



GUIDE TO THE ISSUES

MODERNIZE AMERICA'S NUCLEAR TRIAD AND MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEMS

Ensuring a safe, effective, and reliable nuclear deterrent is the military's top priority and the cornerstone of America's national security. However, Russia and China are making significant investments in developing and deploying new nuclear weapons, even as America's nuclear arsenal ages.¹

BACKGROUND

America's land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and bombers form America's nuclear deterrent also known as the "Nuclear Triad."²

The Nuclear Triad ensures America's ability to deliver a "decisive response, anywhere, anytime" in the event of a catastrophic first strike by an adversary.³

The United States built most of these weapon systems in the 1980s. As such, many have been extended well beyond their service lives. Even with extensions, these systems will reach the end of their service lives between 2025 to 2035. This leaves little time to get modern replacement systems online and no margin for error. The United States must make significant investments over the next 20 years to modernize the deterrent, but at no point is the cost expected to be greater than seven percent of the Department of Defense (DOD) budget.⁴ As Ash Carter, President Obama's Secretary of Defense said, "It's not an enormous part of our budget, but it is a critical part of our budget."⁵ Former Secretary Mattis put it more succinctly, "America can afford survival."⁶

China and Russia

China and Russia are rapidly modernizing their own nuclear arsenals. China is investing in long-range bombers that could make it one of three countries in the world with a nuclear triad. China is also building out a robust arsenal of missiles designed to deny the United States and our allies access in the Indo-Pacific. Russia spent more than ten percent of its military budget on nuclear modernization every year since 2011.⁷ In 2018, President Vladimir Putin announced six new strategic weapons systems. Five of them are nuclear capable.⁸

Low-Yield Weapons

The U.S. recently deployed new low-yield nuclear weapons to reinforce America's nuclear deterrent. Opponents of these weapons, including many House Democrats, argue that they are destabilizing and increase the potential for nuclear war.⁹ In reality, they are a deterrent to Russia's dangerous "escalate to de-escalate" theory that calls for the use of Russian low-yield weapons in a limited attack, betting that the United States would not respond disproportionately with one of our high-yield weapons. These new low-yield weapons deter the threat of limited first use because the United States would be able to respond proportionally.¹⁰ President Obama's Defense Science Board recommended deploying new low-yield

Quick Take

Nuclear deterrence is the cornerstone of our national security, but the nuclear triad and missile defense systems require significant modernization.

The President's budget request makes important investments to ensure a robust nuclear deterrent.

weapons because, according to Dr. Mark Schneider, “it plugs a major hole in our current deterrent capability at virtually no cost.”¹¹

Missile Defense

Republicans have championed strong missile defenses to protect the American homeland as well as to protect our partners and allies. While rogue nations like North Korea and Iran develop missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons to the United States, robust layered missile defense capabilities are critical to our national security. For regional missile threats in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, the United States has pursued capabilities that will protect our deployed troops, partners, and allies from near peer and rogue nations alike. The U.S. continues to work with Israel in the cooperative development of missile defense capabilities which are essential to their safety and security. In addition, a robust missile defense research and development effort must address emerging threats from hypersonic weapons, cruise missiles, and other novel systems under development. Missile defense is a critical part of America’s deterrence calculus.

Withdrawing From the INF Treaty

The United States completed withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in August of 2019. The INF Treaty was established in 1987 and led to the elimination of U.S. and Soviet ground-launched cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.¹² Beginning in 2008, the Obama Administration raised concerns that Russia was testing missiles that could fly to ranges banned by the treaty. By 2014, the Obama Administration concluded that Russia had violated the treaty, “the most serious allegation of an arms control treaty violation that the Obama administration... leveled against Russia.”¹³ Congress took action repeatedly to hold Russia accountable, but Russia refused to return to compliance.¹⁴

While Russia was testing banned missiles, China was developing their own arsenal of missiles unconstrained by the INF treaty. According to the US-China Commission, “Over the last two decades Beijing has built up a formidable missile arsenal outside the limits of the [INF Treaty].”¹⁵ Prior to INF Treaty withdrawal, the United States had no comparable capability due to INF restrictions, which put “the United States at a disadvantage and place[d] our forces at risk because China is not a signatory.”¹⁶

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY AND REPUBLICAN PRINCIPLES

Under Article I Section 8, the Constitution requires Congress, “To raise and support Armies; To provide and maintain a Navy,” and to, “make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces.” As President Reagan noted, peace comes through strength. American troops and their families deserve the best deterrent to war our country can provide.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

Congress must authorize sufficient funding to create effective deterrents to a catastrophic attack. In the 1960s, DOD spent approximately 17.1 percent of its budget on the Nuclear Triad. In 1984, during the peak of the last modernization effort, DOD spent 10.6 percent of its budget on the project. President Trump’s Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Proposal calls for needed investments in America’s nuclear deterrent. The President proposes to spend \$28.9 billion, or 3.9 percent of the total national defense budget request, on nuclear modernization. The President’s nuclear modernization plan would spend seven percent of the DOD budget at peak spending levels.

Please contact Cameron Smith or Kelsey Wall with the Republican Policy Committee at (202) 225-4921 with any questions.

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- ¹ Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, Testimony before HASC, March 26, 2019, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20190326/109163/HHRG-116-AS00-Wstate-ShanahanP-20190326.pdf>.
- ² Department of Defense, *America's Nuclear Triad*, <https://www.defense.gov/Experience/Americas-Nuclear-Triad/>
- ³ *Id.*
- ⁴ Department of Defense, FY21 Budget Overview, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2021/fy2021_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf
- ⁵ Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 2016.
- ⁶ Phil Steward, *Under Trump, future of U.S. nuclear arsenal slowly taking shape*, Reuters, Sept. 14, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-military-nuclear/under-trump-future-of-u-s-nuclear-arsenal-slowly-taking-shape-idUSKCN1BP04D>
- ⁷ Shanahan, *supra*, note 1.
- ⁸ *Id.*
- ⁹ Rep. Adam Smith, *Smith Criticizes the Administration's Deployment of W76-2 Low-Yield Nuclear Warheads*, February 4, 2020, <https://armedservices.house.gov/press-releases?ID=B4D7CA1E-45CB-4C0A-9D56-A8E832D48D15>.
- ¹⁰ Undersecretary of Defense for Policy John Rood, *Statement on the Fielding of the W76-2 Low-Yield Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile Warhead*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2073532/statement-on-the-fielding-of-the-w76-2-low-yield-submarine-launched-ballistic-m/>.
- ¹¹ Mark B. Schneider, *Deterring Russian First Use of Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons*, RealClearDefense, March 12, 2018, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/03/12/deterring_russian_first_use_of_low_yield_nuclear_weapons_113180.html.
- ¹² Arms Control Association, *U.S. Withdrawal from the INF Treaty: What You Need to Know*, <https://www.armscontrol.org/pressroom/2019-07/us-withdrawal-inf-treaty-what-you-need-know>.
- ¹³ Michael R. Gordon, *U.S. Says Russia Tested Cruise Missile, Violating Treaty*, New York Times, July 28, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/29/world/europe/us-says-russia-tested-cruise-missile-in-violation-of-treaty.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&_r=1
- ¹⁴ House Armed Services Committee Republicans, *INF Withdrawal a Long Time Coming*, October 25, 2018, <https://republicans-armedservices.house.gov/news/defense-drumbeat/hasc-fact-sheet-inf-withdrawal-long-time-coming>.
- ¹⁵ *Id.*
- ¹⁶ Admiral Philip Davidson, *Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Philip Davidson, USN Expected Nominee for Commander, U.S. Pacific Command*, Senate Armed Services Committee, April 17, 2018, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_APQs_04-17-18.pdf,