

Nuclear Weapon Concerns

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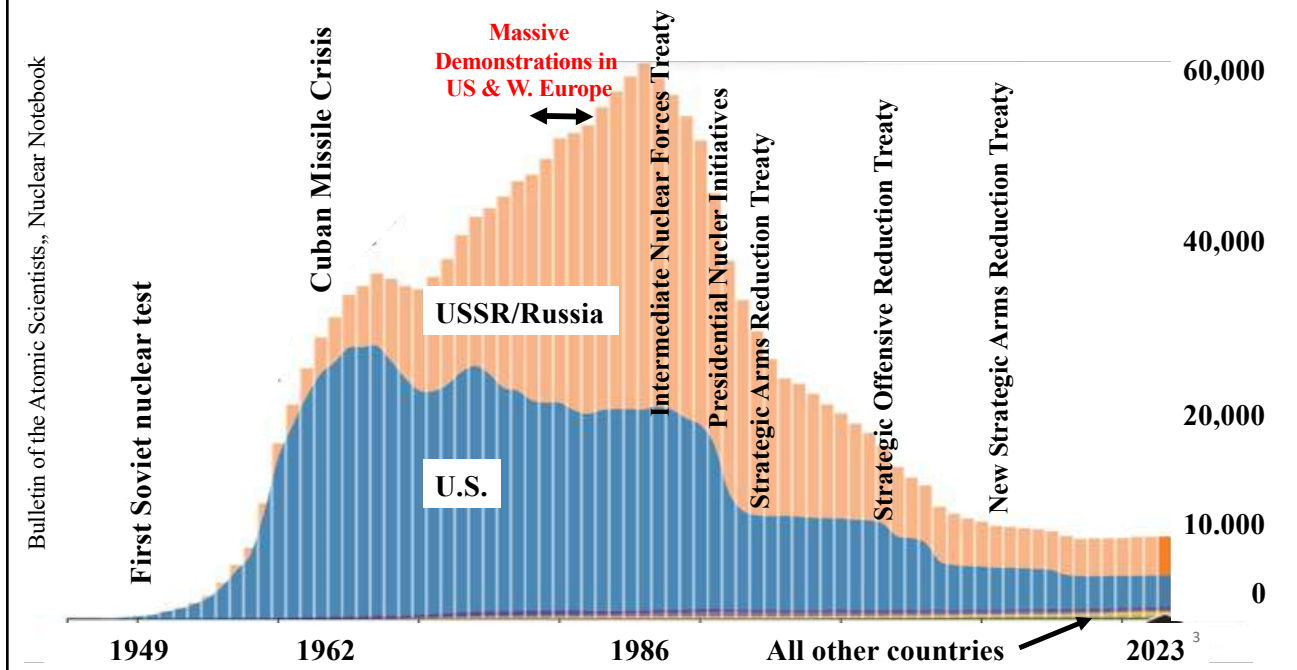
Outline

- 1. Current situation**
- 2. Nuclear arms race with China?**
- 3. Danger of accidental nuclear war.**
- 4. Things we can do to reduce the danger.**

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Deep cuts since the Cold War but all US-Russian limits have expired (New START) or been cancelled (ABM, INF Treaties).



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We've stopped reducing and, with China building up, discussing "uploading" some US strategic ballistic missiles with stored "hedge" Cold War warheads.



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U.S. nuclear “umbrella” over allies in confrontations with Russia, China, North Korea includes a commitment to use nuclear weapons *first* in their defense if need be.



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**Benefits and problems associated with U.S. “nuclear umbrella”
(covers NATO countries plus Japan, South Korea and Australia)**

- **Benefit: Nonproliferation:** “You don’t need to acquire nuclear weapons because our nuclear deterrent is your nuclear deterrent.”

Danger: Allies want nuclear deterrence against *non-nuclear attacks*. This has made impossible a US no-first-use policy such as Presidents Obama and Biden wanted.

Some Democratic members of Congress are proposing the “Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2025,” would require Congressional authorization for any Presidential first use (Ted Lieu, HR 669).

- To make our threats of first nuclear use more credible if Russia attacks a NATO country or if China attacks Taiwan, we are acquiring **“low-yield” nuclear warheads** (thousands of tons TNT equivalent) **deliberately lowering threshold to nuclear war.**

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The dangers of pre-nuclear “counterforce” targetting

Highest-priority targets are other countries’ targetable nuclear weapons, command posts, and the communication links between them.

Creates *crisis instability* – incentives for:

- striking first
- launch on warning of incoming attack.

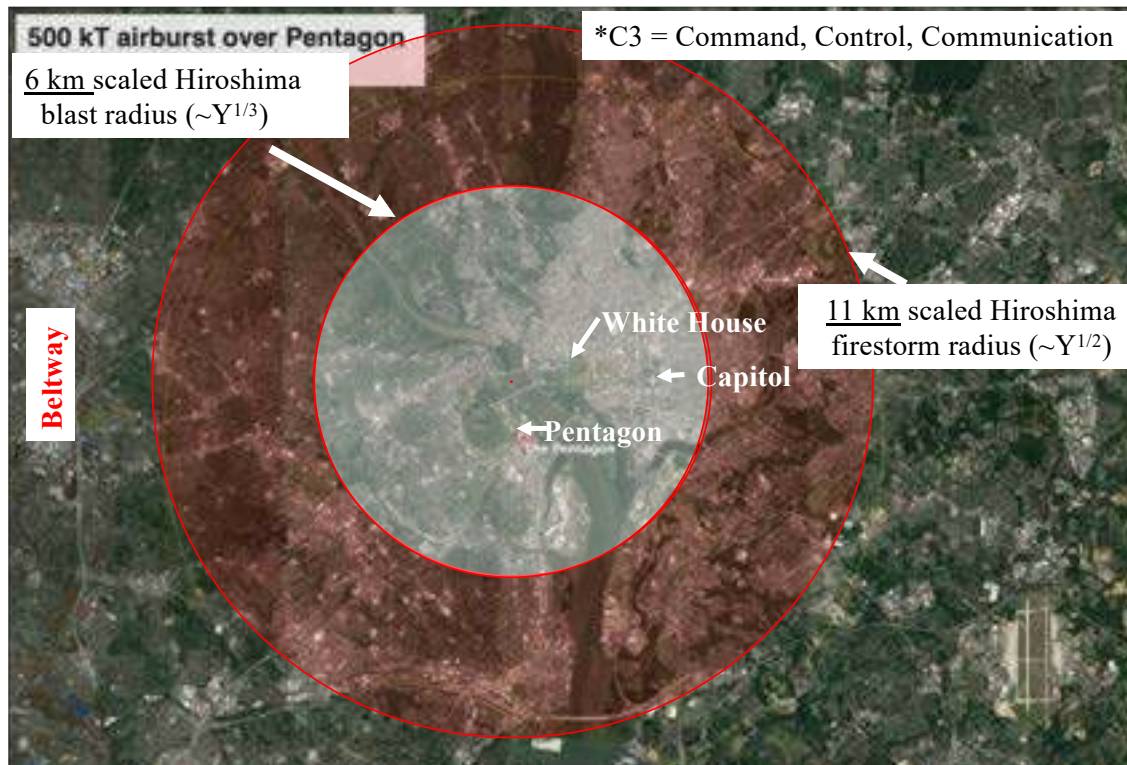
“Collateral damage:” Militaries do not assess civilian deaths from planned nuclear attacks because civilians are not deliberately targeted and it is uncomfortable to think about.

In 1974 Congress commissioned a peer review of a Secretary of Defense’s estimate that a Soviet attack on US intercontinental ballistic missile silos in the Great Plains would cause up to **20,000 US deaths**. After the peer review, the estimate became up to **20 million**).

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“Collateral Damage”: Pentagon is a counterforce target. So is Russia’s General Staff headquarters in Moscow & many other C3* targets in cities.



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Danger of accidental nuclear war

400 US Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) in
"silos" in the northern Great Plains.

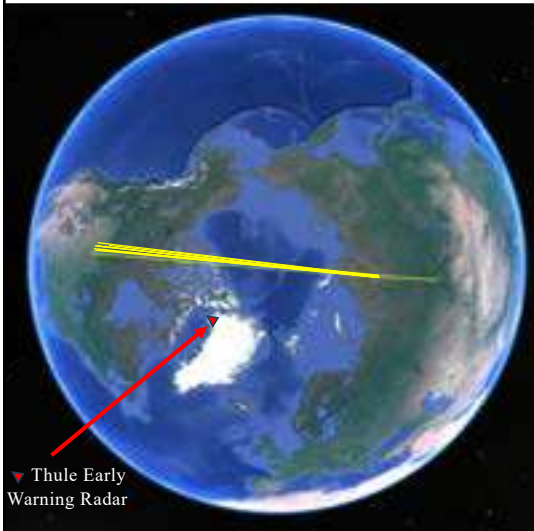
Hard silos can be destroyed by accurate warheads. Therefore, missiles
are in a **Launch on Warning Posture**



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10-minutes at most for a launch decision (in case of warning of attack on
US ICBMs by 10-warhead Russian ICBMs. 5,000-mile flight)



30-minute timeline:*

1 min. after launch: *Russian ICBM hot booster exhaust detected by US early-warning satellite*

4 minutes: US early-warning teams report assessment, President contacted

10-15 minutes: *President briefed*

13 minutes: *Early-warning radar detects warheads, confirming attack, president "jammed" to launch*

17 min: *President issues launch order (or doesn't)*

19 minutes: Launch order transmitted to launch crews

21 minutes: Crews authenticate order

22-27 minutes: US ICBMs launch

30 minutes: Russian warheads (if real) arrive.

Presidential reactions to scenario:* *Reagan wanted to do away with ballistic missiles. George Bush Jr. complained he would not have time "to get off the crapper."*

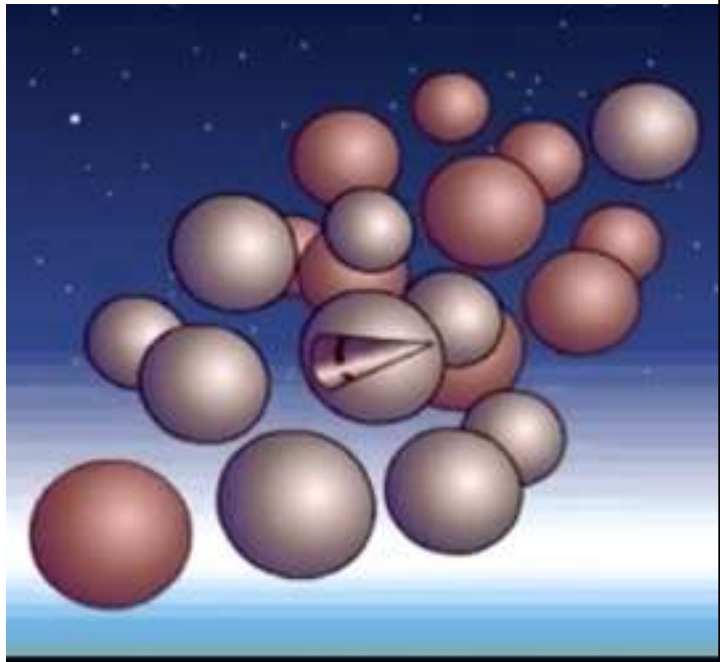
Obama tried to end launch on warning (but massive Pentagon & Republican opposition). Despite near misses, Strategic Command insists on keeping its "launch under attack" option. Would "jam" President to execute if an attack was judged to be real. ("House of Dynamite")

* Bruce Blair, <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2020-01/loose-cannons-the-president-and-us-nuclear-posture/>, 1 Jan. 2020

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Folly of Ballistic Missile Defense: Now “Golden Dome” with space-base interceptors (replay of Reagan’s “Star Wars”)

1. Congressional Budget Office 20-year cost estimate: \$1.2 trillion to “engage” (not stop) an attack such as North Korea could mount. Could be “overwhelmed” by Russia or China.*
2. Could be deceived (e.g. by aluminized balloons containing handwarmers).
3. Would stimulate offensive buildups by adversaries. (*Soviet Union stopped at 64 interceptors around Moscow but US added thousands of warheads just in case.*) ABM Treaty limit of 100 interceptors on each side made limits on offensive forces possible.



*https://www.cbo.gov/publication/62422#_idTextAnchor005

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Recommendations

1. **Eliminate launch-on-warning silo-based ICBMs.** *2/3 of US deployed warheads are already untargetable on submarines at sea.*
Bombers *could* be launched on warning in a crisis because they can be recalled.
2. **Don't invest in ineffective but arms-race-driving strategic missile defenses.**
3. **Don't restart nuclear testing** ended by 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. (Trump Administrations have accused Russia and China of cheating and Trump has ordered US testing “on an equal basis.”)
4. **Adopt a no-first-use posture.** (Act as if we believe “*A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought*”).
5. **Get back to reductions with Russia (plus China).** France and UK both believe about 150 warheads on two ballistic missile submarines at sea are sufficient to deter a Russian nuclear attack. **Another factor of ten!** Then we can start focusing on how to get to zero.

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