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U.S. Poorly Integrates CCMDs, Hasn't Figured Out Hybrid, Hyten Says

March 10, 2021 | By John A. Tirpak

The current system of integrating the responsibilities and actions of regional commanders in chief doesn't work well, and the U.S. is still failing to address hybrid warfare coherently, Gen. John E. Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said March 10.

He also discussed China and Russia's strategic activities, how to approach modernizing NORAD, and his efforts to inject more speed into the joint requirements process.

Speaking on an online seminar of the Canadian Conference of Defence Associations, Hyten said the U.S. is struggling with "the integration piece" of its system of regional combatant commands, and who has responsibility for threats and conflicts that overlap the commands' areas of regard.

"We've learned that we actually don't know how to do that very well," Hyten said. "We don't effectively operate in an integrated manner." The U.S. is experimenting with ways to close those seams through exercises and wargames, some alone and some in concert with allies, "especially in Europe," he said.

"So, we've achieved the first step of the 12-step process, but we haven't moved beyond," he joked.

The impulse is to re-organize the system, he said, but "in almost every case ... that's the worst place to start dealing with the problem." The first task is to "figure out what you need to do, ... who needs to do what, how it needs to work, and then say, 'Am I organized correctly to do that?'"

The analysis is being done within the Joint Warfighting Concept, he said, with all the combatant commands, allies, and partners playing a role.

"I'm not sure we're organized incorrectly," he cautioned, noting that the COCOMs are the direct connection to individual and groups of allies in theaters, and those relationships are key.

Almost every COCOM, for example, has a responsibility to deal with Russia, Hyten noted. Even U.S. Southern Command is dealing with Russia's relationship with Venezuela, he said.

"You can't look at each COCOM as a unique function that only deals with that territory, because all problems are global," Hyten asserted.

In that context, the recent proposal to move responsibilities with Israel from U.S. European Command to U.S. Central Command is not a "fundamental change" in the construct, he said.

On the subject of refreshing the North American Aerospace Defense Command, Hyten said the U.S. and Canada need to "sit down together and figure out what aerospace defense really means. Let's look at the threats and what we have to do," and then decide if NORAD is doing too much or too little, and whether it is too big or too small. That should drive decisions on how and what to modernize it, he said.

"You don't modernize just to modernize. You modernize to do something, and the only way to [do that] is to figure out what that is," Hyten said.

Absent that step, "Modernization just means, we want you to build new stuff for all your old stuff."

The U.S. has not “done a good job of understanding the hybrid threat, and therefore we haven’t done a good job of responding” to it, Hyten said of Russia’s mix of information and kinetic warfare.

Russia “and others” see hybrid warfare as “another means ... to their end state.” Russia is “trying to change the perception of others around the world ... They believe they can walk up to a line and not cross the line and still achieve their objectives in the ‘gray zone’” of influence.

The U.S. and its allies needs to “open our eyes and realize ... that is a strategy. We have to study it just like we study conventional warfare or ... nuclear warfare, just like we’ve studied counterterrorism.” If hybrid is not treated with the same discipline of analysis and response, “you will not be effective ... because it is a focused effort by a nation-state in trying to challenge the West,” he said.

Hyten said his biggest concern is that “we have not taken a fresh look at it, and therefore, everybody’s idea of how to deal with it is based on their own perceptions ... That’s not how we deal with every other element of warfare, but somehow that’s what we’ve fallen into.”

China and Russia have to be faced with “open eyes,” Hyten said, and dealt with based not on wishful thinking but their behavior.

“It’s important to be realistic,” he warned. “If [China is] building a nuclear triad ... [and] massive and powerful space capabilities, if they’re building and using cyber capabilities inside the United States [and Canada], they’re doing it for a reason. They’re not doing it because it’s ... kind of fun.” America’s adversaries are “using enormous amounts of national treasure to build things that basically threaten the West; not just the United States ... To threaten the liberal order that was developed after World War II, that we’ve operated under for the last eight decades.”

The COVID crisis has been a revelation about China, Hyten said.

“We saw China show their true colors,” he asserted. “They still have not been transparent about what happened in Wuhan. They still have not been transparent in helping the world deal with the virus ... They still have not been transparent on supplies.” The U.S. and its allies need to view China “not just from a [physical] security perspective—am I going to be attacked—but what are the other elements going on that impact our everyday existence? And China over the last year has not helped the world in our everyday existence, and they still aren’t. So it’s important that we open our eyes and understand that.”

Likewise, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine shouldn’t be ignored, he said, but all its aggressions looked at “with open eyes” and realism.

Hyten said he “hasn’t fixed the problem” of injecting far greater speed into the joint requirements process, something he hopes to advance in his last months in the job. He noted that in 2000, the military moved from a threat-based process to a capabilities-based system, wherein it was reasoned that, “if we just develop the capabilities, we’ll be able to stay ahead of any adversaries as far in the future as you can see.” That approach, though, led to a risk aversion that drove all decisions to the Pentagon “and away from the field,” slowing things down and building an elaborate bureaucracy.

“We have to get back to the way we did it in the 1950s,” he said, explaining that Thule Air Base, Greenland—with an early warning radar, 10,000-foot runway, two hangars for B-52s, and a town for 2,500 people—was built “in 91 days, ... 600 miles from the North Pole” at the order of former head of Strategic Air Command, Gen. Curtis LeMay, and held up for many decades of use. The Pentagon needs to emulate that and delegate authorities to lower levels “and allow people to do their job.”

His goal is to tell the services, “Here’s your joint requirement, just go build it, and go fast. That’s what we’re trying to do. It’s frustrating, but we should all take ownership of the fact that we’ve become bureaucratic and slow, and we have adversaries that move very fast.”

Biden, lawmakers take step to limit president's authority to go to war

https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/mar/7/joe-biden-moves-limit-presidential-authority-go-wa/?utm_source=Boomtrain&utm_medium=manual&utm_campaign=newsalert&utm_content=newsalert&utm_term=newsalert&bt_e=JB7IVwGZPTktwz3IqN8jXcSszTdOYK1ZuBz7qgEy2GelFja%2B%2Fg2R%2BeJqjFRONfl&bt_ts=1615162999658

By [Ben Wolfgang](#) to The Washington Times // Updated: 7:03 p.m. on Sunday, March 7, 2021

President [Biden](#) and a bipartisan caucus on Capitol Hill may have just taken the first step toward a deal that has eluded Washington for more than a decade: the establishment of clear, narrow limits on a commander in chief's authority to take the country into war.

Mr. [Biden](#) on Friday committed to working with Congress to replace war-making authorities that have underpinned U.S. military action in the Middle East and beyond for the nearly two decades since the shock of the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001. Despite the readiness for change, laying down new rules will likely prove a tough task on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. The White House comments were the first clear signal from the Biden administration that it is on board with a bipartisan push to craft new versions of Authorization for Use of [Military Force \(AUMF\)](#) laws.

Critics say the authorizations have been stretched past the breaking point and abused by presidents of both parties at the expense of congressional oversight. The White House announced its intentions a week after Mr. [Biden](#) authorized, without congressional approval or notification, U.S. airstrikes in Syria against the Iran-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah, which the Pentagon said had been targeting American forces in neighboring Iraq.

The president did not cite any [AUMF](#) in his legal rationale. Lawmakers and analysts said the strikes, along with President Trump's decision to target and kill Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani last year, offered more proof that the executive branch had amassed near-limitless power to conduct military operations whenever and wherever they please. The key debate centers on the [AUMF](#) enacted in 2001 in the days after the 9/11 attacks, giving President Bush the legal grounds for the U.S. to invade Afghanistan and topple the Taliban.

It also authorized the president to take military action to defeat al Qaeda and others who plausibly contributed to or supported the devastating attacks. In the years since, Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump used the force authorization measure to justify years of military campaigns against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, hundreds of airstrikes on the al-Shabab terrorist network in Somalia, and a host of other actions in the Middle East and Africa. Presidents in both parties have argued that the [AUMF](#) gives them broad discretion to target terrorist groups around the globe.

Analysts say it's long past time to rewrite the rules.

"At some point, a country has to be precise about how it thinks about its military footprint. The idea that we've allowed the original [AUMF](#) to expand exponentially since the fall of 2001 is really unconscionable," said Karen J. Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University School of Law. "What we've learned is we actually need laws with some barriers and with limits. The reason we need to reconsider the [AUMF](#) comes down to lessons learned."

The White House seems to agree, at least rhetorically, with the need to establish new guidelines. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday that Mr. [Biden](#) is committed to working with the House and Senate to "ensure that the authorizations for the use of military force currently on the books are replaced with a narrow and specific framework that will ensure we can protect Americans from terrorist threats while ending the 'forever wars.'"

How far and how fast?

It's not entirely clear, however, exactly how far the partnership will go. Although the White House said it is open to reviewing all AUMFs on the books, current legislation on Capitol Hill does not address the 2001 law that Ms. Greenberg and other specialists say is the most problematic. A bipartisan bill rolled out last week by Sen. Tim Kaine, Virginia Democrat, and Sen. Todd Young, Indiana Republican, would repeal the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs on the books.

The 2002 [AUMF](#) authorized the U.S. military campaign against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and the 1991 law paved the way for the Persian Gulf War and technically remains in place 30 years later. "Last week's airstrikes in Syria show that the executive branch, regardless of party, will continue to stretch its war powers," Mr. Kaine said in a statement. "Congress has a responsibility to not only vote to authorize new military action, but to repeal old authorizations that are no longer necessary."

The 1991 and 2002 authorizations, Mr. Kaine said, "need to be taken off the books to prevent their future misuse. They serve no operational purpose, keep us on permanent war footing and undermine the sovereignty of Iraq, a close partner." The legislation has support across the ideological spectrum, including from liberal Sen. Richard J. Durbin, Illinois Democrat, and libertarian-leaning Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican.

Ms. Greenberg said the broader and ill-defined 2001 [AUMF](#) also must be a part of the discussion. "I think the 2001 [AUMF](#) has to be addressed, and the sooner the better," she said. Lawmakers and administration officials alike say the politics of the move can be tricky. Rescinding the force authorization measures is easy enough. Saying specifically, on the record, what should replace them is difficult for both the executive and legislative branches.

"We did try to do this a few years ago, and it's not easy to get to yes," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during his Senate confirmation hearing in January, when he recalled his own experiences as a top foreign policy aide in the Obama administration. "For some the porridge is too hot, for others the porridge is too cold," he said. "And can we get a consensus around what's just right? But I would be determined and committed to working on that."

Lawmakers say the recent airstrikes on Iran-backed militias should spur action, but Mr. [Biden](#) did not cite any [AUMF](#) in his legal justification for the order. Instead, he cited the right to self-defense after a missile attack on a base housing U.S. and allied troops and the belief in national security circles that the Iraqi militias would soon launch fresh attacks against U.S. interests. "The United States took this action pursuant to the United States' inherent right of self-defense as reflected in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter," the president said in a letter to congressional leaders.

Some legal experts say that explanation is important and suggests that the limits of the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs may have been reached. "Given that the Feb. 25 airstrikes targeted groups that were Iranian backed, rather than remnants or offshoots of the Islamic State, it would have been a legal stretch, and politically impossible, for [Biden](#) to rely on either the 2001 or 2002 [AUMF](#)," John B. Bellinger III, a partner at the Arnold & Porter law firm and former legal adviser to the State Department, wrote in a recent post for the website Lawfare.

USAF: All-female alert crews posted to dispatch on International Women's Day

ArkLaTex.com (KTAL/KMSS), 8 Mar 21 Nancy Cook

BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La. – As it has since 2016, Air Force Global Strike Command recognizes Women’s History Month by coordinating all-female alert crews to dispatch to the missile field, and all-female bomber crews at some of its bases.

This year, all three intercontinental ballistic missile wings are posting women to the field on alert for International Women’s Day today.

In addition, bases across the command will have all-female command post teams, maintenance teams, and helicopter and security forces crews as well.

It’s been 112 years when the Wright Brothers delivered the first airplane to the U.S. Signal Corps for \$30,000 kicking off the military’s love story in the sky, but for the first 67 years, only men flew the airplanes.

Then, in 1975, then Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. David C. Jones, announced a test program that would allow women to enter pilot training, and on Sept. 26, 1976, 10 woman alongside 35 male classmates began undergraduate pilot training (UPT) at Williams Air Force Base, Arizona, and the rest is history.

The women accumulated more than 210 hours in the T-37 Tweetie Bird and T-38 Talon, clearing the way for future generations of women to not only fly and command every aircraft the U.S. Air Force owns, but to also become test pilots and even astronauts

So, as of January 2020, those first 10 female pilots had paved the way for U.S. Air Force 806 women who serve as pilots, 347 navigators and 233 air battle managers, according to Air Force’s Personnel Center officials, and women made up 21% of the U.S. Air Force.

“It is important for us to recognize the important role women play in our military today, and International Women’s Day is the perfect opportunity to do that,” said Col. Anita Feugate Opperman, 341st Missile Wing Commander.

“When I came in 27 years ago, we would have barely been able to put together a couple of female crews, and now we are doing it across all three missile wings as well as some of our bomber wings as well,” Opperman said.

We want the American public to know that women directly support our mission every day.”

Women’s History Month commemorates the vital role of women in American history and its future.

From manning the home front during the world wars to propelling suffragettes to demand the right to vote, women’s contributions in society have been – and are – constantly evolving.

Posting female crews has become an annual tradition at AFGSC as a way to recognize the contributions women make to the command and its mission.

USAF Planning Boss Pushes for Flexible Budgets to Keep Up with New Tech

Air Force Magazine March 5, 2021 | By [Rachel S. Cohen](#)

As the Air Force pieces together its fiscal 2023 budget, due early next year, it must think not only about the immediate future, but also five years down the road.

That's a challenge right now, said Lt. Gen. S. Clinton Hinote, the Air Force's deputy chief of staff for strategy, integration, and requirements. "I should know what the requirements are in 2027. I don't," the planning boss said during a March 5 event hosted by the Hudson Institute. Broadly, the Air Force knows what it wants: modern, artificially intelligent networking capabilities to connect its people, planes, and data in new ways; faster, stealthier, or longer-range aircraft and weapons; a fresh slate of nuclear weapons; disposable drones. Hinote's comfortable with how the Air Force is investing in military-specific technology so far. But it gets murkier when he tries to envision how commercial-sector innovation could bleed into the military realm.

"Cloud computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning—these are all things where there's a great amount of progress being made in a very short amount of time," he said. "When I talk to leaders in the tech world, they look at me like I'm crazy when we start to say, 'What's going to happen in 2027?'"

It's tough to put a dollar figure on ideas that could change so drastically in the next half-decade. That lack of clarity can also complicate how the Air Force decides to allocate its money under the ["Accelerate Change or Lose"](#) modernization plan.

Later this year, the Air Force will have to pitch an updated funding plan for the Advanced Battle Management System, its piece of the Pentagon's joint all-domain-command-and-control puzzle. That blueprint will need to work with the ideas submitted by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Space Force so each service's systems can communicate in combat.

"We know the general requirements, and I think we know the general trajectory of the acquisition program, but what we don't know is what we're going to buy in 2027. If I was going to tell you, I can tell you, I'd be 100 percent wrong about that."

The price tag for the multibillion-dollar ABMS project is still evolving. The Air Force stresses that it's important to keep an open mind and avoid getting locked into certain technologies to remain flexible over time, while lawmakers have said they want to see more certainty in the program. Keeping Congress in the loop as the service's plans for ABMS and more evolve can help avoid programming whiplash, but Hinote said Capitol Hill is dubious about the Air Force's ability to deliver.

Last week, Hinote said, he presented the findings from a recent set of major wargames to a congressional defense committee's staff. "I was talking through some of the new capabilities we played, some of the way that it worked," he said. "I remember one of the staffers looking up and saying, 'You know, this all sounds great, but I have no confidence that we can field these capabilities in the timeline you're talking about.'"

Hinote slumped in his chair. “I said, ‘I share your skepticism on that, but China’s doing it. China’s doing it so rapidly that, literally, they’ll get two or three cycles in to our one if we don’t change something,’” he continued. “They began to realize, ‘Wow, we’re in this together.’”

That echoes [recent remarks](#) by Air Combat Command boss Gen. Mark D. Kelly urging the U.S. to move faster on finishing the futuristic fighter capability known as the [Next-Generation Air Dominance program](#), before China gets there first.

The solution to budgeting uncertainty in the military technology race may be to rethink the way the armed forces plan their finances, Hinote said. In recent years, the Pentagon has advocated for more flexibility in areas like software development, so it can move money around as new updates roll out. Hinote envisions an even more malleable approach.

He called for a more adaptable process that keeps up with the tech sector without skimping on civilian and legislative oversight.

“What we’re hoping to be able to do is harness that power through a flexible-enough budget process that allows us to do that iteration,” he said. “I’m really excited that—maybe—we’re seeing some movement in this direction, even from people who I think have been very skeptical about the idea of flexible budgeting.”

Top Pentagon strategist said Iran nukes ‘probable’

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2017 assessment made despite Obama nuclear deal
BY ROWAN SCARBOROUGH to THE WASHINGTON TIMES // 10 March 2021

The Pentagon’s top strategist believes it is “probable” that Iran’s anti-American Islamist regime will one day possess nuclear weapons, according to his talking points obtained by The Washington Times.

James H. Baker, who directs the Defense Department’s Office of Net Assessment (ONA), raised that inevitability during a private talk in July 2017 before a Japanese-U.S. audience. At the time, Iran was under the constraints of a U.S.-led, time limited agreement that prevented Tehran from seeking nuclear arms but the new Trump administration was weighing an end to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Program of Action (JCPOA) with Iran.

President Trump heaped scorn on JCPOA as a giveaway to a chief sponsor of terrorism and a killer of U.S. service members, and he pulled the U.S. out of the deal in May 2018. But even under JCPOA and its restraints on bomb-making uranium enrichment, Mr. Baker revealed that he thought Iran’s bellicose leaders will likely acquire nuclear weapons. Today, President Biden is trying to coax Iran into talks to adhere to JCPOA.

So far, the ruling mullahs have refused to negotiate, as their surrogate armies in Yemen and Iraq fire rockets at Saudi Arabian civilian targets and Iraqi bases housing Americans. As chief strategist for Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Mr. Baker’s secretive office is presumed producing options and assessments for the next U.S. moves. The two men worked together 10 years ago, when then-Army Lt. Gen. Austin ran the Joint Staff, which reports to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Mr. Baker, then an Air Force officer, was JCS strategic adviser.

Obama aides picked Mr. Baker to head the Office of Net Assessment in 2015. His 2017 talk was titled “Rise of Eurasian Revisionist Powers (Iran, Russia, China) and the Implications for the Japan-U.S. Alliance.” “The region dominates Iran in every dimension of power, even though lack of Sunni cooperation severely hampers effectiveness,” his talking points state. “Saudi Arabia possesses the will and wealth to contest Iranian expansionism.

Proxy wars and destabilizing tendencies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen are likely to preoccupy the entirety of Timur’s old possessions and prevent stability. Each of these trends is likely to continue. Iranian probable possession of a nuclear weapon carries serious and likely risks, but offers Iran only limited use in reshaping the power dynamics in the region,” he wrote. Timur was a Central Asian conquerer who established an empire in the region in the 1300s.

Air Force Lt. Col. Uriah L. Orland, a Pentagon spokesman, told The Washington Times that Mr. Baker’s “probable” assessment is not out of line. “The long-term comparative assessments of trends, key competitions, risks, opportunities, and future prospects of U.S. military capability provided by Mr. Baker and the Office of Net Assessment are an integral part of helping the department adapt to a changing and dynamic threat landscape,” Col. Orland said.

“One area of interest ONA is examining is a proliferated world, so these comments are not atypical. In fact, we expect ONA to present the Secretary with ideas, concepts and alternative futures that force the department to think differently and more strategically about the challenges we will face,” the colonel said. Mr. Baker also said: “Iran, if it chooses, may ‘safely’ possess a nuclear weapon in 10-15 years time.”

The Times asked a U.S. defense official about this sentence. The official said “safely” is not an assessment of Iran’s ability to secure weapons. It is instead, the official said, a reference to JCPOA’s expiration dates and the fact that Iran might own nukes and still avoid “significant penalty or repercussions ... resulting in a poor outcome for the world.” Mr. Baker in his talk delivered his views on “revisionist” states — China, Russia and Iran — so labeled because they want to upend the global status quo.

“Russia and Iran also do not possess the means, and are unlikely to ever possess the means to permanently change the borders of their neighbors, or to dominate them economically.” he said. Russian President Vladimir Putin was able to change one border with his invasion and seizure of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Iran respects little of its border with Iraq, moving units and equipment through the country to aid militias there and in Syria.

Mr. Baker’s talk also argued that China, Russia and Iran “lack the ability to substantially revise the present international order through violent or coercive means.” On China, Mr. Baker said the communist regime has clearly abandoned an old strategic policy of “hide and bide” — that is, to mask a burgeoning national military while waiting for the right time to unleash an aggressive foreign policy.

“The U.S. is presently not well poised to capitalize on this trend, nor is it clear that U.S. elites across the political spectrum understand the danger that China poses as a competitor,” Mr. Baker said. “Comparative military advantage remains with the United States (and its allies), but is being systematically undermined by increased Chinese investment, focus, training and basing,” Mr. Baker wrote.

Still, he said, China depends on globalization for prosperity, which “will inhibit more radical tendencies.” By 2020, the Trump administration had come to view China as America’s chief adversary. Just this month, China launched another broad computer hacking attack, this time against Microsoft mail servers. The hack was an effort to try to steal personal information and other data from millions of Americans. The FBI estimates that China has stolen private identity data on half the U.S. population.

News & Opinion

America's Dangerous Nuclear Weapons Game

Critics of the U.S. modernization effort—begun in earnest under the Obama administration and robustly continued under the Trump administration—are trying to unilaterally eliminate whole sections of U.S. nuclear forces

National Interest Online, 6 Mar 21 Peter Huessy

Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. John Hyten is urging the United States to expand how it looks at strategic threats to the United States especially cyber, biological, as well as the traditional concern with nuclear weapons. To do so, he underscores the need to fully modernize the U.S. nuclear enterprise including the command-and-control system. Otherwise, as U.S. Strategic Command warns, the entire nuclear force will rust to obsolescence and, says Hyten, “without the backstop of the nuclear Triad, it basically is all impossible” to deter an adversary with nuclear capability.

Critics of the U.S. modernization effort—begun in earnest under the Obama administration and robustly continued under the Trump administration—are trying to unilaterally eliminate whole sections of U.S. nuclear forces, including all four hundred Minuteman missiles, up to half of our submarines, and the cruise missile for America's strategic bombers. If accepted, then these cuts would eliminate fully five hundred of the seven hundred strategic nuclear delivery vehicles the United States is allowed under the New START arms agreement, which was just extended for another five years.

Even more worrisome however is that while 92 percent of all U.S. nuclear forces are still limited by the START Treaty, only 45 percent of Russia's systems are, while China, now doubling its nuclear forces over the next five years, is under zero treaty restraints. Given such a hugely imbalanced strategic environment, the current modernization effort simply keeps the United States in the nuclear business and is the minimum necessary to keep deterrence credible.

The proponents of these big cuts, such as Global Zero and Ploughshares, with multi-million-dollar budgets, think somehow Russia, with 92 percent of its nuclear forces fully modernized, will generously give up large numbers of its nuclear forces in return for the United States not even having any forces on the table with which to trade.

For example, Global Zero argues that if the United States actually commits to building a new land-based missile, it will not be available to leverage further Russian reductions under a new arms treaty. However, Global Zero argues phasing out U.S. ICBMs, will “make it easier” for the Russians to follow suit. With both the United States and Russia coming down, then perhaps China will buildup to the same level.

In the 1980s the nuclear freeze advocates argued the United States could not get rid of the massive Soviet SS-20 missile deployments in Europe even if the United States deployed counter missiles such as the Pershing and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles.

Reagan disagreed with the disarmament folks and the nuclear freeze advocates, built, and deployed the U.S. Pershings and GLCMs and in a stunning development, leveraged the Soviets into agreeing to “Zero-Zero,” the 1987 INF treaty that got rid of all such Soviet and U.S. medium-range missiles. So, too, did Reagan’s call for strategic missile defense and modernization of all our strategic systems lead to the series of START treaties that reduced Soviet and then Russian strategic nuclear warheads by at least 80 percent.

We currently rely on the very nuclear deterrent the Reagan administration put into place. The 2010 New START Treaty under which the United States and Russia operate to at least 2026, is fully consistent with the entire nuclear modernization plans that Congress has approved for the past twelve years. In short, there is no choice between maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent and arms control—the two can go together if arms deals are verifiable and nuclear modernization is fully funded and secured. Such a strategy in dealing with our enemies is called “peace through strength.” It works, as opposed to the new idea from the children of the Nuclear Freeze which could be best expressed as “peace through disarmament.”

--Peter Huessy, President of GeoStrategic Analysis, Potomac, Maryland

Research, procurement could get squeezed in Biden budget

Defense News Online, 10 Mar 21

Aaron Mehta and Joe Gould

WASHINGTON -- Defense spending experts are suggesting procurement and research spending could take a hit in what is expected to be an effectively flat defense budget for fiscal year 2022.

Reports this week peg the Pentagon’s share of the overall defense budget in the range of \$704-\$708 billion. That’s in line with the \$705 billion the department received as part of the fiscal year 2021, but department officials have claimed anything less than 3-5 percent growth annually amounts to a cut due to inflation.

“If this is the number that’s included in the budget request, we would view it as positive because the Biden Admin would be signaling to Congress that it doesn’t want cuts in defense,” analyst Roman Schweizer of Cowen wrote in a letter to subscribers.

“That would displease liberal progressives (who want big cuts) and defense hawks (who want +3-5% annual growth). In Washington, when both sides are angry, that’s called a compromise. There will be a lot of griping along the way, but it’s the kind of outcome that probably makes sense.”

Calculations from Byron Callan, an analyst with Capitol Alpha Partners, show that when required spending is subtracted from that top line figure, it leaves about \$227 billion in the procurement and research, development, testing and evaluation (RDT&E) funds.

While that is certainly a big pile of money for the department , in context, it’s actually a cut. The FY21 NDAA authorized \$247 billion for that pot of money, and the FY22 plan laid out by the lame duck Trump administration called for \$243 billion. And because certain procurement programs are growing in size, that means RDT&E funds may end up the loser, Callan predicted in a letter to subscribers.

“DoD plans have shown growth in Procurement as major weapons systems, such as Columbia-class submarines, B-21 bombers, [the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent], Army modernization programs, and stepped-up F-35 buys to occur over the balance of the decade,” he wrote. “RDT&E funding declines as these transitions occur.”

It is traditional for a new administration to delay its budget rollout by several months while it takes a hard look at choices that were set up by the previous administration. The Biden team is no different, with the budget expected to roll out in early May. Kathleen Hicks, the deputy secretary of defense, has said she is focusing her attention on reviewing a few key areas, including shipbuilding and nuclear modernization.

There are some signs of where the Biden administration might look to find savings, thanks to an “interim” national security guidance document released last week.

That document called for “clear priorities” within the defense budget, stating “we will assess the appropriate structure, capabilities, and sizing of the force, and, working with the Congress, shift our emphasis from unneeded legacy platforms and weapons systems to free up resources for investments in the cutting-edge technologies and capabilities that will determine our military and national security advantage in the future. We will streamline the processes for developing, testing, acquiring, deploying, and securing these technologies.”

Any defense cuts will be welcomed by progressive advocates and members of Congress, who argue that the defense budget needs to come down in favor of COVID-19 relief and other domestic priorities.

A report Wednesday from the Center for American Progress, a liberal-leaning think tank, called for dropping the overall national security topline from a projected \$755 to around \$700, which would include pausing production on the F-35 joint strike fighter in favor of buying more B-21 bombers, cutting funds for new aircraft carriers, and reducing end strength.

Congressional Republicans, meanwhile, have already started pushback on any budget cuts, with key lawmakers warning Biden in a recent letter to not just reject cuts, but push for the annual 3-5 percent growth Pentagon leaders have said they need.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Wash., this week brushed aside those demands.

“How you spend the money is what matters,” he said at a Brookings event March 8. “Well, it’s got to be 3 to 5 percent — on what?”

In broader remarks emphasizing more modest, cost-effective goals for the military, Smith said arguments over the top line are stealing oxygen from more important debates over how to size the military for the country’s security goals and procurement reforms that will stretch taxpayer dollars.

“We have wasted a spectacular amount of money on weapons systems that either haven’t worked at all or who have not lived up to their promise. Our acquisition and procurement process over the last 20 years can only be described as a complete disaster,” Smith said. “We can complain about the money that we wasted, but that’s gone. What we have to make sure of is that we don’t waste any more.”

On China, Smith worried that analysis showing the U.S. would struggle in a war is feeding an impossible, undesirable goal, to dominate China. Washington instead ought to rely on diplomacy and allies more and the military less, he said.

“The wrong message to get out of that is ‘oh my gosh, we have got to build a military that enables us to dominate China,’” Smith said. “What we need is we need an entire approach that deters China, and others, from doing the things we don’t want them to do.

Why the Air Force Worries About Long-Term Commitment Missile Plans

Several senior Air Force leaders have expressed growing concern about a potential “missile gap” occurring prior to the arrival of larger numbers of Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent.

National Interest Online, 7 Mar 21 Kris Osborn

The Air Force is planning to operate its newly emerging Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) for decades well into the 2080s, with the understanding that technological advances and threat circumstances are likely to evolve substantially in coming years, requiring needed adaptations to the weapons system.

A key area of emphasis for these kinds of technical circumstances, over the course of many years now, is for the military services to upgrade hardware with advanced new software and computer algorithms designed to respond to and incorporate new threats as they emerge.

For instance, adversaries are expected to mature newer kinds of ICBM countermeasures including sensors able to better discern and intercept ICBMs in space. While Air Force leaders make a point not to discuss specific technical elements of GBSD development, for obvious security reasons, senior leaders do talk generally about how weapons developers have successfully employed digital engineering techniques to expedite and refine the development of the weapon.

The GBSD weapons system is, according to Air Force Global Strike Command leader Gen. Timothy Ray, “purpose-built” to “be in the ground for a long time,” referring to various engineering methods designed to enable the weapons to accommodate new technologies over time.

Software upgrades, for instance, can add new guidance systems, reliability technologies and targeting sensors to the weapon as new innovations emerge, an important factor given that the new ICBM is slated to serve for decades and beyond. The possibility for ongoing modernization was intentionally built into early designs of the weapon, due to the use of digital engineering techniques able to replicate technological detail and help establish common computer standards enabling continued upgrades. It would make sense that the weapons were built with a specific mind to ongoing modernization, given that the U.S. Air Force has a long history of upgrading and maintaining ICBMs.

The existing 1960s-era Minuteman III, for example, is already operating decades beyond its intended lifespan. This circumstance, wherein the weapon has been lingering upon the boundaries of obsolescence for many years, has added to the urgency with which the United States is moving to engineer and deploy its new GBSD.

As part of the transition from Minuteman III to GBSD, the Air Force has maintained a high op tempo regarding upgrades to the older platform to make it viable, relevant and functional until the new ICBM arrives at the end of the decade. This has involved several recent tests and shoot-offs of the weapon. For example, upgrades have included reliability improvements as well as ongoing maintenance. Over the years, despite the pressing need for a new generation of ICBMs, the Air Force has pushed to incorporate a large number of upgrades to the Minuteman III, given its age. During one test last Fall, Air Force Global Strike Command fired off a Minuteman III to assess and verify reentry vehicle performance and gather data. Last October, a Minuteman III reentry vehicle traveled more than forty-two hundred miles to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, according to an Air Force Global Strike statement. What this means is, in many key respects, the Air Force is aggressively pursuing a two-fold trajectory, to include both working to ensure the Minuteman III still functions as a workable deterrent while also fast-tracking and preparing GBSD given the urgency of the need for a new platform.

Several senior Air Force leaders have expressed growing concern about a potential “missile gap” occurring prior to the arrival of larger numbers of GBSD, given the concerning obsolescence of the Minuteman III. This is perhaps why the Air Force is making sure to test and preserve the Minuteman III for at least a few more years to ensure a safe transition to GBSD and make sure potential adversaries understand that the United States has an effective ICBM.

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Hits and Misses In Biden’s Interim National Security Guidance

“Seemingly gone is the naivety of the Obama era” about Russia and China, writes the Heritage Foundation’s Tom Spoehr in this op-ed. But the retired three-star general still sees some worrying woolly-mindedness

BreakingDefense.com, 5 Mar 21 Thomas Spoehr

President Joe Biden has released his interim National Security Strategic Guidance to “convey my vision for how America will engage with the world.” Unfortunately, much of the document’s 24 pages are dedicated to topics such as voting rights, clean energy, climate change, and racial justice that are only tangentially related to national security. Still, it covers enough defense and foreign policy issues to give a good idea of where the new administration intends to head.

First things first: the administration deserves kudos for coming out so early with guidance. With only a skeleton crew of confirmed political appointees the administration has, in just 45 days, produced guidance designed to shape the President’s first budget requests and policy decisions until more formal reviews can be completed.

Second, and most encouraging: Seemingly gone is the naivety of the Obama era when the administration hoped for “deeper and more effective partnerships” with countries like China and Russia. Biden’s interim guidance rightly calls out China for becoming more “assertive” and identifies

Beijing and Moscow as having “invested heavily in efforts meant to check U.S. strengths and prevent us from defending our interests and allies around the world.”

Areas of continuity with the Trump administration include identification of China, Russia, North Korea and Iran as potential adversaries. Alliances and allies enjoy great importance in the Biden guidance, with its call to “reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world.” Unfortunately, accompanying that sound guidance are some lingering traces of campaign rhetoric, e.g., “America cannot afford to be absent any longer on the world stage. And under the Biden-Harris Administration, America is back. Diplomacy is back. Alliances are back.” Such political sloganeering seems jarringly out of place in a strategy document.

The interim guidance identifies three national priorities: protect the security of the American people; expand economic prosperity and opportunity; and realize and defend the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life. The first two—security and prosperity—nest nearly exactly with the first two pillars of President Trump’s 2017 National Security Strategy and deserve top billing in any American national security document. Biden’s third priority, defending democratic values, was mentioned in the Trump strategy in a sub-section under “Advance American Influence.” But Biden affords democratic values higher prominence.

The third pillar in Trump’s National Security Strategy was “Preserve Peace Through Strength,” acknowledging how a strong military “ensures our diplomats are able to operate from a position of strength.” Biden’s guidance takes great pain to state the administration will make “responsible use of our military, while elevating diplomacy as our tool of first resort [emphasis added].” This, too, comes across as virtue-signaling, as one would be hard-pressed to think of a time when America used its military as a “tool of first resort.”

In the relatively short section discussing national defense as traditionally defined, the interim guidance contains some puzzling thoughts regarding nuclear weapons. For example, it states the administration will “head off costly arms races.” Absent is acknowledgment that our two primary nuclear competitors, Russia and China, have already embarked upon—and largely completed—modernizations of their nuclear arsenals, while the U.S. continues to rely on antiquated platforms and aged weapons. Indeed it isn’t out of a desire for an “arms race” that the U.S. is belatedly pursuing nuclear modernization; it is now a matter of preserving deterrence itself, and potentially of national survival.

The nuclear section goes on to state the U.S. will “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.” It seems rather at odds with statements made by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who testified at his confirmation hearing that nuclear deterrence is “DOD’s highest priority mission.” How can the administration reduce the role of nuclear weapons if it is the DOD’s highest priority mission? Perhaps this refers to backing off some of the new “low-yield” weapons that Trump proposed and Democrats consistently rejected as destabilizing, but with so few details we can only speculate.

Further guidance on the military reassuringly identifies investment in people as the highest priority, and that the administration will sustain readiness and “ensure the U.S. Armed Forces remain the best trained and equipped force in the world.”

Unsurprisingly, the guidance also takes up the increasingly common call for the military to “shift our emphasis from unneeded legacy platforms and weapon systems to free up resources for investments in the cutting-edge technologies....” Missing is any acknowledgement that the legacy platforms proposed for divestment would be essential to defend America from adversaries today, should the need arise. Divesting arms in hand on the mere promise of a future technology is foolhardy.

Also carried forward from the Presidential campaign is the mantra that the United States “should not, and will not, engage in ‘forever wars’ that have cost thousands of lives and trillions of dollars.” The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is performing several functions, such as advising Afghan forces and conducting counter-terrorism operations, but fighting a “forever war” is not one of them. The term “forever war” should be retired, and the decision to retain a U.S. presence in Afghanistan should be considered on the merits, not a bumper sticker slogan.

National security guidance, especially early in an administration, provides useful insight into a president’s vision and views. That it came out so quickly speaks well of the processes in the nascent Biden National Security Council.

The administration will have the opportunity to refine it when they publish the required full National Security Strategy within a year of the inauguration. Let’s hope that the full strategy will focus more on nuts-and-bolts national security and foreign policy goals and less on other topics, which, fresh off an election, clearly weigh on their minds now.

--Thomas Spoehr, a retired Army lieutenant general, directs the Heritage Foundation’s Center for National Defense. He’s a member of the Breaking Defense Board of Contributors

Of Bitcoins, Tulips, and Electric Grid Insecurity

<https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/541385-bitcoins-tulipmania-and-electric-grid-insecurity>

BY Dr. PETER VINCENT PRY, CONTRIBUTOR to THE HILL // 03/05/21 02:30 PM EST _

Are bitcoins, an electronic cyber currency skyrocketing in value — recently trading [above \\$50,000](#) for a single bitcoin — the next big advancement toward a high-tech future? Or are bitcoins another big vulnerability for electronic civilization, already facing existential threats from nature and man?

In 2013, four years after the invention of the bitcoin, the former president of the Dutch Central Bank, Nout Wellink, compared the bitcoin to the ruinous “[tulipmania](#)” afflicting Holland 400 years ago. Wellink [said bitcoins](#) are “worse than the tulipmania. ... At least then you got a tulip; now you get nothing.” During the Dutch Golden Age (1600-1720), Holland was a world empire with a mighty navy, the highest per capita income in the world, and the most advanced system of banking, finance and market trading.

Tulips, newly introduced to Europe from the Ottoman Empire, became enormously popular, including with Dutch investors. By 1637, paper trading for scarce tulips drove up the price for a single tulip bulb to 50,000 golden guilders, more than a skilled craftsman could earn in 10 years. In February 1637, at an auction in Haarlem, when no one was willing to pay real golden guilders for real tulip bulbs, the bottom fell out of the market and paper stocks on tulip bulbs became worthless.

Modern historians quibble over whether the Dutch tulipmania is history's first example of a burst economic bubble, and over the economic consequences to Holland. But the bottom line is: A single tulip bulb having little intrinsic value, once theoretically worth many times its weight in gold, virtually overnight declined in value by 99.999 percent. Are bitcoins the tulip bulbs of the 21st century? Perhaps not.

Japan's [Satoshi Nakamoto](#) invented bitcoin as the first digital currency, designed deliberately to be scarce so its value could increase. An estimated 18.6 million bitcoins are circulating out of a maximum supply of 21 million, a number that allegedly cannot grow because this limit is "hard-coded" into bitcoins, to create artificial scarcity. Arguably, bitcoins, unlike tulip bulbs, have significant intrinsic value. As a cryptocurrency, bitcoins can hide wealth and financial transactions from increasingly snoopier and greedier governments.

Moreover, as government deficit spending skyrockets across the world — recklessly printing dollars, pounds and yuan to flood the global money supply — the value of traditional money is threatened by looming hyper-inflation, as is the profitability of investment. Bitcoins have become for the super-rich another hedge against a dystopian future, like gold. However, like gold, even bitcoins can be stolen. Hackers reportedly have stolen billions of dollars in bitcoins in recent years.

In February, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) National Security Division [charged](#) North Korea's cyber warfare agency, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, with plotting to steal over \$1 billion in cash and bitcoins. North Korean hackers Jon Chang Hyok, Kim Il and Park Jin Hyok are accused by the DOJ of stealing "tens of millions of dollars' worth of cryptocurrency," and DOJ calls them "the world's leading bank robbers."

According to the United Nations, North Korean cryptocurrency thefts are [helping to fund](#) Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile programs. Bitcoins may not be a good investment, or a good hedge against a dystopian future, when national electric grids and electronic civilization may be on the brink of a new Dark Age. The Biden administration claims the recent ice storm that crippled the Texas electric grid — causing statewide rolling blackouts, depriving water and heat to millions and inflicting property damage and deaths — is a harbinger of catastrophic climate change.

If true, so-called "green energy" windmills and solar panels, alleged solutions to climate change, proved most vulnerable to the challenge of an unusual, but not unprecedented, Texas ice storm. Nuclear and coal-fired power plants were least affected. Climate change is not the cause of what may be remembered as the "great Texas blackout of 2021," which really was the result of politics.

In 2017, the congressionally mandated Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Commission warned: "Current institutional arrangements for protecting and improving the reliability of the electric grids ... has proven to be ineffectual" because the "power industry is largely self-regulated." For example, Texas and California electric utilities [failed to take commonsense precautions](#) to protect themselves from severe weather. Federal and state governments are letting electric utilities cause deadly California wildfires and an ice age in Texas, essentially getting away with murder.

Government policy that trusts electric utilities to protect the nation from existential threats such as EMP and cyber warfare ultimately could prove to be genocidal, killing millions. Maybe the super-rich do not care about the lives of 330 million Americans. But if financial wizards do not want their bitcoins to become as worthless as tulip bulbs, they should use their great political influence to advance policies that protect the national electric grid. As the EMP Commission warned: "

An EMP attack that disrupts the financial services industry would, in effect, stop the operation of the U.S. economy. ... The alternative to a disrupted electronic economy may not be reversion to a 19th century cash economy, but reversion to an earlier economy based on barter.” Will the recent [SolarWinds cyber attack](#) and Texas ice storm result in real protection for electric grids, or just more studies? Russia, China, North Korea and Iran are watching.

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The Mullahs' Nuclear Weapons Game

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/17129/iran-nuclear-weapon-game>

By: [Majid Rafizadeh](#) to the Gatestone Institute // March 9, 2021 at 4:00 am

- *If the Western leaders know anything about the theocratic establishment of Iran, they would be able to see that the regime has used the Shia religion of Islam to justify repressing its population, killing, executing and sponsoring terror groups across the region. So, what would stop the mullahs from issuing a fake religious ruling if it is going to advance their nuclear program by concealing the fact that they want both nuclear weapons and ensuring the survival of their theocracy?*
- *"The government is empowered unilaterally to revoke any Shahri'ah agreements which it has concluded with the people when these agreements are contrary to the interest of the country or Islam." — Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, quoted in "Iran: The Formation of Trans Identity and Possible Paths Toward the Acceptance of Greater Gender 'Deviance'", Berkeley Journal of Middle Eastern & Islamic Law [Vol. 9:1].*
- *The important issue for the ruling mullahs of Iran is the survival of their dictatorship. Anything, including religion, can be used to ensure that.*
- *The Iranian regime has acknowledged for the first time that it might [pursue](#) openly obtaining nuclear weapons.*

The Iranian Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi, a close advisor to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, [pointed](#) out recently that Iran might in fact very likely pursue that path:

"I must make it clear that if a cat is pushed into the corner, it may behave differently from a cat that walks freely. If Iran is pushed into a corner, it will not be its fault [i.e. the pursuit of nuclear weapons] but rather the fault of those pushing it."

This statement is critical. The Iranian leaders have long argued that there is no way they can [seek](#) nuclear weapons due to a religious fatwa (legal opinion under Islamic law) issued by Khamenei. Khamenei did indeed previously issue a fatwa forbidding the pursuit of nuclear weapons. He has been previously [quoted](#) as saying: "We consider the use of such weapons as haraam [religiously forbidden under Islamic law] and believe that it is everyone's duty to make efforts to secure humanity against this great disaster".

Khamenei also stated that the production or use of nuclear weapons are [governed](#) by Islamic laws which supposedly ban them. On his official website, he [adds](#) that "Both sharia [Islamic laws] and aqli [related to logic and reason] fatwas dictate that we do not pursue them." This fatwa of banning nuclear weapons has been the Iranian regime's ready [answer](#) on international stage to prove that their nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes.

When Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif met with US Senator Rand Paul, in 2019, for example, Zarif [told](#) Paul about Iran's unwillingness to seek nuclear weapons precisely because of Khamenei's fatwa. Other world leaders have also [used](#) the Supreme Leader's fatwa to buttress Iran's claim that it does not want a nuclear bomb. President Barack Obama, for instance, in an attempt to reach a nuclear deal and appease the mullahs, [declared](#) in his address to the U.N. General Assembly in 2013 that "The Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons."

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry supported the mullahs' line by [calling](#) the fatwa "the Highest form of Islamic prohibition": "The supreme leader... says he has issued a fatwa, the highest form of Islamic prohibition against some activity, and he said that is to prohibit Iran from ever seeking a nuclear weapon." Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also [lent](#) her support by further pushing the narrative of the Iranian regime. [According](#) to her:

"The other interesting development which you may have followed was the repetition by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei that they would – that he had issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons, against weapons of mass destruction. Prime Minister Erdogan and I discussed this at some length, and I've discussed with a number of experts and religious scholars." If the Western leaders know anything about the theocratic establishment of Iran, they would be able to see that the regime has [used](#) the religion of Shia Islam to justify repressing Iran's population, killing, executing and sponsoring terror groups across the region.

So, what would stop the mullahs from issuing a fake religious ruling if it is going to advance their nuclear program by concealing the fact that they want both nuclear weapons and ensuring the survival of their theocracy? Secondly, if the Western leaders know anything about Shia Islam, they would realize that a fatwa can be [changed](#) at any time. Third, if the Western leaders know anything about the Islamic Republic of Iran, they would realize that the Iranian leaders have drafted the Islamic Republic's constitution in a way that allows the government to pass laws [prioritizing](#) those codified laws over religious rulings and fatwas.

[According](#) to Article 167, "the judge is bound to endeavor to judge each case on the basis of the codified law [passed by the parliament and endorsed by the Guardian Council]." Then it [adds](#), "In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgment on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwa." Simply put, the Iranian parliament can immediately pass a law allowing the government to pursue nuclear weapons. According to the Iranian constitution, such a codified law would [override](#) any fatwa that banned a nuclear program.

Even the Islamic Republic's founding father, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, mentioned on several occasions that Islamic laws could, if necessary, be [ignored](#). He [pointed out](#), for example, that "the government is empowered unilaterally to revoke any Shahri'ah agreements which it has concluded with the people when these agreements are contrary to the interest of the country or Islam."

On another occasion, Khomeini [stated](#) that "the government can prevent the hajj, which is one of the important divine obligations, on a temporary basis, in cases when it is contrary to the interests of the Islamic country." The important issue for the ruling mullahs of Iran is the survival of their dictatorship. Anything, including religion, can be used to ensure that.

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How to Conduct the Biden Administration's Korea Policy Review

https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/how-conduct-biden-administrations-korea-policy-review-179595?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%20DN%203.10.21&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

The way ahead is deterrence, defense, denuclearization, human rights upfront, and solving the "Korea question" (e.g., unification) with the understanding that denuclearization of the north will only happen when we resolve that "Korea question."

By: David Maxwell for The National Interest // 10 March 2021

The Biden administration has embarked on a comprehensive Korean policy review. This review is critical to charting the course for the next four years for dealing with the North Korean situation in addition to managing the ROK/U.S. alliance. The Biden administration must develop a policy that takes into account the nature and objectives of the Kim family with the understanding that Kim Jong-un is conducting a political warfare strategy to achieve his objectives while the Moon administration is focused on peace at all costs.

Although an anecdote commonly attributed to Einstein says he would spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and use the last five minutes to develop the solution may seem quaint, the concept is sound. You would think that after seven decades we would have a thorough understanding of the nature and objectives of the Kim family regime. Based on many of the writings and strategic assumptions made by leaders in both the ROK and the U.S., it appears we could make better use of Einstein's 55 minutes.

Being that North Korea is one of the hardest targets in the world, it is necessary to spend the time and resources to conduct thorough analysis in a rigorous process to appreciate the context and understand the problem to develop feasible, acceptable, and suitable policies and strategy. Even before administration officials have completed this comprehensive policy review, the press and pundits have jumped to speculation about Biden's new approach and are already making recommendations that support their own views of North Korea from lifting sanctions to arms control negotiations to an end of war declaration and a peace regime.

However, before policymakers and strategists can determine a new strategic approach and policy, they must re-assess the context and better understand of the North Korea problem. There are two critical things the Biden administration must get right. First is the fundamental strategic assumptions upon which to base policy. The second, is to ensure sufficient alignment of those assumptions with the government of the Republic of Korea so that alliance policies and strategy and be effectively coordinated. The ROK/U.S. alliance is critical to the security in the region and the protection of U.S. strategic interests.

The Moon administration has been pursuing a peace and prosperity policy based on a "Korean Peninsula of co-prosperity" and co-existence with the North. President Moon's assumption is that Kim Jong-un shares this vision but Kim Jong-un has refused Moon's outreach and attempts at engagement since their meeting in Pyongyang in September 2018.

First Hints of a Biden Korea Policy

Although a policy review is necessary, President Biden has already indicated his policy approach in an essay in Yonhap News on October 30, 2020, which in effect issued his commander-in-chief's guidance. It was the only essay he published in the foreign press during the election cycle which is an indication of the importance he places on the ROK/U.S. Alliance and the North Korean problem. This excerpt encapsulates what is likely to be the direction of the new policy:

"Words matter -- and a president's words matter even more. As President, I'll stand with South Korea, strengthening our alliance to safeguard peace in East Asia and beyond, rather than extorting Seoul with reckless threats to remove our troops. I'll engage in principled diplomacy and keep pressing toward a denuclearized North Korea and a unified Korean Peninsula, while working to reunite Korean Americans separated from loved ones in North Korea for decades."

It outlines the elements of a potential new policy: A strong ROK/US Alliance based on shared interests, values, and strategy that can deter war; principled diplomacy as the main effort, with an objective of denuclearization of the north, a focus on human rights (the separated Korean Americans is a recognition of one of the many human rights challenges with North Korea), and the only political outcome that can solve the entire Korean problem: unification.

The policy review must begin with understanding what we want or need on the Korean peninsula. It must answer the question of what is the acceptable durable political arrangement that will serve, protect, and advance US and ROK/US alliance interests on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia? However, such an objective must not be “denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula” as was stated in Panmunjom and Singapore.

This already is a problematic statement on numerous fronts because the regime’s definition of denuclearization includes the removal of U.S. troops from South Korea because their presence provides justification for and access to U.S. nuclear weapons. Fortunately, President Biden has already corrected this strategic error by stating the focus will be on the denuclearization of North Korea. Again, he has already described the political arrangement required for success. Policymakers and strategists must build on his guidance. Until denuclearization of the North occurs it is imperative to maintain the most robust alliance deterrence posture.

Assumptions

Assumptions are pivotal. More than any other consideration the policymakers and strategists must get the assumptions right. Diverging perceptions between leaders and policymakers in Washington and Seoul have created tensions in the alliance that need to be addressed.

- The Korea watcher community is largely divided between two assumptions:
- Advocates for engagement with the North assume that concessions and security guarantees can co-opt Kim.
- Advocates of a harder line assume external pressure will coerce him.
- There is little evidence to suggest with confidence that either of these assumptions are correct or that a policy informed by them will succeed.
- There is a third assumption that a proper balance between engagement and pressure can achieve the desired strategic effects to serve our interests. However, even this alone, without a comprehensive strategy, will be insufficient.

There is also the Moon administration's assumption that Kim Jong-un shares a vision of “inter-Korean détente” and will seek agreement for peaceful co-existence. The Moon administration in turn relies on this assumption to support his policy focused on inter-Korean peace and reconciliation or what might be called the “peace at any cost” hope. This assumption is contrary to what we know about the nature of the Kim family regime and its objectives.

The Moon and Biden administrations must answer two essential questions and analyze, discuss, and debate the answers to help get the assumptions about the objectives and nature of the Kim family right. Do we believe that Kim Jong-un has abandoned the seven decades-old strategies of subversion, coercion-extortion (blackmail diplomacy), and use of force to achieve unification dominated by the Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State in order to ensure the survival of the mafia-like crime family cult known as Kim family regime?

In support of that strategy do we believe that Kim Jong-un has abandoned the objective to split the ROK/US Alliance and get US forces off the peninsula? Has KJU given up his divide to conquer strategy - divide the alliance to conquer the ROK? These two questions are derived from the North Korea Constitution and the recently revised Charter of the Korean Workers Party that defines the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a revolutionary and nuclear state that must achieve unification to rid the peninsula of foreign influence and to complete the revolution begun by Kim Il-sung.

Current regime propaganda continues to reinforce these ideas. ROK and U.S. administration policymakers must determine if there is any deviation from these foundational concepts. No effective policy can be developed without taking them into account. There is also a third question that requires an answer to better understand the nature of the Kim family regime: Who does Kim fear more: The US or the Korean people in the north? (Note it is the Korean people armed with information and knowledge of life in South Korea). This question is important for determining the focus on an effective information and influence campaign and for developing internal pressure on the regime.

Analysis of these questions reveals that Kim Jong-un is conducting a North Korean unique form of political warfare to "control its people and influence its neighbors." This is the main effort of the regime's long-term strategy to ultimately dominate the Korean peninsula to ensure the survival of the Kim family regime. The critical point on assumptions is that the Moon and Biden administration must sufficiently align their assumptions.

The Moon administration's naïve assumption about the nature of the regime and its objectives will be the biggest point of friction within the ROK/US alliance in the coming year. It will take leadership at the highest levels to resolve these differences. Therefore, policymakers should consider two assumptions as outlined in a 2019 FDD monograph: Maximum Pressure 2.0: A Plan B for North Korea. The first recognizes that Kim will give up his nuclear program only when he fears the internal pressure from the elite and the people and he concludes that the cost to him and his regime is too great because his survival is threatened from within.

The second assumption is that Kim will continue to employ a political warfare strategy based on the subversion of South Korea; coercion and extortion of the international community to gain political and economic concessions; and ultimately the use of force to unify the peninsula under the domination of the North, thereby ensuring the survival of the Kim family regime. Reaching a consensus on these key assumptions will provide the necessary foundation to better shape new policies and a strategy.

The answers to these questions and establishing the correct assumptions should guide policymakers and strategists to an approach to solve the "Korea question" (derived from paragraph 60 of the 1953 Korean War Armistice Agreement). These answers will lead to the only acceptable durable political arrangement to serve, protect, and advance alliance interests: A secure, stable, economically vibrant, non-nuclear Korean peninsula unified under a liberal constitutional form of government with respect for individual liberty, the rule of law, and human rights, determined by the Korean people. In short, a United Republic of Korea (UROK), which is the end outlined in President Biden's October 30 essay.

The Current Situation in North Korea and nature of the Kim family regime

The common element linking the three key questions mentioned above is evaluating the true nature of the Kim family regime. Kim Jong-un in fact seemingly has provided the answer to this fundamental query through his latest actions. It is suffering under the "triple whammy" of natural

disasters, COVID response, and international sanctions. While Kim has made an unprecedented admission of failure of the north's economic plans he really blames the "triple whammy" and does not accept responsibility and admit that it is his policy responses to the conditions and events that are causing the suffering of the Korean people living in the North.

Kim's shows of military strength and advanced weapons systems during the military parades of October 10th and January 14th likely provided important messages both to reinforce regime legitimacy domestically and of deterrence to the ROK/U.S. alliance. However, what Kim actually revealed is that he continues to prioritize his nuclear and missile programs along with developing advanced conventional warfighting capabilities at the expense of the Korean people.

While some international organizations blame sanctions for the suffering of the Korean people, they fail to acknowledge that it is Kim Jong-un's policy decisions that are the cause. Kim Jong-un has successfully evaded sanctions to maintain sources of financial revenue through global illicit activities, yet he chooses to fund nuclear weapons and his military while North Korea's economy suffers. Even the COVID 19 fight has provided Kim with the opportunity to reduce the free market activity, electronic communications, use of foreign currency, and mobility that has allowed the population to develop a level of resiliency that has served well since the "arduous march" of the great famine of 1994-1996 when as many as 2 million people may have perished. Due to COVID-19, it is possible that the conditions could deteriorate to a point more dangerous than in the 1990s.

In short, the priority is the survival of the Kim family regime through military power at the expense of the welfare of the Korean people. The issue is whether this priority can stand up to the internal pressure it has generated. Most importantly, it is this internal pressure and the regime problems that are causing him to implement even more draconian population and resources and control measures to further systemically oppress the Korean people in the north in order to protect the regime.

Until the North emerges from the current dire internal situation the regime is unlikely to engage in any negotiations. The conditions inside the North may be restraining Kim from so far conducting the expected provocations that have occurred during past administration transitions. Kim may not be in a position to exploit his blackmail in the near term but as pressure mounts, he will be forced to resort to it.

On the other hand, when Kim believes he has the situation in the North under sufficient control he may be enticed with the idea of arms control negotiations that pundits are calling for because they assume that Kim will never agree to denuclearization. However, such a negotiation process has long been something the regime desires because it plays right into the regime's political warfare strategy, allows the regime to keep nuclear weapons, legitimizes the regime as a "nuclear power," and puts it on a perceived "equal footing" with the U.S and other global powers and provides the tools to continue to coerce and extort the South and subvert its political system.

Pundits also call for using the Singapore summit joint statement as the start point for renewed negotiations. However, Kim Jong-un interprets the statement from his political warfare strategy perspective. Specifically, Kim calls for the end of the U.S. hostile policy. Kim's vision requires an end of the ROK/U.S. Alliance and the withdrawal of U.S. troops and end of extended deterrence and the nuclear umbrella over the ROK and Japan. Furthermore, despite there being no nuclear weapons in South Korea since 1991.

Kim also defines the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in the same way which requires the withdrawal of all U.S. troops because the presence of U.S. troops provides access to U.S. nuclear weapons. The conditions inside North Korea as well as the regime's underlying nature and objectives provide a complex situation for ROK and U.S. policymakers. However, with a thorough understanding of the challenges and the nature of the regime, the U.S. and South Korea can devise a more effective approach.

Rock Solid ROK/U.S. Alliance

There are many alliance issues that need to be addressed. Here is a summary the Biden and Moon administration must work on. While these are beyond the scope of the administration's specific policy review toward North Korea they are critical issues that must be addressed because failure to effectively do so will undermine any policy.

- Operational Control (OPCON) Transition: The conditions must be met to ensure the security of the ROK.
- Combined Exercises and Training: These are critical to maintaining military readiness as well as supporting the OPCON transition process and they cannot be negotiated away with the north.
- U.S. Forces Korea access to training areas: This is a critical problem for maintaining the readiness of U.S. forces.
- U.S.- China Competition and the impact the ROK/U.S. Alliance. This will continue to be a source of alliance friction.
- Pandemic response: This impacts not only the entire populations of both nations, but also the economies, and military readiness.
- ROK-Japan historical enmity. Trilateral cooperation is necessary for the security of all three countries.
- ROK/U.S. Trade Issues: Although China is the ROK's largest trading partner, economic relations between the ROK and U.S. are a key component of the alliance.

Regardless of the future policy direction, diplomats, military leaders, and trade and other government officials must work together to manage and where possible, resolve these issues and others. There are mechanisms and processes in place to address these issues from the Military Committee and the security consultative process to the Strategy Working Group at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Department.

However, if these issues are not sufficiently addressed a new administration policy will not achieve success because North Korea will exploit unresolved tensions between the U.S. and South Korea to further divide and isolate the allies from one another to enhance Pyongyang's diplomatic leverage.

Addressing the "Big 5."

Policymakers, strategists, and military planners must take a holistic approach to the broad spectrum of threats and challenges on the Korean peninsula the most important of which are these five:

1. War – The ROK/U.S. combined military must deter, and if attacked, defend, fight, and win and then provide military support to the political solution.

2. Regime Collapse – The alliance must prepare for the real possibility of internal instability and regime collapse and understand the conditions that might lead to collapse can lead Kim Jong-un to make the decision to go to war. This also gives rise to a range of contingencies from "loose nukes," to refugees, to internal civil war. In addition, the results of both war and regime collapse could result in resistance within the north on a scale far exceeding what the U.S. experienced in Afghanistan and Iraq.

3. Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity - (e.g., gulags, external forced labor, separated families, etc.) The alliance must focus on human rights and a human rights upfront approach because it is a moral imperative with 25 million Koreans in the north suffering under horrendous conditions. But it is also a national security issue because Kim Jong-un must deny human rights to ensure the survival of the Kim family regime. While the focus on the nuclear threat enhances regime legitimacy, the focus on human rights is a threat to the Kim Family Regime and undermines domestic legitimacy.

4. Asymmetric threats – These include provocations, proliferation, the nuclear program, missiles, cyber, and SOF and are key to regime survival and support to blackmail diplomacy. In addition, the regime remains committed to the subversion of the ROK as a major line of effort to support its strategy. Finally, its global illicit activities network (e.g., Office 39) is the lifeline for funding the “royal court economy” of the regime. (e.g., counterfeiting to arms sales to drug trafficking).

5. Unification - the biggest challenge and the solution – this is what the alliance should be focused on for the long term. To reiterate: A secure, stable, economically vibrant, non-nuclear Korean peninsula unified under a liberal constitutional form of government with respect for individual liberty, the rule of law, and human rights, determined by the Korean people. In short, a United Republic of Korea (UROK).

To craft the policy and strategy policymakers must have a thorough understanding of the nature and objectives of the Kim family regime and make sound strategic assumptions that must be sufficiently aligned within the alliance. This is the foundation from which to build this administration’s policy and strategy for the Korean peninsula. Moving forward, a key initial effort of the Biden administration should be a convening of the MOFA-State Department strategy working group to review alliance policies and strategies with a focus on assessing the fundamental assumptions upon which ROK and U.S. policies and strategies are based.

As stated, the Moon Administration has been laboring under the erroneous assumption that Kim Jong-un supports President Moon’s vision of peace and reconciliation and that there can be north-South engagement on reciprocal terms. A thorough analysis and understanding of the Kim family regime will reveal the Kim family regimes’ strategy is to use political warfare to subvert the South Korean nation and when conditions are right, and it becomes necessary, to use force to unify the peninsula under northern rule.

Basing policy and strategy on the Moon administration’s assumptions is the path to failure on the Korean peninsula. Also, the U.S. and the ROK/U.S. Alliance must not only deter war and be prepared for the full range of the “Big 5” contingencies that may arise, but it must also counter the regime’s political warfare strategy. This requires a superior form of political warfare that George Kennan envisioned in his 1948 memo on 'The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare.'

He described this as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.” Kennan’s proposed approach can provide a framework to enact President Biden’s guidance because it calls for diplomacy, alliances, economic measures, and information and influence activities resting on a foundation of deterrence. Such a strategic framework is necessary to implement Biden’s policy vision summarized here:

- a strong ROK/US alliance that deters war
- principled diplomacy that maintains the peace
- a path to denuclearization of the north
- a human rights upfront approach
- An acceptable durable political arrangement that will serve, protect, and advance alliance interests: unification.

Again, there is no silver bullet solution to the North Korea problem. This is why the alliance needs to focus on the long-term solution to the security and prosperity challenges on the Korean peninsula. That is to focus on resolving the Korean question, “the unnatural division of the peninsula.” Solving this will also eliminate the nuclear threat and end the human rights abuses and crimes against humanity.

The question to ask is not what worked and what did not, but whether future actions can advance alliance interests and move in the direction of an acceptable durable political arrangement that will protect, serve, and advance U.S. and ROK/U.S. alliance interests? The way ahead is deterrence, defense, denuclearization, human rights upfront, and solving the “Korea question” (e.g., unification) with the understanding that denuclearization of the north will only happen when we resolve that “Korea question.”

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What US war with China about Taiwan would look like

What US war with China about Taiwan would look like (msn.com)

By: Jamie McIntyre for the Washington Examiner to MSN // 8 hrs ago

In last week's Washington Examiner magazine, we examined the trends that make many experts fear the likelihood of a future war with China is growing.

This week, in a follow-up report, Jamie McIntyre, the Washington Examiner's senior writer on defense and national security, describes how such a war would likely play out. The time is later this decade, somewhere in the not-too-distant future. Tensions between the United States and China have been ramping up for years, as Beijing continues to build military bases on islands and fortified reefs in the South China Sea, and the U.S. and its allies have been flooding the international waters around Taiwan with warships conducting "FONOPS," Pentagonese for Freedom of Navigation operations.

Both the U.S. and China are playing a high-stakes game of chicken, each hoping to intimidate the other side to back off. But for Chinese President Xi Jinping to decide to launch an amphibious and airborne assault aimed at achieving his longtime goal of unifying democratic Taiwan with the communist mainland, the leader-for-life would have to roll the dice for two unknowable eventualities.

One, after building up his military for two decades, it was finally capable of successfully invading, subduing, and occupying an island the size of the Netherlands that has the terrain of Norway and a population of 25 million people, not to mention a modern, U.S.-armed military. And two, he'd have

to hope that a war-weary American public and divided U.S. Congress would be reluctant to enter a war in which casualties would be high and the outcome uncertain and that carries the risk of an exchange of nuclear weapons.

Both assumptions are risky gambles, but the longer Xi waits, the longer the odds, said Lonnie Henley, a Pentagon intelligence officer and adjunct professor at George Washington University. "The very strong preference among all Chinese leaders is not to have to use force to achieve their objectives in Taiwan," Henley testified before the congressionally chartered U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission last month.

"What would make them decide they must use force is a conclusion that the nonmilitary approach cannot succeed, that time is not on their side, that if they don't use force, they will lose Taiwan forever." No one knows how a war over Taiwan would end, but experts have a good guess about how the conflict would likely unfold in the early stages. The Chinese People's Liberation Army, or PLA, would set conditions for a seaborne invasion with an "intense fire-strike campaign against targets in Taiwan," said Henley, an opening salvo aimed at degrading Taiwan's air defenses and knocking out many of its shore-based anti-ship missiles.

China has been working for the past 15 years to overcome its most glaring shortcoming: the lack of adequate sealift to ferry a sufficient invasion force across the 110-mile-wide Taiwan Strait.

"The PLA concept of operation for how to get that many troops across the Taiwan Strait includes massive use of civilian shipping, both cargo ships or roll-on/roll-off ferries and any other assets, including a lot of small vessels and large vessels that will need to be going to a port," Henley said. "If the political leadership turned to the PLA and said, 'Can you invade right now?' It's my assessment that the answer would be a firm yes."

China would likely employ special operations commandos delivered by air and sea to begin to secure the ports on Taiwan's west coast in advance of the main invasion force. Taiwan's counterinvasion strategy is to use U.S.-provided anti-ship weapons to sink as much of the Chinese armada as possible. "Sea denial weapons, things like missile boats, coastal defense missiles, can allow Taiwan to send more PLA ships to the bottom of the ocean that Beijing is hopefully willing to lose," said Michael Hunzeker, an assistant professor at George Mason University.

"And should deterrence fail, they can buy time for Taiwan and the United States, if it decides to intervene." The problem Hunzeker told the commission is that "sea denial" is not just Taiwan's first line of defense. It's its only line of defense. "Taiwan's Army does not seem to have a contingency plan for what it will do if the PLA finds a way to fight its way off the beaches or, worse yet, finds a way to skip the beaches entirely," he said.

It is why U.S. support to the Taiwanese military would be crucial in the early hours, days, and weeks of any conflict. Under the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, the U.S. has plans to expand both its air defenses and land-based missiles in the Pacific. China might be tempted to hit U.S. positions, including its air bases in Guam and Japan, preemptively with a missile barrage. Still, a first strike that produced U.S. casualties would likely result in a "Pearl Harbor scenario," in which U.S. public opinion would galvanize in support of U.S. entry into the war.

In the early stages, the U.S. could use missiles, standoff weapons, and sleuth platforms such as the F-35 fighter to hit Chinese targets while avoiding China's air defense umbrella of advanced air defense systems. As the war progressed, under a new doctrine championed by the Marine Corps

Commandant Gen. David Berger, the Marines would conduct guerrilla warfare from the waters of the South China Sea, well inside the island chains that China relies on for defense.

"Once inside, they will use armed drones, offensive cyber capabilities, Marine Raiders, highly capable special forces, anti-air missiles, and even ship-killer strike weapons to attack Chinese maritime forces and perhaps even their land bases of operations," said retired Adm. James Stavridis, NATO's former supreme commander in Europe and author of a just-published novel, 2034: A Novel of the Next World War, which imagines a future war with China.

"The Chinese militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea would be juicy targets, for example," he said. Beijing's biggest problem is that once it's in a war that it has sold to its citizens as vital to its national interest, China is on what is called "death ground," and politically, it can't afford to accept defeat. "They must continue to fight," argued Henley, who said Beijing, lacking a clear victory, would resort to an economic and military blockade of Taiwan that, because of the island's proximity to China and its thickly forested mountains on its eastern coast, China could maintain indefinitely.

"Even if U.S. forces have sunk the entire Chinese Navy, shut down the entire Chinese Air Force, and the Chinese have expended all of their long-range missiles in the invasion phase of this conflict, the PLA nonetheless can continue to seal those west coast ports with shore-based short-range assets, including the short-range cruise missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles that were not of much use in the earlier conflict."

It's a prescription for a long and costly stalemate. --- In his fictionalized account of a future war, Stavridis constructs a scenario in which one side weighs employing a tactical nuclear weapon to turn the tide of battle. That's something China has vaguely hinted at by unveiling a new "Guam killer" nuclear missile and recently producing a propaganda video depicting Chinese H-6 bombers attacking Andersen Air Force Base on Guam.

How likely is it that the nightmare of war with China will one day come to pass? "If we're going to have a global conflict, it would appear to me most likely [to] be between the United States and China," Stavridis said. "If you asked me, 'What are the odds of that occurring?' I'd say, 'Too soon to tell.' We'll know a lot more, I think, over the next five years." "Xi sees the United States and China as being on a collision course.

While Xi, a pragmatist, would prefer to secure China's ascendancy without open conflict with the United States, Xi, the realist, likely sees one form of conflict or another as unavoidable," according to a new strategy document issued by the Atlantic Council. "For a leader like Xi, the fundamental strategic question is one of when and under what circumstances."

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ARTICLES AGAINST CREDIBLE, CAPABLE NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The Missile Trap

Congress's ICBM caucus is taking aim at the White House

Slate.com, 10 Mar 21 Fred Kaplan

For the first time in two decades, the Pentagon is considering, and Congress is debating, whether to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on a new nuclear-armed missile.

The new weapon, called the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), would replace America's 400 Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) at an estimated cost of \$264 billion over the next few decades.

The debate is particularly fierce, and will become more so once the Biden administration releases its defense budget sometime next month, because one faction in this debate—with adherents in the Pentagon, Congress, and the White House—want not only to halt funding for the GBSD but to dismantle some or all of the 400 existing missiles.

Last fall, the Trump administration gave Northrop Grumman a \$13.3 billion sole-source contract to begin engineering and development on the new missile, in an attempt to lock in the project and make it harder for anyone to kill it outright. Northrop had lined up more than a dozen subcontractors—including fellow giants such as Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics, which are normally its competitors—in order to widen support for the project in Congress.

Coordinating this support are the members of the “ICBM Coalition,” legislators who represent the states that house the ICBM bases (Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming) and the Air Force's Global Strike Command (Louisiana). Last summer, when Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) proposed shifting \$1 billion of the GBSD's seed money to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic, Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), a very vocal member of the coalition, accused him of shilling for China.

This coalition is also aided by several hawkish legislators who view the nuclear Triad—the three “legs” of the U.S. arsenal that include land-based ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and long-range bomber aircraft—as tantamount to the Holy Trinity. Remove any one of those legs, they insist as a matter of dogma, and the entire edifice of nuclear deterrence will fall apart.

Last week, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) said he would vote down the nomination of Colin Kahl as undersecretary of defense for policy because Kahl would not kowtow unthinkingly to the GBSD. (Under questioning, Kahl, a former official in the Bush and Obama administrations, said that he supported modernization of the Triad but would have to examine classified material before taking a position on the GBSD. To Cotton, this was heresy.)

The existence of the Triad is an accident of history. There were three branches of the U.S. military—Army, Navy, and Air Force—and so, there are

three separate platforms for nuclear weapons: the Army built land-based missiles, the Navy built missiles for submarines, and the Air Force built bombs to drop from airplanes. (In the late 1950s, the Air Force beat the Army for the ICBM contract, so the Army built short-range missiles for deployment in Europe and Asia. When those missiles were deactivated toward the end of the Cold War, the Army got out of the nuclear business.)

As often happens with historical accidents, theories were crafted afterward to rationalize the way things turned out. It was noted that submarines could roam beneath the ocean's surface for long stretches of time, undetectable and invulnerable; therefore, the subs ensured that, if the Soviets launched a nuclear attack on the U.S., the U.S. could fire back, thereby deterring the Soviets from attacking in the first place. Land-based ICBMs were more responsive to commands, and they were much more accurate than submarine-launched missiles, enabling the U.S. not only to smash Soviet cities, but to hit specific targets, such as enemy missile bases. Bombers could be recalled to their bases (unlike missiles, which, once fired, were irretrievable), reducing the chances of an accidental war and giving leaders time to de-escalate in a crisis.

There was logic to this argument, for a while, but in the 1990s, the rationale for the land-based ICBM started to unravel. The Navy deployed a new submarine-launched missile, called the Trident II, which, unlike earlier models, was powerful and accurate enough to destroy pinpoint targets, such as the Soviet Union's blast-hardened ICBM silos. Command-control systems also improved, so that the president could more reliably send launch orders to a submarine out at sea.

ICBMs were becoming not just superfluous but destabilizing. They were at once highly accurate and highly vulnerable—capable of destroying, but also of being destroyed by, Russian ICBMs. In short, their very existence increased the likelihood of a nuclear war. In an escalating crisis, one side would have an incentive to launch a first strike before the other side launched a first strike.

There were fevered debates about all this in the 1980s and early '90s, but as the Cold War wound down, so did the fear of nuclear war and the intrigue over abstract discussions of nuclear strategy. The U.S. and Russia did reduce their ICBMs through a series of arms-reduction treaties (the U.S. used to have 1,054 of them), but they didn't dismantle those missiles entirely.

Still, time, decay, and dwindling enthusiasm for the nuclear enterprise meant funding would be cut, possibly drastically, over time. So, when President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the New START treaty in 2010, the ICBM Coalition took out the old playbook. They told Obama that they would not ratify the treaty—an act that required two-thirds of the Senate—unless Obama agreed to modernize all three legs of the Triad.

Obama finessed the demand, pledging in a written statement to “modernize or replace” all three legs of the Triad. “Modernize” could mean any number of things: installing new software or better communications gear; it didn't necessarily mean buying whole new systems.

But exploiting this concession, Senate Republicans started rolling out a list of new weapons—new ICBMs, new bombers, new submarines, new cruise missiles, and a few different models of new warheads—which they said would cost a total of \$1.3 trillion over the next 30 years. When Trump took office, Pentagon officials misleadingly, but very cleverly, referred to this plan as “the Obama program of record.” Since no one under Trump would dare propose spending less than Obama on a defense program, this guaranteed that the largest nuclear building plan since the Reagan administration would proceed unimpeded.

But the ICBM still needed a rationale, so a team inside U.S. Strategic Command came up with something called the “sponge” theory. Without any land-based ICBMs, this theory posited, the enemy could launch a highly effective nuclear first strike by destroying a mere six targets inside the United States—two submarine ports, a few bomber bases, and the “national command authority” (meaning Washington, D.C.). However, if we still had ICBMs, the enemy would have to hit them as well; hitting 400 ICBMs would require launching 800 warheads; by any standard, that would be a “major” attack, killing several million Americans; any American president would have to launch a retaliatory attack; therefore, the Russians wouldn’t dare launch a first strike.

There are at least three flaws to this argument. First, it is very strange. A few decades ago, the people who came up with the “sponge” theory were arguing that the Kremlin’s leaders would have little hesitation launching 2,000 warheads against 1,000 U.S. ICBMs; the core of our nuclear strategy assumed that they would. Now these people, or their intellectual heirs, are saying that firing fewer than half that many warheads would be too large and too destructive for the Russians to consider. The threat-scribes have altered their premises to fit the conclusion they want to reach.

Second, the six targets that the enemy, presumably the Russians, would have to hit, if we didn’t have ICBMs, are close to cities; Washington is a city; tens of millions of Americans would die in this “limited” nuclear strike. It is implausible that a Russian leader would take the chance that an American president would simply surrender without retaliating. And the American president could send the retaliatory order to the many submarines that would be out at sea (half of them are at sea at any one time, all the time), and to the several bombers that would have taken off from their bases in the early stages of a crisis.

Finally, let’s say that there is something to the sponge theory—that we should present the Russians or Chinese or whomever with more than a half-dozen targets to hit if they were contemplating a first strike. Do we need to present them with 400 extra targets? Would 100 be enough? How about 50 or a dozen? The sponge theorists should be asked to make the case that fewer than 400 would be too few.

Nor does the sponge theory require those ICBMs—however many there are—to be new. Yes, some of the existing Minuteman missiles have been sitting in their silos since the 1970s. But they haven’t been doing much that causes wear and tear; they’ve undergone several “service-life extensions” over the decades—new warheads, software, avionics, guidance systems, command-control receivers, etc.—and there’s no reason they couldn’t undergo more. The 76 nuclear-armed B-52H bombers in the fleet have been around since the 1950s, and they’ve been flown and otherwise jostled a lot. They too have undergone a lot of service-life extensions, and they’re in fine shape.

In other words, there is no good reason to buy the GBSD and several good reasons not to.

Usually, this wouldn’t matter. Congress tends to defer to military commanders on what weapons are “required,” especially when it comes to the nuclear Triad. Sen. Cotton said in another recent hearing, “It’s very expensive and hard to win an arms race, but it is much better to win an arms race than to lose a war.” OK, but Cotton and others who think like him should be asked how not building the GBSD heightens the risk of losing a war. They should also be asked to consider whether sparking a new arms race might heighten the risk of starting a war.

It is quite possible that the likes of Cotton will find themselves on the losing side of the argument this year. First, the Biden administration may not

ask for full funding of the GBSD. Biden himself has long been skeptical of the nuclear priesthood. His midlevel political appointees working on nuclear problems in the National Security Council and the Defense Department are skeptical as well. And his secretary of defense, retired Gen. Lloyd Austin, spent his career in a branch of the military—the Army—that hasn't had any involvement with nuclear weapons for decades.

Finally, after just spending several trillion dollars to recover from the economic ravages of the pandemic, Congress might be less casual about spending trillions more on nuclear weapons, especially since other military ambitions—a larger navy, a stealthier air force, a more robust cybersecurity effort—might strike some, including inside the military, as more urgent.

Long ago, a Pentagon official told me, only half-jokingly, that, when contemplating the numbers involved in nuclear weapons and nuclear war, it's best to “chop off the zeroes”—the nine zeroes denoting billions of dollars and the six zeroes marking millions of deaths. This may have been a sound option during the Cold War; it was too unsettling to stare straight into the abyss. But this past year we've been immersed in an abyss that's disturbing enough, not least because it's been real, and so it may be a fine time to ask how many nuclear weapons we really need—and to make those who say we need to build more explain very clearly just why.

Cold war-era weapon': \$100bn US plan to build new nuclear missile sparks concern

Scientists say the GBSD project is outdated and the result of lobbying rather than a clear sense of what it will achieve

The Guardian Online (UK), 10 Mar 21 Julian Borger

WASHINGTON -- The US is building a new \$100bn nuclear missile based on a set of flawed and outdated assumptions, a new report by the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) will say.

The report, due to be published next week, will argue the planned ground-based strategic deterrent (GBSD) is being driven by intense industry lobbying and politicians from states that will benefit most from it economically, rather than a clear assessment of the purpose of the new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

“It is becoming increasingly clear that there has not been a serious consideration of what role these cold war-era weapons are supposed to play in a post-cold war security environment,” the FAS report, titled Siloed Thinking, will say.

According to the FAS, a non-partisan thinktank, the US Air Force price tag for the new GBSD was deliberately framed in such a way as to appear slightly less than the cost of extending the life of the missile it would be replacing, the Minuteman III.

An independent assessment by the Rand corporation at about the same time, suggested the cost of a totally new weapon could cost two to three times more.

An effort by Congress to mandate an independent study on the comparative costs was blocked in 2019 with the help of the industry lobby.

The current estimate is that the basic acquisition costs of the GBSD will be \$100bn, while the total cost of building, operating and maintaining it over

its projected lifespan to 2075 is projected as \$264bn.

The report is being published as the Biden administration is preparing its first defence budget which may reveal its intentions towards the GBSD, which is in its early stages.

In September 2020, Northrop Grumman was awarded an uncontested bid for the \$13.3bn engineering, manufacturing and development phase of the project, just over a year after its only rival, Boeing, pulled out of the race, complaining of a rigged competition. It said Northrop Grumman's purchase of one of the two companies in the US making solid fuel rocket motors gave it an unfair advantage.

There are currently 400 Minuteman missiles spread over five states: Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wyoming. Many arms control advocates argue that rather than being replaced, they should be phased out entirely on grounds of their vulnerability and consequent instability.

A US president would have less than half an hour to decide whether to use the missiles in the event of a surprise attack from Russia (the only country with an arsenal big enough to carry out such an attack), or risk losing them altogether to incoming enemy missiles. The decision would have to be made on the basis of early warning systems, which could potentially be faulty or hacked.

“Deciding to launch US ICBMs under these conditions would be the most impactful decision in human history,” the report said. “No matter how competent the president is, it is unfathomable that a single individual would be able to make a rational decision under these extraordinary circumstances, especially given the irrationality of the system itself and likelihood of a false alarm.”

ICBM sceptics, who include former secretaries of defence and military commanders, say US should rely instead on its nuclear bombers and submarine-launched missiles, the other two legs of the US nuclear triad, which could be used in a retaliatory strike if a nuclear attack is confirmed.

Supporters of the GBSD argue against greater reliance on the sea-launched Trident missiles, which they say will be hostage to advances in anti-submarine warfare.

“It doesn't make sense to rely over the long term on the fact that the seas will forever be opaque,” Tim Morrison, a former White House adviser to Donald Trump on Russia and nuclear weapons, now at the Hudson Institute.

“Our adversaries understand how much of our deterrence is based on our submarines and we can bet that they are seeking to make those submarines vulnerable. I see no reason why the US would put more eggs in that basket by eliminating the cheapest, most responsive leg of our triad.”

The FAS report will argue the opposite – that the survivability of the US submarine force, which carries 55% of the total nuclear arsenal, “is unlikely to change, even decades into the future”.

Some critics argue for a pause in the GBSD build-up, delaying the scheduled boost in funding while the new administration conducts a nuclear posture review.

While a pause is possible, the Biden administration is not expected to rethink the triad, which has been US nuclear orthodoxy since early in the cold war.

“I think they are going to make the wrong decision,” former defence secretary William Perry told the Guardian. “These arguments in favour of maintaining the triad have been so ground into us through the years it’s very unlikely they will find a way of rising above that.”

A study published by the Centre for International Policy on Tuesday said Northrop Grumman and its top subcontractors spent over \$119m on lobbying in 2019 and 2020 alone and employed a total of 410 lobbyists including many former officials.

The rising military power of China is being increasingly cited by GBSD supporters as a rationale for building the new weapon. When Democratic congressman Ro Khanna suggested an amendment last July for using \$1bn of GBSD seed money to help combat the Covid pandemic, Republican Liz Cheney, whose home state of Wyoming hosts the Minuteman complex at the Warren air force base, came close to accusing him of being a Chinese stooge.

“I don’t think the Chinese government, frankly, could imagine in their wildest dreams that they would have been able to get a member of the US Congress to propose, in response to the pandemic, that we ought to cut a billion dollars out of our nuclear forces,” Cheney said.

The FAS currently estimates the Chinese arsenal at 320 warheads, compared to the 3,800 the US has deployed and in the reserve stockpile. The Siloed Thinking report will argue that America’s ICBMs are irrelevant to deterring China because any launch from the Great Plains and over the Arctic could be interpreted by Moscow as an attack on Russia and would therefore risk widening an already catastrophic conflict.

“Overall, the Air Force’s ... recommendation to pursue a brand-new missile was based upon a series of flawed assumptions about how GBSD would address perceived capability gaps, maintain the health of the large solid rocket motor industrial base ... and – most importantly – be cheaper than the cost of a Minuteman life-extension,” the Siloed Thinking report will say.

“In hindsight, and upon further scrutiny, all of these assumptions appear to have either been exaggerated or de-prioritized,” the report will conclude, calling for a thorough re-evaluation.

CONGRESSIONAL

By Susan Cornwell

FY22 BUDGET:

- Expected to come out in April
- HASC Republicans sent a letter to President Biden urging him to increase the Defense Budget by 3 to 5 percent, adjusted for inflation. The letter was led by Ranking member Mike Rogers
 - Rogers was joined in the letter by the seven ranking members of each HASC subcommittee. What a 3 to 5 percent increase means exactly isn't clear in the letter. If the request pertains to the Defense Department's base budget, which was \$636 billion for fiscal 2021, that likely amounts to an increase of anywhere between \$32 billion (to reach \$668 billion) and \$45 billion (to reach \$681 billion), said defense budget and aerospace expert Todd Harrison, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

HASC

Smith, Biden Agree: Time to Repeal 2002 AUMF is Now

March 9, 2021

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Representative Adam Smith (D-Wash.), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, today issued the following statement after the Biden administration explicitly supported efforts to replace the existing Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF).

“Much has changed since the initial passage of the 2002 AUMF, namely the democratic Iraqi government is now our partner in our counterterrorism mission. Given that the 2002 AUMF was passed to authorize the Iraq war, and because circumstances in the region have changed so significantly over the past 19 years, this authorization should be repealed.

“As a legislator and policy maker, I am glad that the Biden administration is willing to work with Congress to review the existing authorities. It's not enough to just repeal the 2002 AUMF – serious reforms to the 2001 AUMF are also required, and I look forward to working on substantive changes with my colleagues in Congress.”

SASC

- **March 4:** The SASC held a hearing for the nomination of Dr. Colin H. Kahl To Be Under Secretary Of Defense For Policy
 - He had some encouraging words for ICBMs and the Nuclear Triad.
 - **“It is also critical that we ensure our nuclear deterrent is safe, reliable, and effective—one that is credible in the eyes of our adversaries and our allies. The nuclear triad has been the bedrock of our strategic deterrent for decades, and modernization efforts are key to maintaining our deterrent. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that the triad remains**

an important hedge against the prospect of future technological changes that may question the survivability of any given leg. “

Biden, lawmakers take step to limit president's authority to go to war

https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/mar/7/joe-biden-moves-limit-presidential-authority-go-wa/?utm_source=Boomtrain&utm_medium=manual&utm_campaign=newsalert&utm_content=newsalert&utm_term=newsalert&bt_ec=JB7IVwGZPTktwz3IqN8jXcSszTdOYK1ZuBz7qgEy2GelFja%2B%2Fg2R%2BeJqjIFRONfl&bt_ts=1615162999658

By Ben Wolfgang to The Washington Times // Updated: 7:03 p.m. on Sunday, March 7, 2021

President Biden and a bipartisan caucus on Capitol Hill may have just taken the first step toward a deal that has eluded Washington for more than a decade: the establishment of clear, narrow limits on a commander in chief's authority to take the country into war.

Mr. Biden on Friday committed to working with Congress to replace war-making authorities that have underpinned U.S. military action in the Middle East and beyond for the nearly two decades since the shock of the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001. Despite the readiness for change, laying down new rules will likely prove a tough task on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. The White House comments were the first clear signal from the Biden administration that it is on board with a bipartisan push to craft new versions of Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) laws.

Critics say the authorizations have been stretched past the breaking point and abused by presidents of both parties at the expense of congressional oversight. The White House announced its intentions a week after Mr. Biden authorized, without congressional approval or notification, U.S. airstrikes in Syria against the Iran-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah, which the Pentagon said had been targeting American forces in neighboring Iraq.

The president did not cite any AUMF in his legal rationale. Lawmakers and analysts said the strikes, along with President Trump's decision to target and kill Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani last year, offered more proof that the executive branch had amassed near-limitless power to conduct military operations whenever and wherever they please. The key debate centers on the AUMF enacted in 2001 in the days after the 9/11 attacks, giving President Bush the legal grounds for the U.S. to invade Afghanistan and topple the Taliban.

It also authorized the president to take military action to defeat al Qaeda and others who plausibly contributed to or supported the devastating attacks. In the years since, Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump used the force authorization measure to justify years of military campaigns against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, hundreds of airstrikes on the al-Shabab terrorist network in Somalia, and a host of other actions in the Middle East and Africa. Presidents in both parties have argued that the AUMF gives them broad discretion to target terrorist groups around the globe.

Analysts say it's long past time to rewrite the rules.

”At some point, a country has to be precise about how it thinks about its military footprint. The idea that we've allowed the original AUMF to expand exponentially since the fall of 2001 is really unconscionable,” said Karen J. Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University School of Law. “What we've learned is we actually need laws with some barriers and with limits. The reason we need to reconsider the AUMF comes down to lessons learned.”

The White House seems to agree, at least rhetorically, with the need to establish new guidelines. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday that Mr. Biden is committed to working with the House and Senate to “ensure that the authorizations for the use of military force currently on the books are replaced with a narrow and specific framework that will ensure we can protect Americans from terrorist threats while ending the ‘forever wars.’”

How far and how fast?

It’s not entirely clear, however, exactly how far the partnership will go. Although the White House said it is open to reviewing all AUMFs on the books, current legislation on Capitol Hill does not address the 2001 law that Ms. Greenberg and other specialists say is the most problematic. A bipartisan bill rolled out last week by Sen. Tim Kaine, Virginia Democrat, and Sen. Todd Young, Indiana Republican, would repeal the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs on the books.

The 2002 AUMF authorized the U.S. military campaign against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and the 1991 law paved the way for the Persian Gulf War and technically remains in place 30 years later. “Last week’s airstrikes in Syria show that the executive branch, regardless of party, will continue to stretch its war powers,” Mr. Kaine said in a statement. “Congress has a responsibility to not only vote to authorize new military action, but to repeal old authorizations that are no longer necessary.”

The 1991 and 2002 authorizations, Mr. Kaine said, “need to be taken off the books to prevent their future misuse. They serve no operational purpose, keep us on permanent war footing and undermine the sovereignty of Iraq, a close partner.” The legislation has support across the ideological spectrum, including from liberal Sen. Richard J. Durbin, Illinois Democrat, and libertarian-leaning Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican.

Ms. Greenberg said the broader and ill-defined 2001 AUMF also must be a part of the discussion. “I think the 2001 AUMF has to be addressed, and the sooner the better,” she said. Lawmakers and administration officials alike say the politics of the move can be tricky. Rescinding the force authorization measures is easy enough. Saying specifically, on the record, what should replace them is difficult for both the executive and legislative branches.

“We did try to do this a few years ago, and it’s not easy to get to yes,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during his Senate confirmation hearing in January, when he recalled his own experiences as a top foreign policy aide in the Obama administration. “For some the porridge is too hot, for others the porridge is too cold,” he said. “And can we get a consensus around what’s just right? But I would be determined and committed to working on that.”

Lawmakers say the recent airstrikes on Iran-backed militias should spur action, but Mr. Biden did not cite any AUMF in his legal justification for the order. Instead, he cited the right to self-defense after a missile attack on a base housing U.S. and allied troops and the belief in national security circles that the Iraqi militias would soon launch fresh attacks against U.S. interests. “The United States took this action pursuant to the United States’ inherent right of self-defense as reflected in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter,” the president said in a letter to congressional leaders.

Some legal experts say that explanation is important and suggests that the limits of the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs may have been reached. “Given that the Feb. 25 airstrikes targeted groups that were Iranian backed, rather than remnants or offshoots of the Islamic State, it would have been a legal

stretch, and politically impossible, for Biden to rely on either the 2001 or 2002 AUMF,” John B. Bellinger III, a partner at the Arnold & Porter law firm and former legal adviser to the State Department, wrote in a recent post for the website Lawfare.

Republicans join Democrats to urge Biden make 'comprehensive' deal with Iran

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/republicans-join-democrats-urge-biden-make-comprehensive-deal/story?id=76326175>

A bipartisan letter is a rare moment of unity on a foreign policy challenge.

By: [Conor Finnegan](#) for ABC News // March 9, 2021, 9:37 AM

One hundred-forty U.S. lawmakers from both parties urged the Biden administration on Tuesday to aim for bipartisan consensus and seek a "comprehensive" deal with [Iran](#) that addresses not just its nuclear program, but a range of other national security issues, according to a letter shared first with ABC News.

In a divisive political moment, on among the most sensitive and fraught foreign policy challenges, it's a rare example of bipartisanship -- but it may be short-lived as the administration pushes for negotiations with Iran and other world powers that could involve more controversial tactics. "Despite everything you see, there is bipartisanship going on in DC, even over something as contentious as the Iran deal," said Rep. Mike Waltz, R-Fla., who helped spearhead the letter.

"We're thrilled to have been able to come together on a number of these points... encouraging the administration to encompass all of Iran's malign behavior." Under the Obama-era nuclear deal, Iran agreed to constraints on its nuclear program and international inspections and, in exchange, received economic sanctions relief from the U.S. and other signatories -- France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, and Russia.

Former President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the accord and reimposed U.S. sanctions under a "maximum pressure" campaign, with Iran following suit one year later and defying the nuclear constraints -- enriching more uranium, at higher levels, using more centrifuges and more advanced ones. President Joe Biden has said the U.S. will reenter the deal and remove those sanctions only once Iran returns to compliance and then seek a "longer and stronger" agreement that addresses Iran's nuclear program, as well as its ballistic missiles and support for proxy forces throughout the Middle East -- a proposal that Iran has rejected.

While his administration has offered to hold talks with Iran and the other parties, Tehran has said it will only meet once the U.S. abides by its commitments again. The letter, sent to Secretary of State Antony Blinken Tuesday, was signed by 70 Republican and 70 Democratic House members. It shares some common ground with Biden's proposal -- calling for an agreement or set of agreements that reinstate limits on Iran's nuclear program, curtail its ballistic missile program, and address its "malign behavior throughout the Middle East."

That regional activity includes the American hostages it continues to detain, its support for militants in Lebanon and Yemen, and its arms for militias in Iraq, including those that have attacked U.S. forces in recent weeks. "We're encouraging the administration to look at how do you bring Democrats and Republicans together around an issue that should unify us, and that is addressing the risk presented by Iran," said Rep. Anthony Brown, D-Md., who helped organize Democratic signatures.

The letter's signatories cross the ideological spectrum and include some top lawmakers on both sides, like Rep. Albio Sires, D-N.J., a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee chair, and House Democratic caucus chair Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., as well as Rep. Mike Rogers, the top Republican on the Armed Services Committee, and Republican whip Rep. [Steve Scalise](#), R-La. It's the latest dispatch from Capitol Hill to Blinken on how to address Iran's growing stockpile of fissile material, now enriched at higher levels that put it closer within reach of a nuclear weapon.

The Iranian government has said it does not seek a nuclear weapon, although it has long operated elements of its program in secret and maintained plans on how to secretly produce the bomb. In December, 150 House Democrats urged Biden to swiftly return to the nuclear deal in order to bring Iran back into compliance as well, saying that should serve as "a starting point for further negotiations." Some of those Democrats, including Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Calif., signed Tuesday's letter as well.

That December effort was met with a Republican effort last month. One-hundred-and-twenty House Republicans wrote to the administration to say do not rejoin the nuclear deal, arguing that Trump built leverage with his maximum pressure campaign that Biden shouldn't release until Iran agrees to address all the issues. Waltz signed that letter, but told ABC News in an interview Monday there needed to be greater bipartisan consensus on how to approach Iran -- something Brown echoed as well.

"It's not a numbers game, but what this letter represents is a bipartisan approach," Brown told ABC News Monday. "This letter provides a real opportunity for the administration to see that there's a significant number of members that would support a balanced approach -- a bipartisan, balanced approach." Still, the full scope of what would be a "balanced approach" isn't clear, including whether the limited enrichment allowed under the original nuclear deal would be palatable to lawmakers.

What is clear is there is also little consensus on how to achieve that shared end goal -- especially on whether any U.S. sanctions can be lifted as part of an effort to reinstate constraints on Iran's program. Biden has said no sanctions relief until Iran returns to compliance, but without sanctions relief, the U.S. would not be returning to compliance -- making it difficult to see how the deal can survive.

"I don't know that there's going to be agreement on the tactics there. I hope there is. But what I'm pleased about is that we have bipartisan agreement that it does need to be a broader, more comprehensive deal," Waltz said, adding, "How do we get there? We're trying to allow some flexibility, but at the end of the day, it needs to be a much more comprehensive deal." Still, it could signal that at least some lawmakers are willing to give the Biden administration room to negotiate -- provided they keep Congress briefed on developments.

"If there is a demonstrable effort on the part of the administration to do that -- to seek our input, our ideas, our thoughts -- I think it's more likely that they'll get the space that they need on this," Brown added.

Lawmakers gird for spending battle over nuclear weapons

[Lawmakers gird for spending battle over nuclear weapons \(msn.com\)](#)

By: Rebecca Kheel for THE HILL // 10 hrs ago

Nuclear weapons are emerging as one of the top political brawls in the brewing battle over next year's defense budget.

Democrats have been introducing bills to curtail costly nuclear modernization programs, as well writing letters urging President Biden to support their efforts. But Republicans are shooting back with their own letters and op-eds calling on Biden to stay the course on programs that largely originated during the Obama administration. They're also working to pin down Pentagon nominees on where they stand.

The back-and-forth over nuclear modernization is providing a lens into the larger fight that's taking shape as the Biden administration prepares to present its first defense budget in the spring. Expectations are that the administration will keep funding flat. In one of the latest salvos, top Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee said Biden should boost defense spending by 3 to 5 percent, in part citing nuclear modernization needs, as well as bolstering cyber and naval capabilities.

"As you prepare your administration's **fiscal year 2022 (FY22) budget** for submission to Congress, we urge you to reject demands from many on the left to cut or freeze defense spending at current levels," ranking member **Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Ala.)** and the top Republicans on each of the panel's subcommittees wrote in a Thursday letter to Biden. "The next four years are going to be a crucial period for our military and our nation," they added. "If we do not make the investments our military needs today, we will not be able to defend our nation or our allies in the future."

Defense officials early in the Trump administration talked about the need for 3 to 5 percent annual budget growth over inflation in order to properly fund the National Defense Strategy, which calls for reorienting the military toward competition with China and Russia after years of focusing on counterterrorism. But even the Trump administration had projected a relatively flat defense budget in fiscal year 2022 compared to the **\$740 billion defense budget in fiscal 2021**, amid other pressures such as a growing national debt.

As the Biden administration faces a time crunch in crafting its first budget proposal, **Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks** in a February memo directed a review of a select group of programs, including low-yield nuclear warheads and nuclear command and control, according to multiple reports. The Trump administration developed and deployed a submarine-launch low-yield nuclear warhead, dubbed the **W76-2** warhead, that Democrats argued raised the risk of nuclear war by potentially lowering the threshold for the U.S. willingness to use nuclear weapons.

Trump officials were also in the early stages of developing a new nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile. On Thursday, **Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.)** and **Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Conn.)** introduced a bill to prohibit production and deployment, as well as research and development, of the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile and its associated warhead. "Putting new, expensive nuclear warheads on attack submarines and surface ships that haven't carried those weapons in almost thirty years is a distraction that will suck precious resources away from the most pressing need of the U.S. Navy—namely, to increase the size of its overworked fleet," Courtney, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's seapower subcommittee, said in a statement.

"This legislation is a common-sense bill that will stop the hemorrhaging of precious Navy dollars for a wasteful program that Congress barely debated." Democrats have also expressed concern about the price tag of nuclear modernization programs that started during the Obama administration, in particular a replacement intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) known as the **Ground-based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD)**.

The total cost of the nuclear modernization programs, which also include the new B-21 bomber and new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine, could reach an estimated \$1.7 trillion over 30 years, according to a 2017 Government Accountability Office report. In a Wednesday letter, **Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.)** and **Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.)** pressed Biden to take several steps in his fiscal 2022 budget request and any other policy reviews to "reflect the hard, cold reality that there is no such thing as a winnable nuclear war."

Among the steps they urged Biden to take was to withdraw the **W76-2** from deployment, cancel the new sea-launched cruise missile program and pause funding for the GBSD program to instead extend the life of existing Minuteman III ICBMs. "The United States can retain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent which is also affordable and enhances our national security," Khanna and Markey wrote.

An interim national security strategy released by the White House on Wednesday said the administration would "take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, while ensuring our strategic deterrent remains safe, secure, and effective and that our extended deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong and credible." But Republicans have been pushing back against any potential changes to nuclear programs.

In an op-ed last month for Breaking Defense, Rogers and **Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.)**, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, railed against efforts to "cripple the U.S. nuclear deterrent forever." "President Biden must prioritize long-overdue investments in the nuclear triad, or risk permanently losing our most effective means for deterring existential military threats," they wrote. The triad refers to being able to launch nuclear missiles by land, sea and air.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) responded to their op-ed on Friday by questioning whether spending more than \$1 trillion is "really necessary to have a deterrent." "We have to have a deterrent so that nobody thinks they can ever launch any nuclear weapon of any size without paying an unacceptable cost," Smith said at an event hosted by the Brookings Institution. "My big beef is that I don't think we need 5,000 nuclear weapons to accomplish that."

More generally, Smith bristled at the focus on increasing the overall defense budget by 3 to 5 percent, saying the topline number is not as important as what it's spent on. "Can we all just sort of get off of this epic fight over whether or not it's 3 percent or 5 percent or 1 percent or it's cut or whatever, and let's just spend the goddamn money effectively," Smith said. Meanwhile, Republicans on the Senate Armed Services Committee have been pushing to get Biden's Pentagon nominees on the record supporting nuclear modernization, particularly the GBSD program.

Supporters of the program have been bolstered in their arguments by January comments from **Strategic Command chief Adm. Charles Richard** that "you cannot life-extend Minuteman III." Both Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Hicks said at their confirmation hearings they were generally supportive of nuclear modernization and all three legs of the nuclear triad. But they stopped short of endorsing any specific existing programs, saying they needed to see the latest classified information first.

Colin Kahl, Biden's nominee to be undersecretary of Defense for policy, gave a similar answer at his confirmation hearing Thursday. Republicans, some of whom are opposing him over fiery tweets he wrote criticizing the Trump administration, tore into him for what Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) described as "evasive" answers. "I will take that unwillingness to give a straight answer as that you probably don't think that we should continue to

fund the Ground-based Strategic Deterrent, as do many other members of your party," Cotton, who is opposing Kahl over his tweets, said at the hearing.

Committee Chairman **Jack Reed (D-R.I.)** defended Kahl's "practical concerns" about needing to see the most recent classified information before taking a position, to which Kahl replied that he thinks "the triad has been a tried and true bedrock of our deterrence for decades" and his "only reason to be cautious was precisely for the reasons that you identified, which is that there is classified material which is relevant to these systems that I am not privy to."

Reed, for his part, told reporters at a recent roundtable that he supports existing programs to modernize the triad, but that Congress needs to ensure they are being done in the most cost-effective way. "We have to modernize the triad and maintain, in my view, the triad for strategic reasons that have been successful for about 70 years," he said. "But in every one of these areas we can't avoid looking at cost and trying to minimize those costs."

New House Task Force to Examine Defense Supply Chain Threats

Air Force Magazine March 5, 2021 | By [Rachel S. Cohen](#)

House Armed Services Committee members are launching a task force to dig into defense supply chain issues, the panel said March 4. "Committee leadership can initiate a task force to execute oversight of issues that cross multiple subcommittee jurisdictions or are deemed worthy of special attention by its members," Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and Ranking Member Mike Rogers (R-Ala.) said in a release.

Pentagon officials, lawmakers, and military experts have sounded the alarm on supply chain problems for years, over concerns ranging from a shortage of domestic microelectronics expertise to the potential for crippling cyberattacks and digital theft.

The Fiscal Year 2020 Industrial Capabilities Report to Congress was released in January 2021. The report details the challenges faced by the U.S. defense industrial base, their effects on national security, and potential solutions.

Those worries have become particularly pressing as the Pentagon tries to stay technologically ahead of other advanced militaries.

Reps. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.) and Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) will co-chair the group as it looks at threats to and vulnerabilities in the defense industrial base.

Democratic Reps. Donald Norcross of New Jersey, Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania, and Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey, and Republican Reps. Don Bacon of Nebraska, Michael Waltz of Florida, and Stephanie Bice of Oklahoma are also members of the task force.

Their work will last at least three months, but could run for up to six months if lawmakers feel there is more to do.

AROUND THE WORLD



RUSSIA:

Russia to test 'Item 70' air-launched hypersonic missile in 2023

[BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union](#) [London] 23 Feb 2021.

Izvestia website in Russian 0309 gmt 22 Feb 21/BBC Monitoring/© BBC

A hypersonic air-launched missile code-named Gremlin will take off in two years: tests are planned in 2023.

The item is called GZUR - hypersonic guided missile - in some documents. Based upon its dimensions, the Gremlin will be smaller than the Kh-47M2 Kinzhal that was previously accepted into the inventory. Thanks to the small dimensions, one will be able to employ the hypersonic guided missile not only from onboard heavy bombers and MiG-31 interceptors. The Tu-22M long-range supersonic missile aircraft and also the Su-57, Su-30SM, and Su-35 fighter aircraft could become its platforms. The Russian Air Force will actually get a super-weapon. Experts think that it is practically impossible to repel a strike by this system using state-of-the-art PVO [Air Defence] systems.

'Item 70'

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that precision-guided hypersonic systems on various platforms will be used to strengthen Russia's conventional deterrence potential, at the operational-mobilisation training assembly on 9 February of this year. The day prior to this, he conducted a meeting, at which he reported about the General Staff decision on additional orders for that weapon.

According to the schedule of the accomplishment of the work (Izvestia has it at its disposal), the hypersonic guided missile should emerge for state joint tests in 2023. Based upon the documents, experimental-design work on Gremlin began in November 2018, when the Defence Ministry signed a contract for that work with Tactical Missile Missiles Corporation (KTRV). The tests of the weapon's propulsion system will begin in the near future.

In February, Turayev's 'Soyuz' Machine-building Design Bureau (Soyuz TMKB) posted a notification (Izvestia has it at its disposal) about the conduct of the stand firing tests as part of Gremlin design. The missile has received the designation Item 70. Reports about the tests of functional mass-dimensional mockups of an unnamed hypersonic guided missile on the Su-57 fifth-generation fighter aircraft also appeared in February. The missile's dimensions permit them to accommodate it in the internal weapons bay of the Russian "stealth fighter aircraft".

It was previously reported. Plans to also use these munitions on Tu-22M3 long-range bombers and also on operational-tactical aviation aircraft have previously been reported. "Judging by everything, the Gremlin's mockup has been tested on the Su-57," military analyst Dmitry Kornev told Izvestiya. "We have known for a long time about that development at KTRV but nearly no details whatsoever about the characteristics and designation have appeared previously.

Its distinctive feature is its small dimensions, which permits the use of these missiles with ordinary fighter aircraft and nonstrategic bombers". The development of the technologies has permitted them to also equip frontal aviation with these munitions. Hypersonic missiles are extremely difficult to intercept and shoot down right now. While taking range into account, Su-57s that are equipped with them will be able to conduct precision unstoppable strikes against important enemy targets - headquarters, radars, and ships, Dmitriy Kornev explained.

In the event of successful tests, nothing will also prevent the employment of the hypersonic guided missiles on other aircraft. They will certainly equip the modernised Tu-22M3M bombers with the munition and, possibly, the upgraded variants of the Tu-95 and Tu-160 missile aircraft, the expert thinks.

Ramjet engine

The development and testing of Item 70 are mentioned as a component of the Gremlin experimental design work in the contracts. A ramjet rocket engine, which is being designed for hypersonic missiles by Soyuz TMKB, is known under this designation. They engineered that design for the fastest munitions, which need to exceed the speed of sound many times over. Item 70 completed firing tests on a Ts-12 stand in 2020.

It is designed for many hours of testing of rocket engines with the simulation of flight at high speeds and altitudes of up to 25 kilometres and was developed for the tests of Soviet Burya intercontinental cruise missiles. Later, they used it in numerous subsequent domestic developments of advanced weapons. The advanced missile's official characteristics have not been reported. Presumably, the hypersonic guided missiles will have a range of up to 1,500 km and a hypersonic speed of Mach 6. In 2013, Former Air Force Commander-in-Chief Col-Gen Alexander Zelin announced those same characteristics of the unnamed munition that is being developed.

Gran seeker

The Gran-K-02 target seeker (GSN), the development of Detail UPKB [Urals Planning and Design Bureau], is also mentioned in the subcontracts, which KTRV has concluded based upon the Gremlin experimental design work contract. We know that a variant of this active-passive target seeker is being employed on modernised anti-ship missiles. It is capable of providing the hypersonic guided missile with the capability to destroy not only ground but also naval surface targets.

Information is not being disclosed for the time being about whether the missile has a variant with a nuclear warhead. State-of-the-art munitions for long-range and strategic aviation are most frequently developed with both conventional and also special warheads. The Kh-101/Kh-102 family, the conventional variants of which were actively employed in Syria, can serve as an example. Short-range hypersonic munition

Several models of ground-based, air-launched, and sea-launched long-range hypersonic missiles are being tested right now or are already arriving in the inventory in Russia. The Defence Ministry has announced successful launches of the first Tsirkon hypersonic missiles to equip combat ships. They have tested them several times from onboard the Project 22350 frigate Admiral Gorshkov. In the future, they will equip other new and modernised Russian Navy ships and submarines with those munitions.

Two more intercontinental ballistic missiles with Avangard hypersonic gliding warheads were placed on combat alert in December of last year. They re-equipped the launch silos of two regiments of the RVSN's [Strategic Missile Troops] 13th Division in Orenburg Region with them. A squadron of MiG-31K modernised interceptors with "Kinzhal" missiles went on test combat alert in Southern Military District already at the end of 2018. They have a range of 2,000 km.

This munition's large dimensions do not permit them to accommodate it in the Su-57's internal stores or to use it on ordinary operational-tactical aviation aircraft. Developments in the hypersonic weapons sphere are also being conducted abroad, including in China and the European Union countries. The US has also dramatically increased investments in this sphere to reduce its lag behind Russia. The AGM-183A air-launched conventional missile development programme to equip B-52 strategic bombers has advanced the furthest of all there.

Russia Warns Against U.S. Retaliation for SolarWinds Amid Fears of Cyberwar

Russia Warns Against U.S. Retaliation for SolarWinds Amid Fears of Cyberwar (msn.com)

By: Paul D. Shinkman for US News & World Report

Russia on Tuesday warned against pending action that U.S. officials say will take place in retaliation for the massive and ongoing hack into federal computer servers despite the potential for a devastating cyberwar.

"This is nothing more than international cybercrime," Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for the Kremlin and Russian President Vladimir Putin, told reporters Tuesday morning, according to a translation of his remarks. He spoke in response to a series of claims from U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and FBI Director Christopher Wray, that they are considering harsh punishments on Russia for the attack, including overt sanctions and some form of covert salvos in the cyber realm.

Wray hinted at the action in testimony before Congress this month, saying the U.S. was preparing cyber "joint sequenced operations." Peskov's comments serve as the latest denial from Moscow of anything to do with the alarming intrusion into public and private computer servers that reportedly began in 2019, the scope of which U.S. security officials are still grappling with. The sweeping hack first came to public attention late last year, and U.S. intelligence agencies in January concluded that Russia was the likely culprit.

The New York Times has reported on some of the specific covert measures the U.S. is currently preparing to target Russian networks, which Peskov on Tuesday called "alarming information." And he repeated denials of any complicity from Moscow, saying "the Russian state has never had and has nothing to do" with "such cybercrime and cyber terrorism." Many analysts support the need for some sort of retaliation to deter Russia from future action, while also acknowledging that the attack exposed gaping holes in the U.S. system for protecting its cyber infrastructure, which controls banks, electricity grids and airports.

However, some have already pointed out that the SolarWinds attack could have been much worse and say the Russian response to new U.S. action may be if the Biden administration does not proceed carefully. "Russian authorities are likely to increase harassment of diplomats and restrict their activities, including possible expulsions. They may also seek to take legal action against local entities that have Western links by using a recently enhanced 'foreign agents' law to impose fines and curtail their operations," private intelligence firm Stratfor wrote in a recent analysis note.

It notes that Russia would likely impose new sanctions or open investigations into U.S. businesses as a way to interfere in their local operations. "Most aggressively, the Kremlin could make public and/or covert moves in the security sphere. The Russian government could endorse cyber operations targeting Western companies not merely to collect information, but to infect and damage their networks," according to Stratfor. "Of most concern, but also the least likely at the moment, Russia could step up pressure in military conflict zones, such as increasing support for separatists in eastern Ukraine."

Russia to test 'Item 70' air-launched hypersonic missile in 2023

BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union [London] 23 Feb 2021.
Izvestia website in Russian 0309 gmt 22 Feb 21/BBC Monitoring/© BBC

A hypersonic air-launched missile code-named Gremlin will take off in two years: tests are planned in 2023.

The item is called GZUR - hypersonic guided missile - in some documents. Based upon its dimensions, the Gremlin will be smaller than the Kh-47M2 Kinzhal that was previously accepted into the inventory. Thanks to the small dimensions, one will be able to employ the hypersonic guided missile not only from onboard heavy bombers and MiG-31 interceptors. The Tu-22M long-range supersonic missile aircraft and also the Su-57, Su-30SM, and Su-35 fighter aircraft could become its platforms. The Russian Air Force will actually get a super-weapon. Experts think that it is practically impossible to repel a strike by this system using state-of-the-art PVO [Air Defence] systems.

'Item 70'

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that precision-guided hypersonic systems on various platforms will be used to strengthen Russia's conventional deterrence potential, at the operational-mobilisation training assembly on 9 February of this year. The day prior to this, he conducted a meeting, at which he reported about the General Staff decision on additional orders for that weapon.

According to the schedule of the accomplishment of the work (Izvestia has it at its disposal), the hypersonic guided missile should emerge for state joint tests in 2023. Based upon the documents, experimental-design work on Gremlin began in November 2018, when the Defence Ministry signed a contract for that work with Tactical Missile Missiles Corporation (KTRV). The tests of the weapon's propulsion system will begin in the near future.

In February, Turayev's 'Soyuz' Machine-building Design Bureau (Soyuz TMKB) posted a notification (Izvestia has it at its disposal) about the conduct of the stand firing tests as part of Gremlin design. The missile has received the designation Item 70. Reports about the tests of functional mass-dimensional mockups of an unnamed hypersonic guided missile on the Su-57 fifth-generation fighter aircraft also appeared in February. The missile's dimensions permit them to accommodate it in the internal weapons bay of the Russian "stealth fighter aircraft".

It was previously reported. Plans to also use these munitions on Tu-22M3 long-range bombers and also on operational-tactical aviation aircraft have previously been reported. "Judging by everything, the Gremlin's mockup has been tested on the Su-57," military analyst Dmitry Kornev told Izvestiya. "We have known for a long time about that development at KTRV but nearly no details whatsoever about the characteristics and designation have appeared previously.

Its distinctive feature is its small dimensions, which permits the use of these missiles with ordinary fighter aircraft and nonstrategic bombers". The development of the technologies has permitted them to also equip frontal aviation with these munitions. Hypersonic missiles are extremely difficult to intercept and shoot down right now. While taking range into account, Su-57s that are equipped with them will be able to conduct precision unstoppable strikes against important enemy targets - headquarters, radars, and ships, Dmitriy Kornev explained.

In the event of successful tests, nothing will also prevent the employment of the hypersonic guided missiles on other aircraft. They will certainly equip the modernised Tu-22M3M bombers with the munition and, possibly, the upgraded variants of the Tu-95 and Tu-160 missile aircraft, the expert thinks.

Ramjet engine

The development and testing of Item 70 are mentioned as a component of the Gremlin experimental design work in the contracts. A ramjet rocket engine, which is being designed for hypersonic missiles by Soyuz TMKB, is known under this designation. They engineered that design for the fastest munitions, which need to exceed the speed of sound many times over. Item 70 completed firing tests on a Ts-12 stand in 2020.

It is designed for many hours of testing of rocket engines with the simulation of flight at high speeds and altitudes of up to 25 kilometres and was developed for the tests of Soviet Burya intercontinental cruise missiles. Later, they used it in numerous subsequent domestic developments of advanced weapons. The advanced missile's official characteristics have not been reported. Presumably, the hypersonic guided missiles will have a range of up to 1,500 km and a hypersonic speed of Mach 6. In 2013, Former Air Force Commander-in-Chief Col-Gen Alexander Zelin announced those same characteristics of the unnamed munition that is being developed.

Gran seeker

The Gran-K-02 target seeker (GSN), the development of Detail UPKB [Urals Planning and Design Bureau], is also mentioned in the subcontracts, which KTRV has concluded based upon the Gremlin experimental design work contract. We know that a variant of this active-passive target seeker is being employed on modernised anti-ship missiles. It is capable of providing the hypersonic guided missile with the capability to destroy not only ground but also naval surface targets.

Information is not being disclosed for the time being about whether the missile has a variant with a nuclear warhead. State-of-the-art munitions for long-range and strategic aviation are most frequently developed with both conventional and also special warheads. The Kh-101/Kh-102 family, the conventional variants of which were actively employed in Syria, can serve as an example. Short-range hypersonic munition

Several models of ground-based, air-launched, and sea-launched long-range hypersonic missiles are being tested right now or are already arriving in the inventory in Russia. The Defence Ministry has announced successful launches of the first Tsirkon hypersonic missiles to equip combat ships. They have tested them several times from onboard the Project 22350 frigate Admiral Gorshkov. In the future, they will equip other new and modernised Russian Navy ships and submarines with those munitions.

Two more intercontinental ballistic missiles with Avangard hypersonic gliding warheads were placed on combat alert in December of last year. They re-equipped the launch silos of two regiments of the RVSN's [Strategic Missile Troops] 13th Division in Orenburg Region with them. A squadron of MiG-31K modernised interceptors with "Kinzhal" missiles went on test combat alert in Southern Military District already at the end of 2018. They have a range of 2,000 km.

This munition's large dimensions do not permit them to accommodate it in the Su-57's internal stores or to use it on ordinary operational-tactical aviation aircraft. Developments in the hypersonic weapons sphere are also being conducted abroad, including in China and the European Union countries. The US has also dramatically increased investments in this sphere to reduce its lag behind Russia. The AGM-183A air-launched conventional missile development programme to equip B-52 strategic bombers has advanced the furthest of all there.



CHINA:

Chinese foreign minister takes firm tone, calls for ‘non-interference’ between China and the U.S.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/07/chinese-foreign-minister-calls-for-non-interference-between-china-us.html>

By: [Evelyn Cheng@CHENGEVELYN](mailto:Evelyn.Cheng@CHENGEVELYN) for CNBC News // PUBLISHED SUN, MAR 7 2021 5:54 AM EST

KEY POINTS

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Sunday at a high-level press conference that the U.S. needs to remove “unreasonable restrictions” and stop interfering in what Beijing considers its domestic affairs.
- U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration has maintained a tough position on China and raised concerns about Beijing’s stance around Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet.
- Wang did not specify what the restrictions were, and pointed to a phone call between the two countries’ leaders in February as a positive basis for rebuilding the bilateral relationship.

BEIJING — Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Sunday that the U.S. needs to remove “unreasonable restrictions” for the two countries’ relationship to move forward under President [Joe Biden](#)’s administration.

Wang’s remarks come as tensions between the U.S. and China have escalated in the last few years under former President Donald Trump, whose term ended in January. So far, the Biden administration has maintained a tough position on China — calling the country a [more assertive “competitor”](#) — and raised concerns about Beijing’s stance around Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet.

China’s central government considers those issues part of its domestic matters. “Speaking of China-U.S. relations, I believe first of all both sides need to abide by the principle of non-interference in each others’ internal affairs,” Wang said. That’s according to an official English translation of his Mandarin-language remarks at a press conference held alongside the [“Two Sessions” annual parliamentary meeting](#) in Beijing, the country’s biggest political event of the year.

Wang also called for the U.S. to “remove all its unreasonable restrictions on bilateral cooperation as early as possible” and “not create new obstacles.” But he did not specify what the restrictions were. In a speech last month Wang had [called for the new U.S. administration to remove tariffs and sanctions](#), particularly on China’s technology companies. Citing national security concerns, Trump [sanctioned dozens of Chinese companies](#), most prominently telecommunications giant Huawei.

The company has suffered as a result, [falling from the number one smartphone vendor globally to sixth place](#) last year. On Sunday, Wang rejected [claims that Beijing was committing “genocide” in Xinjiang](#) and said the government had the ability to “thwart” all attempts to promote Taiwan’s independence. He spoke firmly in support of Beijing’s decision to “improve” Hong Kong’s electoral system. Delegates at the Two Sessions are considering a proposal to change [Hong Kong’s electoral system](#), which would allow [Beijing to strengthen its control](#) of the semi-autonomous region.

Biden-Xi phone call

[Biden had raised “fundamental concerns”](#) about Beijing’s actions on issues such as Hong Kong in a two-hour phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping in February ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, according to the White House. At the time, the two leaders also discussed how to counter the coronavirus pandemic, working together on climate change and preventing weapons proliferation.

Wang said Sunday the two countries could also cooperate on the economic recovery from the pandemic, and pointed to the phone call as a positive basis for rebuilding the bilateral relationship.

“We’re ready to work with the United States to follow through on the outcome of this important phone call and set China-U.S. relations on a new path of healthy and steady growth,” he said.

Dragon Ships: China's Naval Threat

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/17159/china-naval-threat>

By: [Peter Schweizer](#) to the Gatestone Institute // March 8, 2021 at 5:00 am

- *China's navy is now the world's largest. It has been for some time. The U.S. Navy may still rule the oceans, but the Chinese rule the vital trade routes in the South China Sea.*
- *China means to threaten the economic security of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and others. America must remain resolute in the face of this build-up in order to maintain freedom of commerce in the Asian seas.*
- *They would say their naval buildup is "for defensive purposes," but their neighbors do not buy that for a minute.... [China's] clear intention, for now at least, is to overwhelm anything in its vicinity that threatens its expansion and domination of the Asian sea lanes.*
- *As the Pentagon also noted in its report, the Chinese Communist Party does not intend for its navy to be merely "a showpiece of China's modernity or to keep it focused solely on regional threats." It will grow with China's ambitions.*
- *Its fourth aircraft carrier, however, is expected to be China's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, and its first to use advanced launching and landing systems.... Thus, China intends to have a blue-water navy to challenge the U.S. in several years.*

- *All the force investments in the world won't matter if the US fails to impose enough diplomatic and economic costs to alter Chinese behavior." — Gregory Poling, director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Deutsche Welle, October 21, 2020.*

For Americans used to having the biggest and most modern military forces in the world, it is humbling to realize that China's Navy is now the world's largest.

It has been for some time. The U.S. Navy may still rule the oceans, but China rules the vital trade routes in the South China Sea. Pentagon planners know this and have called out China's work on building both capital ships and the swarms of smaller escort vessels that will project the dragon's breath across those critical trade routes for years to come. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is building their capability to control and possibly interdict shipping from other Asian nations, mostly as an economic and political lever.

China means to threaten the economic security of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and others. America must remain resolute in the face of this build-up in order to maintain freedom of commerce in the Asian seas. In naval warfare strategy, technology has replaced sheer numbers in some ways, as the ability to project power can be achieved less by heavily armed and heavily crewed warships. and more by the development of ships that rely on artificial intelligence and remote control, or on unmanned vehicles that can deliver their ordnance of smart weapons through drones above and beneath the surface.

Submarines pose a greater threat than destroyers because of their stealth, but in a direct conflict, the ability to direct air power against coastal targets and hostile warships remains the dominant mode of naval tactics. China's destroyer-building program reflects this. Its Type 052D Luyang III and Type 055 Renhai [guided-missile destroyers](#) are China's most modern designs. These ships are intended for "air warfare" missions, equipped with phased array radars, air search radar, two target illumination radars, and sixty vertical launch missile silos for surface-to-air missiles.

They will also carry anti-ship missiles, land attack cruise missiles and anti-submarine weapons. Destroyers protect capital ships, such as China's two aircraft carriers and the two more that observers [say](#) are under construction or on the planning board. Chinese officials expect the PLAN will have five or six carriers in operation within 20-30 years. In raw numbers, the Pentagon said in its [annual report](#) to Congress for 2020 that China had "approximately 350 ships and submarines including over 130 major surface combatants."

The comparable number for the U.S. Navy is 293 ships, as of early 2020. What these numbers do not reflect is the strategic capabilities and ability to project power anywhere in the world that has been the U.S. naval goal since the Cold War. China's naval aims are closer to home. They would say their naval buildup is "for defensive purposes," but their neighbors do not buy that for a minute. Japan recently announced plans to build transport ships to counter the massive military build-up in the East China Sea targeted at the disputed Senkaku chain of islands claimed by Japan, China, and Taiwan.

China's clear intention, for now at least, is to overwhelm anything in its vicinity that threatens its expansion and domination of the Asian sea lanes. As the Pentagon also noted in its report, however, the Chinese Communist Party does not intend for its navy to be merely "a showpiece of China's modernity or to keep it focused solely on regional threats." It will grow with China's ambitions.

One indicator of this change in outlook is the propulsion systems on China's aircraft carriers. The two already at sea and the third one under construction are all conventionally powered. The fourth one, however, is expected to be China's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, and its first to use [advanced launching and landing systems](#). Each of those capabilities is significant: first, nuclear powered ships can stay at sea almost indefinitely without refueling; and second, the catapult system planned for the fourth carrier will be an electromagnetic aircraft launch system design (EMALS), which not even the U.S. Navy has quite perfected yet.

Such a system makes it possible to launch more – and heavier – aircraft from a carrier's deck and recover them as well. Thus, China intends to have a blue-water navy to challenge the U.S. in several years. All of this challenges longtime strategic assumptions regarding China's threat being restricted to regional, territorial saber-rattling. At a minimum, China is putting military force behind its legally dubious claims to control more than 80% of the South China Sea as sovereign territory, including even the far-flung Spratly Islands.

China's military exercises last month, met by a strong presence of naval force by the USS John McCain, clearly showed that China is more confident in its ability to do that. Thus far, and despite his own campaign rhetoric attacking the China policies of the Trump administration, President Joe Biden has not reversed any of these actions and continues to talk tough on China's regional ambitions, including a flat-out [rejection of China's claims](#) in the South China Sea.

His administration does not appear interested in making changes to those policies any time soon, but how it will respond will be critical. U.S. public opinion remains generally hostile to the Chinese government, even more since the coronavirus came from Wuhan. Apart from the political fringes, there will be no political pressure on Biden to soften U.S. policies toward China, but there will be economic pressures to do so.

On the other hand, there is no support in the U.S. for doing more. "If the US is going to increase deterrence and strike capability in the South China Sea, it will need to do so with dispersed, mobile ground and air forces along the first island chain," said [Gregory Poling](#), director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies recently. "The South China Sea isn't really a military problem and has no military solutions. All the force investments in the world won't matter if the US fails to impose enough diplomatic and economic costs to alter Chinese behavior," he said.

Peter Schweizer, President of the Governmental Accountability Institute, is a Gatestone Institute Distinguished Senior Fellow and author of the best-selling books Profiles in Corruption, Secret Empires and Clinton Cash, among others.

China's Nuclear Weapons Build Up Has the U.S. Military Worried

Fact: The Chinese have plans to at least double their arsenal by the end of the decade
National Interest Online, 5 Mar 21 Kris Osborn

China's military seems like it is growing in every direction possible.

For example, Chinese shipbuilders are adding new aircraft carriers, amphibians and destroyers at an alarming pace. Chinese armored vehicle engineers are fast-adding new infantry carriers and mobile artillery platforms. Chinese weapons developers are adding large numbers of new drones and attack

robots. But the largest and potentially most alarming element of all of this, according to many senior U.S. leaders, is the staggering pace at which China is adding nuclear weapons.

“A troubling revelation has been about the trajectory of the Chinese nuclear program. The Chinese have plans to at least double their arsenal by the end of the decade. They are departing from what has been known as a minimalist theory,” Gen. Timothy Ray, Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command, told reporters at the 2021 Air Force Association Symposium.

Ray’s concern about the fast-growing Chinese nuclear arsenal aligns with and builds upon the Pentagon’s 2020 China Military Report, which states that the number of warheads arming Beijing’s intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of threatening America will likely grow to 200 in the next five years. As an element of this expansion, China is increasing its inventory of long-range land-fired DF-26 Anti-Ship missiles able to fire both conventional and nuclear missiles.

Ray cited a hope that China might be willing to consider joining various ongoing arms treaty discussions, but did not appear extremely optimistic about the possibility given China’s approach to nuclear weapons modernization.

“I think the need to have China in a conversation about arms control is important,” Ray says.

“Combined with a near-complete lack of transparency regarding their (China’s) strategic intent and the perceived need for a much larger, more diverse nuclear force, these developments pose a significant concern for the United States,” the 2020 Pentagon report explains.

The reality of the threat circumstance with China seemed to be one of several reasons why Ray stressed the importance of maintaining and adding to the U.S. nuclear triad, particularly in the Asian theater.

There continues to be successful U.S. and allied Bomber Task Force Patrols, including ongoing work with B-1s in India and integrated flights with nuclear-capable B-2s and B-52s. Ray said the Air Force is working vigorously to expand allied collaboration with Bomber Task Forces beyond its current scope.

“We have the highest bomber aircrew readiness in the history of the command,” he said.

Alongside an effort to emphasize the growing importance of allied operations in the Pacific, Ray stressed a need for the U.S. to maintain its strategic deterrence posture with a modernized nuclear triad.

“There are no allied bombers and no allied ICBMs. These two components are the cornerstone of the security structure of a free world,” Ray said.

What much of this contributes to, Ray explained, is the importance of continuing the current Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent program, a now underway effort to build a new arsenal of 400 U.S. ICBMs.

--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

China boosts defense budget again, exceeding \$208 billion

DefenseNews By: [Mike Yeo](#)

MELBOURNE, Australia — China has announced a 6.8 percent growth in its defense budget for next financial year, representing a slight increase from [last year's percentage increase](#) of 6.6 percent as it continues to modernize its military.

The country will spend 1.35 trillion yuan (U.S. \$208.58 billion) on its military, according to figures released by China's Finance Ministry as the country's leadership convenes for its annual meeting of the National People's Congress in Beijing.

During his speech to the largely rubber-stamp legislature, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang reiterated that efforts to strengthen the People's Liberation Army will continue. He pledged to boost military training and preparedness across the board as well as improve the country's approach to defense-related scientific, technological and industrial efforts, without providing further details.

China's financial year lasts from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31

What are China's modernization plans?

The announcement of another budgetary increase comes in the wake of an eventful year for the PLA. The armed force in 2020 clashed with Indian troops on its mountainous border, which resulted in deaths on both sides following hand-to-hand combat.

China has also continued its [massive military modernization program](#) throughout all branches of the PLA, and continued assertive actions in the East and South China seas with military and paramilitary forces, where China has mounted what some consider a [pressure campaign against Taiwan](#). China is also embroiled in [territorial disputes](#) with other Asian nations.

Satellite images published on open-source mapping program Google Earth shows two of China's three recently commissioned Type 055 Renhai-class cruisers berthed at a naval base near Sanya on Hainan island, which is located at the edge of the South China Sea. The finding suggests both ships are assigned to the South Sea Fleet.

The Type 055 warships are the PLA Navy's premier surface combatant, each boasting 128 vertical launching system cells capable of firing surface-to-air, anti-ship and land-attack cruise missiles. They are also fitted with 3D phased array radar as well as an extensive sensor and electronic warfare suite.

China is building at least eight of these 10,000-ton surface combatants at two different shipyards, along with its third aircraft carrier and three new amphibious helicopter carriers, two of which are undergoing sea trials including a visit to the naval base at Sanya. This indicates that at least one amphibious helicopter carrier may be assigned there when it is commissioned into the PLA Navy.

How the US Military is preparing for a war with China

Juicy targets include artificial islands in the South China Sea

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/How-the-US-military-is-preparing-for-a-war-with-China>

By: Adm. James Stavridis, Guest Writer for Nikkei // March 7, 2021 05:00 JST

The Atlantic Council's publication of The Longer Telegram, which lays out a sweeping blueprint for a U.S. strategy to face China, provides significant clues about a new lay-down of American forces around east Asia.

Whether the new Biden administration fully embraces the paper's aggressive stance remains to be seen, but elements are under serious consideration. Certainly, the new team at the National Security Council, led by highly respected Asia hand Kurt Campbell and a deep bench of Asia experts, will be looking at a wide variety of options for the military component of a new overall strategic posture.

One of the key elements in the military component is a series of "red lines" to which the U.S. would respond militarily. These include "any nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons action by China against the U.S. or its allies or by North Korea; any Chinese military attack against Taiwan or its offshore islands, including an economic blockade or major cyberattack against Taiwanese public infrastructure and institutions; any Chinese attack against Japanese forces in their defense of Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, which China claims as the Diaoyu, and their surrounding exclusive economic zone in the East China Sea; any major Chinese hostile action in the South China Sea to further reclaim and militarize islands, to deploy force against other claimant states, or to prevent full freedom of navigation operations by the U.S. and allied maritime forces; and any Chinese attack against the sovereign territory or military assets of U.S. treaty allies."

At U.S. Indo-Pacific headquarters, strategic, operational and tactical teams are putting together new approaches for deploying American forces. These new options will be sent back to the Pentagon as part of the overall "posture review" being undertaken by new Secretary of Defense General Lloyd Austin. What will emerge? One option is an enhanced role for the U.S. Marine Corps, which traces so much of its pre-9/11 operational history to the Pacific going back to World War II. Under the dynamic intellectual leadership of Marine Corps Commandant Dave Berger, gone are the large troop formations, armored capability and land-based Marine tactics of the "forever wars" in the Middle East.

Instead, in the context of a U.S.-China strategy, the Marines will be resolutely sea-based and able to sail into the waters of the South China Sea, well inside the island chains China relies on for defense. Once inside, they will use armed drones, offensive cyber capabilities, Marine Raiders -- highly capable special forces -- anti-air missiles and even ship-killer strike weapons to attack Chinese maritime forces, and perhaps even their land bases of operations. The Chinese militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea would be juicy targets, for example. In essence, this will be guerrilla warfare from the sea.

In addition to a new Marine tactical and operational approach, the U.S. Navy will be undertaking more aggressive patrols throughout the waters off China. Some will say this is merely the military equivalent of "driving doughnut holes in your neighbor's lawn." But the strategic concept is clever: to

gradually include other allied warships in this aggressive freedom of navigation patrols. Doing so internationalizes the pushback on Chinese claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea.

In particular, the Pentagon is hoping to include British, French and other NATO allies in the effort. Indeed the recent NATO defense ministerial in Brussels involved consultations over the alliance's role in facing the rising military capability of China. Over time, the U.S. would like to convince Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam to participate in such deployments. The U.S. overall maritime strategic posture is predicated on creating a global maritime coalition to face the Chinese People's Liberation Army's highly capable forces.

In addition to the sea service's activities, the U.S. Air Force will likely be shifting additional long-range land-attack bombers and fighters to Pacific bases that are widely distributed across Asia, including some very remote sites on smaller islands. These so-called spokes will be supported from larger bases in Guam, Japan, Australia and South Korea. The concept, dubbed Agile Combat Employment, adds a high degree of mobility to the currently concentrated combat power of both fighter and attack aircraft deployed in the region. Finally, the U.S. Army will increase both combat power and mobility to deploy units forward in support of the red lines along those advocated in the telegram, including enhanced capability based in South Korea and Japan but easily capable of deploying to smaller islands throughout the region.

Both the Army and Air Force would be on the forward edge of additional training and exercises with the Taiwanese as well. Look for increased emphasis from the new American Space Force to focus intelligence and reconnaissance on the theater, as well as enhanced offensive cyber options from the U.S. Cyber Command, in coordination with the National Security Agency. Taken together, it seems clear that the U.S. military is stepping up its presence and combat capability in the Western Pacific, and positioning for a conflict with China over the coming decades. The Longer Telegram provides an important clue as to what options the Pentagon and the White House are considering as part of an expected new strategy to face the rise of China. Hopefully, skillful diplomacy and the intertwined economies of the two great powers will preclude the outbreak of war -- but U.S. military planners are busy these days.

Admiral James Stavridis was 16th Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and 12th Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He spent the bulk of his operational career in the Pacific, and is author of "2034: A Novel of the Next World War."

China warns Biden to reverse 'dangerous practice' of supporting Taiwan

[China warns Biden to reverse 'dangerous practice' of supporting Taiwan \(msn.com\)](#)

From the Associated Press to Market Watch and Microsoft New // 21 hrs ago

BEIJING — China's foreign minister warned the Biden administration on Sunday to roll back former President Donald Trump's "dangerous practice" of showing support for Taiwan, the island democracy claimed by Beijing as its own territory.

The claim to Taiwan, which split with the mainland in 1949, is an "insurmountable red line," Wang Yi said at a news conference during the annual meeting of China's ceremonial legislature. The United States has no official relations with Taiwan but extensive informal ties. Trump irked Beijing by sending Cabinet officials to visit Taiwan in a show of support. "The Chinese government has no room for compromise," Wang said.

“We urge the new U.S. administration to fully understand the high sensitivity of the Taiwan issue” and “completely change the previous administration’s dangerous practices of ‘crossing the line’ and ‘playing with fire,’” he said. President Joe Biden says he wants a more civil relationship with Beijing but has shown no sign of softening Trump’s confrontational measures on trade, technology and human rights. Surveys show American public attitudes turning more negative toward China, which is seen as an economic and strategic competitor.

Wang gave no indication how Beijing might react if Biden doesn’t change course, but the ruling Communist Party has threatened to invade if Taiwan declares formal independence or delays talks on uniting with the mainland. The State Department later reiterated that the Biden administration’s support for Taiwan was rock-solid and that the U.S. stood with its regional friends and allies, including “deepening our unofficial ties with democratic Taiwan.”

“We urge Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan and instead engage in meaningful dialogue with Taiwan’s democratically elected representatives,” said the statement issued late Sunday in Washington. Wang’s comments in a wide-ranging, two-hour news conference reflected Beijing’s increasing assertiveness abroad and rejection of criticism over Hong Kong, the northwestern region of Xinjiang and other sensitive topics.

Wang defended proposed changes in Hong Kong that will tighten Beijing’s control by reducing the role of its public in government. He dismissed complaints that erodes the autonomy promised to the former British colony when it returned to China in 1997. The changes announced Friday follow the arrest of 47 pro-democracy figures in Hong Kong under a national security law imposed last year following months of anti-government protests.

Beijing needs to protect Hong Kong’s “transition from chaos to governance,” Wang said. The proposal would give a pro-Beijing committee a bigger role in picking Hong Kong legislators. That would be a marked reduction of democracy and Western-style civil liberties in Hong Kong. Mainland officials say they want to make sure the territory is controlled by people deemed patriots. “No one cares more about the development of democracy in Hong Kong than the central government,” Wang said. He said the changes will protect the “rights of Hong Kong residents and the legitimate interests of foreign investors.”

Also Sunday, Wang rejected complaints Beijing’s treatment of predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang amounts to genocide. Human rights researchers say more than 1 million people, many of them members of the Uyghur minority, have been sent to detention camps. Chinese officials say they are trying to prevent extremism. “The so-called existence of genocide in Xinjiang is absurd. It is a complete lie fabricated with ulterior motives,” Wang said. He blamed “anti-China forces” that he said want to “undermine the security and stability of Xinjiang and hinder China’s development and growth.”

China's Desert Storm Education

[https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/march/chinas-desert-storm-](https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/march/chinas-desert-storm-education#:~:text=China%27s%20Desert%20Storm%20Education%20China%20took%20lessons%20from,ambitions.%20By%20Commander%20Michael%20Dahm%2C%20U.S.%20Navy%20%28Retired%29)

[education#:~:text=China%27s%20Desert%20Storm%20Education%20China%20took%20lessons%20from,ambitions.%20By%20Commander%20Michael%20Dahm%2C%20U.S.%20Navy%20%28Retired%29](https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/march/chinas-desert-storm-education#:~:text=China%27s%20Desert%20Storm%20Education%20China%20took%20lessons%20from,ambitions.%20By%20Commander%20Michael%20Dahm%2C%20U.S.%20Navy%20%28Retired%29)

China took lessons from Operation Desert Storm and remade itself with foreign technology to build a formidable joint military force with expeditionary ambitions.

By: Commander Michael Dahm, U.S. Navy (Retired) for the Proceedings // March 2021

THE 1991 GULF WAR was a harbinger of change for the Chinese military. In just 42 days, a United States–led coalition eviscerated the Iraqi military and expelled it from Kuwait.

Before Operation Desert Storm, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was aware of its shortcomings relative to the West, but the war underscored the magnitude of the problem. The similarities between the PLA and the vanquished Iraqi military—an army-centric force organized for a defensive campaign—created a sense of urgency, as Beijing realized its military was ill-prepared to face a modern foe like the United States. The transformations in Chinese military strategy, technology, and force structure born out of the Gulf War have been seismic, shifting the balance of power in East Asia and portending global challenges for the U.S. military.

The 30th anniversary of the Gulf War is an appropriate time to examine where the PLA was three decades ago and what it may become. Chinese President Xi Jinping recently set a goal for the PLA to become a “world class military” by 2049, the centennial of the founding of the People’s Republic of China. What the U.S. military accomplished in Operation Desert Storm certainly represents a world-class standard in terms of joint force, expeditionary operations. Well before Xi’s edict to achieve this status, however, China understood its military needed a complete overhaul to achieve three outcomes: a joint force featuring a substantially improved air force and navy; precision-strike capabilities; and a modern command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) system. As impossible as those lofty goals may have seemed in 1991, in just a few decades, the PLA has made stunning progress toward them.

Chinese researchers have referred to the Gulf War as the “epitome” of information warfare.¹ Alongside stealth, precision-strike, and joint operational capabilities, the war showcased psychological operations, electronic warfare, and computer network operations. PLA lessons learned from the Gulf War led almost inevitably to China’s 2004 shift in military strategy toward “informationized warfare”—warfare transformed by information—which is still the prevailing form of war that drives PLA force structure and strategy. Informationization and information-control are not a Chinese sideshow, they are central to PLA operational concepts and campaign design.²

The Gulf with Wars Past

Until the Gulf War, Chinese military strategies had been based on a “People’s War” concept—a total war, counterinvasion approach that emphasized large ground formations and national mobilization. Potential strategic adversaries included the United States (following the Korean War) and Soviet forces arrayed along China’s northern border since the 1960s. China’s 1979–91 conflict with Vietnam also primed the PLA for a shift in military strategy. The four-week-long 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War is often mistakenly cited as the PLA’s most recent combat experience. Despite Beijing declaring victory in its punitive campaign against Vietnam in March 1979, border clashes continued for more than a decade.

PLA forces from across China rotated through its southern frontier well into the 1980s; millions of artillery rounds were exchanged; thousands died on both sides. The conflict culminated in 1988, with China’s seizure of Vietnamese-claimed reefs in the South China Sea that later would be built into massive artificial islands.³ Other developments also served as catalysts for changes to PLA strategy in the 1990s. China’s strategic nuclear deterrent reduced the chances of a large-scale foreign invasion. Following the Soviet Union’s decline in the late 1980s, China’s threat axis pivoted away from its northern border. Attention shifted to the possibility of conflict over Taiwan independence and the threat of U.S. intervention.

But based largely on lessons from the Gulf War, China's Central Military Commission issued new Military Strategic Guidelines in 1993 that represented a wholesale reevaluation of PLA strategy. While the PLA had been intently studying conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli wars and the Falklands War, in the minds of PLA scholars, the Gulf War heralded a profound shift in the character of modern warfare. Regional wars fought with modern weaponry were identified in the new Chinese strategy as "local wars under high-technology conditions." However, in the 1990s, the Chinese military had little in the way of high technology to deal with what it had just witnessed in Iraq.

The Post–Gulf War State of the PLA

Given the PLA's status as a "near-peer competitor" of the U.S. military today, the backwardness of China's military in 1991 is striking. Even Chinese assessments put the PLA 30 to 40 years behind Western militaries. Most Chinese equipment at the time was based on 1960s-era Soviet technology. In the 1980s, Chinese defense industries were known for producing large volumes of low-tech Soviet knock-offs that were sold across the developing world. The Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) had been particularly lucrative. China supplied more than \$7 billion in arms to Iraq and Iran, some of which Iraqi forces employed during the Gulf War, but with little effect.⁴

The PLA had a decidedly "brown-water" navy in 1991. The PLA Navy (PLAN) consisted of hundreds of patrol boats and a handful of destroyers and frigates based on 1950s Soviet designs. Chinese shipyards built dozens of antiquated diesel-electric submarines and a small number of noisy, indigenously produced nuclear-powered submarines. Virtually all PLA Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft were copies of Soviet MiG-19s and MiG-21s. A Chinese version of the Soviet SA-2 surface-to-air missile provided what passed for strategic air defense. PLA ground forces were built around antiquated Soviet-designed armor and were only beginning to experiment with combined-arms operations. PLAN marines offered few expeditionary capabilities.

Any advanced military technology found in China in 1991 had likely come from the West. Near the end of the Cold War, the United States and Western Europe sold military technology to the PLA as an "enemy-of-my-enemy" hedge against the Soviets. In 1985, the United States supplied China with 24 Sikorsky S-70/H-60 Blackhawk helicopters. Other helicopters were French designs. China's YJ-8 antiship cruise missile bore a strong resemblance to France's Exocet.⁵ A late-1980s U.S. initiative proposed outfitting 50 Chinese J-8 air-superiority fighters with advanced avionics, including the F-16 AN/APG-66 radar.

Most Western arms sales were suspended in June 1989, however, when the PLA violently put down protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. The Chinese kept what they had acquired pre-sanctions, of course, including Western technology to outfit a Type 052 Luh-class destroyer commissioned in 1994—U.S. gas turbines, German diesel engines, French sonar and electronics, and an Italian torpedo system. Interestingly, the United States issued a waiver from the Tiananmen sanctions to continue the J-8 upgrades. However, \$200 million in U.S. defense contractor cost overruns achieved what international condemnation of the PLA could not. Beijing unilaterally canceled the so-called Peace Pearl contract in 1990.⁶ The PLA would need to look elsewhere for 21st-century military technology.

PLA Leapfrog Development

In applying lessons from the Gulf War, the PLA focused on developing joint capabilities, which necessarily meant drawing down its two-million-man army while building up a technologically advanced navy and air force. The PLA also realized that it required significant long-range precision-

strike capabilities to enable greater defense in depth and to support offensive operations. To locate enemy targets and coordinate the joint force, the Gulf War demonstrated that the PLA required robust, survivable C4ISR networks.

Acquiring high-technology platforms, weapons, and C4ISR became an urgent priority, and China's defense industrial base in the early 1990s was not up to the task of originating such equipment. Indigenous Chinese design is not how the PLA first evolved following the Gulf War. China instead pursued a strategy to reverse engineer technology acquired from foreign sources, principally from a defanged and cash-strapped Russia. Overt arms purchases from Russian, European, and Israeli sources were supplemented by aggressive covert actions to acquire military technology from the United States and elsewhere.⁷

Well into the 2000s, Chinese research and development was directed not at inventing, but instead on integrating and improving acquired technologies, in a strategy referred to as "leapfrog development." China continues to capitalize on its lagging position in many areas, acquiring foreign technology to advance its standing in cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence.⁸ Still, there is no doubt that China's defense industries have made significant and demonstrable progress in some high-technology fields in recent years—space and missile technologies stand out as examples.

The tables below—Chinese Weapons Development, 1990–2020—depict when different military systems were acquired by the PLA and the technological leaps in Chinese manufacturing that followed, showing how many major Chinese systems trace their lineages to foreign acquisitions.⁹ Foreign military systems acquired in the 1990s significantly improved PLA capabilities. In the 30 years since the Gulf War, PLA innovation has been all about adaptation and improvement, with little in the way of originality.

Naval acquisitions in the 1990s and early 2000s included four Russian Sovremenny-class destroyers and 12 Kilo-class diesel-electric attack submarines. The purchases offered a trove of weapons, electronics, and propulsion technology to improve indigenous Chinese development. PLAN leaders had been impressed by the U.S. Navy's "high-speed mobility and multidimensional combat capability" supporting air and ground operations in the Gulf War.¹⁰ In 1992, eager to emulate aircraft carrier battle groups, the PLAN initiated discussions to purchase an unfinished Soviet aircraft carrier (the Varyag, an Admiral Kuznetsov-class carrier built in Ukraine).¹¹ Following a painful and expensive refit in China, the ship eventually was commissioned as the Type 001 aircraft carrier Liaoning in 2012. China's burgeoning commercial shipyards have produced a number of PLAN ship classes, especially smaller patrol boats and corvettes.¹² China commissioned more than 300 ships and submarines between 2000 and 2020, making the PLAN the world's largest navy.

While in recent years China has revealed ostensibly unique designs, such as the stealthy J-20 fighter, most PLAAF aircraft have decidedly Russian origins. There also is evidence of Israeli involvement in the development of China's first "indigenous" fourth-generation fighter, the J-10, which bears a striking resemblance to Israel's Lavi fighter.¹³ China continues to incorporate high-tech Russian and European components into its aircraft and missiles.¹⁴ It still purchases, integrates, and exploits cutting-edge equipment, such as Russia's Su-35 fighter and S-400/SA-21 surface-to-air missile system—to say nothing of technology stolen from Western defense contractors in cyber hacks that continue to be a staple of PLA development.¹⁵

Precision-Strike with Gulf War Characteristics

The Gulf War highlighted another Chinese requirement: long-range precision-strike capabilities. These enable what the PLA calls “noncontact warfare.” Noncontact warfare does not mean “nonkinetic.” Instead, it refers to warfare in which enemy forces are not in direct contact. Chinese cruise missile programs may have received benefits from the first use of U.S. Navy Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles during the Gulf War. Tomahawks that failed to reach their targets were rumored to have been harvested from crash sites in Iraq and reverse-engineered into Chinese cruise-missile designs. In subsequent years, China almost certainly obtained updated Tomahawk technology from missiles fired into Afghanistan that fell short and crashed in Pakistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.¹⁶

China has pursued independent development of ballistic-missile technology and has excelled in that field. However, in 1991, the PLA had just three types of conventional ballistic missiles. Subsequent generations of a variety of Chinese ballistic missiles have featured significantly increased accuracy using satellite navigation, active and passive seekers to enable maneuvering reentry vehicles, and hypersonic glide vehicles.¹⁷ The table on p. 24 depicts the evolution of Chinese ballistic and cruise missiles. For Chinese observers, the Gulf War reinforced the PLA’s conviction that command and control must be highly centralized. According to Chinese analyses, combining a strong C4ISR network and a “highly centralized defense leadership organ” was the only way to integrate ground, air, and maritime forces in fast-moving, large-scale operations like Desert Storm.¹⁸ The disarray and destruction that followed U.S. strikes on Iraqi C4ISR provided a complementary lesson—Chinese adversaries would mercilessly target PLA C4ISR; therefore, it must be redundant and resilient.

In the 1990s, the PLA began building substantial C4ISR networks to support joint military operations and deliver battlespace information dominance. Given China’s limited aerospace industry at the time, developing terrestrial networks became the priority. Beginning in 1994, the PLA embarked on a decade-long renovation of its National Defense Communications Network to high-speed fiber-optic cable.¹⁹ Between 1996 and 2003, a war-zone C4ISR network was installed in southeast China, a “theater electronic information system” known by the Chinese abbreviation “Qu Dian.”²⁰ Qu Dian control had expanded nationwide by 2008.²¹ In the early 2000s, Chinese research institutes developed an “integrated command platform (ICP),” an enterprise architecture to ingest and process large amounts of information, aid in command decision-making, and enable an interoperable joint force.²² By the late 2000s, China had also fielded its own version of the U.S. Link-16 datalink, the “Joint Information Distribution System.”²³

The PLA’s foray into space began in 2000, with the launch of its first military communications satellite, its first imaging satellite, and the first Beidou navigation satellite. Since then, China’s military space capabilities have only expanded, especially as the PLA has begun leveraging nominally civil satellites for military use (though even these are nearly all the property of state-owned enterprises). Chinese satellite launches since 2015 have included high-throughput satellites supporting on-the-move communications and dozens of low-earth orbit communication and intelligence-collection satellites.²⁴ The Beidou-3 navigation constellation achieved global coverage in 2020.

China was still building diesel-electric Type 033 attack submarines (left)—known to NATO as the Romeo class—as late as 1984. Despite significant improvements in sound emissions, the Romeos (which first entered service in the late 1950s) were noisy and easy to detect. In 1998, China’s first locally designed class of submarines—the Type 039, NATO reporting name: Song—began to enter service. By most accounts, the Songs are as quiet and capable as any Western diesel-electric sub. Alamy/Reuters (Guang Niu)

By the mid-2000s, special mission aircraft with substantial C4ISR and electronic warfare capabilities emerged as significant force multipliers for PLAAF and PLAN operations. In the past several years, Chinese unmanned aerial systems have integrated with PLA forces to significantly enhance

C4ISR capabilities.²⁵ This is to say nothing of the dizzying array of Chinese land- and ship-based radars and electronic warfare systems that together cover a huge swath of the electromagnetic spectrum.²⁶

Forecasting the Next PLA

China took many lessons, large and small, from the Gulf War, ranging from insights about combat logistics to the use of night-vision technology. Beyond any individual lesson, though, the Gulf War showed the PLA how modern wars were fought and provided a road map to become a world-class military. China's 2015 Military Strategy explicitly states how the PLA expects to fight and win modern wars: "Integrated combat forces will be employed to prevail in system-of-systems operations featuring information dominance, precision strikes on critical nodes and joint operations [emphasis added]."²⁷

The PLA reorganized in 2016 to align with priorities identified in the 2015 strategy and the many lessons of the Gulf War. The military region construct that had provided the defensive foundations of the people's war was finally abandoned. A PLA joint staff was created, and China was organized into five theaters staffed by all services to facilitate offensive joint operations. A new military service-level element, the Strategic Support Force, was created to integrate information capabilities, including cyber, electronic warfare, and space capabilities. The Second Artillery Corps, responsible for nuclear and conventional ballistic missiles and a large proportion of long-range strike capabilities, was elevated to a military service and renamed the PLA Rocket Force. A PLA Army staff also was created, finally distinguishing ground forces from the other services, creating equivalency and jointness with the PLAN and PLAAF.

Where will the PLA be in 30 years? Will China ever be able to execute an overseas operation approaching the size and scale of Operation Desert Storm? Much has been made of a handful of Chinese ships on counterpiracy patrols and a small garrison of PLA troops in East Africa as hallmarks of Beijing's military aspirations. Better indicators of PLA priorities may be found in the country's investments in nuclear attack submarines, aircraft carriers, cruisers, big-deck amphibious ships, heavy-lift aircraft, and global C4ISR coverage. These long-range expeditionary capabilities may have some utility in a local conflict like a Taiwan or South China Sea scenario, extending China's defensive lines farther into the western Pacific and Indian Ocean. However, defending China's overseas interests is an increasingly important mission for the PLA.

Beijing's Belt and Road initiative significantly extends Chinese economic interests into South and Southwest Asia, Africa, and South America. Looking back at the lessons China learned from the Gulf War and closely monitoring Chinese investments over the next 30 years will provide the best indication of how and where the PLA may try to realize its "world-class" ambition.

Pacific Commander Warns China Likely To Move On Taiwan; Guam A Target

Taiwan may be targeted for annexation by 2027, Adm. Phil Davidson said, and Guam will have to be vigorously defended in a Pacific War. Breaking Defense By [PAUL MCLEARY](#) on March 09, 2021 at 1:59 PM

WASHINGTON: The head of the Indo-Pacific command believes China might try to annex Taiwan "in this decade, in fact within the next six years," as part of its massive military buildup in the region.

Adm. Phil Davidson told the [Senate Armed Services Committee](#) that China is “accelerating their ambitions to supplant the United States and our leadership role in the rules-based international order,” which they’ve long said that they want to do by 2050. “I’m worried about them moving that target closer. Taiwan is clearly one of their ambitions before that, and I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in the next six years.” One way to support Taiwan is through “persistent arms sales,” which were accelerated by the Trump administration, and could continue under the Biden team given its public comments on the need to contend with the Chinese buildup and incendiary rhetoric when it comes to the independent island.

Davidson, [who will retire later this year](#), was likely making his last appearance before the committee and used the time to push for funding his Pacific Deterrence Initiative, which would run the DoD \$4.6 billion in 2022, as part of [a five-year, \\$27 billion effort](#). The proposal received \$2.2 billion last year from the Trump administration.

His top priority in that plan is to get an Aegis Ashore air defense system put on place on Guam

“Guam is a target today,” he said. “It needs to be defended, and it needs to be prepared for the threats that will come in the future.” Davidson pointed to a [propaganda video](#) released by China showing their H-6 bombers attacking Andersen Air Force Base on Guam.

The island’s current THAAD system “is not capable of meeting the current trajectory of threats from China,” Davidson warned. “It’s clear to me that Guam is not just a place that we believe that we could fight *from*, as we have for many decades,” he said. “We are going to have to fight *for* it, in order to be able to do that,”

Putting US forces at potential risk on Guam and elsewhere is the massive buildup of modern aircraft. ships, and long-range missiles that Beijing has financed over the past decade-plus, aimed at solidifying territorial claims and reaching at least parity with the US.

Estimates are that China will have three aircraft carriers deployed to the Pacific by 2025, compared to the single American carrier home ported in Japan, along with dozens of new ships and submarines.

Last August, China conducted a new round of tests of its DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile in the South China Sea to send an “unmistakable message” that “these mid-range, anti-ship ballistic missiles are capable of attacking aircraft carriers in the western Pacific,” Davidson said.

The US has also been working on its own anti-ship missiles that it’s been rushing into the fleet.

After a 25-year absence, the Navy will [start packing](#) Harpoon ship-killer missiles on its attack submarines as the Pentagon looks to deploy more offensive punch at longer ranges, a clear recognition of the growing ability of China and Russia to keep American and allied forces at a distance in any potential confrontation.

The Navy has also deployed its over-the-horizon Naval Strike Missile, with a range of about 100 miles, aboard the Littoral Combat Ship USS Gabrielle Giffords, and has plans to make the weapon a mainstay aboard its forthcoming Constellation-class frigates along with the entire fleet of more than 30 Littoral Combat Ships.

The Navy and Marine Corps are [also looking](#) to get the NSM fitted aboard its amphibious ships, a move that advances the emerging plan to find ways for the Corps to provide more support for ships at sea from dispersed locations aboard ships or on land.

The Army is also eager to prove its relevance in the long-range fight in the Pacific, and has been [experimenting with precision](#) long-range fires, and held a live-fire experiment this month that used artificial intelligence to share targeting data amongst Marine F-35s, Air Force A-10s, ground-based HIMARS rocket launchers, and commercial satellites.

Davidson threw his full support behind the Marine Corps and the Army to provide that kind of firepower from land-based missiles, saying the “US fights as a joint force. And long range precision fires delivered to the ground force I think are critically important. It’s going to enhance the maneuver and positional advantage of us forces in the theater.”

China’s moves to strengthen its atomic arsenal

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/china-moves-strengthen-atomic-arsenal/>

Silo-based missile capabilities increase the odds of survivability for China’s small arsenal and are integral to Beijing’s nuclear modernisation effort.

By: [HARSH V. PANT](#) and [KARTIK BOMMAKANTI](#) for the ORF // MAR 09 2021

The Chinese recently moved to build a new set of missile silos. Speculation is rife about what this new development brings. Is it to bolster the survivability of the Chinese arsenal or respond promptly to a nuclear first strike? This is a hard question to answer. It is entirely possible that it is a combination of both. Silo-based missile capabilities increase the odds of survivability for China’s small arsenal and are integral to Beijing’s nuclear modernisation effort.

Indeed, Washington has used it as a justification for the pursuit of its own nuclear build-up. Beijing has other motives as well — a No First Use (NFU) policy that mandates the development of [highly survivable forces](#), in that the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) must first absorb a nuclear first strike before it can retaliate. There is a high inverse relationship between the size of the arsenal and its survivability, in that the smaller the size of the arsenal, the greater the premium on survivability.

The PRC is believed to have roughly [over 200 nuclear-tipped missiles](#), which are expected to double in the next decade. There is a high inverse relationship between the size of the arsenal and its survivability, in that the smaller the size of the arsenal, the greater the premium on survivability. Further, the improvements in Chinese nuclear forces are geared to thwarting and blunting American intervention over Taiwan and the South China Sea (SCS).

Consequently, a silo-based missile capability helps augment Beijing’s alert posture against its principal foe — the United States. However, there are indications that the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) is also moving towards a Launch Under Attack (LUA) posture that will seek to deter an American attack. This further complicates any nuclear first strike against Chinese nuclear forces. Where are these new missile silos located?

They are believed to be located in [Jilantai in north-central China](#), which falls directly under the control operation of the People Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF). It is also a major missile training site of the PLARF. There are indications that the Peoples Republic of China is also moving

towards a Launch Under Attack (LUA) posture that will seek to deter an American attack. Despite the PRC moving towards the development of missile silos for the launch of Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBMs) by replicating the nuclear missile basing strategies of the US and the Russian Federation, Beijing's efforts constitute a very small fraction of the silo-based missiles that the US and Russia deploy.

The United States Air Force (USAF) that oversees the operation of all silo-based missile forces manages 450 silos, of which 400 are packed with ICBMs. The Russians, for their part, operate only 130 silos. The PRC in comparison has 16 silos as part of its latest construction loaded with the newly developed solid fueled silo-based variant of the DF-41 ICBMs, which is in addition to the roughly 18 silos of its older liquid fueled DF-5 ICBMs.

The latter are more cumbersome to launch in a crisis where time is at a premium, explaining the DF-41s deployment that can LUA more rapidly and strike targets across most of the continental US and Alaska. China's extant nuclear modernisation presents considerable and growing challenges for its adversaries in the form of the DF-41s which performs a key deterrent role. Although these are geared to ensure the survivability of the Chinese nuclear forces, Chinese Short-Range Ballistic Missile Forces (SRBMs) and Inter-Mediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) are likely to be the mainstay of China's strategic capabilities.

However, a higher number of Chinese SRBMs and IRBMs are likely to be conventionally armed. The PRC's conventional ballistic missile forces also play a very key role in ensuring the defence of China's relatively small arsenal compared to their US and Russian adversaries. Supplementing this effort, the Chinese are increasingly commingling conventional ballistic missiles with nuclear-armed capabilities. There is no evidence yet of China doing the same with its latest silo-based variants of its DF-41 ICBMs.

A mixture of nuclear and conventional forces presents targeting challenges for any potential nuclear adversary of the PRC. From China's perspective, it creates uncertainty in the adversary by sowing doubt and caution, thereby, deterring nuclear first use. Further, it neutralises or limits the precise identification by the enemy of Chinese conventional and nuclear armed missiles. The PRC has pursued a fairly consistent approach in maintaining a limited nuclear arsenal through the course of its nuclear history.

It is relying equally on non-nuclear capabilities such as cyber, electronic, and space warfare capabilities to offset the strengths of its adversaries which are endowed with numerically larger nuclear forces. Cyber, space, and electronic enable the PRC to [dominate the Electromagnetic Spectrum \(EMS\)](#) on which American, Russian, and even Indian nuclear forces are dependent for Command, Control, Communication and Computers Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR).

The PRC's conventional ballistic missile forces also play a very key role in ensuring the defence of China's relatively small arsenal compared to their US and Russian adversaries. For a nuclear-armed India, which has a smaller number of nuclear capabilities than its northern eastern rival—the PRC, there are a few potential challenges and opportunities. Firstly, the Indian nuclear arsenal is not only smaller than the PRC's; it is not growing at the rate of the Chinese arsenal.

In the short-term, this might not represent a challenge, but over the next few years India will need to consider accelerating the production of more fissile material to build a larger arsenal, which may still be in the low hundreds, but one that does not precisely match the numerical strength of the

PRC's over the next decade. New Delhi can live with some nuclear asymmetry vis-à-vis the PRC, but if it is to ensure the survivability of its arsenal and create a margin of insurance, it also has to contend with a Pakistani arsenal that is growing.

The latter complicates the present numerical strength of New Delhi's strategic capabilities and creates a two-front nuclear challenge. Secondly, India's delivery capabilities will need to improve, particularly in the range of its missiles and platforms from which they are deployed and launched. This is especially indispensable for the sea leg of the Indian nuclear deterrent. Finally, there are opportunities for New Delhi.

India could replicate China's approach by investing less in the numerical strength of its nuclear weapons, pursue commingling of its nuclear and conventional forces that are mobile and invest significantly more in non-nuclear strategic capabilities as the PRC has done in the form of cyber, electronic warfare, and space capabilities.

China's defense budget signals will to outmatch US

[China's defense budget signals will to outmatch US - Asia Times](#)

Beijing has been clear about its desire to vanquish US and has the capacity for near limitless domestic defense spending

By: [Grant Newsham](#) for Asia Times // March 8, 2021

It's that time of year when the People's Republic of China (PRC) announces its defense budget.

This year, defense spending is set to [increase nearly 6.8%](#) after last year's 6.6% rise. Beijing perhaps only issues these figures as a favor to the Pentagon and US think tanks. -- How's that? In the US a defense budget works as follows: Congress authorizes a certain amount of money to be spent on "defense." Say, US\$700 billion. The Department of Defense and the military services then have to live within that amount. If they overspend, they're Out of Schlitz, to borrow an old beer commercial jingle. And they'll have to wait until next year, or else beg for something extra.

It's not so different from our personal budgets and how we manage our income and expenses. So it sounds familiar to us when China announces that it is spending a certain amount on defense. Analysts will argue over the "true" figure and whether there are "defense-related" expenditures that don't go into the official figure. And they'll try to adjust for the fact that things don't cost the same in China as in the US.

But it's basically the same idea: The PLA gets a certain amount of money and has to live within its means. Just like the US military. Or so one might think. But it's in fact different with China. Here's how: In America, the secretary of defense goes to the Senate Armed Services Committee and asks: "How big is our budget this year?" The answer: "\$700 billion." In China, the top dog in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) goes to the Central Military Commission (atop which sits President Xi Jinping) and asks: "How big is our budget this year?"

The answer: "As big as you want it to be." -- In other words, the Chinese government will spend whatever amount it takes, over as many years as needed, to build a military that can defeat the US. And Beijing has been clear about its desire to vanquish the Americans for many years, even if too many experts have refused to believe them. One Western observer with several decades of experience in China describes how to consider PRC defense spending:

“Think of the Chinese Communist Party as the national central account holder for all of its departments: agriculture, power, coal, education, PLA. The party funds what needs to be funded – on an ongoing basis allocating funds to where party policy priorities are during any given period. It is a continuous process, not an annual budget that you spend until next year’s budget kicks in.” “Remember, all expenditures in China are in non-convertible yuan. There are 12 regional printing centers that provide whatever funding is needed this week, this month, this year.”

“Funding the PLA’s domestic expenditures is easy – print yuan when and in the amount needed:

- Salaries – print yuan;
- Equipment from Chinese equipment suppliers – print yuan;
- Bombs, guns, bullets from Chinese suppliers – print yuan;
- Uniforms, boots, helmets, belts, caps, underwear (South China Sea island forces were just issued a new-fabric tropical underwear) made in China – print yuan;
- Pensions and payments to retirees – print yuan;
- Whatever the PLA needs that is supplied domestically – print yuan.”

Defense is the top priority for the CCP – and there are no Chinese Bernie Sanders or Green New Dealer types who will complain about the defense budget, for long. And once the PLA can outmatch the US military, every other nation will fall into line. That is worth almost any price. There is a limit to defense spending, however. Anything that is needed from overseas – say, iron ore to build steel, technology, “dual use” equipment and technology, landing and stevedoring fees for PLA aircraft and ships stopping off at overseas ports and airfields – all must be paid for in currency that’s convertible, which the yuan is not.

To sum up, while the CCP can print up whatever cash it needs for domestic military expenditures, it needs to obtain convertible currency to pay for overseas expenses. There are effectively two different defense accounts – one domestic and more or less unlimited and one overseas and dependent on available foreign exchange. The latter should be a problem for Beijing. The CCP doesn’t have anywhere near the foreign exchange it needs to meet its total expenses – or at least it shouldn’t.

But with US and foreign financial firms pouring billions of convertible currency (somebody else’s) into the PRC every year, and foreign business investing in the PRC and chasing their own China dream, the CCP has enough to pay for defense. Thus, US’ defense spending versus China’s is something like: “You’ll spend what you’re allocated” versus “We will spend what we need” to defeat the Americans.

And there’s more to worry about. Retired US Navy Captain James Fanell, former head of intelligence at US Pacific Fleet, says that regardless of the amount China actually spends it’s essential to consider what China is actually producing with its defense spending. “In 2020 the PRC experienced its lowest overall increase to GDP since the 1980s, 2.3%. Yet the CCP was so determined to increase spending on the PLA that they increased spending by 6.6%.”

With this year's targeted increase even higher, "they keep talking about everything but the one metric that matters: what is produced." Fanell adds: "And on that account, the PRC is getting four times as many warships and submarines as the US – who spends three times as much money. "What is the Biden administration's strategy to deal with this reality? Build fewer, but more capable warships?"

More '[distributed maritime operations](#)' (DMO) concept papers and PowerPoint slides? More promises of a 6th generation fighter in 20 years? Where are the damn supersonic and long-range ASCMs [anti-ship cruise missiles] that the US Pacific Fleet has been asking for for two decades? Where are they? Or, instead, will team Biden just ignore this reality and commission a million dollar study to tell them that all is fine?"

Meanwhile, the PRC keeps spending whatever it takes to defeat America. And they won't run out of yuan. And Wall Street and industry appear willing to make sure they have the US dollars they need to round things out. Now that's a defense budget with Chinese characteristics.



NORTH KOREA:

North Korea lacks means for nuclear strike on US: Experts

[North Korea lacks means for nuclear strike on US: Experts - International - World - Ahran Online](#)

Western officials claim that Pyongyang's threat to launch a war against the United States will never happen

From: [Reuters](#) to Ahran // Friday 5 Apr 2013

North Korea's explicit threats this week to strike the United States with nuclear weapons are rhetorical bluster, as the isolated nation does not yet have the means to make good on them, Western officials and security experts say.

Pyongyang has slowly and steadily improved its missile capabilities in recent years and U.S. officials say its missiles may be capable of hitting outlying U.S. territories and states, including Guam, Alaska and Hawaii. Some private experts say even this view is alarmist. There is no evidence, the officials say, that North Korea has tested the complex art of miniaturizing a nuclear weapon to be placed on a long-range missile, a capability the United States, Russia, China and others achieved decades ago.

In other words, North Korea might be able to hit some part of the United States, but not the mainland and not with a nuclear weapon. The threats against the United States by North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-un are "probably all bluster," said Gary Samore, until recently the top nuclear proliferation expert on President Barack Obama's national security staff. "It's extremely unlikely they have a nuclear missile which could reach the United States," said Samore.

The North Koreans "are not suicidal. They know that any kind of direct attack (on the United States) would be end of their country," said Samore, now at Harvard University's Kennedy School. On Wednesday, North Korea's state-run KCNA news agency said its military had "ratified" an attack involving "cutting-edge smaller, lighter and diversified nuclear strike means," an apparent reference to miniaturized nuclear weapons.

It was the latest in a stream of invective from Pyongyang against what it apparently sees as hostile U.S.-South Korean military exercises, and U.N. sanctions imposed after its latest underground nuclear test. Also on Wednesday, the Pentagon said it was moving a missile defense system known as the THAAD, or Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, to Guam, which Pyongyang has specifically threatened.

Bombs and Missiles

The details of North Korea's weapons programs known to U.S. and other intelligence agencies remain classified. And there appear to be gaps in that knowledge, due to North Korea's highly secretive nature. Some U.S. official and private weapons experts say North Korea may have succeeded in designing, and possibly building, a miniaturized nuclear device that could be fit aboard medium-range missiles known as the Nodong.

This is in dispute, however. And even if Pyongyang has developed such a warhead, there are serious doubts about whether North Korea would be able to test it enough to ensure it actually worked. Medium-range missiles such as the Nodong might be able to reach U.S. allies South Korea and Japan, as well as Okinawa, where there is still a large U.S. military presence. But they do not have the range to hit even remote U.S. Pacific territories.

Another missile that U.S. intelligence agencies are watching closely is the KN-08, which has a longer range than the Nodong, and was first shown off in a North Korean military parade a year ago. Last month, Admiral James Winnefeld, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told journalists that "we believe the KN-08 probably does have the range to reach the United States." On Thursday, a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States believes the KN-08 could hit U.S. Pacific territory Guam, Hawaii and Alaska, but not the U.S. mainland.

Another official acknowledged that the U.S. estimate of the missile's range is based on limited intelligence. Greg Thielmann, a former State Department intelligence official now with the Arms Control Association, was more skeptical of the KN-08 missile. When some experts examined close-up pictures of a KN-08 missile on display in Pyongyang, they concluded it was a fake or mock-up, Thielmann said. "This was not ready for prime time," he said.

On Thursday, Western officials confirmed reports that North Korea had moved yet another weapon, apparently a medium-range missile known as a Musudan or Nodong B, to its east coast. Experts said it was unclear if the missile was moved as a menacing gesture or in preparation for a test firing. The Musudan is believed to have a range of 3,000 kilometers (1,875 miles), more than the Nodong, which would put all of South Korea, Japan and possibly Guam in its range. Thielmann said the Musudan had not flown either. "A missile that has never even had a flight test is not an operational system and is not a credible threat," he said.

Conditional Threats?

U.S. officials say the latest threats about a nuclear strike go beyond previous rhetoric voiced not only by Kim Jong-un, but also his father Kim Jong-il and grandfather, North Korea's founding dynast Kim Il-sung. One U.S. official said that until now, read closely, the threats from Pyongyang were conditional, suggesting an attack on the United States would only take place if the U.S. first acted against North Korea.

However, that was not the case with Wednesday's threat of a nuclear strike, the official said. Thielmann said North Korea has several hundred missiles, most of which are variants of the SCUD-B and SCUD-C missiles with a range of 300 km and 500 km (187 to 312 miles). They have some dozens of Nodong missiles with an estimated 1300 km (862 miles) range. "Neither of these (medium range) systems can reach Guam. Neither of them can reach Hawaii or (the) Aleutian Islands," Thielmann said. There are "missiles that North Korea pretends that it has and ... various people in the United States seem to want to lend credence to these fantastic North Korean claims."

U.S. commander: North Korea posing 'persistent challenges' with weapons

U.S. commander: North Korea posing 'persistent challenges' with weapons - UPI.com

By: Elizabeth Shim for UPI // MARCH 11, 2021 / 9:33 AM

March 11 (UPI) -- The United States' top military commander on the Korean Peninsula said there is no evidence North Korea has stopped nuclear weapons development, less than a month after Seoul confirmed Pyongyang has increased investments in missile research and development facilities.

U.S. Forces Korea Commander Gen. Robert Abrams said in written testimony presented to the House Armed Services Committee the North's advances in weapons systems include progress in nuclear weapons and advanced missile systems, cyber capabilities, and emerging asymmetric military technologies, Yonhap reported. According to Abrams, the U.S. military faces an increasingly dynamic security environment and highlighted the importance of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, the report said.

The senior U.S. military official also said easing of tensions in 2018, including trust-building measures at the Korean demilitarized zone, played a role in the reduction of North Korean provocations, but the North Korean threat persists to the present. U.S. troops remain prepared to "fight tonight," Abrams added. "We have not become complacent when it comes to North Korea," he said. "We remain clear-eyed about the persistent challenges we face today and in the future.

"We will continue to ensure a strong and effective deterrence posture so the North Koreans never misjudge our role, never misjudge our commitment and our capability to respond as an alliance." Abrams, who assumed command of USFK in 2018, also raised skepticism about the North's "world's most powerful weapon," according to Stars and Stripes. "Projecting a capability in a parade, while an effective communication strategy, does not necessarily equal the ability to deliver it," Abrams said.

"In fact, there has been no reporting to indicate that North Korea has exhibited a platform capable of delivering the weapons we were shown." Abrams is highlighting the U.S. alliance with Seoul after the conclusion of burden-sharing talks between the two sides, after a prolonged negotiation that began more than a year ago. Seoul is to pay about \$1.03 billion this year for 28,500 troops on the peninsula, according to Yonhap.

THREE'S COMPANY? PRIORITIZING TRILATERAL DETERRENCE AGAINST NORTH KOREA

https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/threes-company-prioritizing-trilateral-deterrence-against-north-korea/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2003.11.21&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief

By: SHANE SMITH AND BRAD GLOSSERMAN to War On The Rocks // MARCH 10, 2021

In December 2018, a South Korean destroyer allegedly locked its targeting radar on a Japanese surveillance aircraft. Although details of that incident remain bitterly contested, the controversy captures well the suspicions and ill-will that have engulfed Japanese-South Korean relations. The tarring of that military-to-military relationship — one that has historically served as a shock absorber for difficulties between the two governments — is particularly troubling for the United States. The challenge of deterring a nuclear-armed North Korea is more severe if its two closest allies in Northeast Asia are more concerned about each other than their common adversary.

The extent of that challenge has long occupied U.S. strategists and planners. Days after the 2016 election, President Barack Obama warned his successor Donald Trump that North Korea would be the most urgent threat he would face. Much has changed since then, but North Korea remains one of the most pressing security challenges as President Joe Biden returns to the White House. North Korea's nuclear threat has not remained static over the last four years. It continued to build a larger and more capable arsenal to menace its neighbors and hold U.S. cities at risk. As Vice Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Hyten said last year, North Korea is “building new missiles, new capabilities, new weapons as fast as anybody on the planet.” Pyongyang is now positioned to test U.S. alliances in Northeast Asia like never before.

The lack of meaningful trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea makes deterring North Korea more difficult. Pyongyang is poised to exploit gaps between Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo. It has signaled for years how it would do so: by using nuclear threats against Japan to weaken U.S. resolve to defend South Korea and Japanese willingness to grant the United States use of bases on its soil that are critical for responding to a Korea contingency. North Korea's growing capabilities make those threats too dangerous to ignore.

Trilateral deterrence on the part of the United States, Japan, and South Korea should be a pillar of, not a supplement to, U.S. strategy toward North Korea. Successive U.S. administrations have pushed for trilateral cooperation, only to see their efforts stymied by domestic politics in South Korea or Japan. Getting Seoul and Tokyo to work together is no easy task. Failure to do so, though, threatens the security of all three countries. Fortunately, there are signs that South Korean and Japanese leaders are both alert to the need for greater cooperation and prepared to begin a constructive dialogue toward improving relations. U.S. leadership will be necessary to bring the two allies into a deterrence partnership. The Biden administration has signaled it is ready to fill that role.

We offer a set of recommendations to move the three governments toward an operational framework to meet the deterrence requirements of a new era: trilateral presidential-level summitry to set a direction and provide much-needed momentum for cooperation; the inclusion of allies throughout the Biden administration's North Korea strategic review process, not just at the beginning and end; the establishment of a trilateral deterrence policy dialogue; the creation of a mechanism to enable nuclear-related consultations during crises; standing up a planning capability to better coordinate conventional operations under the nuclear shadow; and strengthening alliance contributions to U.S. strategic deterrence missions.

Beijing is sure to object to any measure the three countries take to strengthen regional deterrence. Although the trilateral framework outlined below is tailored to North Korean threats, it could be broadened to meet Chinese aggression. Ideally, China would apply pressure to restrain North Korea in a way that precludes the need for such trilateralism. Until that time, however, the allies cannot leave themselves vulnerable to North Korea to appease Beijing.

North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Threat

North Korea has substantially increased the size, diversity, and sophistication of its nuclear arsenal over the last decade and there is no sign that it will ease up on that mission. According to some estimates, it now has enough fissile material to build well over 50 warheads and can add around 10 weapons' worth to its stockpile every year. It has continued to unveil and test new missiles to deliver those weapons on targets across the globe, including advanced designs that are intended to evade missile defenses. During a parade in October 2020, North Korea rolled out a "monster missile" — what appeared to be the world's largest road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile. Earlier this year, Kim Jong Un committed to fielding solid-fueled, intercontinental ballistic missiles fitted with multiple warheads, submarine-launched capabilities, as well as tactical nuclear weapons.

North Korea's statements, capabilities, and past nuclear exercises that it advertised as trial runs for "preemptive strikes" against airfields and ports in South Korea and Japan portend a dangerous shift in its nuclear strategy. While it may be close to possessing viable retaliatory capabilities, it is already developing options toward a warfighting strategy — a strategy to enable limited nuclear strikes on regional targets, while using threats against multiple U.S. cities to deter an overwhelming U.S. response. Kim Jong Un made clear in his 2017 New Year's address that retaliation is no longer the sole tenet guiding North Korea's nuclear strategy, when he said: "we will continue to build up our self-defense capability, the pivot of which is the nuclear forces, and the capability for preemptive strike."

North Korea's history of nuclear threats in combination with lower-level provocations suggests it may believe it can use, or threaten to use, those weapons to coerce — not just deter — the United States and its allies. While it is hard to imagine North Korea would ever conclude that it could use nuclear weapons against the United States or its allies and survive, it is not immune to misperception or miscalculation. All national leaders are subject to the perils of misperception, but experts suggest dealings with North Korea are singularly prone to such problems. The United States and its allies cannot afford to send muddled messages, especially when it comes to deterrence.

Trilateral Cooperation: A Yawning Deterrence Gap

The new administration faces two imperatives when it addresses North Korea policy. The first is identifying anything that can be salvaged from the Trump-Kim summits that it can use to push for "principled diplomacy" to restrain or reverse North Korea's nuclear program. Such an approach might include reaffirming the principles set out in the 2018 Singapore Joint Statement committing both sides to build a workable agenda for denuclearization negotiations. Recognizing that a deal for complete denuclearization is unlikely to materialize in the near term, the Biden team might, as Ariel Levite and Toby Dalton advocate, opt for a phased approach that starts with limiting North Korea's ability to build new and more advanced weapons. Regardless of the approach to negotiations the Biden team adopts, North Korea's existing capabilities are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future. That is where the second imperative comes in: upgrading the U.S. regional deterrence and defense posture that has been largely neglected in recent years even as North Korea's nuclear capabilities have grown.

Urgent attention is needed to repair U.S. bilateral relationships with South Korea and Japan, particularly as it relates to America's nuclear guarantee. Trump's transactional diplomacy, especially for allies, has eroded the core requirement for maintaining a credible extended deterrent: perceived U.S. resolve to defend allies against nuclear threats, even at risk to the U.S. homeland. The new administration has already prioritized rebuilding relations with, and underscoring U.S. commitments to, its Northeast Asian allies. Reports suggest the first overseas travel for U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will be to Japan and South Korea later this month. And, Biden's first in-

person visit with a foreign leader will be with Japan's Prime Minister, Yoshihide Suga, in April. Early engagements with Northeast Asian allies would signal a prominent place for the region in Biden's strategic outlook.

A growing and potentially more challenging deterrence problem stems from the sorry state of trilateral security cooperation among the United States, South Korea, and Japan. North Korea may be pursuing a "triangular decoupling strategy" by putting Japan first on its nuclear target list, reasoning that threatening Japan will present the United States with a strategic dilemma: Will it sacrifice one ally in Tokyo to save another ally in Seoul? Alternatively, Pyongyang may hope that it can convince Japan to deny the United States the use of bases on its soil for the defense of South Korea, complicating the flow of U.S. forces to the peninsula during a crisis.

Put bluntly: If North Korea believes it can split the alliances with nuclear threats, deterrence will be weakened. Pyongyang will be emboldened to use force or the threat of force to challenge what it contends to be objectionable political, military, or territorial arrangements. War is more likely if it misreads U.S. and/or South Korean resolve in the face of such a challenge. And North Korea's modernizing capabilities mean that the destruction would be felt far and wide, perhaps including nuclear attacks on U.S. cities. The stakes for deterrence are high and growing.

The Biden administration should make trilateral security cooperation a pillar of its deterrence strategy toward North Korea. U.S. policymakers have long argued that trilateral cooperation is valuable, but they have often treated it as a supplement to the bilateral alliances — something extra. That framing is outdated. Trilateral cooperation is no longer a luxury. North Korea's nuclear developments require the United States to demand from Seoul and Tokyo such cooperation as essential to effective deterrence. Moreover, allied military capabilities have matured. They are able to do more than ever before to contribute to deterrence. This recognition provides the foundation for new thinking about burden sharing among allies and the reconfiguration of U.S. alliances in Northeast Asia to strengthen deterrence beyond recommendations to assure allies of U.S. nuclear commitments.

From the Top: Setting the Right Tone and Direction

Getting South Korea and Japan to work together will not be easy. History looms large in both countries, but especially in South Korea, and strategic concerns are often subordinated to domestic politics. The memory of Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula in the first half of the 20th century has consistently derailed efforts in Seoul to improve relations with Japan. Recent public opinion polls show South Korean views toward Japan are at a near all-time low, and Japan is seen by many South Koreans as a future security threat. Japanese views toward South Korea are similarly grim and there is little public support for measures that might improve the bilateral relationship, even as leaders in both countries acknowledge their importance in the abstract.

Biden has already sent reassuring messages to U.S. allies, and many experts expect him to play a helpful role in mending ties between South Korea and Japan. However, his administration should set its sights higher than merely smoothing over troubled relations between the two allies. While Washington cannot solve the disputes that roil the Seoul-Tokyo relationship, it should communicate to them that their continuing deterioration of relations — or even the current paralysis — is unacceptable. It should articulate a vision for regional deterrence and defense that makes clear the stakes and a potential price to alliance relations for continued indulgence of historical grievances. In short, the United States should make clear to its allies that it cannot act effectively in defense of their national interests if they cannot work together. The stakes for the United States have changed and business as usual in the face of North Korea's growing capabilities diminishes the security of each country.

The Biden team should bring South Korea and Japan fully into its strategy reviews of the North Korean nuclear threat and seek to adjust the regional security architecture to reflect four new realities. First, North Korea's nuclear weapons are here to stay for the foreseeable future. While denuclearization remains a diplomatic priority, Pyongyang is unlikely to abandon its nuclear ambitions any time soon. Second, North Korea is signaling that any war on the peninsula will be a nuclear one. It can no longer be assumed that it would use nuclear weapons only in the dying throes of the Kim regime. Third, the potentially catastrophic consequences of a second Korean War would not be confined to the peninsula. It must be presumed that North Korea can and will make good on its threats against Japan and the United States. Lastly, an effective deterrence posture requires a coherent and robust trilateral approach.

The strategy review process should be bookended by trilateral presidential-level summitry. The first meeting at the earliest possible date would acknowledge the need for and set-in motion a trilateral, two-track approach toward North Korea. The first track would include a commitment to diplomacy that advances both denuclearization goals and inter-Korean peace. The second track should emphasize a commitment to strengthening trilateral deterrence and response capabilities against North Korea's growing threat in the event that denuclearization diplomacy falters. The second summit would announce the findings of the review and the strategy that it created.

South Korea and Japan should not bear the burden of adjusting to trilateralism alone. The United States should be prepared to adapt its plans, force structure, and investments to ensure they are well-suited to support the trilateral requirements for deterring and responding to North Korea's growing nuclear threats. It should be ready to bring allies more fully into policy and planning processes, including those related to nuclear crises and war, in ways that will be uncomfortable at first. All parties need to hone their understanding of deterrence and its requirements, the implications of deterrence failure, and the response options that may need to be considered if North Korea employs nuclear weapons. This requires a more inclusive approach. Including allies in the review process signals U.S. readiness to do its part.

Operationalizing Trilateral Deterrence

Trilateral summits, ministerial meetings, and strategy documents are necessary for setting the right direction, but they should also directly enable concrete action to build and strengthen trilateral deterrence. Below are options to jumpstart the kind of coordination and cooperation that is necessary for deterring North Korea in a new era. The vital first step is an early trilateral summit that signals a commitment to a positive outcome at the highest level of all three governments. This affirmation is needed to motivate lower-level officials. We don't doubt those officials' readiness to cooperate, but their inboxes are full and there is much to do given new administrations in Washington and Tokyo. Presidential and prime ministerial approval can provide much needed prioritization, momentum, and direction.

Establish a Trilateral Deterrence Policy Dialogue

A second step is to establish a trilateral deterrence dialogue to advance a common understanding of the threat, deterrence requirements and expectations should deterrence fail, and areas for improved policy coordination. The existing bilateral deterrence dialogues the United States maintains with South Korea and Japan are essential to support the goals, military relations, and political consultation mechanisms that are unique to each alliance. But, because they are bilateral, they are insufficient for deterring a North Korea committed to exploiting perceived gaps between the two alliances. A trilateral dialogue should not replace existing bilateral dialogues — it should strengthen them. Its scope should be broad to include

the full range of threats — conventional, chemical, cyber, as well as nuclear — to enable the development of a coherent deterrence posture that accounts for escalation risks across the entire spectrum of possible North Korean provocations.

Create a Nuclear Consultation Mechanism

An early goal of the new dialogue should be to establish a trilateral mechanism tailored explicitly to enable nuclear-related crisis consultations among national leaders. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Brad Roberts argues that the absence of such a mechanism “is perhaps the biggest gap in the existing deterrence architecture and promises to become even more glaring as the threat [from North Korea] develops.” Should any scenario emerge in which the U.S. president is considering the employment of nuclear weapons to defend an ally, it is difficult to imagine that he would not seek input from leaders in Seoul and Tokyo, who would rightly expect to be consulted if time and circumstance permit. Waiting to adopt a mechanism ad hoc during a time of extraordinary stress, in which every minute lost could have grave consequences, is no way to prepare U.S. and allied leaders for the most consequential conversation they might have. Preparation and extensive advance work are necessary to facilitate timely and informed decision-making in a time of a nuclear crisis. Concerns that establishing such a mechanism could create a “slippery slope” toward allies believing they need a more robust U.S. nuclear presence or need to build their own weapons notwithstanding, doing otherwise is a recipe for alliance failure.

Enhance Trilateral Planning for Conventional Operations Under the Nuclear Shadow

Whereas a nuclear consultation mechanism would enable national leaders to dialogue during a crisis in which a U.S. president may consider employing nuclear weapons, steps are also needed to coordinate operational-level planning against a nuclear-arming North Korea. We recommend standing up a trilateral planning capability to sustain attention on the operational implications of a North Korean nuclear attack, as well as mitigation and response options. This would involve the relevant allied planners to enhance conventional military — not nuclear employment — operations and coordination under the nuclear shadow.

This conventional focus distinguishes our recommendation from one that was made in a recent task force report from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. That report calls for establishing an Asian Nuclear Planning Group, similar to NATO’s long-standing nuclear planning group. It would bring Australia, Japan, and South Korea “into U.S. nuclear planning processes and provide a platform for these allies to discuss specific policies associated with U.S. nuclear forces and conduct war games and exercises, including those involving the highest political-level participation.” The Chicago Council recommendation is likely to face two near-term obstacles. Stout anti-nuclearism in Japanese politics is likely to prohibit it from joining a group tasked explicitly with nuclear employment planning. Moreover, by including Australia, an Asian nuclear planning group would appear, to Beijing at least, to be aimed at China, complicating South Korean membership. What we recommend is a trilateral mechanism that can be easily tailored to — and explained to domestic constituencies as — responding to a clearly growing North Korean threat and is focused on better enabling conventional operations in a nuclear environment.

Defense communities in all three countries have long recognized the need for greater information sharing and coordination to support critical missions, such as noncombatant evacuation operations and missile detection and defense. Also sorely needed is deeper consideration in planning for Japan’s involvement in a Korean contingency. Japan could provide medical and humanitarian support to mitigate the consequences of a North Korean nuclear attack on the South, substantial anti-submarine and maritime defense capabilities for operations in the Sea of Japan, and use of ports/bases located on its territory by both U.S. and South Korean forces to enhance resiliency should nuclear strikes on military targets in South

Korea render bases there inoperable. These are difficult but necessary conversations to have, and they are not going to get any easier, as the nuclear (first strike) threat to Japan grows. Sober discussions about the effects of a nuclear exchange on conventional military operations could inject a greater sense of realism into allied investments, planning, and exercises to enhance their ability to communicate, operate, and deny North Korea benefits from using nuclear weapons against allied forces.

Some in the defense communities of all three countries may object to a trilateral planning mechanism due to the classified nature of military plans. To be clear, this is not a call to strip unilateral or bilateral plans of their classification to share them with partners. Engaging in planning is not the same thing as sharing plans. Savvy planners can have informed and useful discussions about the operational implications of a nuclear attack and response options without divulging information beyond a given level of classification. Those discussions can lead to the development of better-informed unilateral and bilateral plans and facilitate timely operational-level coordination, if needed.

Strengthen Allied Contributions to U.S. Deterrence Operations

Lastly, recent changes in U.S. regional bomber operations provide a need and rationale for strengthening allied involvement in U.S. strategic deterrence missions aimed at North Korea. In April 2020, the United States stopped permanently basing strategic bombers in Guam. The official explanation emphasized the need to adopt a “dynamic force employment” concept that was introduced in the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy, which prioritized expanding the flexibility of U.S. regional deployments. The United States now relies solely on continental U.S.-based bomber groups that can deploy to different locations in the region at a time of their choosing for deterrence missions.

The new approach arguably increases the resiliency and flexibility of the bomber force but it has raised doubts about the U.S. commitment to regional security. In an apparent effort to assuage some of these concerns, the U.S. Air Force Global Strike Command has said it “will maximize all opportunities to train alongside our allies and partners, to build interoperability, and bolster our collective ability to be operationally unpredictable.” When it comes to missions aimed at deterring North Korea, the focus should be on finding and exploiting opportunities to enhance trilateral cohesion.

The United States conducted bomber overflight missions in response to North Korea’s 2017 intercontinental ballistic missile launches. South Korean and Japanese fighters provided tactical escorts, offering a particularly strong show of unity. Should an uptick in tensions with North Korea resume, routinizing combined exercises of this nature could help demonstrate alliance resolve. Moreover, the transition to a “dynamic force employment” model is intended to allow U.S. bombers to operate from a “broader array of overseas locations.” Joint allied investments in airfields to expand that range of potential locations from which U.S. bombers can operate, potentially including on allied territories, would signal a combined commitment to U.S. strategic deterrence operations against North Korea.

Anticipating the China Factor

Hanging over many of these discussions is China. While the approaches outlined above are narrowly focused on the threat from North Korea, Beijing is nonetheless likely to take offense. It has a history of objecting and responding with punitive measures to actions the United States and its allies take to protect themselves against North Korea. And it may see in stronger trilateral cooperation against North Korea a harbinger of alignment against it. The scope of trilateral cooperation indeed could be broadened to better cope with an expansionist China. Optimistically, that specter of trilateral deterrence would encourage Beijing to apply more pressure to restrain North Korea. At the end of the day, Chinese sensitivities and potential reactions should not discourage the allies from adopting necessary measures to enhance deterrence and defense against North Korea. However, the

allies could take measures to be transparent that trilateral cooperation is not aimed at containing China. Ultimately, in this and in other areas, Beijing should not have a veto over policies the United States and its allies deem necessary to their national security.

Final Thoughts

Unlike changes in force posture or nuclear signaling to strengthen deterrence, creating a trilateral deterrence dialogue, a nuclear consultation mechanism, and a conventional military planning capability have the benefit of not overtly raising military pressure on North Korea. They do not include an outward show of force. As a result, they could be adopted in the near term without being seen by Pyongyang as provocative in a way that disrupts the diplomatic agendas of either Washington or Seoul. Rather, they establish a framework to enable a sound trilateral response should diplomacy falter. Efforts to strengthen allied contributions to U.S. strategic bomber missions, however, fall in another category. Because they may be seen as militarily provocative by Pyongyang, those measures could be discussed now but implemented at a time of the allies' choosing.

Lastly, vital to these efforts will be a public information program that explains to the three publics the necessity and value of trilateral cooperation. This will be a difficult task, not only because it demands that speakers go straight to the maw of historical grievance, but also because it concerns straight talk about nuclear war, a subject that most governments prefer to avoid. Yet it is only by acknowledging the potential implications of crises and deterrence failure that countries can signal the resolve that is a critical element of deterrence. Vision and leadership will be essential. Without this, deterrence will weaken and could fail.

The governments in Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul have long acknowledged that a forward-looking, cooperative relationship among them is a pillar of their defense strategies and is essential to any effort to deter and, if necessary, defeat an adversary in the event of a crisis or conflict. In recent years, however, domestic political considerations have outweighed that national security imperative. Such self-indulgent thinking is ever more dangerous. There is now an opportunity to return to first principles, resume and advance trilateral cooperation, and strengthen deterrence in Northeast Asia. The visits to Japan and South Korea later this month that are reportedly being planned for Secretaries Austin and Blinken offer a chance to get started.

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SOUTH KOREA:

US and South Korea scale back military drills over virus, North Korea diplomacy

US and South Korea scale back military drills over virus, North Korea diplomacy (armytimes.com)

By: Hyung-Jin Kim, The Associated Press to the Army Times

SEOUL, South Korea — The South Korean and U.S. militaries are scaling back their annual exercises this month due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to support diplomacy focusing on North Korea’s nuclear program, officials said Sunday.

Seoul’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that the allies decided to start the nine-day drills on Monday after reviewing factors like the status of the pandemic and diplomatic efforts to achieve denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula. It said the drills are defensive in nature and are mostly tabletop exercises and simulations that won’t involve field training. Last year, the allies canceled their springtime drills after some of their troops were infected with the coronavirus.

In recent years, the countries have also suspended or downsized many of their regular training to create more space for the now-stalled U.S.-led diplomatic drive to convince North Korea to denuclearize in return for economic and political incentives. U.S.-South Korea drills have been a major source of animosities on the peninsula, with North Korea viewing them as invasion rehearsals and responding with its own weapons tests. In January, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un urged the U.S. to withdraw its hostile policy and South Korea to end drills with the U.S., warning the fate of their relations with North Korea depends on how they behave.

Some experts have said Kim may resume high-profile missile tests and raise tensions if he feels provoked by the upcoming drills, one of the two major military exercises between Seoul and Washington along with their summertime training. The nuclear negotiations have been stalled for about two years since a February 2019 summit between Kim and then President Donald Trump collapsed due to wrangling over U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea.

The government of South Korean President Moon Jae-in, which facilitated the early part of the U.S.-North Korea talks, has been calling for the diplomacy’s restart and greater inter-Korean ties. A South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff officer said that Seoul and Washington decided to “minimize” the number of troops participating in this month’s drills because of the pandemic. The officer, who requested anonymity citing a department rule, said the allies have been staging field exercises throughout the year to maintain their readiness, rather than holding them intensively in certain periods, in an apparent reference to the spring and summer drills.



IRAN:

Iran enriching with new set of advanced machines at Natanz: IAEA

[Iran enriching with new set of advanced machines at Natanz: IAEA \(msn.com\)](#)

By: Francois Murphy for Microsoft News // 24 mins ago

VIENNA (Reuters) - Iran has started enriching uranium with a third set of advanced IR-2m centrifuges at its underground plant at Natanz, the U.N. nuclear watchdog told its member states on Monday, a further breach of Tehran's 2015 deal with major powers.

The move is part of a recent acceleration by Iran of its violations of restrictions under that deal, which granted Iran relief from financial sanctions in return for curbs to its nuclear activities. It began breaching limits after then-U.S. President Donald Trump quit the deal and re-imposed sanctions in 2018. The acceleration of breaches appears aimed at raising pressure on Trump's successor Joe Biden. The new U.S. president wants to revive the accord, but Washington and Tehran are locked in a standoff over which side should move first.

The deal allows Iran to enrich uranium only with first-generation IR-1 centrifuges at the underground, commercial scale Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) at Natanz. In November Iran started enriching there with a first set of IR-2m machines, which are far more efficient, and has since been adding to it. "On 7 March 2021, the Agency verified at FEP that: Iran had begun feeding natural UF₆ into the third cascade of 174 IR-2m centrifuges," the International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report obtained by Reuters, referring to uranium hexafluoride, the form in which uranium is fed into centrifuges to purify it.

"The fourth cascade of 174 IR-2m centrifuges was installed but had yet to be fed with natural UF₆; installation of a fifth cascade of IR-2m centrifuges was ongoing; and installation of a sixth cascade of IR-2m centrifuges had yet to begin," it added. In addition to its IR-1 machines, Iran is now using 522 IR-2m centrifuges to enrich uranium to up to 5% fissile purity at the FEP, the IAEA added. That is more than the 3.67% purity allowed under the deal but less than the 20% it is enriching to at another facility, Fordow. Uranium enriched to 90% purity can be used to make an atomic weapon.

(Reporting by Francois Murphy; Editing by Peter Graff)

The Mullahs' Nuclear Weapons Game

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/17129/iran-nuclear-weapon-game>

By: Majid Rafizadeh to the Gatestone Institute // March 9, 2021 at 4:00 am

- If the Western leaders know anything about the theocratic establishment of Iran, they would be able to see that the regime has used the Shia religion of Islam to justify repressing its population, killing, executing and sponsoring terror groups across the region. So, what would stop the mullahs from issuing a fake religious ruling if it is going to advance their nuclear program by concealing the fact that they want both nuclear weapons and ensuring the survival of their theocracy?
- "The government is empowered unilaterally to revoke any Shahri'ah agreements which it has concluded with the people when these agreements are contrary to the interest of the country or Islam." — Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, quoted in "Iran: The Formation of Trans Identity and Possible Paths Toward the Acceptance of Greater Gender 'Deviance'", Berkeley Journal of Middle Eastern & Islamic Law [Vol. 9:1].
- The important issue for the ruling mullahs of Iran is the survival of their dictatorship. Anything, including religion, can be used to ensure that.
- The Iranian regime has acknowledged for the first time that it might pursue openly obtaining nuclear weapons.

The Iranian Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi, a close advisor to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, pointed out recently that Iran might in fact very likely pursue that path:

"I must make it clear that if a cat is pushed into the corner, it may behave differently from a cat that walks freely. If Iran is pushed into a corner, it will not be its fault [i.e. the pursuit of nuclear weapons] but rather the fault of those pushing it."

This statement is critical. The Iranian leaders have long argued that there is no way they can seek nuclear weapons due to a religious fatwa (legal opinion under Islamic law) issued by Khamenei. Khamenei did indeed previously issue a fatwa forbidding the pursuit of nuclear weapons. He has been previously quoted as saying: "We consider the use of such weapons as haraam [religiously forbidden under Islamic law] and believe that it is everyone's duty to make efforts to secure humanity against this great disaster".

Khamenei also stated that the production or use of nuclear weapons are governed by Islamic laws which supposedly ban them. On his official website, he adds that "Both sharia [Islamic laws] and aqli [related to logic and reason] fatwas dictate that we do not pursue them." This fatwa of banning nuclear weapons has been the Iranian regime's ready answer on international stage to prove that their nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes.

When Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif met with US Senator Rand Paul, in 2019, for example, Zarif told Paul about Iran's unwillingness to seek nuclear weapons precisely because of Khamenei's fatwa. Other world leaders have also used the Supreme Leader's fatwa to buttress Iran's claim that it does not want a nuclear bomb. President Barack Obama, for instance, in an attempt to reach a nuclear deal and appease the mullahs, declared in his address to the U.N. General Assembly in 2013 that "The Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons."

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry supported the mullahs' line by calling the fatwa "the Highest form of Islamic prohibition": "The supreme leader... says he has issued a fatwa, the highest form of Islamic prohibition against some activity, and he said that is to prohibit Iran from ever seeking a nuclear weapon." Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also lent her support by further pushing the narrative of the Iranian regime. According to her:

"The other interesting development which you may have followed was the repetition by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei that they would – that he had issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons, against weapons of mass destruction. Prime Minister Erdogan and I discussed this at some length, and I've discussed with a number of experts and religious scholars." If the Western leaders know anything about the theocratic establishment of Iran, they would be able to see that the regime has used the religion of Shia Islam to justify repressing Iran's population, killing, executing and sponsoring terror groups across the region.

So, what would stop the mullahs from issuing a fake religious ruling if it is going to advance their nuclear program by concealing the fact that they want both nuclear weapons and ensuring the survival of their theocracy? Secondly, if the Western leaders know anything about Shia Islam, they would realize that a fatwa can be changed at any time. Third, if the Western leaders know anything about the Islamic Republic of Iran, they would realize that the Iranian leaders have drafted the Islamic Republic's constitution in a way that allows the government to pass laws prioritizing those codified laws over religious rulings and fatwas.

According to Article 167, "the judge is bound to endeavor to judge each case on the basis of the codified law [passed by the parliament and endorsed by the Guardian Council]." Then it adds, "In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgment on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwa." Simply put, the Iranian parliament can immediately pass a law allowing the government to pursue nuclear weapons. According to the Iranian constitution, such a codified law would override any fatwa that banned a nuclear program.

Even the Islamic Republic's founding father, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, mentioned on several occasions that Islamic laws could, if necessary, be ignored. He pointed out, for example, that "the government is empowered unilaterally to revoke any Shahri'ah agreements which it has concluded with the people when these agreements are contrary to the interest of the country or Islam."

On another occasion, Khomeini stated that "the government can prevent the hajj, which is one of the important divine obligations, on a temporary basis, in cases when it is contrary to the interests of the Islamic country." The important issue for the ruling mullahs of Iran is the survival of their dictatorship. Anything, including religion, can be used to ensure that.

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

Iran Will 'Raze' Tel Aviv If Israel Attacks, Defense Minister Warns Amid Nuclear Standoff

Iran Will 'Raze' Tel Aviv If Israel Attacks, Defense Minister Warns Amid Nuclear Standoff (msn.com)

By: David Brennan for Microsoft News

Iran's defense minister has responded to the suggestion of military action from Israel by threatening to "raze" the cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa, as regional tensions remain high amid U.S. President Joe Biden's efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal.

Israel remains staunchly opposed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which it says is inadequate and will only embolden Tehran in its weapons programs, and has threatened military action against Iran's nuclear program. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last month that his country would stop Iran's nuclear program "with or without" the JCPOA, while Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Israel Defense Forces chief Aviv Kohavi have both said their troops are drawing up attack plans.

Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said Sunday that the country would retaliate if attacked, the state-run Fars News Agency reported. Hatami dismissed Israeli leaders as "dogs" and the country as "too small to show hostility to the Islamic Republic." "The Zionist regime knows—and if it does not know, it should know—that if it makes a mistake, the Islamic Republic will raze down Tel Aviv and Haifa," Hatami added. "I advise them not to make this mistake, even in words."

Iran has traditionally threatened attacks against Tel Aviv—Israel's commercial and technological capital—and Haifa to try and deter Israeli action against it. After Kohavi's comments in January, Iranian Armed Forces spokesperson Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi said Iran could "level Haifa and Tel Aviv in the shortest possible time." Israel has previously launched attacks against nuclear facilities in Syria, Iraq and—in coordination with the U.S.—Iran.

The country is also accused of an assassination program against Iranian scientists before the JCPOA was signed, as well as the killing of top nuclear researcher Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh in November. The Biden administration has said it plans to coordinate with regional allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia which remain set against the JCPOA, considering it a win for Iran and a threat to their strategic position.

Gantz said last week that Israel "will never allow Iran to become nuclear capable or anywhere close to it," during an interview with Fox News Radio. "If the world stops them before, it's very much good. But if not, we must stand independently," he added. "And we must defend ourselves by ourselves."



INDIA:

India on alert as Pakistan showcases terrifying nuclear breakthrough in menacing threat

[India-Pakistan news: Islamabad step closer to nuclear superiority, spark World War 3 fears | World | News | Express.co.uk](#)

PAKISTAN'S latest military test has sparked fear in India as the nuclear-armed country's Air Force shows off its military capabilities.

By: [GERRARD KAONGA](#) to the UK Express // PUBLISHED: 07:15, Wed, Feb 19, 2020 | UPDATED: 11:10, Wed, Feb 19, 2020

A Pakistan cruise missile was successfully tested on Tuesday and released footage of the event.

The missile is reported to have an extended range of 600km (373 miles) and successfully hit its designated target during the test. A PAF Mirage III jet fired the Ra'ad missile and video footage captured the moment the rocket detached from the aircraft, started its engine and struck its target. Pakistan's military Inter-Services Public relations (ISPR) said the cruise missile is furnished with "state of the art guidance and navigation systems ensuring the engagement of targets with high precision."

The addition of increased range to the missile is expected to cause concern in India as tensions between Pakistan and India remain high over the Kashmir border issue. The increase of range to the Ra'ad missile would allow the missile to be launched within Pakistan's territory while being able to hit critical targets in India. New Delhi is roughly 430 kilometres from Lahore making it a viable target for attack.

Senior fellow at the Centre for International Strategic Studies in Islamabad Mansoor Ahmed warned Pakistan may be bolstering its military capabilities to keep up with India's modernisations, like the Nirbhay missile. Mr Ahmed, who specialises in Pakistan's nuclear program and its delivery platforms said: "Ra'ad will significantly enhance the operational and targeting flexibility of the air leg of Pakistan's strategic forces.

"It gives an enhanced capability for precision strikes against critical military targets on land and at sea from safer standoff ranges. "With its extended range forces and assets can now be taken out with greater precision, targets that were previously only covered by Pakistan's ballistic missiles are now within striking distance." India is expected to carry out their own cruise missile tests later this year.

New variations of the Nirbhay missile are either planned or already being developed which is expected to worry Pakistan if tensions continue to escalate. India and Pakistan have not held talks over Kashmir since February of last year when the two sides almost became involved in a full-blown war. The Kashmir crisis was triggered after a terror attack by a suicide bomber on an Indian military convoy in the Indian-administered Kashmir town of Pulwama.

The attack killed more than 40 people, with India claiming that Pakistan was behind the strike. In the ensuing military standoff, both nuclear-armed countries launched air raids on each other's territory, resulting in an Indian fighter jet being shot down. Tensions were diffused when Pakistan returned the pilot of the shot down jet to India, but frequent military skirmishes continue to plague the region.



PAKISTAN:



UNITED KINGDOM:

NSTR



FRANCE:

NSTR



GERMANY:

German Ministry of Defense warns of threat from Russia, China

<https://pledgetimes.com/armaments-ministry-of-defense-warns-of-threat-from-china/>

By: [Bhavi Mandalia](#) for Pledge Times // [March 7, 2021](#)

The German Federal Ministry of Defense warns after information from [“World on Sunday”](#) in an internal document before the claims to power and the military capabilities of Russia and China.

Russia has approximately 6375 nuclear warheads

With a view to Russia, the paper refers to “the introduction of high-precision, far-reaching and barely interceptable hypersonic agents (hypersonic missiles)”. In addition, Moscow is investing heavily in “maintaining nuclear sea-based second strike capability” and in “priority modernization of nuclear weapons potential”. Russia already has “approximately 6375 nuclear warheads”.

The 840,000 soldiers are well trained and can be relocated quickly.

“Conventional Russian armed forces are able to achieve superiority in terms of time and space,” says the paper according to “Welt am Sonntag”. A weakness is currently the “limited capabilities for worldwide, sustainable maritime use” and the lack of armed drones. For Moscow, the military is an “instrument of political action and power”. “The greatest possible benefit is generated” with comparatively little expenditure of funds.

China continues to develop nuclear capabilities (Friederike Böge, Beijing)

China’s goal is to “secure economic development and shape international order in line with its own interests,” the newspaper quotes from an internal planning paper of the ministry. Russia, in turn, is pursuing the “destabilization and weakening of NATO as a maxim for action”. China is “increasingly outstripping Russia in the context of global influence, including with regard to arms sales and military cooperation,” “Welt am Sonntag” quotes from the paper written by military experts of the Bundeswehr.

China now has two million soldiers, around 6,850 battle tanks and 1,600 fighter planes, but also has the “world’s largest conventional missile potential”. This also included the extremely dangerous hypersonic missiles with a long range of up to 2500 kilometers. In addition, Beijing is systematically expanding its nuclear capabilities and is now also the “world’s largest exporter of armed drones”.



ISRAEL:

Israeli jets escort American B-52s during flyby, in show of force to Iran

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-jets-escort-american-b-52-during-flyby-in-show-of-force-to-iran/>

Move comes amid tensions between US, Israel, and Tehran, with Iran tied to missile strikes on US bases and an attack on an Israeli-owned ship in Gulf of Oman

By: JUDAH ARI GROSS for the Times of Israel // Today, 8:24 pm

Israeli F-15 fighter jets escorted two American B-52 bombers through Israeli airspace on Sunday in a new show of force by the United States against Iran — with an Israeli element — amid rising tensions in the region.

Recent weeks have seen multiple attacks on American military bases in Iraq by Iran-linked militias, including one last week that resulted in the death of an American contractor, as well an attack on an Israeli-owned ship in the Gulf of Oman that Israel has blamed on Tehran. Late last month, the US responded to the rocket attacks on its bases with an airstrike on an Iran-linked militia in Syria, killing at least one member.

Sunday's flyby through the region by the B-52 heavy bombers was at least the seventh such maneuver in the past six months. It marked the first time that Israeli planes were photographed accompanying the US bomber, however. Each B-52 was accompanied by four Israeli F-15 jets. According to the US military, the patrol flight was meant to "deter aggression and reassure partners and allies of the US military's commitment to security in the region."

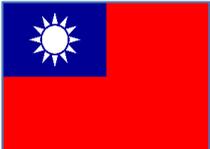
In addition to the Israeli F-15s, aircraft from Saudi Arabia and Qatar escorted the B-52 bombers as they flew through their respective airspaces. "This flight is another testament to the strategic cooperation with American forces, which is a cornerstone in the preservation of the security of the airspace of the State of Israel and the Middle East," the Israel Defense Forces said in a statement.

In recent months, Tehran has attempted to improve its bargaining position with the United States on the issue of its nuclear program by ratcheting up tensions in the region as the two countries attempt to negotiate a mutual return to the 2015 nuclear deal. In addition, Iran has for months threatened retaliation against Israel over the killing of its chief military nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, in what was widely attributed to an Israeli Mossad operation. An attempted bombing near the Israeli embassy in India last month, as well as last week's mine attack on an Israeli cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman, have both been attributed to Iran by Israel.



JAPAN:

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TAWIAN:

NSTR



SAUDI ARABIA:

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TURKEY:

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