. The thrust of the argument advanced in the story was simply that Russia and China are now developing more “advanced missiles, including hypersonic ones.” The comments and arguments advanced by the paper seem to invite several pertinent questions, such as the many factors either left out or not addressed by the story.

The most apparent problem with the Chinese newspaper’s claims is that seems to lack the awareness of the Navy’s advanced SM-3 IIA; the missile is a modern variant of the interceptor which is larger in size and, perhaps of even greater relevance, it is engineered with new, advanced, more discriminating seeker technology enabling it to improve precision and better track enemy targets. While many technical details of an emerging weapon such as the SM-3 IIA are likely not available for understandable security reasons, it certainly seems possible that the SM-3 IIA might be able to track and destroy moving targets.

Also, even in the event that mobile launcher were able to obscure, vary or conceal the launch point of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), its heat signature upon launch might likely be detectable by satellites. In fact, fast-evolving methods of tracking threats are advancing detection technologies through the proliferation of new Low and Medium Earth Orbit satellites. The SM-3 IIA intercept was a breakthrough first-step in a series of fast-moving developments intended to refine, test and deploy an even wider-range of ship-mobile ICBM defenses.

These fast-emerging systems are specifically designed to improve space-based meshed networking to track fast-maneuvering enemy missiles, such as ICBMs or even hypersonic missiles at some point in the future. Lastly, the interceptor itself may not need as much of its own tracking to follow the

launch and trajectory of a missile fired from a mobile launcher, as the flight path may well be known by space sensors or other methods of detection before ship-based SM-3 IIA fire control is fired.

This means ship commanders may already have an accurate track of a weapon, given improving space connectivity, sufficient to offer coordinates, details or flight-path specifics to sailors operating and programming an SM-3 interceptor system. While referred to by the Chinese paper as a “mock target,” the ICBM was a Northrop-built trainer missile designed to very closely replicate an actual ICBM. It was in effect described as simply an “unarmed” ICBM.

Kris Osborn is the defense editor for the National Interest. Osborn previously served at the Pentagon as a Highly Qualified Expert with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army—Acquisition, Logistics & Technology. Osborn has also worked as an anchor and on-air military specialist at national TV networks. He has appeared as a guest military expert on Fox News, MSNBC, The Military Channel, and The History Channel. He also has a Masters Degree in Comparative Literature from Columbia University.



NORTH KOREA:

Time for Kim Jong-un to embrace denuclearisation and open up North Korea economically

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3112222/time-kim-jong-un-embrace-denuclearisation-and-open-north-korea>

- While North Korea’s leader possesses a vision for the future of his country, the lack of an exit strategy from his nuclear programme has thwarted peace talks
- Embracing denuclearisation in exchange for security guarantees, normalised relations and development aid will open the path for North Korea’s economy to soar

By: Chan Young Bang for the South China Morning Post // Published: 3:45am, 3 Dec, 2020

Despite the perception that Kim Jong-un will never relinquish his nuclear weapons programme , analysis of the North Korean leader’s rationale reveals it to be untrue. He has an ardent aspiration to ensure the survival and enduring sovereignty of his country, and it is with this mindset that he approached the global community in repeated summit meetings. However, peace talks consistently failed because, although Kim possesses a vision for the future of the country, he lacks a viable exit strategy from the nuclear weapons programme.

Today, with the rapidly approaching inauguration of US President-elect Joe Biden – who has stated he will not conduct any meetings with Kim “absent preconditions” – North Korea’s time is running out. Time and again, sitting President Donald Trump could not enunciate the “bright future” he so publicly promised the regime. What Kim needs from Biden to ensure a bright future for North Korea and lasting peace for the international community is the transformation of the country into a normalised, peaceful and prosperous member of the global community, coupled with spectacular economic growth.

Kim, as a rational decision-maker in a cost-benefit calculation, is sure to come to the conclusion that trading denuclearisation for sustained economic development with the United States, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan – the other members of the six-party talks – offers a distinctly better chance of survival. However, a merely transactional agreement – dismantlement in exchange for economic modernisation – will not be enough to

ensure the survival of the country. Kim must also transform the distorted North Korean system into one viable and capable of achieving rapid and sustained growth.

North Korea's current economic state is antithetical to the idea of economic modernisation. This backwardness is characterised by a complete inability to introduce macroeconomic policy because of the absence of economic and financial institutions, transparency, access to credit and legal business entities. However, improvement measures alone will not be sufficient to ensure successful modernisation.

They must be accompanied by opening – entailing full integration with the world economy and transformation into a friendly trade partner to allow for foreign investment, knowledge transfers and technology sharing. Without transforming into market socialism – with a free labour market, free economic activities and private enterprise – sustained, dynamic growth cannot be achieved. Ultimately, the current deficient state of infrastructure within the country would make sustained economic growth impossible.

“It does not matter if the cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice.” This well-known wisdom from Deng Xiaoping, the architect of the modern Chinese economy, is an allegory for the notion that the ideological shackles restraining the economic system must be cast off and a new paradigm adopted. The basic requirement for the globalisation of North Korea's economy will be to liberalise economic activities, necessitating the elimination of all bureaucratic systems and controlling measures that block integration with the global economy.

It calls for radically revising the revolutionary *juche* ideology established by Kim Il-sung. Such a transformation must involve a change from hostile foreign policy to amicable, normalised relations. Thus, the decision to denuclearise would mean shifting the state's development paradigm from the *byungjin* policy of simultaneously pursuing military and economic development to an economy-first policy, implying that *juche* has lost its validity.

To demonstrate the legitimacy of the new national development paradigm, Kim must sustain a high level of economic growth. At least 10 per cent average annual GDP growth is needed to mitigate the shocks that will arise during economic modernisation. The kind of rapid development required to provide Kim with a new source of domestic legitimacy and a means of continuing his dynastic legacy will demand the allocation of a development fund of at least US\$30 billion per year across at least a 10-year period to ignite growth and mitigate the destabilising effects of opening the country.

Along with the development fund, the stakeholders must provide certain security guarantees. All threats of military or political pressure, including sanctions, must be withdrawn. Guarantees from the US and South Korea must be issued, accompanied by an end to joint military exercises and the ultimate withdrawal of US forces from the Korean peninsula. In addition, diplomatic relations between North Korea and each of the stakeholders must be established, with reconfirmed alliances with China and Russia.

All stakeholder nations would agree to such a package deal in exchange for denuclearisation, provided it meets their strategic interests. They are that sanctions will not be used to incite regime change; denuclearisation will be accompanied by sustained peace and mutual prosperity on the Korean peninsula and the establishment of North Korea as a normalised member of the global community, and; that North Korea will remain a buffer zone and maintain the geopolitical balance between South Korea and the Sino-Russian border.

The time is ripe for Kim to accept the bold challenge of approaching Biden and the remaining stakeholder nations with this blueprint for survival. Because of the country's unique position, I am confident that, with a viable exit strategy in hand, North Korea can achieve one of the highest sustained GDP growth rates in history. Kim must only make the courageous decision to embrace complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation in exchange for the chance to introduce rapid economic modernisation, establish a new legacy as a benevolent leader dedicated to the people's welfare and, ultimately, save himself and his family from demise.

Dr Chan Young Bang is the president of KIMEP University, principal investigator at the DPRK Strategic Research Center and former economic adviser to president Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. This article is an edited excerpt from his recent book, *Transition beyond Denuclearisation*

Biden team weighs North Korea policy as the era of Trump's and Kim ends

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/03/politics/biden-north-korea-challenge/index.html>

By Kylie Atwood, CNN // Updated 6:04 AM ET, Thu December 3, 2020

(CNN) President-elect Joe Biden's foreign policy team will soon have access to the letters President Donald Trump exchanged with North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un, correspondence that belongs to the US government -- not Trump -- and could provide insight into one of the world's most enigmatic leaders.

"They may help paint a richer psychological portrait of Kim Jong Un and offer insight into his thinking, or at least his approach to his engagement with Donald Trump," said a source close to the transition, adding that the missives are known to be high on rhetoric -- Trump described them as "love" letters -- and much lower on substance. As Biden has his team review the Trump-Kim letters, the latest intelligence and other information, he will face the same challenge Trump and all his predecessors have: A North Korea determined to continue advancing its nuclear program. The difference: In the four years since Biden was in government, North Korea has more nuclear arms, better means of delivery and is that much more dangerous.

Biden's approach

There are hints about how Biden will approach that challenge -- based on his public remarks, his commitment to multilateral alliances and his staffing choices -- but sources familiar with the transition say he will take time to flesh out a policy after meeting with allies and partners. As he does so, the President-elect will have to deal with potential resistance from Republicans in Congress, an unreliable counterpart in China and the unpredictable nature of North Korea itself, where state media already refer to him as a "rabid dog."

Biden is expected to take a more traditional approach than Trump, drawing in allies and partners instead of going at it on his own. Just weeks before the presidential election, Biden signaled that he is open to engaging with Pyongyang, using the term "principled diplomacy" to describe how he will approach North Korea. His team won't decide exactly how that looks in practice until they have reviewed information about events that happened on Trump's watch, sources familiar with the transition told CNN.

"The transition will be looking to understand as much as they can about what has been happening inside the Trump administration vis-a-vis North Korea," said a second source close to the transition. "From engagement with North Korea, the engagement with Japan, with China, with South Korea, as well as the defense plans and exercises and force posture adjustments." Tony Blinken, Biden's nominee to be secretary of state, worked on the North Korea portfolio when he was in the Obama administration.

Former officials who worked with him said that he appeared to be open to diplomacy with North Korea. He was part of the group that attempted to jumpstart diplomatic conversations with the North Koreans at the end of the Obama administration, an effort which was unsuccessful, they said. So far, there have been no meetings on North Korea between the Biden transition team for the State Department, which typically leads the diplomatic effort with North Korea, and career officials at the department, according to three State Department officials who said those meetings are expected in the coming weeks.

The Biden State Department team would likely be the ones reviewing the letters Trump exchanged with Kim. Some South Korean officials and North Korea experts tell CNN they are worried the Biden team will take too long to develop their strategy and allow North Korea to set the tone. Pyongyang often launches missiles in the early days of an incoming administration, which would force Biden's team into a defensive posture, rather than an offensive posture. The second source close to the transition said, "there is somewhat of an expectation around that," and noted Biden will have to manage the response to any missile launch without getting into a "counterproductive cycle."

The China hurdle

The sources familiar with the transition would not say if Biden would consider sending a private message sent to Pyongyang early on in his administration in an effort to prevent any North Korean provocations. They did say Biden wouldn't do so during the transition while Trump is still in the White House. Part of Biden's North Korea strategy early on will involve repairing strains to the US-South Korea relationship caused by Trump's demand that Seoul pay up to 400% more to keep US troops in the country, the sources said.

Biden's team also believes engaging China is important, the sources familiar with the President-elect's transition said. But working with Beijing will be a hurdle for them just as it was for Trump officials -- particularly given Beijing's recent pattern of ignoring and even abetting North Korea's sanctions violations. Congress will also have a role to play when the Biden team begins to carry out its North Korea strategy. Democrats on the Hill are concerned Republicans may stand in the way of any Biden effort to draw North Korea by partially reducing sanctions -- a step that would need congressional approval.

"I think our politics is the biggest part of the question as to if we can get North Korea diplomacy up and running," said one Democratic congressional aide. "The President has a huge amount of latitude when it comes to negotiating a deal, but when it comes time to actually moving things around on the table ... if Congress chops the legs out from under a president, it could very be problematic."

Biden may also have to deal with some hostility -- or at least name-calling -- from North Korea. The President-elect called Kim a "thug" during a presidential debate. He has also implicitly compared him to Adolf Hitler, given human rights reports about North Korea that describe say Kim keeps labor camps in his country, uses starvation as a tool of control, and deployed a biological weapon to assassinate family members in public places.

President Barack Obama warned Trump before he took office that North Korea's nuclear program would be his toughest foreign policy challenge. Trump responded by trying a radically different approach to slowing and stopping North Korea's nuclear program than previous presidents, emphasizing face-to-face diplomacy with Kim Jong Un. The Trump-appointed State Department Deputy Special Representative for North Korea,

Alex Wong, acknowledged Tuesday that effort failed, and that Pyongyang has not engaged in detailed dialogue or made "any concrete steps toward denuclearization."

Out of the box

Trump administration officials also privately admit that North Korea's nuclear program is more advanced now than it was when they came into office. Two current officials told CNN they view the engagement with Kim as a useful exploration of out-of-the-box diplomacy. But Pyongyang's missile tests have shown that they can now hit the US. And several countries believe Pyongyang has made gains in producing ballistic missiles with small nuclear devices attached, according to a UN report this year.

In late 2017, North Korea claimed to have successfully tested a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile, topped with a "super-large heavy warhead," capable of striking the US mainland. After the launch, Kim said North Korea had "finally realized the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force." Then Secretary of Defense James Mattis said the missile test went "higher, frankly, than any previous shot they have taken" and demonstrated that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un now has the ability to hit "everywhere in the world basically."

Biden must decide on North Korea strategy early, says top Obama-era diplomat

Biden must decide on North Korea strategy early, says top Obama-era diplomat | US news | The Guardian

Kurt Campbell says the delay in acting on Pyongyang in previous Democratic administration 'headed off any possibility of engagement'

From Reuters News Wire // Thu 3 Dec 2020 01.05 EST

The incoming US administration will have to make an early decision on what approach it will take with North Korea, and not repeat the delay of the Obama era, a former US official who has advised President-elect Joe Biden has said.

Kurt Campbell, the top US diplomat for east Asia under President Barack Obama and seen as a contender for a senior position under Biden, said the administration he had served in began with a "rather prolonged period of study" on how to handle Pyongyang. "One of the key challenges of Biden administration is the need to make an early decision about what to do with respect to North Korea," Campbell said.

He said the period of delay during the Obama administration saw "provocative" steps by North Korea "that basically headed off any possibility of engagement." Campbell praised the "extraordinarily bold strokes" of President Trump's Pyongyang diplomacy, which involved unprecedented summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, though so far there has been no progress in persuading him to give up nuclear weapons and missiles that threaten the US.

"When I talk about areas that I think we need to emulate or admire, I think some boldness is appropriate in American foreign policy, particularly in Asia," Campbell said, while stressing the need to work closely with South Korea. "Early signals to North Korea will be something that will be near the top of the list of the Biden team as they assume office," he said. While Kim has been unwilling to give up his weapons, he has conducted no nuclear or long-range missile tests since 2017.

He has though shown off new weapons and there are fears he could resume tests to challenge the incoming US administration. Biden, who was vice-president under Obama, called Kim a "thug" during the election campaign and said the "days of cozying up to dictators are over." Last year, North

Korea called Biden a “rabid dog” that needed to be “beaten to death with a stick.” Biden said in October he would only meet Kim “on the condition that he would agree that he would be drawing down his nuclear capacity to get there. The Korean peninsula should be a nuclear free-zone.”

BIDEN IS KIM’S TO LOSE

<https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/biden-is-kims-to-lose/>

By: RAMON PACHECO PARDO for War On The Rocks // NOVEMBER 27, 2020

With the departure of President Donald Trump, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is losing a friend with whom time together was a “precious memory,” as the North Korean leader wrote in a letter to the U.S. leader. Will Kim be able to form a similar relationship with Trump’s successor?

President-elect Joe Biden has signaled what his approach to North Korea will be: “principled diplomacy.” Diplomacy: This word is key. Few expect a rerun of President Barack Obama’s “strategic patience,” which ultimately failed to curb North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. Biden’s call for diplomacy with Pyongyang suggests a different approach that could yield benefits not only to the United States, but also to the Kim regime. But Kim needs to get the message.

Pyongyang certainly has an incentive to take a wait-and-see approach until U.S.-North Korean diplomacy resumes. As I explain in a recent book on the history of U.S.-North Korean relations, Pyongyang wants a fundamentally different relationship with the United States. It wants normal diplomatic relations, which would bring recognition and, North Korea hopes, economic prosperity. An end to hostility will not suffice from Pyongyang’s perspective.

Diplomatic normalization is a goal dating back to at least 1974, when the North Korean Supreme People’s Assembly sent a letter to the U.S. Congress to request it. Along with development of a nuclear deterrent, diplomatic normalization with the United States has been the only consistent North Korean foreign policy goal throughout the decades. Pyongyang’s behavior in the runup to the recent U.S. presidential election suggests that the Kim regime is now willing to wait and see. Its most recent recorded missile test dates back to March.

It has refrained from responding to Biden after he called Kim a “thug.” In sharp contrast, North Korean media was quick to lash out at the incoming U.S. president as recently as last year. Whether Kim will miss his summits and letter exchanges with Trump is a moot point. The reality is that North Korea now has to deal with the new sheriff in town. Why might North Korea feel positive about the prospects of diplomacy under Biden?

An op-ed by the president-elect carried by South Korea’s press agency Yonhap News shortly before the election is a good place to start. In his op-ed, Biden wrote that he “[will] engage in principled diplomacy and keep pressing toward a denuclearized North Korea and a unified Korean Peninsula.” The fact that Biden mentioned both denuclearization and unification (read: reconciliation) in the same line matters.

It suggests openness to consider denuclearization and inter-Korean relations together — even if the former usually takes precedence for any U.S. administration. Furthermore, Biden’s close foreign policy adviser Brian McKeon is on record indicating that Biden would be willing to meet with Kim. This would only come after the necessary groundwork: in other words, following the normal, bottom-up approach to diplomacy that Trump shunned.

Even though conventional wisdom suggests that Kim would prefer to go straight to the top by meeting directly with the president, the truth is that three meetings with Trump have yielded no benefits to Pyongyang. If North Korea is serious about getting an agreement, as Kim himself said right before the failed Hanoi summit, proper negotiations with a U.S. administration following a consistent approach could be a safer bet.

Plus, whisper it, but a growing number of voices in Washington are taking a more realistic approach towards North Korea's (potential) denuclearization. North Korea relinquishing its nuclear arsenal before getting any concession in return is, quite simply, a nonstarter. Enter arms control. Incoming Vice President Kamala Harris has written that "simply demanding complete denuclearization is a recipe for failure.

The United States] must work closely ... to contain and reverse the short-term threats posed by Pyongyang as [it works] toward that long term-goal [of denuclearization]." Meanwhile, Secretary of State nominee Antony Blinken has publicly indicated that "it's, if not impossible, highly unlikely that we will achieve in any near term the complete denuclearization of North Korea. I just don't see that as realistic in the near term. What I think we can get is an arms control and, over time, disarmament process put in place."

Similarly, potential Secretary of Defense nominee Michele Flournoy has stated that it is "hard to see [Kim] and this regime completely accepting nuclear disarmament ... it's more of a risk management challenge in my view, realistically, even though [the United States] should keep disarmament out there as the ultimate long-term goal." And according to Obama's former North Korea envoy Joseph Yun, the Biden administration would be willing to try a different approach and be much more pro-engagement than Obama's.

These statements must be music to Kim's ears. North Korea needs an agreement with the United States to kickstart an economy battered by COVID-19, recurrent natural disasters, and sanctions. Without a deal with the United States, there won't be sanctions relief. Without sanctions relief, there won't be the large-scale aid and, potentially, investment that could upgrade the North Korean economy. Can the Kim regime survive without sanctions relief and continue to develop its nuclear and missile programs?

Certainly. Sanctions date back to 2006. Can North Korea thrive without them? No. North Korea can count on an unlikely ally to press the Biden administration to allow sanctions relief: South Korea. As President Moon Jae-in stated when congratulating Biden for his victory, the two Koreas are "stakeholders in the issues of the Korean Peninsula." Moon has also reiterated that his government's policy is engagement and that peace in the Korean Peninsula is his ultimate goal. Seoul certainly wants North Korea to move toward denuclearization.

But from the Moon government's perspective this can only happen with a step-by-step process such as that outlined by Washington's North Korea envoy Stephen Biegun, in which engagement comes together with denuclearization steps. In this sense, North Korea could see the transition from Trump to Biden in similar terms to the transition between Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Back then, North Korea had an agreement with the United States that it hoped the new administration would continue to implement: the "Agreed Framework."

Thus, it refrained from provocations until it became clear that the agreement would be discontinued. This time around, North Korea doesn't have an agreement — unless one considers the one-page Singapore joint statement signed by Trump and Kim as such. But Pyongyang has an incoming U.S. administration willing to try out diplomacy and entertaining the idea of focusing on arms control as a first step — and with South Korea's support for diplomacy to boot.

In contrast, the transition between Obama and Trump came at a point in time when U.S.-North Korean relations were essentially broken. And the transition between Bush and Obama took place as implementation of the Six-Party Talks agreements was shaky at best, due to differences between Washington and Pyongyang regarding sequencing, and also with regard to what had actually been agreed. During these two transitions, Pyongyang opted for high-intensity brinkmanship in the form of nuclear and missile tests.

This was counterproductive, regardless of the state of U.S.-North Korean relations. Pyongyang may have learned its lesson. Certainly, there is much skepticism about whether North Korea will be able to hold off from a provocation to try to catch the attention of the incoming U.S. president for long. After all, from Pyongyang's perspective its patience following Bush's election was not rewarded.

But North Korea has much to lose from high-intensity brinkmanship. It could lead to more sanctions. Or if China, and Russia, block U.N. sanctions, nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests could result in a tightening of implementation of existing sanctions plus new bilateral sanctions from the United States, the European Union, or Japan. This type of test would also make it less likely that the United States would opt to follow a diplomatic path — not more likely.

The latter might have been the case up to the mid-2000s. Under Obama and Trump, however, nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests did not yield negotiations. Pyongyang could, of course, resume short- and mid-range missile tests. It could also up the tempo vis-à-vis Seoul, as it did when it blew up the inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong earlier this summer. It isn't certain, however, that these provocations would attract the attention of a Biden administration focusing on domestic affairs as well as on more pressing foreign policy issues, such as dealing with China or rebuilding multilateralism.

But these types of actions at least would not necessarily kick diplomacy into the long grass. In this context, what can the incoming Biden administration do to take advantage of North Korea's need for a deal with the United States? As a starting point, it would make sense for U.S. officials to communicate early on to Pyongyang that negotiations and an agreement are possible — but that a North Korean provocation will put diplomacy on hold. Blinken has advocated an Iran-type deal with the Kim regime.

While the two cases are different, the Biden administration can use the Iran nuclear agreement as an example of its willingness to use diplomacy. Washington can communicate this message directly to Pyongyang, using the New York channel or any of the other channels still in place. Or it can go through Seoul, since the Moon government has its own lines of communication with the North Korean regime. Or even better, it could engage in a “maximum pressure” communication campaign using a range of channels to hammer home the message that it is willing to negotiate.

In addition, the incoming U.S. government can use aid as a goodwill message. Kurt Campbell, who has been advising the Biden campaign on North Korea and East Asia policy, recently indicated that “sending a message to North Korea to be patient through humanitarian assistance is a good idea.” Certainly, the offer of humanitarian aid would be a very positive diplomatic signal. From Pyongyang's perspective, nuclear weapons are a necessary deterrent against a hostile United States.

Aid would symbolize a move away from this alleged hostility. And, of course, it is the right thing to do from a humanitarian point of view. The incoming Biden administration should also try to come up with a common position with its ally, South Korea. Certainly, working with China will be necessary to address the North Korean nuclear issue. But South Korea is the U.S. ally, and no one has more at stake in Korean Peninsula issues than the Koreans themselves.

Seoul's position was essentially ignored by the Trump administration, which actually set up a bilateral coordination meeting between the State Department and Seoul's Ministry of Foreign Affairs that hindered South Korea's own engagement agenda. For the Biden team, it would make sense to sit down early with Seoul to understand how inter-Korean economic engagement and reconciliation fit with Washington's focus on denuclearization.

After all, the current South Korean government is different from the two previous conservative administrations that the Obama administration worked with, when Biden was vice president. The Moon government does not believe that focusing on pressure almost exclusively will bring a resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue. Lee Nak-yeon, chairman of Moon's Democratic Party and one of the favorites to be the party's next presidential candidate, has even suggested that the Biden administration should use the Singapore joint statement as a starting point for its North Korea policy.

While this is unlikely to happen, it shows that the Moon government prioritizes engagement. It would make sense for Biden and Moon to agree on the right mixture of carrots and sticks on North Korea. In any case, one thing is certain: It is up to Kim to have a positive relationship with Biden or not. A bit of patience and avoiding unnecessary provocations could be rewarded with negotiations and, ultimately, a proper deal that proved elusive under Trump. For the time being, there is no indication that Biden will be an "Obama III" when it comes to North Korea. There is a solid base for North Korea to build on.

Ramon Pacheco Pardo (@rpachecopardo), PhD, is the KF-VUB Korea Chair at the Institute for European Studies of Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Reader (Associate Professor) in International Relations at King's College London.



SOUTH KOREA:

NSTR



IRAN:

Iran's nuclear dilemma: Ramp up now or wait for Biden

<https://www.axios.com/iran-nuclear-program-mohsen-fakhrizadeh-a49ef6e7-58dd-4702-b897-db689ab9cbbf.html>

By: [Barak Ravid](#), for Axios // 16 hours ago -

The world is waiting to see whether Iran will strike back at Israel or the U.S. over the assassination of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, the architect of Iran's military nuclear program.

Why it matters: Senior Iranian officials have stressed that Iran will take revenge against the perpetrators, but also respond by continuing Fakhri-zadeh's legacy — the nuclear program. The key question is whether Iran will accelerate that work now, or wait to see what President-elect Biden puts on the table. The backstory: Iran has waited out two years of "maximum pressure" under President Trump, breaching the enrichment limits of the 2015 nuclear deal after Trump withdrew but stopping short of more drastic steps.

Biden has long said that if Iran returns to compliance, he'll loosen sanctions in order to bring the U.S. back into the deal. State of play: Hardliners in Tehran have long been critical of President Hassan Rouhani's "strategic patience" policy, and their voices have grown louder in the wake of Fakhri-zadeh's assassination. Parliament passed a non-binding resolution on Tuesday calling on the government to raise uranium enrichment levels to 20%, start rebuilding the heavy water reactor in Arak, and limit the access of UN inspectors to Iran's nuclear sites.

The other side: The more pragmatic camp, led by Rouhani, argues that such steps on the nuclear program would play into the hands of the Trump administration and Israel. They stress the need to prioritize the removal of U.S. sanctions once Biden assumes office — a goal they think is at hand. Rouhani said on Wednesday that the Parliament decision was "harmful for diplomatic activities," adding: "We think that with the defeat of this war [by Trump] and the maximum pressure, the situation will be different next year."

The decision is ultimately in the hands of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. His public comments thus far have not indicated that he's siding with those arguing for an imminent acceleration on the nuclear front. The latest: Biden and his transition team have been silent on Fakhri-zadeh's assassination, and several Biden aides refused to comment on the matter for this story. Flashback: The two-tiered debate over Iran's response echoes the aftermath of the killing of Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, by the U.S.

Iran took tactical revenge by launching missiles at American bases in Iraq. But Iran's strategic response was to press the Iraqi government to call on the U.S. to pull its troops out of the country. What to watch: Diplomats from world powers who are still part of the nuclear deal (Russia, China, France, Germany, the UK and the EU) will meet Iranian officials in Vienna on Dec. 16 to discuss ways to preserve the deal, get Iran back to full compliance and prepare for the new U.S. administration.

Iran's supreme leader vows revenge over slain scientist

[Iran's supreme leader vows revenge over slain scientist \(apnews.com\)](#)

By AMIR VAHDAT and JON GAMBRELL for the Associated Press News // 38 minutes ago

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran’s supreme leader on Saturday demanded the “definitive punishment” of those behind the killing of a scientist who led Tehran’s disbanded military nuclear program, as the Islamic Republic blamed Israel for a slaying that has raised fears of reignited tensions across the Middle East.

After years of being in the shadows, the image of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh suddenly was to be seen everywhere in Iranian media, as his widow spoke on state television and officials publicly demanded revenge on Israel for the scientist’s slaying. Israel, long suspected of killing Iranian scientists a decade ago amid earlier tensions over Tehran’s nuclear program, has yet to comment on Fakhrizadeh’s killing Friday. However, the attack bore the hallmarks of a carefully planned, military-style ambush, the likes of which Israel has been accused of conducting before.

The attack has renewed fears of Iran striking back against the U.S., Israel’s closest ally in the region, as it did earlier this year when a U.S. drone strike killed a top Iranian general. The U.S. military acknowledged moving an aircraft carrier back into the region, while an Iranian lawmaker suggested throwing out U.N. nuclear inspectors in response to the killing. Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Fakhrizadeh “the country’s prominent and distinguished nuclear and defensive scientist.”

Khamenei, who has the final say on all matters of state, said Iran’s first priority after the killing was the “definitive punishment of the perpetrators and those who ordered it.” He did not elaborate. Speaking earlier Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani blamed Israel for the killing. “We will respond to the assassination of Martyr Fakhrizadeh in a proper time,” Rouhani said. “The Iranian nation is smarter than falling into the trap of the Zionists. They are thinking to create chaos.”

The United Nations called for restraint.

“Of course we condemn any assassination or extra-judicial killing,” said Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. “We urge restraint and the need to avoid any actions that could lead to an escalation of tensions in the region.” Both Rouhani and Khamenei said Fakhrizadeh’s death would not stop the nuclear program. Iran’s civilian atomic program has continued its experiments and now enriches a growing uranium stockpile up to 4.5% purity in response to the collapse of Iran’s nuclear deal after the U.S.’ 2018 withdrawal from the accord.

That’s still far below weapons-grade levels of 90%, though experts warn Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium for at least two atomic bombs if it chose to pursue them. Analysts have compared Fakhrizadeh to being on par with Robert Oppenheimer, the scientist who led America’s Manhattan Project in World War II that created the atom bomb. Fakhrizadeh headed Iran’s so-called AMAD program that Israel and the West have alleged was a military operation looking at the feasibility of building a nuclear weapon.

The International Atomic Energy Agency says that “structured program” ended in 2003. Iran long has maintained its nuclear program is peaceful. Fakhrizadeh’s widow appeared unnamed on state television in a black chador, saying his death would spark a thousand others to take up his work. “He wanted to get martyred and his wish came true,” she said. Hard-line Iranian media has begun circulating memorial images showing Fakhrizadeh standing alongside a machine-gun-cradling likeness of [Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, whom the U.S. killed in the January drone strike.](#)

Soleimani's death led to Iran retaliating with a ballistic missile barrage that injured dozens of American troops in Iraq. Tehran also has forces at its disposal all around Israel, including troops and proxies in neighboring Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Islamic Jihad — and to a lesser extent Hamas — in the Gaza Strip. The Iranian Guard's naval forces routinely shadow and have tense encounters with U.S. Navy forces in the Persian Gulf as well.

Hours after the attack, the Pentagon announced it had brought the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier back into the Middle East, an unusual move as the carrier already spent months in the region. It cited the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq as the reason for the decision, saying “it was prudent to have additional defensive capabilities in the region to meet any contingency.” Iran has conducted attacks targeting Israeli interests abroad over the killing of its scientists, like in [the case of the three Iranians recently freed in Thailand in exchange for a detained British-Australian academic](#).

Iran also could throw out inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, who have provided an unprecedented, real-time look at Iran's nuclear program since the deal. Nasrollah Pezhmanfar, a hard-line lawmaker, said a statement calling to expel the “IAEA's spy inspections” could be read Sunday, the parliament's official website quoted him as saying. [Friday's attack happened in Absard](#), a village just east of the capital that is a retreat for the country's elite.

Iranian state television said an old truck with explosives hidden under a load of wood blew up near a sedan carrying Fakhrizadeh. As Fakhrizadeh's sedan stopped, at least five gunmen emerged and raked the car with rapid fire, the semiofficial Tasnim news agency said. The precision of the attack led to the suspicion of Israel's Mossad intelligence service being involved. The CIA separately declined to comment on the attack Saturday.

State media has only said the attack killed Fakhrizadeh, though a statement Saturday from the European Union described the incident as killing “an Iranian government official and several civilians.” EU officials did not respond to requests for comment. In Tehran, a small group of hardline protesters burned images of Trump and President-elect Joe Biden, who has said his administration will consider reentering Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

While burning an American and Israeli flag, the hard-liners criticized Iran's foreign minister who helped negotiate the nuclear deal, showing the challenge ahead of Tehran if officials chose to come back the accord. On Saturday night, the family of Fakhrizadeh gathered at a mosque in central Tehran for his funeral service, a website associated with Iranian state TV reported. The scientist's body lay in a flag-draped, open coffin, his eyes closed.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Killing of nuke chief was done entirely by remote control — Iranian report

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/top-iranian-nuclear-scientist-was-killed-by-remote-controlled-gun-report/>

Semi-official Fars claims operation to kill Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was conducted in three minutes with no human operatives on the ground

By JUDAH ARI GROSS for the Times of Israel // 29 November 2020, 8:23 pm

The attack that killed the alleged architect of Iran's nuclear weapons program on Friday was carried out from afar using a remote-controlled machine gun attached to a car, a leading Iranian news site reported Sunday.

According to the semi-officials Fars news site, the entire operation was conducted with no human agents whatsoever, a significantly different description of the attack than has been presented until now. The account was not attributed to official sources and was not immediately confirmed by Iran. According to the outlet, the assault took place over the course of three minutes as Mohsen Fakhrizadeh — a brigadier general in Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and a key figure in the country’s military research-and-development program long regarded by Israel and the US as the head of its rogue nuclear weapons program — traveled with his wife toward the resort town of Absard, east of Tehran.

The operation kicked off when the lead car in Fakhrizadeh’s security detail traveled ahead to inspect his destination, the report said. At that point, a number of bullets were fired at Fakhrizadeh’s armored car, prompting him to exit the vehicle as he was apparently unaware that he was under attack, thinking that the sound was caused by an accident or some problem with the car, according to Fars news.

The outlet did not specify if those shots were fired from the remote-controlled machine gun or from a different source. Once Fakhrizadeh exited the vehicle, the remote-controlled machine gun opened fire from roughly 150 meters (500 feet) away, striking him three times, twice in the side and once in his back, severing his spinal cord. Fakhrizadeh’s bodyguard was also hit by the gunfire. The attacking car, a Nissan, then exploded, the report said.

Fakhrizadeh was evacuated to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead. His wife survived the attack, according to Iranian media. Photos and video shared online showed a sedan with bullet holes in the windshield and back window, blood pooled on the asphalt and debris scattered along a stretch of the road. Until now, reports from Iran indicated that an explosion occurred first, forcing Fakhrizadeh’s car to stop, at which point armed agents opened fire at him and his security detail, killing them, before fleeing the scene.

According to Fars news, Iranian authorities tracked down the owner of the Nissan, who left the country on October 29. The name of the owner was not included in the report. A number of defense analysts cast doubts on the Fars report, noting that photographs of the scene showed what appeared to be precise gunfire aimed at Fakhrizadeh’s car, which a remote-controlled automatic weapon would be unlikely to produce and that better fits the initial descriptions of armed, trained operatives conducting the raid.

Other news outlets have also published contradictory accounts of the killing, including claims that dozens of Israeli operatives were involved. The highly public killing of Fakhrizadeh prompted widespread condemnation from Iran, which explicitly accused Israel of being responsible for the attack and threatened to exact revenge for it. The United Nations and European Union criticized the operation — without naming Israel — saying it inflamed tensions in the region.

Some American Democrats also spoke out against the raid, saying it appeared to be an effort to hobble efforts by US President-elect Joe Biden to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal, a move that Jerusalem staunchly opposes along with several Sunni Arab states. An unnamed Western intelligence source told Channel 12 the killing of the nuclear physicist, described in the past as the “father” of Iran’s project to develop nuclear weapons, was the “pinnacle” of Israel’s long-term plans.

Tehran officially denies plans to develop atomic weapons, maintaining its nuclear program is for civilian purposes, though a trove of Iranian documents stolen from Tehran by the Mossad, which were revealed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2018, showed plans by Iran to attach

a nuclear warhead to a ballistic missile. While Israel remained officially mum on the killing of Fakhrizadeh and its alleged role in it, an Israeli minister publicly praised the results of the operation.

“The assassination in Iran, whoever did it, it serves not only Israel, but the whole region and the world,” Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz told the Kan public broadcaster on Sunday. Fakhrizadeh was named by Netanyahu in 2018 as the director of Iran’s nuclear weapons project. When Netanyahu revealed then that Israel had removed from a warehouse in Tehran a vast archive of Iran’s own material detailing with its nuclear weapons program, he said: “Remember that name, Fakhrizadeh.”

In a video uploaded to Twitter on Friday shortly after news of the alleged killing emerged, Netanyahu, counting off various achievements of the week, noted that this was “a partial list, as I can’t tell you everything... It’s all for you, citizens of Israel, for our country. It’s a week of achievements, and there’ll be more.” According to Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen, Netanyahu was referring to his widely reported — though not officially confirmed — visit to Saudi Arabia.

Israel was bracing for possible Iranian retaliation, putting embassies on high alert. The Israel Defense Forces, however, remained in its normal routine in apparent indication that it did not anticipate an Iranian retaliation in the form of an immediate military strike. At the same time, the IDF said in a statement that it was “aware of the possible developments in the region” and would “maintain full preparedness against any expression of violence against us.”

Iran has suffered several devastating attacks this year, including the killing of top general Qassem Soleimani in a US drone strike in January, and a mysterious explosion and fire that crippled an advanced centrifuge assembly plant at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility, which is widely believed to have been an act of sabotage. Iran’s atomic program has continued its experiments and now enriches a growing uranium stockpile up to the level of 4.5 percent purity, following the US’s 2018 withdrawal from the nuclear deal. That is still far below weapons-grade levels of 90 percent, though experts warn Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium for at least two atomic bombs if it chose to pursue them.

Iran's parliament advances bill to stop nuclear inspections

<https://news.yahoo.com/irans-parliament-advances-bill-stop-083647577.html>

By: NASSER KARIMI for the Associated Press // Tue, December 1, 2020, 3:36 AM EST

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran’s parliament Tuesday advanced a bill that would end U.N. inspections of its nuclear facilities and require the government to boost its uranium enrichment if European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal do not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions.

The vote to debate the bill, which would need to pass through several other stages before becoming law, was a show of defiance after the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist last month. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the final say on all nuclear policies. The official IRNA news agency said 251 lawmakers in the 290-seat chamber voted in favor, after which many began chanting “Death to America!” and “Death to Israel!”

The bill would give European countries three months to ease sanctions on Iran's key oil and gas sector, and to restore its access to the international banking system. The U.S. imposed crippling sanctions on Iran after President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear agreement, triggering a series of escalations between the two sides. The bill would have authorities resume enriching uranium to 20%, which is below the threshold needed for nuclear weapons but higher than that required for civilian applications.

It would also commission new centrifuges at nuclear facilities at Natanz and the underground Fordo site. Parliament would need to hold another vote to pass the bill, which would also require approval by the Guardian Council, a constitutional watchdog. Lawmakers have pressed for a more confrontational approach since the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018. Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei acknowledged the limitations of such an approach on Tuesday, saying the nuclear file is under the authority of the Supreme National Security Council, and “nobody can work on it independently.”

President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate, heads the council, which answers to the supreme leader. The bill was first tabled in parliament in August but gained new momentum after the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who headed a program that Israel and the West have alleged was a military operation looking at the feasibility of building a nuclear weapon. The International Atomic Energy Agency says that “structured program” ended in 2003. U.S. intelligence agencies concurred with that assessment in a 2007 report.

Israel insists Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons, pointing to Tehran’s ballistic missile program and research into other technologies. Iran long has maintained that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. Iran has blamed Fakhrizadeh's killing on Israel, which has long waged a covert war against Tehran and its proxies in the region. Israeli officials have declined to comment on the killing, and no one has claimed responsibility.

Some Iranian officials have suggested that the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been regularly inspecting Iran's nuclear facilities in recent years as part of the 2015 agreement, may have been a source of intelligence for Fakhrizadeh's killers. Iran began publicly exceeding uranium enrichment levels set by the nuclear agreement after the U.S. restored sanctions. It currently enriches a growing uranium stockpile up to 4.5% purity.

That’s still far below weapons-grade levels of 90%, though experts warn Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium to reprocess into fuel for at least two atomic bombs if it chose to pursue them.

Iran's nuclear dilemma: Ramp up now or wait for Biden

<https://www.axios.com/iran-nuclear-program-mohsen-fakhrizadeh-a49ef6e7-58dd-4702-b897-db689ab9cbbf.html>

By: Barak Ravid, for Axios

The world is waiting to see whether Iran will strike back at Israel or the U.S. over the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the architect of Iran's military nuclear program.

Why it matters: Senior Iranian officials have stressed that Iran will take revenge against the perpetrators, but also respond by continuing Fakhrizadeh’s legacy — the nuclear program. The key question is whether Iran will accelerate that work now, or wait to see what President-elect

Biden puts on the table. The backstory: Iran has waited out two years of "maximum pressure" under President Trump, breaching the enrichment limits of the 2015 nuclear deal after Trump withdrew but stopping short of more drastic steps.

Biden has long said that if Iran returns to compliance, he'll loosen sanctions in order to bring the U.S. back into the deal. State of play: Hardliners in Tehran have long been critical of President Hassan Rouhani's "strategic patience" policy, and their voices have grown louder in the wake of Fakhrizadeh's assassination. Parliament passed a non-binding resolution on Tuesday calling on the government to raise uranium enrichment levels to 20%, start rebuilding the heavy water reactor in Arak, and limit the access of UN inspectors to Iran's nuclear sites.

The other side: The more pragmatic camp, led by Rouhani, argues that such steps on the nuclear program would play into the hands of the Trump administration and Israel. They stress the need to prioritize the removal of U.S. sanctions once Biden assumes office — a goal they think is at hand. Rouhani said on Wednesday that the Parliament decision was "harmful for diplomatic activities," adding: "We think that with the defeat of this war [by Trump] and the maximum pressure, the situation will be different next year."

The decision is ultimately in the hands of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. His public comments thus far have not indicated that he's siding with those arguing for an imminent acceleration on the nuclear front. The latest: Biden and his transition team have been silent on Fakhrizadeh's assassination, and several Biden aides refused to comment on the matter for this story. Flashback: The two-tiered debate over Iran's response echoes the aftermath of the killing of Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, by the U.S.

Iran took tactical revenge by launching missiles at American bases in Iraq. But Iran's strategic response was to press the Iraqi government to call on the U.S. to pull its troops out of the country. What to watch: Diplomats from world powers who are still part of the nuclear deal (Russia, China, France, Germany, the UK and the EU) will meet Iranian officials in Vienna on Dec. 16 to discuss ways to preserve the deal, get Iran back to full compliance and prepare for the new U.S. administration.



INDIA:



PAKISTAN:

NSTR



UNITED KINGDOM:

NSTR



FRANCE:

NSTR

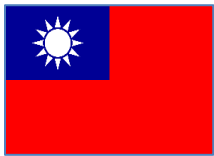


ISRAEL:

NSTR



JAPAN:



TAWIAN:

NSTR



SAUDI ARABIA:

Why Saudi nuclear weapons talk must be taken seriously

[Why Saudi nuclear weapons talk must be taken seriously \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/why-saudi-nuclear-weapons-talk-must-be-taken-seriously/v-AA12345678)

By: Farouk Araie, From the South China Morning Post // Published: 7:25am, 3 Dec, 2020

Johannesburg --- Saudi Arabia's pronouncement that it could acquire nuclear weapons in the face of [the possibility](#) of Iran developing them is a dangerous and deadly escalation of the quest for supremacy in the region.

Nuclear weapons present humankind with an immense challenge, one far greater than most people understand. Seventy-five years ago, they were used to destroy the cities of [Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#), with a single weapon destroying each city. These weapons go beyond homicide and genocide, carrying the possibility of omnicide or death to all. The attacks on Japan have left an indelible mark on human consciousness and our collective conscience.

Nuclear weapons are often presented as promoting security, particularly during times of international instability, but weapons that risk catastrophic and irreversible consequences cannot be viewed as protecting civilians or humanity as a whole. A nuclear strike resulting in the destruction of present life forms on the planet would also obliterate the past and the future, destroying both human memory and possibility.

We cannot hide from the threat that nuclear weapons pose to humanity and life in general. Nuclear weapons are morally and legally unjustifiable because they destroy indiscriminately – soldiers and civilians, men, women and children, the aged and the newly born, the healthy and the infirm. In the aftermath of a nuclear war, the living will envy the dead.



TURKEY:

NSTR