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Feature Report

“The Military Case for Extending the New START Agreement”. By Frank G. Klotz. Published by RAND Corporation; Feb. 14, 2020

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE350.html>

Since the 1960s, U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control agreements have helped to enhance strategic stability, bolster deterrence, and avoid a costly arms race.

With the U.S. decision in 2019 to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty, only one bilateral nuclear arms control treaty remains in force: the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, commonly referred to as the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START. However, New START is set to expire in February 2021. The U.S. government is reportedly still considering whether to exercise the option to extend New START by up to five years.

The U.S. military has important equities in the outcome of this debate. By capping the number of Russian long-range ballistic missiles and nuclear-equipped heavy bombers and putting in place comprehensive verification measures, New START reduces uncertainty regarding Russian nuclear forces and thereby provides the U.S. military with greater confidence in its own plans and capabilities.

Therefore, national security policymakers need to be conversant on the key provisions of New START, the ways in which the treaty supports U.S. military objectives, and the broader political context in which the current debate over its extension is taking place. This Perspective addresses each of these topics in turn. The author concluded that the United States should seek now to extend the treaty to gain the time needed to negotiate a replacement agreement that addresses a broader range of nuclear delivery systems and China's growing nuclear capability.

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NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Air Force Magazine (Arlington, Va.)

Joint Tests Begin for New ICBM Patrol Helicopter

By Rachel S. Cohen and Brian W. Everstine

Feb. 19, 2020

The Air Force completed its first combined test flight of the MH-139A Grey Wolf with manufacturer Boeing on Feb. 11, the service said in a Feb. 19 release.

Testing at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., is the first time Air Force pilots get to vet the new helo, which will replace the Vietnam War-era UH-1N Huey as a nuclear missile field patrol and VIP transport aircraft.

“Boeing completed extensive flight testing on Grey Wolf to satisfy Federal Aviation Administration requirements before the introduction of mixed contractor and Air Force crews,” the service said in the release. “The MH-139A program should complete initial military ground testing later this month.”

Air Force Global Strike Command, which is buying the chopper fleet, did not immediately provide more details about what the Grey Wolf did during the event.

A test detachment stood up at Eglin’s Duke Field in December, and that work will last into mid-2022. The Air Force plans to buy up to 84 operational and test aircraft at a cost of \$2.4 billion, starting with eight deployable helicopters in fiscal 2021.

The service’s buy plan laid out in the 2021 budget request shows the service wants to purchase eight each year until 2023, then ramp up to 15 a year starting in 2024.

At Eglin, a small number of airmen and a few aircraft are just not starting up the aircraft’s developmental testing. Five pilots, six special mission aviators, and four helicopters will go through the ringer in the Florida Panhandle for this earlier phase, before moving north to Malmstrom AFB, Mont., for operational testing next year, said Lt. Col. Mary Clark, commander of Detachment 7 at Eglin, which is overseeing developmental tests along with the base’s 413th Flight Test Squadron.

The crews assigned to Eglin come from all the areas and mission sets that the UH-1N currently serves.

“We’re really focused on mission representation for all our customers—Global Strike, Air Force District of Washington, Air Education and Training Command,” Clark said.

There are hundreds of test points to accomplish. Each one requires days of behind-the-scenes work on top of the flying hours, with briefings before and after flights, test plan development, and more.

This first test plan is linear, with clear-cut requirements to meet. In early 2020, as pilots are starting to get to know the aircraft, they will focus on “really binary” characteristics of the aircraft, Clark said.

For example, does the Grey Wolf “fly as fast as Boeing said it can fly? Does it carry as many people as they say it carries?” Clark said.

The Air Force asked for armed, armored helicopters that can carry at least nine troops and cruise at a minimum speed of 135 knots, among other specifications.

As the test program progresses, “We’ll start getting really into the meat of it, its handling qualities, how the aircraft performs with different inputs, conditions, power settings,” she said.

The service expects the MH-139’s test effort to be significantly shorter than usual because it is based on Leonardo Helicopter’s civil AW139.

“While we’ve militarized it, the basic platform has been known for so long,” Clark said.

<https://www.airforcemag.com/joint-tests-begin-for-new-icbm-patrol-helicopter/>

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VOA News (Washington, D.C.)

US Senators Point to ‘Hypersonic Gap’ with Russia, China

By Eunjung Cho

Feb. 13, 2020

U.S. senators are concerned Russia and China may outpace Washington in developing hypersonic weapons.

In a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Thursday with top defense officials, lawmakers expressed concern about the weapons that fly at five times the speed of sound, or Mach 5.

Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut called the hypersonic weapons “a game-changer.” Independent Senator Angus King of Maine called them “a nightmare weapon for aircraft carriers.”

“It sounds to me as if hypersonic weapons and other future weapons have been more advanced by other countries such as China, even Russia coming back into the scene in a real aggressive way ... are we going to deter them from moving forward?” asked Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia.

Vice Adm. Charles A. Richard, new commander of US Strategic Command, speaks during a change of command ceremony at Offutt AFB...

Maintaining strategic deterrence

Testifying before the committee, Admiral Charles Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, admitted to the ongoing competition. But he sought to reassure the senators that the U.S. has the necessary deterrence capabilities.

“I am confident that this nation has the ability to produce the capabilities we have to have,” he said. “And for deterrence, again, the basic equation hasn’t changed. Can I deny you your aim, or can I impose a cost on you that is greater than what you see? I can do that if necessary.”

Richard added that the U.S. maintains conventional superiority over Russia and China while maintaining strategic deterrence.

Experts say, however, that hypersonic weapon systems could change the existing balance of conventional military power between the U.S. and its major competitors.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the research arm of the Congress, both China and Russia have conducted numerous successful tests of hypersonic glide vehicles and both are expected to field an operational capability as early as 2020.

There are two types of hypersonic weapons: cruise missiles and glide vehicles. Both are difficult to track and intercept because they can maneuver in midflight.

Boosting budget for hypersonic weapons

This is why continued investment is critical in the hypersonic weapons tracking layer in space, according to General Terrence O'Shaughnessy, commander of the Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, who testified at the same hearing.

"We need to continue to invest in that space sensing layer, because as we go from a ballistic missile to a hypersonic glide vehicle, it really changes the problem of maintaining custody of that weapons system throughout its entire flight," said O'Shaughnessy.

In the 2021 budget released Monday, the Trump administration proposed \$3.2 billion for hypersonic weapons, a 23% increase from last year.

"FY2020 represents a pivotal year for hypersonic weapon development and fielding as the department begins aggressively flight-testing capabilities across multiple domains," Richard said in written testimony. The Trump administration has yet to specify when it will field American hypersonic weapons.

New START Treaty

Senators also asked top military leaders about what to expect after the New START Treaty expires in February 2021.

While noting that extending the treaty is ultimately a political decision, Richard pointed to some of the shortcomings of the agreement.

"It does not address a very large class of weapons that the Russians have a significant advantage in, it doesn't constrain novel systems, and it is a bilateral treaty," he said.

He expressed a higher level of distrust in China's intentions in nuclear weapon development.

Richard said he could "drive a truck through China's no-first-use policy," adding, "They're very opaque about what their intentions are. They're very different from the Russians."

The Trump administration is seeking to forge a trilateral arms agreement with Russia and China, although China has so far refused to take part.

<https://www.voanews.com/usa/us-senators-point-hypersonic-gap-russia-china>

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Aiken Standard (Aiken, S.C.)

Full Termination of MOX at Savannah River Site Expected Soon

By Colin Demarest

Feb. 20, 2020

Termination of the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility will be completed in fiscal year 2021, according to the U.S. Department of Energy's latest budget documents, a milestone marking the end of one multibillion-dollar project and, perhaps, the beginnings of another.

Mothballing MOX, a nuclear fuel facility canceled by the National Nuclear Security Administration in late 2018, has involved demolition and disposition of property, retrieving key materials and documents, laying off workers and readying the actual footprint for future use — likely plutonium pit production, the forging of nuclear weapon cores.

Dave Olson, the pit production mission director with Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, the top contractor at the Savannah River Site, last week said the closing out of MOX has left his team with roughly 9 million pieces of "uninstalled equipment" that were bought and never "put in."

About 7 million pieces have been flagged for reuse in plutonium pit production as well as the Surplus Plutonium Disposition project, the MOX alternative more commonly known as dilute-and-dispose, a process to get rid of metric tons of declared-excess weapons plutonium.

Olson said the repurposed equipment will save the government money and offers a hand up in terms of project schedules.

Thousands of pounds of unwanted stainless steel left over from the MOX project was donated to more than a dozen schools in South Carolina and Georgia last year.

Other Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility equipment and property has gone to the Uranium Processing Facility project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, the semiautonomous weapons-and-nonproliferation arm of the U.S. Department of Energy, in October 2018 axed the MOX project, which had been more than a decade in the making.

Five months prior, the NNSA and the U.S. Department of Defense jointly recommended repurposing the never-completed plant for a majority stake in plutonium pit production: making 50 pits per year by 2030, while Los Alamos National Laboratory in northern New Mexico makes 30 per year.

National Nuclear Security Administration Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs Charles Verdon said Feb. 12 his agency "certainly" remains "laser-beam focused on the 2030 goal of 80 pits per year."

A NNSA spokesperson confirmed the MOX termination timeline to the Aiken Standard on Wednesday afternoon.

https://www.aikenstandard.com/news/full-termination-of-mox-at-savannah-river-site-expected-soon/article_ba5eca7a-5259-11ea-982f-6756e34fce57.html

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RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty (Prague, Czech Republic)

NATO Chief Rejects Macron Call to Put French Nukes at Center of European Strategy

By RFE/RL

Feb. 16, 2020

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg dismissed calls by French President Emmanuel Macron to put France's nuclear deterrence at the center of European defense strategy, saying the United States and Britain already provide an effective security umbrella.

"We have to remember that we have a European nuclear deterrent today -- 28 allies deliver that every day and it's not only a promise, but it's something that has been there for decades," Stoltenberg told reporters at the Munich Security Conference on February 15.

"It's tried and tested, we exercise it, and it's institutionalized, and it is the ultimate security guarantee for Europe," said Stoltenberg, who also called France a "highly valued ally" whose nuclear capabilities contributed to NATO's overall security.

Macron has been pushing for an overhaul of European Union security and defense matters in response to Brexit -- Britain's departure from the bloc.

Following Brexit, France is the only EU nation with a nuclear arsenal, and Macron has pressed for European "strategic autonomy" -- the ability to defend the continent without relying on Washington, although he has stated his commitment to NATO.

In a key speech last week, Macron called for dialogue among EU countries about what role the French nuclear deterrent could play as he called for a "surge" in European defense spending.

France is a NATO member but does not make its atomic weapons available to the alliance. It has long prided itself on its independent nuclear deterrent.

Germany has particularly opposed an increased reliance on France's stockpile as a deterrence, seeing the U.S. nuclear umbrella as a key to its security.

"The issue is not for Europeans to know whether they must defend themselves with or without Washington," Macron said during his February 7 speech. "But our security derives also, inevitably, from a greater capacity by Europeans to act autonomously."

"To build the Europe of tomorrow, our norms can't be under American control. Our infrastructure, our ports and airports can't be controlled by Chinese capital, neither can our digital networks be under Russian pressure," he said.

At the Munich event, Macron reiterated those sentiments, saying, "We need a European strategy that renews us and turns us into a strategic political power."

With reporting by AFP and Reuters

<https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-soltenberg-dismisses-macron-call-french-nuclear-deterrence/30436632.html>

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Defense News (Washington, D.C.)

Poland's Aegis Ashore Delayed to 2022 with New Way Forward Coming Soon

By Jen Judson

Feb. 19, 2020

WASHINGTON — Construction issues have caused delays in establishing operational capability of the the Aegis Ashore missile defense site in Poland for well over two years, and that delay has now extended by another two years, according to Vice Adm. Jon Hill, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency's director.

But Hill said he will soon know a path forward that could potentially make up for lost time.

The Aegis Ashore site in Poland was originally expected to be in operation by August 2018, but Defense News reported at the time that a delay would push that date to calendar year 2020 due to problems with the contractor hired in Poland to build the site.

The schedule slipped further due to poor weather and problems with ramping up manpower and other resources to get the job done, then-MDA Director Gen. Samuel Greaves said at the time.

The fiscal 2021 budget request released Feb. 10 revealed the agency would need an extra \$96 million in funding to maintain the Aegis Ashore weapon system, which is already on site in protective, temperature-controlled containers.

Hill told reporters during a briefing Feb. 10 that the current constructor has had problems in "that last tactical mile" and the project has been sitting nearly complete, but not quite there.

"What is not complete is what we really need, which is auxiliary controls, heating, power and cooling, the things that feed a combat system," Hill said, "so that is where that design and engineering that is inside the construction contract has [slowed] down and where the contractor is having problems."

The MDA did an independent assessment in December, Hill said, sending a team to Poland to look at the problems, and the agency engaged with qualified contractors to garner the reality of the situation on the ground. The Army Corps of Engineers holds a fixed-price contract with the contractors in Poland, so the MDA is working with them to go over contract options, Hill added.

"That is what we are doing now," he said, noting that by the end of the month the agency and the Corps of Engineers will have figured out a plan to proceed, "which will involve, I believe, some contract modifications to the construction side to get us on track so that we can accelerate beyond quicker than the '22 [date] that we've estimated."

Hill noted that the schedule is currently a "very conservative estimate" and is "the worst-case" scenario.

Poland's Aegis Ashore site is part of the European Phased Adaptive Approach to regional missile defense against threats from Iran and includes Aegis radar-capable ships based out of Rota, Spain, an AN/TPY-2 radar in Turkey, and another Aegis Ashore site in Romania that are both operational. The TPY-2 radar was stood up in Turkey in 2011 and the Romanian Aegis Ashore site in 2016.

<https://www.defensenews.com/smr/federal-budget/2020/02/18/polands-aegis-ashore-delayed-to-2022-with-new-way-forward-coming-soon/>

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VOA News (Washington, D.C.)

US Diplomat, Saudi King Discuss Iran Security Concerns

By VOA News

Feb. 20, 2020

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Saudi King Salman discussed security issues presented by Iran Thursday in Riyadh.

One day before the meeting, Pompeo told reporters he was ready to negotiate with Iran, but was not in rush to sit with Iranian officials at the bargaining table.

U.S.-Iranian tensions have escalated since the U.S. withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with global powers and imposed sanctions on the country.

The U.S. sent additional troops to Saudi Arabia last year following an attack on Saudi oil facilities that was blamed on Iran. Tehran denied any role in the attack.

In response to the attack, the U.S. State Department said in a statement Thursday "the United States deployed missile defense, and fighter jets on a defensive mission to deter and protect against any future attacks."

During Pompeo's three-day visit to Saudi Arabia, he said he also plans to discuss human rights issues with Saudi leaders, particularly the plight of a Saudi-American doctor who is facing charges there.

Saudi-American physician Walid Fitaihi was detained in November 2017 amid Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's unprecedented anti-corruption crackdown that detained ministers, senior princes and businessmen.

"I'm sure I'll bring up that issue and a wide range of human rights issues, as well," Pompeo told reporters in Addis Ababa before flying to Saudi Arabia.

Pompeo Heads to Saudi Arabia to Talk Iran, Other Key Issues

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrives in Riyadh on Wednesday at a time of heightened tensions in the Middle East. Some issues on the agenda include tensions with Iran, the Trump administration's Mideast peace plan, the ongoing war in Yemen and human rights issues. VOA's Ardita Dunellari reports the meetings take place at a time when both countries are recalibrating their approach to open regional matters and to their bilateral relations.

About 200 people were detained for weeks and months in a hotel in Riyadh and forced to relinquish billions of dollars in assets to the Saudi government.

Fitaihi, who was detained on unspecified charges, was freed last summer. But he and seven of his relatives who are also U.S. citizens have been prohibited from leaving Saudi Arabia while he stands trial, according to U.S. Democratic Congressman Eliot Engel and Republican Congressman Michael McCaul.

The two U.S. lawmakers, members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, submitted a letter to Pompeo on Tuesday urging him to discuss Fitaihi's case with Saudi leaders. They said Fitaihi was detained without being charged for nearly two years. Ahmed Fitaihi told members of the U.S. congress his father had been tortured and had infrequent contact with his family while he was detained.

Saudi Arabia, and the crown prince in particular, are under close global scrutiny for alleged human rights abuses. The prince's reputation was tarnished after Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi was killed and dismembered in 2018 inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. Khashoggi was living in exile and writing about the prince's crackdown when agents employed by the prince murdered him.

Pompeo said he will also discuss economic and security issues with Saudi leaders, particularly security matters involving Iran.

After departing Saudi Arabia on Friday, Pompeo will visit Oman — a close U.S. ally who also has relations with the Saudi Kingdom and Iran.

Pompeo ended a three-day tour of Africa Wednesday before leaving for Saudi Arabia.

Cindy Saine contributed to this report.

<https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/us-diplomat-saudi-king-discuss-iran-security-concerns>

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VOA News (Washington, D.C.)

Experts: U.S. Shifts Focus Away from North Korea

By Christy Lee

Feb. 14, 2020

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump is shifting his priorities away from North Korea in his run up to the presidential election this year, experts said, after fruitless efforts at denuclearization talks that remain deadlocked.

"I suspect the administration sees little opportunity for renewed nuclear diplomacy before the 2020 election," said Robert Manning, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Trump has been reassigning U.S. officials involved in negotiations with North Korea to other posts, a move that experts think signals that his administration is putting less emphasis on denuclearization talks that failed to make a breakthrough last year.

The White House announced Tuesday that Trump has nominated Alex Wong, the deputy special representative for North Korea at the State Department, to a post at the U.N. Wong will be the alternative U.S. representative for special political affairs at the U.N. with a rank of ambassador, the White House said.

In December, Steve Biegun, who served as the State Department's special representative for North Korea since his appointment in August 2018, was confirmed as the Deputy Secretary of State. In January, Mark Lambert, who was the special envoy for North Korea, took up a role at the U.N. to contain Chinese influence at the international body. He began working at the State Department as director for Korea policy in 2015.

“The reassignments of officials who have worked on North Korea, combined with Trump’s silence on the subject during his State of the Union address, suggest that no further engagement with Pyongyang is planned for the rest of this presidential term,” said Joshua Pollack, a North Korean expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California.

In 2018, Trump spoke at length about North Korea. He highlighted the regime’s violation of human rights records, with Ji Seong-ho, a North Korean defector, and the parents of Otto Warmbier, an American college student who died shortly after his release from being detained in North Korea, at the event.

In 2019, Trump praised his first summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, described his relationship with him as “a good one,” and announced that his administration was working on a second summit.

Trump met with Kim for the first time at the Singapore summit in June 2018. Their second summit was in February 2019 in Hanoi. It ended quickly because Washington’s call for full denuclearization and Pyongyang’s demand for sanctions relief did not mesh.

An attempt to bridge that difference at working-level talks in Stockholm in October broke down, and the talks remain stalled since then.

Manning said Trump is turning away from North Korea because the lack of progress made on denuclearization does little to benefit him during an election year.

“Trump has made North Korea a signature issue of his foreign policy, so the failure to achieve any serious steps toward denuclearization, while North Korea continues to improve its missile and nuclear capabilities is a stain on his record on a key issue in which he is heavily invested,” Manning said.

According to a confidential U.N. report to be released next month and seen by Reuters, North Korea has been continuing to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programs while it was engaged with the U.S. last year.

On Monday, CNN reported that Trump told his top foreign policy advisers he does not want to meet with Kim before the presidential election in November, quoting sources familiar with the matter.

Speaking at the Atlantic Council, a foreign policy think tank in Washington, on Tuesday, National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien said the president would meet with Kim if there is a prospect of making a deal.

“If there is an opportunity to move the ball forward for the American people, he’s always willing to do that,” O’Brien said. “We will have to see as to whether another summit between the leaders is appropriate.”

Douglas Paal, vice president at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said that attempting a summit with Kim could be risky for Trump, who is running for re-election. But O’Brien’s remarks suggest that the Trump administration is leaving a door open for diplomacy.

“Doing deals with dictators in election years tends to benefit the opposition,” Paal said. “Trump sees no need for a summit now, but his national security adviser is covering for the possible downside.”

Scott Snyder, director of the U.S.-Korea policy program at the Council on Foreign Relations, said neither Trump nor Kim has much to gain if there is no progress made through another summit.

“It stands to reason that Trump would seek political benefit from another meeting [with] Kim, but would not be interested in another meeting if it will not benefit him politically or advance the U.S. national security interest,” Snyder said.

“It is in the interest of both Trump and Kim Jong Un to ensure that any future meetings are accompanied by meaningful achievements,” he added.

Experts think there is little chance that another summit will take place between Washington and Pyongyang this year in the current stalemate.

“There is little reason to think that the two leaders will meet this year or that any new agreements will be reached,” Pollack said. “The sides simply aren’t talking to each other.”

Manning thinks “for now, denuclearization diplomacy is dead.”

However, North Korea could become a priority if it changes its position or tests more missiles, according to experts.

“It’s pretty [clear] North Korea is not a priority in an election year, unless North Korea decides to make it a priority through its actions,” Paal said.

Ken Gause, director of the Adversary Analytics Program at CNA, thinks North Korea could either escalate threats by testing its weapons again in an attempt to gain the U.S. attention or stay conservative, hoping that Trump will win the election.

“That comes down to North Korean calculus,” Gause said. “What does Kim think? Does Kim think that it’s better to be conservative, not cause a lot of problems and hopes that Trump wins? Or does he think, ‘Hey I need to force this issue before the election?’ And, we’ll find out in the next few months.”

Lee Joen and Ahn So-young contributed to this report, which originated on VOA Korean.

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/experts-us-shifts-focus-away-north-korea>

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Wilson Center (Washington, D.C.)

What to Look for in 2020: The Year Ahead in Asia

By Abraham Denmark, Michael Kugelman, and Shihoko Goto

Jan. 7, 2020

Alliances in Crisis

In the face of the increasing risk of North Korean aggression and Chinese assertiveness in 2020, President Trump has reiterated his demand for allies to greatly expand their financial contributions to the United States and threatened the withdrawal of U.S. military forces. As regional threats intensify and Seoul and Tokyo negotiate with Washington about the future of their alliances, questions across the region about the reliability of the United States to come to the aid of its allies have deepened. How America’s allies and partners across the region react to these countervailing geopolitical trends will have deep consequences for the future of the region and for American power and influence across the Indo-Pacific.

Deepening Uncertainties in Asia’s Economy

As China’s economy slows and the U.S.-China trade war continues to fester, nations across the Indo-Pacific will need to adjust to the new normal of continued economic uncertainty in 2020. The region will be less likely to be united by a shared commitment to economic stability and faith in export-led growth. Instead, political calculations may well overshadow economic interests in the year ahead. Rivalry between Japan and South Korea is expected to continue to hurt trade relations between two

of the region's most advanced economies, while growing political divides among Southeast Asian nations may well undermine the economic ambitions of a more integrated ASEAN. Asia has spent the past year adjusting to the shift in U.S. strategic interests in the region, but 2020 will be defined by how competing visions for growth can take root.

A Pivotal Year in Afghanistan

Afghanistan faces an inflection point in 2020. President Trump is likely to redouble efforts to reach an agreement with the Taliban that puts Afghanistan on a path to peace and allows for the withdrawal of U.S. military forces. While the major challenge for Washington will be convincing the insurgents to agree to a ceasefire in the early stages of negotiations, a more significant long-term hurdle will be finding a way to convince the Taliban to peacefully engage the Afghan government in talks. If negotiations fail to make major progress, President Trump—who abruptly called off talks with the Taliban in 2019 with the two sides on the verge of a deal—will face a difficult decision: stage a unilateral withdrawal even while the war continues to rage, or stay the course and keep fighting an interminable conflict—the longest, by far, in American history.

The Threat of War in South Asia

India and Pakistan will arguably enter 2020 at greater risk of going to war than at any time in over a decade. The year 2019 saw the launch of the first Indian air strike inside Pakistan since 1971, as well as India's decision to revoke the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir. A single trigger in the coming year – such as a mass-casualty attack in Kashmir that New Delhi blames on Islamabad, or an Indian provocation in the part of Kashmir administered by Pakistan – could well spark a conflict. In 2020, Washington, which has a strong interest in reduced tensions on the Subcontinent, will need to decide how to manage and mediate tensions between the nuclear-armed nemeses.

Deepening Peace or a Return to 'Fire and Fury'?

Will the U.S. and North Korea finally make progress on denuclearization negotiations, or will Pyongyang revert to testing nuclear bombs and long-range ballistic missiles? The year 2020 holds significant weight for Korea. In April, South Korea holds general elections that could bring political change to Seoul. In June, Koreans on both sides of the DMZ mark the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. And in October, North Korea celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Korean Workers' Party. With threats and rhetoric rising from both sides, fears of a return to the “fire and fury” of 2017 are palpable. In 2020, we'll be watching whether the standoff will culminate in provocations and responses that send the Korean Peninsula back to destabilizing tensions – or whether Kim and President Trump will draw on their personal relationship and return to nuclear negotiations.

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<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/what-look-2020-year-ahead-asia>

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COMMENTARY

The Hill (Washington, D.C.)

Allies Show US the Price of Reducing Common Defense Funding

By Dov S. Zakheim

Feb. 16, 2020

There are a number of surprises in the Pentagon's budget request for fiscal year 2021. For example, despite trumpeting its increased allocation for research and development to just over \$106 billion, it actually reduced its request for science and technology funds by \$2 billion from that of fiscal year 2020. S&T activities, which address the most basic elements of research, are critical to the Department of Defense's (DOD) ability to exploit scientific breakthroughs that would ensure American dominance on the battlefield for decades to come.

Given the DOD's constant and accurate refrain that, on the one hand, it remains hamstrung in its ability to capitalize upon technological advances in the commercial sector, and, on the other, that it faces an increasingly serious technological challenge from Russia and especially China, the reduction in S&T funding is puzzling, to say the least.

The defense budget's reduction in funding for the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) constitutes another surprising development. The EDI — previously the European Reassurance Initiative — represents Washington's concrete demonstration of its commitment to the defense of its Eastern European NATO allies, namely, Poland and the Baltic states. The initiative has funded an increase in American military exercises, operations and presence in the Baltic region. Last year the DOD requested \$6.1 billion for the EDI, and boasted that this sum represented the seriousness of America's commitment to the defense of Poland and the Baltic states.

How, then, should these allies interpret the new budget request of \$4.5 billion, which represents a 25 percent cut? Moreover, how are they to understand this reduction in the context of DOD's proposed increase in funds for training and exercises? With European member states having become increasingly skittish about America's commitment to the NATO alliance, especially in light of President Trump's negative musings about its value to the United States, a reduction of that magnitude hardly helps matters. It also contradicts the pious statements in both the National Defense Strategy and the new budget regarding the importance of allies to American security.

The Trump administration not only has created uncertainty about American reliability in the face of a crisis affecting its allies, it also has rattled a number of them with demands for full compensation for the forward deployment of its troops on their territory. The newly released defense request provides a worrying example of the consequences of these policies.

For years the United States had planned to construct and field a missile defense radar somewhere in the Pacific to help defend against potential North Korean missile attacks on its territory and those of its allies. The radar was meant to fill gaps in the defense against North Korean missiles by tracking them in the midst of their flight. As the former Missile Defense Agency (MDA) director, Lt. Gen. Samuel Greaves, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee's strategic forces subcommittee in April 2019, "The Pacific Radar will ... maximize BMDS [Ballistic Missile Defense System] discrimination for both homeland and regional missile defense."

The plan took shape with a \$1 billion program that called for deployment of the radar by fiscal year 2026. To this end, Congress awarded the MDA \$14.1 million in fiscal year 2019 to launch the program, and followed with an additional \$6.7 million in fiscal year 2020 for radar studies. The FY

20 funds were awarded to several contractors to define requirements for the radar, while the bulk of spending on the program was to commence with the FY 2021 budget. Nevertheless, at the same time as it funded the studies, Congress recognized that MDA's plans for fielding the radar were too ambitious and it both delayed the program by two years and reduced five-year spending by about a quarter, to \$764 million.

Instead of ramping up spending on the radar in the FY 21 budget, however, DOD killed the program. There is no funding for the radar in the new budget. And the reason is an exceedingly worrying comment on the degree to which allies and friendly states are hesitant to expand their cooperation with Washington. No nation was prepared to come forward to host the radar.

DOD asserts that it will find other ways to provide for mid-course tracking of North Korean missiles, and perhaps it will. But the message of the cancelled system is that there is a price to pay for belittling allied contributions to the common defense.

President Trump continues to call on Asian allies to fully fund the cost of deploying American troops on their territory. He also continues to demand that European NATO allies increase their defense budgets. Yet the cut to EDI hardly helps his case. On the contrary, America may find that, just as there were no takers for its Pacific radar, the Europeans also may decide that they need not jump through their own budget hoops to satisfy diktats from Washington.

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<https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/483011-allies-show-us-the-price-of-reducing-common-defense-funding>

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War on the Rocks (Washington, D.C.)

On Iran, Europe Plays a Weak Hand to Advantage

By Ferial Ara Saeed

Feb. 20, 2020

No one is optimistic about Europe's latest initiative to save the Iran nuclear deal. Iran is violating the agreement incrementally in reaction to U.S. sanctions. Continuing this high-stakes strip tease could provoke a nuclear crisis in the middle of an already tense standoff with the United States. Europe hopes to convince Iran to stop. Here's the problem: The Europeans can't offer Iran any meaningful economic incentives because European companies won't risk U.S. secondary sanctions to do business with Iran, which would be disastrous for their global competitiveness. Worse yet, the ever-growing U.S. "maximum pressure" campaign gives Iran every incentive to continue down the path of nuclear escalation. Lacking tangible leverage to moderate Iranian or American behavior, most analysts deem the initiative desperate, a gamble, and possibly counterproductive. In other words, it's a long shot.

Or is it?

France, Germany, and the United Kingdom are relying on the nuclear deal's dispute resolution process, and the political calculations the U.S. presidential election in November will prompt in Tehran and Washington, to motivate Iranian cooperation and American restraint. The electoral and

dispute resolution processes provide important inducements: a face-saving line of retreat for Iran without “caving” to U.S. pressure; the threat of punitive action if Iran fails to change course; the risk to both sides of losing international support; the restraint inspired by the U.S. electoral calendar; and the potential for U.S. and Iranian policy options to change, if dispute resolution can be extended through the U.S. election. Admittedly, this is not much to work with but, skillfully played, it may be enough to keep Iran’s nuclear violations from becoming an international crisis and a *casus belli* through November.

What Is Europe’s Strategy?

The Iran nuclear deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, established a Joint Commission to handle dispute resolution, among other matters. It comprises the signatories to the accord: the U.K., France, Germany, Russia, China, Iran, and the European Union. Any Joint Commission member can invoke dispute resolution to address concerns over any other member’s compliance with the agreement. It is a flexible process that can move back and forth between the Joint Commission and its members’ foreign ministers, as well as to an advisory board. Time limits for talks in each of these venues can be extended, almost indefinitely, with consensus. The last stop is the U.N. Security Council.

This is the process France, Germany, and the United Kingdom triggered last month. It starts a clock on negotiations to address Iran’s breaches of the nuclear deal and carries a severe penalty for failure. Within 65 days, unless all members of the Joint Commission agree to a postponement, Iran’s nuclear violations are referred to the U.N. Security Council, where U.N. sanctions would probably be re-imposed (a process also called “snapback”).

Referral to the Security Council and re-imposition of U.N. sanctions would renew Iran’s international isolation and indicate that Tehran had lost valuable European diplomatic support. It would also be game-over for the European initiative. Iran has threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty if the dispute lands in the Security Council. Even without that dangerous provocation, it is easy to imagine some combination of Iranian overreaction and American overreach provoking a nuclear crisis and even direct military conflict. Avoiding these outcomes incentivizes Iranian cooperation. That is why keeping the dispute out of the Security Council is central to Europe’s strategy.

Why Is the U.S. Presidential Race the Key?

Equally important to the European strategy is extending the process through the U.S. presidential election in November, which incentivizes Iranian cooperation and American restraint.

U.S. policy towards Iran is incoherent. President Donald Trump says he wants to re-negotiate the nuclear deal, but his expanding maximum pressure campaign whispers regime change. Trump has had it both ways without any apparent political costs. That will change in an election year. In 2016, Trump won three battleground states because he rejected American military adventurism. Some of the president’s most influential media surrogates are warning him that his Iran policy could lead the United States into war, and some 2020 voters are also worried. So were eight Republican senators who, in a rare break with Trump, joined Democrats recently in a vote to limit the president’s ability to attack Iran. As he seeks re-election in November, Trump would risk the support of his base if he stumbled into another military conflict in the Middle East, which would be seen as an unnecessary and costly distraction from urgent problems at home. That will incline him toward restraint.

What will U.S. restraint mean for the maximum pressure campaign? Trump’s hardline Iran policy fires up parts of his base, so it will likely continue, but with less risk of provocation. It could also be re-packaged in a style that gives the appearance of reacting to Iranian moves, rather than remaining

offensive in nature. This is where the nuclear deal's dispute resolution mechanism could help. Washington has never offered Iran an off-ramp. While dispute resolution cannot offer quid pro quo de-escalation, it does offer Iran a line of retreat from nuclear escalation without appearing to bow to U.S. pressure. This allows Iran, which strives to convey the impression that it is capable of withstanding the full weight of American pressures, to maintain that posture, and also to demonstrate that it is not isolated and retains the diplomatic support of Europe, Russia, and China. That would make it harder politically for America to marshal international censure of Iran, let alone launch a military strike. These factors, and the possibility of a new face in the White House, will incline Iran toward restraint, reinforced by the threat of punitive action under the dispute resolution process.

After November, any number of developments could alter the strategic and tactical choices of Iran and the United States, potentially improving the political climate for a new deal. Similarly, as America's European allies lead the effort to keep the nuclear deal operational, their persistent attempts to deny Washington the ability to dictate European foreign policy through threats and U.S. secondary sanctions could erode international acquiescence to American unilateralism. If this European trend becomes irreversible, it would have consequences for America's image, credibility, and posture in the world.

Will Iran See Cooperation as in its Interest?

Without Iranian cooperation, the European initiative cannot succeed in postponing a final reckoning on the nuclear deal. Iran has violated the accord in four areas: breaching limits on the amount of low-enriched uranium and heavy water it is allowed to stockpile, surpassing the limit on uranium enrichment, abandoning limits on advanced centrifuges, and resuming enrichment at its underground facility at Fordow. Iran exceeded the limit on low-enriched uranium, its first violation, after the United States imposed sanctions in May 2019 preventing the sale or exchange of its surplus stock, as required under the nuclear deal. Last month, Iran announced a fifth breach, abandonment of enrichment restrictions, but there has been no follow-up, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

These violations are concerning and must be addressed, but they are not more important than continued nuclear transparency and monitoring. Iran's full compliance with its commitments regarding the presence and access of inspectors employed by the International Atomic Energy Agency in the country, and the nuclear deal's enhanced inspection regime, gives the international community eyes and ears on the ground in Iran every single day. The International Atomic Energy Agency could detect and report to the world if Iran began producing weapons-grade uranium, for instance. Of the four violations to date, only one is irreversible: the potential improvement in Iran's knowledge of centrifuge enrichment, which it cannot unlearn. The Europeans cited this breach with particular concern and they are right to prioritize it. Uranium enrichment is the other major concern. Iran is leaving the door open to abiding by all enrichment restrictions again if economic benefits resume. However, if Tehran takes any further provocative steps, such as enrichment to 20 percent, referral to the U.N. Security Council would be guaranteed. The regime must also consider that the longer Iran's nuclear violations continue, the more likely the U.S. position on domestic uranium enrichment will revert to its pre-2015 status quo: that zero enrichment is the best guarantee that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon.

Extending Dispute Resolution Through November Will Be Challenging, But Possible

None of this will be easy, and the Europeans may overestimate their ability to park the nuclear issue safely in the dispute resolution process. First, extending the process will almost certainly require restoring some compliance Iran has withdrawn, without compensating sanctions relief. Iran complied with the nuclear deal for a year after the U.S. withdrawal in May 2018, without economic

benefits, while waiting for the Europeans to find a way around U.S. sanctions. Tehran has good reasons to play ball again. Iran's cooperation would deepen the divide in the transatlantic alliance over Iran policy and could sharpen international criticism of the U.S. maximum pressure campaign, strengthening Iran's position vis-à-vis the United States. Iran also has an obvious stake in avoiding referral to the Security Council. How the regime would weigh these advantages against other considerations is hard to predict. Intensifying U.S. sanctions could raise the regime's tolerance for risk and reduce its willingness to cooperate. Second, the Trump administration will not sit quietly on the sidelines. Nothing says "maximum pressure," after all, like the referral of a nuclear breach to the U.N. Security Council. Washington will try to force that outcome, drawing on the impartial and authoritative documentation of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Assuming Iran cooperates, resisting U.S. pressure without risking retaliation will be a high-wire act for Europe. The Trump administration is willing to condition trade agreements on foreign policy demands and can leverage ongoing economic disputes with the U.K., France, and Germany to weaken their resolve. Washington succeeded, initially, with an isolated, Brexited, Britain: Eliminating U.S. auto tariffs is a U.K. priority, and after a U.S. official threatened 25 percent tariffs, Prime Minister Boris Johnson suggested scrapping the Iran nuclear deal and letting Trump negotiate a new agreement. The incident highlights the challenges to European unity, but they are not insurmountable. Johnson also assured Iran that the United Kingdom is committed to the nuclear deal after Trump urged withdrawal. More significantly, he decided that Chinese technology giant Huawei will be able to take part in Britain's 5G telecommunications network, despite a massive push to the contrary from Washington.

De-Escalation Measures Are Also Urgently Needed

While they manage the dispute resolution process, the Europeans also hope to resume France's efforts to promote a "comprehensive" settlement between Tehran and Washington. That is unrealistic at the moment. Although Iran showed restraint in responding to the U.S. assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, as did Trump following Iran's retaliatory strike, the fury driving both sides closer to direct military confrontation has not abated. Over the past eight months, both have demonstrated the potential damage they can do as well as an alarming willingness to run rapidly up the escalatory ladder: Iran with its attacks on oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz and (alleged) strikes on two key Saudi oil facilities, and the United States with the hit on Soleimani. The danger is that both may be miscalculating, and the tactics designed to deter conflict might in fact bring it on. European efforts to mitigate those risks and de-escalate U.S.-Iran tensions are, therefore, urgently needed.

European Success on Iran Would Advance Europe's Stature and Global Security

Europe needs this initiative to succeed, not only to avert a nuclear crisis and possibly another war and refugee influx on Europe's doorstep, but to stem the decline in its global influence. After the United States withdrew from the nuclear deal and reinstated secondary sanctions on those doing business with Iran, Europe lost its only source of leverage over Tehran: the promise of trade and financial relations. When its solutions to this problem failed to convince European firms they would be safe from U.S. sanctions, Europe looked weak, irrelevant, and incapable of defending its interests. While the Europeans support the goals of U.S. policy insofar as they relate to changing the regime's behavior, they vehemently oppose the destabilizing tactics the Trump administration has adopted to achieve them. The dispute resolution process allows the Europeans to continue their resistance and counter any perception of impotence. If that perception is allowed to take root, other global powers (Russia and China) could move against European interests more easily in the future. There is more at stake than Iran policy.

The European initiative is the only serious diplomatic process seeking to put guard rails on Iran's nuclear violations and prevent an international nuclear crisis, which could incite a dangerous escalation in the already volatile U.S.-Iran standoff. Without this initiative, the international community would become mere spectators to events that could undermine global peace and security. If the Europeans can keep dispute resolution going through November and mitigate the potential for direct military conflict, the international community should be grateful.

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<https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/on-iran-europe-plays-a-weak-hand-to-advantage/>

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Brookings (Washington, D.C.)

Russia's Shifting Views of Multilateral Nuclear Arms Control with China

By Steven Pifer

Feb. 19, 2020

Over the past year, President Donald Trump and administration officials have made clear the importance they attach to engaging China in nuclear arms control along with Russia. The Chinese have made equally clear their disinterest in participating.

Moscow, meanwhile, has stepped back from its position that the next round of nuclear arms reductions should be multilateral rather than a continuation of the bilateral process that produced the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) in 2010. Russian leaders are not opposed to bringing in China — to the contrary, they'd undoubtedly welcome it. But Moscow seems prepared to leave the heavy lifting to the United States.

CHINA WANTS NO PART

Press reports last year indicated that Trump had expressed interest in doing more on arms control than extending New START. The president in April reportedly ordered development of an approach to involve China and Russia in a new negotiation to cover not just deployed strategic nuclear arms (covered by New START) but other nuclear weapons as well.

Getting China into a nuclear arms control negotiation, while desirable, is unrealistic. The U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals are each more than an order of magnitude larger than China's. The Federation of American Scientists puts the U.S. and Russian arsenals at 3,800 and 4,490 nuclear weapons respectively, as opposed to China's 290. Beijing has long taken the position that it will not participate in negotiations until that gap narrows.

The administration might increase its prospects for success by instead asking that, in the context of further U.S.-Russian nuclear reductions, China provide transparency on the total size of its arsenal and pledge unilaterally not to build up as long as the United States and Russia continued to reduce. Just getting China to do that would require a herculean effort.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/19/russias-shifting-views-of-multilateral-nuclear-arms-control-with-china/>

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ABOUT THE USAF CSDS

The USAF Counterproliferation Center (CPC) was established in 1998 at the direction of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Located at Maxwell AFB, this Center capitalizes on the resident expertise of Air University — while extending its reach far beyond — and influences a wide audience of leaders and policy makers. A memorandum of agreement between the Air Staff's Director for Nuclear and Counterproliferation (then AF/XON) and Air War College commandant established the initial personnel and responsibilities of the Center. This included integrating counterproliferation awareness into the curriculum and ongoing research at the Air University; establishing an information repository to promote research on counterproliferation and nonproliferation issues; and directing research on the various topics associated with counterproliferation and nonproliferation.

In 2008, the Secretary of Defense's Task Force on Nuclear Weapons Management recommended "Air Force personnel connected to the nuclear mission be required to take a professional military education (PME) course on national, defense, and Air Force concepts for deterrence and defense." This led to the addition of three teaching positions to the CPC in 2011 to enhance nuclear PME efforts. At the same time, the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center, in coordination with the AF/A10 and Air Force Global Strike Command, established a series of courses at Kirtland AFB to provide professional continuing education (PCE) through the careers of those Air Force personnel working in or supporting the nuclear enterprise. This mission was transferred to the CPC in 2012, broadening its mandate to providing education and research on not just countering WMD but also nuclear operations issues. In April 2016, the nuclear PCE courses were transferred from the Air War College to the U.S. Air Force Institute for Technology.

In February 2014, the Center's name was changed to the Center for Unconventional Weapons Studies (CUWS) to reflect its broad coverage of unconventional weapons issues, both offensive and defensive, across the six joint operating concepts (deterrence operations, cooperative security, major combat operations, irregular warfare, stability operations, and homeland security). The term "unconventional weapons," currently defined as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, also includes the improvised use of chemical, biological, and radiological hazards. In May 2018, the name changed again to the Center for Strategic Deterrence Studies (CSDS) in recognition of senior Air Force interest in focusing on this vital national security topic.

The Center's military insignia displays the symbols of nuclear, biological, and chemical hazards. The arrows above the hazards represent the four aspects of counterproliferation — counterforce, active defense, passive defense, and consequence management. The Latin inscription "Armis Bella Venenis Geri" stands for "weapons of war involving poisons."

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