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Eliminate our dangerous ICBMs now

There is no specific, concrete step we could take that could so improve our true national security as *eliminating* land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, ICBMs, from our nuclear posture.

That means removing 400 Minuteman III missiles from their silos and dismantling them, and filling the silos with concrete (450 of them, along with 50 missiles in storage) —removing them permanently from the bloated Russian target list and disposing of the present danger of launching them ourselves mistakenly on false warning of Russian attack.

It means appropriating and spending *none* of the quarter-trillion dollars scheduled to be spent in coming decades on a follow-on ICBM, the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent, converting to useful purposes the money already appropriated but not yet spent. This shift is urgent not because the currently planned use of this money is massively wasteful—though it is—but because it is *dangerous*.

The money allocated would be far better spent paying management and employees of Northrop Grumman and their sub-contractors *not* to make any new missiles; and to use part of that appropriation instead to remove and dismantle all Minuteman III missiles. Virtually any other use they might make of that money—including fully paid unemployment compensation, but ideally for doing socially useful work or preparing to transition to such work—would be better for the US and the world than their currently programmed employment.

The title “Ground Based Strategic *Deterrent*” is false labeling, a marketing device for a dangerous product. Neither existing nor programmed fixed-location ICBMs can add in the slightest to the deterrence of nuclear attack on us, because, unlike our submarine-launched ballistic missiles, they can’t survive it to retaliate.

On the contrary, rather than add to our deterrence of nuclear war, they *detract* from it. They increase the risk it will occur, initiated by one side or the other.

On both sides, when there is warning that an enemy missile attack may be underway or imminent—as Russian President Boris Yeltsin was warned at his desk in 1995, and as US officials regularly rehearse—the president has ten minutes or less to launch his unrecalable missiles, because side’s own vulnerable missiles challenge leader to “use them or lose them.”

No other strategic weapon on either side creates that pressure. ICBMs *are* the hair-trigger — and at the same time, a lightning rod—on the Doomsday Machines.

Why use them rather than lose them, at all? If the Russians receive a false alarm that they're under attack, their main, almost their only incentive to try to preempt that supposed attack is to launch weapons targeted upon our ICBM silos, hoping some of our missiles of known location haven't yet been launched.

Their only other military targets would be our missile subs in port—though they carry only a small fraction of our deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles, the majority being at sea where they can't be targeted. They would probably also -- with profound unwisdom exactly like our own—aim to destroy our command and control, making the war uncontrollable and unendable.

That preemption even at its most successful would not, in reality, protect them from utter destruction from our SLBMs at sea at all times, let alone protect the rest of humanity from nuclear winter and nuclear famine brought on by their own attack as well as by our retaliation.

Exactly the same is true for our own comparably-planned response to a warning to a U.S. president (which was seconds away, for example, in the case of a mistaken warning to President Carter's national security assistant in 1979.)

No, Virginia, contrary to all intuition and air force doctrine, striking first is *not* less awful in its effects than striking second, in the age of sub-launched nuclear weapons and nuclear winter.

Not only is there no victory in nuclear war between nuclear weapons states—as Biden and Putin have just agreed again, echoing Reagan and Gorbachev—there is no damage-limiting either, no war-ending, no advantage whatever to preemption, counterforce, decapitation, super-accuracy in SLBMs, weapons on high alert, launch-on-warning of ICBMs: or having ICBMs at all.

No advantage at all in preempting or in carrying out our nuclear threats, if they fail. None. Yet fairy tales to the contrary are the selling points for the vast majority of our strategic nuclear forces, including their \$1.7 trillion "modernization." All, the equivalent to oxychloroquine and bleach for covid-19.

How can Congress fall for this? Easily. *Preparing* for these infeasible goals is good for business. And taxpayer-financed jobs, votes, lobbyists, campaign donations, revolving-door jobs for military officers, and above all, profits, largely for Lockheed, Raytheon, Boeing, General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman and their sub-contractors in nearly every state in the Union. Thus: good for politicians.

Likewise in Russia. Its own military-industrial complex is now as capitalist as ours, though its military and party bureaucracy got the job of expanding their budgets done as well as ours, ever since their humiliation in the Cuban Missile Crisis led them to demand what we had.

A mutual ban on ballistic missiles was discussed at high or low levels exactly once in the nuclear era: for a few hours between Reagan and Gorbachev at Reykjavik in 1986. It would have been in the existential interests of Russia and the US, and the rest of the world, any day in the last 75 years. This is still true today.

Next best—very, very good, better than virtually any other specific step the US can take today to decrease the risk of civilization-destroying nuclear war—is to renounce unilaterally the possession of dangerous, fixed-location ICBMs, and to implement that long-overdue improvement to our deterrent immediately.

