

THE ICBM EAR OR PREVIEWS OF COMING DISTRACTIONS, THE WEEK OF MARCH 12, 2021

Highlights

- ✓ Commentary of the week on dangers to the Nuclear Modernization Consensus
- ✓ Fred Kaplan of Slate calls for pausing GBSD and pursuing MMIII SLEP, concludes aerospace industry and Republican politicians created fiction of the need for nuclear modernization. Huessy analysis of his essay included.
- ✓ US Military Commander Questions NK Missile Claim
- ✓ **New Updated AGENDA for the Crane, MI and SSP Triad Symposium, July 7th, 2021**
- ✓ HASC Chair discusses US China strategy
- ✓ Heritage Foundation Defense Studies
- ✓ HASC Chair says JSF is too costly, the US should “cut its losses.”
- ✓ Great essay on the Chinese Navy by Peter Schweitzer
- ✓ Kahl nomination to top OSD policy position under fire.
- ✓ Khanna and Markey call for GBSD to be terminated.
- ✓ Kheel Essay summarizing nuclear fights emerging in Congress, includes push to slowdown, pause or terminate GBSD.
- ✓ Mark Schneider speaks at nuclear seminar series, video link provided.
- ✓ **Updated Seminar Series on Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense: Frank Miller on March 23, 2021 at 10am.**

Commentary of the Week by The ICBM EAR

Keeping the Modernization Consensus

Various elements in the US Congress want US nuclear policy to go in a decidedly different direction. This push may place in jeopardy the hard fought for bi-partisan consensus created over the past ten years to fully modernize the aging US deterrent while also jointly implementing arms control with our adversaries.

Critics of the consensus, while a minority, may have supporters within the new administration, and may put at risk critical elements of the US deterrent, markedly change US deterrent policy and use new arms control proposals to cut at least another one-third of US nuclear forces, even doing so unilaterally.

The current consensus position is pretty straightforward. Modernize the three aging elements of the Triad—strategic bombers and related cruise missiles, land-based missiles, and submarines and related sea-launched ballistic missiles. And build a new nuclear command and control system especially to protect the US from cyber threats, while also refurbishing the nuclear warhead laboratories and facilities.

Critics oppose low-yield nuclear weapons on our submarines and propose the elimination of a Navy cruise missile now only in research. Also opposed is the new Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) to be discarded in favor of a temporary service life extension of the already 50-year-old Minuteman missiles.

As for bombers, some members of Congress want to eliminate entirely the bomber cruise missile or long-range strike option (LRSO) and rely only penetrating bombers for our air-breathing deterrent. Finally, critics oppose rebuilding the warheads currently in our inventory, particularly the current policy of having the capability to produce from between 20-80 “nuclear pits” or the core technology for all warheads.

On nuclear deterrent policy, the divide between the current consensus and the critics is also stark.

Critics want the US to adopt a No First Use policy. However, even some in the disarmament community now understand our extended deterrent over NATO and our Western Pacific allies has historically included the deterrent threat of responding to a major conventional attack from Russia or North Korea or China, for example, with the first use of nuclear weapons. As such many of our allies would be naturally worried if that option were specifically “undone” by explicit US policy.

Equally problematic is the notion the US deterrent force is considerably larger than required. The HASC Chair, Adam Smith (D-WA), has complained the US doesn’t need “5000 warheads” to deter. However, the US had deployed in its long-range strategic deterrent force only about 33% of that number, or around 1700 warheads, and of those, some less than 1000 are deployed “on-alert” or readily available at any one time on a day-to-day peacetime basis.

Another push is to reduce US nuclear forces by fully one-third based on an unverified assumption that some US military officials responsible for nuclear deterrence were supportive of just such a US unilateral reduction.

Now some differences on nuclear issues may be the result of an outdated assumption of what exactly US nuclear deterrent policy entails. For many years, US nuclear policy was often referred to with the acronym MAD or mutual assured destruction. This referenced a US policy during the Johnson administration where US policy held that deterrence was deemed sufficient if the US could destroy from 50-75% of the Soviet industry and its population.

However, even the Kennedy administration was looking at options known as “flexible response” to get away from what many experts thought of as not very credible unitary policy of “massive retaliation” to any Soviet aggression. Particularly under the leadership of Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, the adopted US policy changed to hold at risk key Soviet military and defense assets. These assets were primarily the Soviets military weaponry and those missiles, bombers, submarines, and other nuclear forces which a US President would not want to see remain in a sanctuary from which to be free to continue to attack the United States and its allies.

Over some many decades, the US has refined such a “counterforce doctrine” to limit the first strike, preemptive and disarming type of weapons our nuclear armed adversaries possess. While the total warhead inventories have through arms control been reduced well over 80% for Russia

and the United States, that threat remains a serious future potential. That is why the US keeps a multiplicity of forces available with which to retaliate, including some submarines always at sea and strategic bombers capable of being airborne should a crisis materialize that calls for such US action.

However, given the survivability of the current US nuclear forces, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), determined the likelihood of a Russian attack on the US nuclear forces, particularly our 400 Minuteman silos, as “next to zero”, a conclusion also reached by a number of analysts at the Federation of American Scientists and the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace.

Given the near zero likelihood of such a threat today, keeping the US nuclear deterrent credible and avoiding any such strikes from our enemies requires the US to maintain the structure of the current deterrent but in a credible and effective manner which means the force must be fully modernized.

As the current commander of US Strategic Command explained recently, if we choose not to modernize, we are choosing to go out of the nuclear business as the old legacy forces simply cannot be sustained much beyond this decade when the replacements are scheduled to be delivered. ,

Top Story of the Week

On March 10, Slate published an essay by Fred Kaplan arguing that GBSD is not needed, and if any ICBMs are required for deterrence, that mission can be achieved through the life extension of the existing Minuteman III missiles at some number but not necessarily at the current force of 400. Here follows in bold face is my analysis along with the text of Kaplan’s essay.

Kaplan alleges the military industrial complex invented the need for TRIAD modernization to piggyback on the New START ratification process; that Strategic Command invented the idea of a “ICBM nuclear sponge” to justify the ICBM force, and that a MMIII SLEP is cheaper than a new GBSD ICBM force.

PRH ANALYSIS OF & COMMENT ON:

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 LAST TIME THE US CONGRESS DEBATED WHETHER TO BUILD A NEW ELEMENT OF THE NUCLEAR TRIAD WAS WHEN THE US WAS CONSIDERING THE PEACEKEEPER MISSILE, WHICH WAS INITIALLY DEPLOYED IN OCTOBER 1986, WITH A THE KEY VOTE TO FORWARD IN MAY 1985, SOME 36 YEARS AGO, HOWEVERM THE INITIAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPEMENT FUNDING FOR THE PEACEKEEPER/MX STARTED IN 1974 NEARLY A HALF A CENTURY AGO.

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.

THIS COST ESTIMATE BY KAPLAN IS PURE FICTION. BUT IT IS OVER 65 YEARS WHICH HARDLY QUALIFIES AS A "FEW DECADES" —COST IS ACTUALLY \$87 BILLION FOR THE ENTIRE RDT&E AND ACQUISITION FOR GBSD OVER NEARLY 15 YEARS.

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.

CONGRESS SUPPORTED THE PROGRAM BECAUSE IT WAS NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR NATIONAL SECURITY. AS FOR THE CONSORTIUM OF COMPANIES IN THE GBSD PROGRAM, EACH COMPANY BRINGS A CRITICAL TECHNOLOGY TO THE PROGRAM AND WENT THROUGH A NORMAL BUT THOROUGH COMPETITIVE PROCESS TO WORK ON THE PROGRAM.

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.

MR. KHANNA LOST 14-43 VOTE IN HASC AND 166 TO 266 ON THE HOUSE FLOOR. GBSD SUPPORT WAS BI-PARTISAN AND OVERWHELMING. THE KEY ARGUMENT WAS ALL PREVIOUS SERIOUS ASSESSMENTS CONCLUDED THAT GBSD WAS THE BEST WAY FORWARD AND NOT A LIFE EXTENSION FOR MINUTEMAN.

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.)

YOU CANNOT BUILD MMIII AGAIN AS IT WON'T TECHNICALLY BE CAPABLE MUCH BEYOND 2030, WON'T MEET THE DETERRENT REQUIREMENTS OF THE COUNTRY AND WILL COST FAR MORE TO SUSTAIN AND OPERATE THAN GBSD

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.

THE ICBM FORCE HOLDS AT RISK KEY RUSSIAN ASSETS THAT OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE TRIAD MAY NOT BE ABLE TO DO. ALSO, THE SUB FORCE IS ONE THIRD ON ALERT AND THUS WITH SOME 360 WARHEADS THUS MAKING GBSD AT 400 WARHEADS, HIGHLY COMPLIMENTARY IN HOLDING KEY RUSSIAN ASSETS AT RISK REQUIRED FOR MAINTAINING DETERRENCE.

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.

ACTUALLY, AS THE NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW OF 2018 AND RECENT REPORTS FROM FAS AND CARNEGIE ALL CONCLUDED THERE IS “NEAR ZERO” CHANCE FOR THE RUSSIANS TO ATTACK THE UNITED STATES ICBM FORCE, THUS FINALLY THROWING OUT THE FOOLISH IDEA THAT ICBMS ARE INHERENTLY DESTABILIZING. AN ATTACK BY RUSSIA ON THE ICBM FORCE OR THE ENTIRETY OF THE US NUCLEAR FORCE WOULD BE SUICIDAL.

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.

THE US HAD OVER 500 BOMBERS AND OVER 600 SEA LAUNCHED MISSILES AND 1054 LAND BASED MISSILES. THUS, ALL ELEMENTS OF THE TRIAD HAVE BEEN REDUCED BY BETWEEN 60-90%, WITH ICBMS THE LEAST REDUCED OF ALL 3 LEGS OF THE TRIAD.

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.

THE CHOICE IS NOT BETWEEN ARMS CONTROL VS NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION. BOTH ARE REQUIRED. EACH LEG OF THE TRIAD WILL LITERALLY GO OUT OF BUSINESS STARTING AT THE END OF THIS DECADE UNLESS REPLACED.

THE MMIII ICBMS, SAYS THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, WILL LITERALLY BEGIN FALLING APART AROUND 2030; THE SUB HULLS WILL NOT LAST BEYOND 42 YEARS AND THE OLD STRATEGIC BOMBERS WILL EVENTUALLY NOT BE ABLE TO PENETRATE TO THEIR TARGETS.

THE NEW START TREATY WAS WRITTEN SPECIFICALLY TO ACCOMMODATE THE CURRENTLY PLANNED TRIAD AND WAS AGREED TO PRIOR TO OR BEFORE THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND THE SENATE WAS CONCLUDED IN DECEMBER 2010. THATS WHY 700 SNDVS WERE ALLOWED UNDER NEW START. OTHERWISE WITHOUT THE ICBM FORCE, THE US SNDV LEVEL WOULD BE 250 STRATEGIC NUCLEAR DELIVERY VEHICLES MADE UP OF 192 SEA-LAUNCHED BALLISTIC MISSILES AND 60 STRATEGIC BOMBERS. WHY THEN WOULD THE TREATY ALLOW 700 SUCH SYSTEMS IF THE US HAD NO NEED FOR ANYTHING BEYOND 250? .

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.

AGAIN, KAPLAN DOESNT UNDERSTAND DEFENSE BUDGETS. THE \$1.3 TRILLION IS A FALSE NUMBER. AND THE REQUIRED NEW SYSTEMS WERE NOT INVENTED BY REPUBLICANS TO PAD THE DEFENSE BUDGET.

A NEW ICBM HAS BEEN IN THE WORKS FOR A DECADE AS HAS FUNDING FOR THE NEW COLUMBIA CLASS SUBMARINE AND THE B-21 BOMBER. ALL THREE SYSTEMS ARE NEEDED TO REPLACE AGING AND EVENTUALLY OBSOLETE CAPABILITIES. AS ADMIRAL RICHARD, THE HEAD OF US STRATEGIC COMMAND HAS EXPLAINED THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN MODERNIZATION OR THE USA GOING OUT OF THE NUCLEAR BUSINESS. THERE IS NO CHEAP LEGACY SYSTEM ALTERNATIVE FOR ANY LEG OF THE TRIAD, INCLUDING NUCLEAR COMMAND AND CONTROL OR NC3, AS WELL AS THE NEED TO REBURBISH OUR WAREHADS AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS INFRASTRCTURE. WORK ON THESE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TRIAD HAVE BEEN GOING ON PRIOR TO NEW START.

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.

THE \$1.3 TRILLION IS NOT FOR MODERNIZATION BUT ALL SUSTAINMENT AND SUPPORT FOR 30 YEARS PLUS MODERNIZATION. THE ENTIRE RESEARCH,

DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION BUDGET FOR THE THREE NEW TRIAD PLATFORMS—THE B21 BOMBER, THE COLUMBIA CLASS SUBS AND THE ASSOCIATED D-5 MISSILES AND THE GBSD WILL IN FY2021 RUN ABOUT \$8.5 BILLION OUT OF A DEFENSE BUDGET OF \$741 BILLION, OR 1.1%.

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.

NO ONE DREAMED UP THE SPONGE THEORY EXCEPT THE DISARMAMENT COMMUNITY’S TO JUSTIFY THEIR FAILED MULTIPLE DECADES LONG OBSESSION WITH KILLING ICBMS. KAPLAN GETS ONE THING RIGHT AND THAT IS IF THE RUSSIANS WANTED TO TAKE OUT THE MINUTEMAN FORCE THEY WOULD NEED TO ATTACK WITH 800+ WARHEADS. RUSSIA WOULD ALSO BE USING ITS BEST HARD TARGET KILL WARHEADS AND ONLY TAKE OUT 400 USA WARHEADS AT BEST.

DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR, THE WINDOW OF VULNERABILITY WAS INDEED A TOP CONCERN BECAUSE THE SOVIETS 11500 WARHEADS WERE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO TAKE OUT ALL 1054 US ICBMS AND HAVE CLOSE TO TEN THOUSAND REMAINING WARHEADS AVAILABLE TO HOLD AT RISK KEY REMAINING USA MILITARY ASSETS AND US CITIES. THE FEAR WAS SUCH A SOVIET ATTACK OR THREAT OF SUCH AN ATTACK WOULD COMPEL THE US TO STAND DOWN IN A CRISIS. A KEY EFFORT TO OVERCOME THIS VULNERABILITY WAS TO MAKE THE ICBM FORCE MOBILE. HOWEVER, WITH THE (1) BAN ON MULTIPLE WARHEAD LAND BASED ICBMS IN START II, (2) THE DOWNLOADING OF OUR ICBMS TO ONE WARHEAD EACH, (3) ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS REDUCING SOVIET AND THEN RUSSIAN WARHEADS BY 90%, AND (4) WITH THE END OF THE COLD WAR, THAT WINDOW OF VULNERABILITY WAS SHUT.

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.

THE SITUATION TODAY IS VASTLY DIFFERENT. THOUGH RUSSIA HAS A VERY LARGE FORCE CAPABLE OF DEPLOYING 3400-4400 STRATEGIC WARHEADS IN AN OUTBREAK FROM THE NEW START TREATY, WITHIN THE NEW START TREATY RUSSIA HAS 1490 MISSILE WARHEADS.

TO ATTACK THE UNITED STATES ICBM FORCE INCLUDING LAUNCH CONTROL FACILITIES AND ALL 450 SILOS, RUSSIA WOULD HAVE TO PLACE ITS FORCES ON HIGHER ALERT. THIS WOULD GIVE THE USA AND ITS ALLIES SUCH AS GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE, ADVANCED WARNING OF ANY ATTACK. THIS IS A BIG CHANGE FROM THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR. AS NOTED DEPLOYED RUSSIAN WARHEADS NOW ARE DOWN 90% UNDER NEW START.

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.

KAPLAN DOESN'T UNDERSTAND: IF THE RUSSIANS WERE INTERESTED IN DISARMING THE UNITED STATES THEY WOULD NOT ATTACK THE PRESIDENT OF THE USA OR DESTROY MAJOR USA CITIES. TAKING OUT 2 SUB-BASES AND 3 BOMBER BASES WOULD REQUIRE NOT A SINGLE NUCLEAR WEAPON.

WITH ZERO ICBMS IN THE US ARSENAL, THE RUSSIANS WOULD NEED TO TAKE OUT NOT OVER 500 TARGETS BUT JUST 13 TARGETS TO DISARM THE UNITED STATES. THIS WOULD INCLUDE SOME 6-8 SUBS IN TRANSIT TO THEIR BASE OR IN THEIR PATROL AREA, PLUS THE 2 SUB AND 3 BOMBER BASES NOTED ABOVE. NOT A SINGLE NUCLEAR WEAPON NEEDS TO BE USED AS ALL THE TARGETS ARE SOFT TARGETS AND COULD BE ELIMINATED USING CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS.

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.

HERE KAPLAN UNDERSTANDS HIS ARGUMENT IS FULL OF HOLES. HE CHANGES HIS ARGUMENT TO ADMIT HAVING HUNDREDS OF ICBM SILOS SPREAD THROUGHOUT FIVE MIDWESTERN STATES DOES INDEED MAKE THE CHANCE OF A RUSSIAN STRIKE NEAR ZERO. BUT ALL OF SUDDEN ITS NOT 400 MISSILES THAT DO THE STABILIZING JOB BUT 300, or 200 or 50 SAYS KAPPAN. BUT THE 400 ICBM WARHEADS ARE WHAT THE USA NEEDS TO HOLD AT RISK VERY IMPORTANT RUSSIAN NUCLEAR ASSETS NOT THE NUMBER NEEDED TO SOAK UP ATTACKING RUSSIAN WARHEADS.

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.

THERE ARE IMPORTANT REASONS AN EXTENSION OF MMIII ICBMS IS NOT THE RIGHT ALTERNATIVE: (1) OTHER ICBM TECHNOLOGIES INCLUDING THE GUIDANCE AND PROPULSION SYSTEMS NEED TO BE REPLACED; (2) THE CURRENT SYSTEM DOES NOT MEET THE STRATEGIC COMMAND REQUIREMENTS FOR DETERRENCE; AND (3) THE ICBM INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMAND AND CONTROL ALL NEED TO BE MODERNIZED AS WELL.

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.

THERE IS NO USA LED ARMS RACE. DOES KAPLAN NOT UNDERSTAND THE USA NUCLEAR FORCES ALL FIT EXACTLY WITHIN THE NEW START TREATY FRAMEWORK. IT WILL HARDLY MAKE SENSE TO SIGN ONTO A NEW ARMS CONTROL TREATY IF IT ALLOWS A SUBSEQUENT ARMS RACE. AND IT IS ESPECIALLY HARD TO MAKE THE CASE THAT AN OBAMA ADMINISTRATION ARMS TREATY IS NOW INSTIGATING AN ARMS RACE!

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.

DOES THE CURRENT NUCLEAR DETERRENT COST TRILLIONS AS KAPLAN ALLEGES? ACTUALLY, THE CURRENT ENTIRE ANNUAL NUCLEAR ENTERPRISE COSTS \$44 BILLION.

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.

AS FOR HOW MANY NUCLEAR WEAPONS THE US NEEDS THAT IS ESTABLISHED BY A VERY DELIBERATE POLICY OF TAKING A PRESIDENT’S OBJECTIVES, DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE THEM, AND THEN ACQUIRE THE FORCE STRUCTURE THAT ALLOWS FOR THAT STRATEGY TO BE CARRIED OUT UNDER A MYRIAD OF CONDITIONS.

FOR YEARS IT HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD THAT RUSSIA’S NUCLEAR STRATEGY IS NOT TO LAUNCH EVERYTHING THEY HAVE AT THE UNITED STATES IN AN IRRATIONAL SPASM. MOSCOW IS RELYING UPON VARIATIONS OF WHAT TOP EXPERTS HAVE DESCRIBED AS AN “ESCALATE TO WIN” THREAT TO USE LIMITED NUCLEAR STRIKES FOR COERCIVE PURPOSES. THE US ICBM FORCE THUS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO RESPONSIVE, RETALIATORY STRIKES AGAINST RUSSIA’S MOST PRIZED NUCLEAR ASSETS.

OUR ICBM FORCE WAS SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO TAKE OUT RUSSIA’S RESERVE ICBM FORCE. A RUSSIAN FORCE THAT WOULD REMAIN IN A SANCTUARY FROM WHICH TO ATTACK THE UNITED STATES IF NOT HELD AT RISK BY THE PROMPT RETALIATORY LAUNCH ICBM CAPABILITY.

THUS, MINUTEMAN COULD BE USED IN A VARIETY RETALIATORY STRIKE BUT WITHOUT HAVING TO FIRST ABSORB AN ALL-OUT RUSSIAN ATTACK, IMPLYING A VERY SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ICBMS WOULD- BE AVAILABLE FOR DETERRENT PURPOSES. THESE FACTS KNOCK KAPLAN'S SPONGE THEORY OFF ITS HORSE, AS IT DOES THE ENTIRE NARRATIVE OF ICBMS ONLY BEING A DESTABILIZING AND HAIR TRIGGER WEAPONS SYSTEM.

HASC Chair: What's Enough Military to Deal with China?

HASC Chairman Smith (D-WA): "I am worried that we are running towards the idea that the only way to deal with China is to build a military that is large enough to dominate them," Smith added. "I think that's a mistake. I think it's unbelievably expensive, unnecessarily provocative, and also in the modern era of warfare, pretty much impossible." Smith also has noted he believes the swinging of US forces and capability to the Indo-Pacific theater need not require more funding than currently in the budget for forces in that region.

U.S., ASIA:

U.S. Commander Skeptical on North Korea's Claim of New Missile

By Anthony Capaccio, Bloomberg: "The U.S. commander for Korea said there's a "significant gap" between North Korea showing off a new submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile and having a viable nuclear weapon."

NAVSEA Crane, SSP and the Mitchell Institute Presents: THE 21ST NUCLEAR TRIAD SYMPOSIUM, July 7th, 2021, Westgate Academy, Crane, Indiana

Agenda UPDATE

- I *I Keynote Address: Admiral Johnny Wolfe: SSP and Deterrence: Job #1 ©*
- II *Admiral Charles Richard, Commander, US Strategic Command (Invited)*
- III *John Harvey, former OSD and NNSA: Preserving the National Consensus to Modernize the Nation's Deterrent*
- IV *Captain Wright (SSP) and Colonel Dan Voorhies (GSC)*
- V *Mathew Kroenig of the Atlantic Council: Choosing Modernization or Choosing Obsolescence.*
- VI *Rear Adm. Scott Pappano, Program Executive Office for Columbia (Invited).*

VII *Frank Miller, Scowcroft Group: What is the Nature of Nuclear Deterrence and What are the USA Modernization Requirements?*

VIII *General James C. Dawkins, Jr., A10 Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration: GBSD & B-21: Critical to Sustaining Deterrence* ©

IX *Mark Gunzinger and Peter Huessy, The Mitchell Institute: Strategic Bombers and Great Power Competition; & GBSD Contributions to Strategic Stability.* ©

X *Keith Payne, NIPP: Modernization and Deterrence Choices: Common Themes of Nuclear Posture Reviews, 1974-2018*

XI *Michaela Dodge, NIPP: The Defense Budget, National Priorities, and the Cost of the Nuclear Enterprise*

XII *Army, Navy, Air Force Panel on conventional prompt strike and hypersonic technology*

XIII *Aerospace Company Panels: Developing and Delivering the Technology for Nuclear Deterrence: JRC, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Aerojet, and others.*

XIV *University and Aerospace Industry Panel: Developing Long Range Strike, Space and Hypersonic Technologies for Conventional Deterrence.*

XV *Closing Address: General Tim Ray, Commander, USAF Global Strike Command, Our Mission is Deterrence, Our Requirement is Modernization* ©

National Security & Foreign Affairs Update

March 8, 2021

Here are the latest national security and foreign affairs issues on Heritage's radar:

- The FY 2022 NDAA and the defense appropriations bill should keep the military focused on the challenges of great-power competition and build on the bipartisan consensus on the challenges posed by China and Russia.
- Strategy must lead in deciding what changes to defense are made. Today's military investments, especially for the Navy, will look to building the forces needed in the South and East China Seas.
- Washington should re-engage with Japan and South Korea and play a strong behind-the-scenes role that urges remediation between the two countries without appearing to publicly take sides.

Report: [56 Recommendations for Congress: Shaping the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act and Defense Appropriations to Enhance the National Defense](#)
Frederico Bartels, *Senior Policy Analyst, Defense Budgeting*

The NDAA and defense appropriations bill shape the national defense and serve as pivotal guides for the direction of the military in the coming year. The military is facing challenges in preparing to meet the requirements of the National Defense Strategy. Congress should look to the *Index of U.S. Military Strength* as a guidepost and indicator of the health and needs of the military.

[Don't Forget About Iran's Missile Program](#)
Peter Brooks, *Senior Research Fellow*

Few might realize that Iran has the largest missile arsenal—which includes ballistic missiles and cruise missiles—in the Middle East. Stopping Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a clear national security imperative for the United States—and others.

[What Is “Battle Force 2045” and Why Does It Matter?](#)
Brent Sadler, *Senior Fellow for Naval Warfare and Advanced Technology*

Strategy must lead in deciding what if any cuts or additions to defense are made. Today's military investments, especially for the Navy, will look to building the forces needed to fight and win a war in the South and East China Seas. It is high time the Navy get on with its business and make its case for a fleet that can compete with China and Russia in peace and when called on win in war.

[Biden's Supply Chain Executive Order Doesn't Boost the Defense Industrial Base – And That's Okay](#)
Maiya Clark, *Research Assistant, Center for National Defense*

President Joe Biden signed a far-reaching executive order calling for supply chain reviews across many economic sectors deemed strategically significant. Domestic infrastructure for the manufacture and maintenance of defense items is often outdated, creating risks for both service members. With this new executive order, Biden wisely opted not to start from scratch, but instead to build upon the Trump report.

<p>JUST IN: HASC Chairman Says Officials Should 'Cut Our Losses' on F-35 (National Defense Magazine, 5 Mar 21) ... Meredith Roaten.</p>
--

Officials should find a way to “cut our losses” on the F-35 joint strike fighter program, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee said March 5. Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., said he hopes officials can find a way to spend less money on the fifth-generation aircraft, which

has been troubled by a number of issues over the years. Advocates of the platform, which in addition to being stealthy is also equipped with cutting edge sensors and data networking capabilities, say it will be a critical asset in the U.S. military inventory as the United States competes with advanced adversaries such as China and Russia.

Kahl Nomination Stalls

Republicans line up: Inhofe's opposition is a sign of hardening GOP resistance to Kahl. Though he didn't say all 13-Armed Services Republicans would oppose Kahl, Inhofe added that he "can't imagine" GOP senators supporting him.

A handful of Armed Services Republicans have already said they won't support Kahl, including Sens. [Tom Cotton](#) of Arkansas, [Joni Ernst](#) of Iowa, [Marsha Blackburn](#) of Tennessee and [Mike Rounds](#) of South Dakota.

11. China Ramps up Pressure on Taiwan.

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/17111/china-pressure-taiwan>

by: [Judith Bergman](#) for the Gatestone Institute // March 10, 2021 at 4:00 am

- One of the "necessary means" that China employs against Taiwan is forcing the Taiwanese air force to be on constant alert... It is part of a strategy known as "gray-zone warfare" that aims to intimidate and ultimately exhaust Taiwan's resolve to resist the Chinese takeover. Tensions in the region are now considered to be at their highest since the mid-1990s.
- More recently, China has expanded its operations against Taiwan from the air to the sea.
- The new law authorizes China's coast guard to use "all necessary means" to stop or prevent threats from foreign vessels, including the use of fire weapons.
- "I think the time has come to be clear: Replace strategic ambiguity with strategic clarity that the United States will come to the aid of Taiwan if China was to forcefully invade Taiwan or otherwise change the status quo across the [Taiwan] Strait." — Senator Tom Cotton, Defense News, February 18, 2021.

"China must be, will be reunified" with Taiwan, Chinese President Xi Jinping [announced](#) in January 2019. The goal of reunification is a basic tenet of China's policy regarding Taiwan. It forms a central part of Xi's nationalist doctrine, [according](#) to which, reunification is "a must for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era". "We are willing to create broad space for peaceful reunification, but will leave no room for any form of separatist activities", he [added](#).

"We make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means." One of the "necessary means" that China employs against Taiwan is forcing the Taiwanese air force to be on constant alert. Chinese jets [made](#) a record 380 incursions into the Taiwanese air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in 2020 -- the highest number of incursions since 1996 -- thereby forcing the Taiwanese air force constantly to scramble military aircraft to head off the Chinese incursions.

It is part of a strategy [known](#) as "gray-zone warfare" that aims to intimidate and ultimately exhaust Taiwan's resolve to resist the Chinese takeover. Tensions in the region are now [considered](#) to be at their [highest](#) since the mid-1990s. The attempt to intimidate and pressure Taiwan into submission without resorting to actual war continued into the first month of 2021. Chinese air force planes, including bombers and fighters were [spotted](#) in the ADIZ no less than 27 times. The number of aircraft [involved](#) has also surged, with 28 making incursions on January 23-24 alone.

"Taiwan independence means war. The PLA's recent military activities in the Taiwan Strait were a solemn response to interference from external forces and provocations from 'Taiwan independence' forces," [said](#) Wu Qian, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense. He added that they were "necessary actions amid the current security situation across the Strait to safeguard national sovereignty and security."

More recently, China has expanded its operations against Taiwan from the air to the sea. Using sand dredging ships -- which dredge up sand from the ocean bed for construction projects in China -- around the Taiwan-governed Matsu islands, China supplies itself with construction material, while [forcing](#) the Taiwanese coast guard to go on constant round-the-clock patrols to expel the ships. The purpose seems, once again, to exhaust Taiwanese capabilities and break their resolve.

One Taiwanese security official [said](#) it "is part of their psychological warfare against Taiwan, similar to what they are doing in Taiwan's southwestern airspace." [According](#) to Reuters: "Last year, Taiwan expelled nearly 4,000 Chinese sand-dredgers and sand-transporting vessels from waters under its control, most of them in the area close to the median line, according to Taiwan's coast guard. That's a 560% jump over the 600 Chinese vessels that were repelled in all of 2019".

Reuters adds: "Taiwanese officials and Matsu residents say the dredging forays have had other corrosive impacts -- disrupting the local economy, damaging undersea communication cables, and intimidating residents and tourists to the islands. Local officials also fear that the dredging is destroying marine life nearby." China's "gray-zone warfare" against Taiwan includes diplomatic isolation, which China's seeks to bring about by putting pressure on countries to refrain from establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Most recently, this tactic resulted in the cancellation of an agreement with Guyana about the establishment of a "Taiwan office" in the South American country that Taiwan had [signed](#) with Guyana on January 11. On February 4, Taiwan announced that it was opening the office in Guyana, but facing pressure from Beijing, Guyana cancelled the agreement. "The government of Guyana wishes to clarify that it continues to adhere to the one China policy and its diplomatic relations remain intact with the People's Republic of China," [noted a press release](#) from Guyana.

"The government has not established any diplomatic ties or relations with Taiwan and as a result of the miscommunication of the agreement signed, this agreement has since been terminated." "There is but one China in the world, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory," [declared](#) Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin in response to Guyana's cancellation. "China firmly opposes any official exchanges in any form between Taiwan and a country having diplomatic relations with China..."

Facts have once again proved that the one-China principle is a widely recognized norm for international relations and universal consensus of the international community." China's new [China Coast Guard \(CCG\) Law](#), effective February 1, is expected to raise tensions even higher in the South and East China seas. The new law [authorizes](#) China's coast guard to use "all necessary means" to stop or prevent threats from foreign vessels, including the use of fire weapons.

Michael Shoebridge, of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), [writes](#): "We've got used to stories of Chinese fishing fleets and Chinese militia vessels intimidating other nations' vessels and even bumping into them to get their way... We've also got used to the Chinese coastguard shadowing Chinese fishing fleets, ready to intervene if they come into contact with other nations' vessels."

"What's different now, though, is that with this new law Xi has told his coastguard to be wolf warriors at sea—and to use force, including lethal force, to assert Chinese interests. The Chinese

coastguard has been building some novel ships that let it apply force not just with the weapons on board, but with the ships themselves. Coastguard vessels like the 10,000-ton [Haixun](#) aren't just bigger than many naval ships operating in the South and East China Seas, but they also have strengthened hulls that are designed for deliberately hitting other vessels—'shouldering' is the naval term of art."

Taiwan's unofficial ambassador in the United States, Hsiao Bi-khim, [said](#) that regarding China's actions, following the coast guard law, the world should be on "high alert". The question, however, is what happens if or when China shifts from "gray-zone" warfare to actual warfare. For four decades, changing US administrations have been following a doctrine of strategic ambiguity on the question of whether the US will defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, meaning that the US has refrained from answering the question of whether it will assist in Taiwan's defense.

The doctrine is consistent with the [Taiwan Relations Act](#), according to which the president and Congress shall determine an appropriate response by the United States in the event of threats to the security or the social or economic system of the people on Taiwan, and any danger to the United States interests arising from such threats. More voices are arguing, however, that strategic ambiguity does not suffice in the face of China's ramped up pressure on Taiwan and that the doctrine must be replaced with "strategic clarity".

Richard Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, [wrote](#) in September: "The policy known as strategic ambiguity has... run its course. Ambiguity is unlikely to deter an increasingly assertive China with growing military capabilities. "The time has come for the United States to introduce a policy of strategic clarity: one that makes explicit that the United States would respond to any Chinese use of force against Taiwan.

Washington can make this change in a manner that is consistent with its one-China policy and that minimizes the risk to U.S.-Chinese relations. Indeed, such a change should strengthen U.S.-Chinese relations in the long term by improving deterrence and reducing the chances of war in the Taiwan Strait, the likeliest site for a clash between the United States and China." "I think the time has come to be clear:

Replace strategic ambiguity with strategic clarity that the United States will come to the aid of Taiwan if China was to forcefully invade Taiwan or otherwise change the status quo across the [Taiwan] Strait," [said](#) Senator Tom Cotton, a senior Republican on the Senate Armed Services

Committee, recently. The US recently reaffirmed its support for Taiwan in a number of areas. "The United States notes with concern the pattern of ongoing PRC attempts to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan", the US State Department [wrote](#) in a press release in January 23, as Taiwan was experiencing a large amount of incursions into its ADIZ.

"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... Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid and contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and within the region." Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) during his confirmation hearing that the US would uphold its commitment to ensure Taiwan has the ability to defend itself.

He also said that he would like to see Taiwan play a greater role around the world and that he was in favor of greater engagement with Taiwan. The administration is keeping up the previous administration's upgrading of relations between the two countries and [invited](#) Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's unofficial ambassador to the United States, to the presidential inauguration, the first time that has happened since 1979. As China continues to increase its aggressive behavior both in and out of the region, "strategic ambiguity" may end up looking like an open invitation for China to move in.

Judith Bergman, a columnist, lawyer, and political analyst, is a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Gatestone Institute.

8. **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 modernization 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 modernization 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 LRA more rapidly and strike targets across most of the continental US and Alaska. China's extant nuclear modernization 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 defense 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 neutralizes 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 defense 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 outmatch US.

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

by Grant Newsham March 8, 2021

A Chinese soldier eyes a target during a shooting drill to enhance the anti-drug smuggling capacity of border police in Longjing city, in the southeast of Jilin province in a file photo.
Photo: Xinhua

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 over-spend, 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."

The US Pentagon. Photo: AFP

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.

Clerk counting yuan and US dollar notes at a bank. Photo: AFP

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.

A Chinese warship is seen docked at Garden Island naval base in Sydney on June 3, 2019. China has recently launched three new amphibious assault ships, and it is currently building a third aircraft carrier. Photo: AFP / Peter Parks

“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 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.

Link: How US Military is Preparing for War With China.

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

Dragon Ships: China's Naval Threat

by [Peter Schweizer](#)

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.

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. They would say their naval buildup is "for defensive purposes," but their neighbors do not buy that for a minute. Pictured: J15 fighter jets on China's *Liaoning* aircraft carrier during a drill at sea, in April 2018. (Photo by AFP via Getty Images)

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

Hill Members: Kill GBSD and Navy Cruise Missile and Low Yield Warhead

Senator Van Hollen and Rep Joe Courtney have introduced legislation to cancel development of the sea-launched cruise missile and its low yield warhead. Senator Markey and Rep Mo Khanna sent a letter to the President urging the administration to scale back nuclear modernization, including pausing the GBSD land-based ICBM program, and cancelling the low-yield nuclear warheads being placed on D-5 missiles.

Lawmakers gird for spending battle over nuclear weapons.

By [Rebecca Kheel](#) - 03/07/21 07:30 AM EST [280](#)

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 sea power 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.”

Virtual Events: Schneider on Mitchell’s Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense Forum

<https://youtu.be/0XkwZnzjd-0>

By Jennifer-Leigh Oprihory

The Air Force Association's Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies hosted a Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense Forum event March 11 featuring Mark Schneider, senior analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy. Schneider shared his insights into Russia’s nuclear modernization programs and doctrine, the importance of the U.S. nuclear triad, and considerations for the Biden administration’s approach to nuclear deterrence strategy. Peter Huessy, Director of Strategic Deterrent Studies at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, moderated the discussion and facilitate audience Q&A.

2021 The 39th Congressional Breakfast Seminar Series on Nuclear Deterrence, Missile Defense, Proliferation, Arms Control and Defense Policy

Admiral Wolfe, January 14, 2021

Mark Schneider, March 10, 2021’

Franklin Miller, March 23, 2021

Admiral Richards

Uzi Rubin

General Tim Ray

Generals Formica and Todorov

General Dawkins

General Ray

Chris Ford and Susan Koch

Maj Gen Lutton

Gen Fortney (ret)

John Harvey and Robert Soofer

Mathew Kroenig

Mark Gunzinger

