



# Global Threats & Challenges

## CAPSTONE Spouses Course

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11 May 2026

OVERALL CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED



# Agenda



## ➤ Strategic Environment

- Security Environment Overview
- Global Priorities
- Defense Priorities

## ➤ Global Threats

- Iran
- China
- Russia
- North Korea
- Violent Extremist Organizations
- Threats on the Southern Border

## ➤ Strategic Approach

- Defend the Homeland
- Deter China
- Increased Burden Sharing
- Defense Industrial Base

## ➤ Q & A





# Strategic Environment



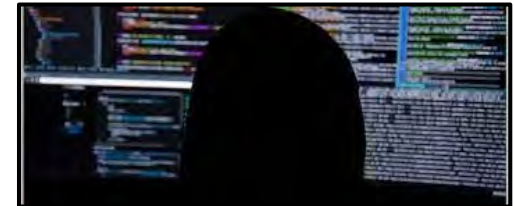
# Security Environment Overview



As the NSS directs, this Strategy recognizes very clearly that not all threats are of equal severity, gravity, and consequence. But even those of lesser salience still matter and must not be ignored. (NDS)

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

- **Homeland and Hemisphere** – Military Threats / U.S. Interests
- **PRC** – Threat to Indo-Pacific
- **Russia** – Persistent, but manageable threat to NATO’s east flank
- **Iran** – “Axis of Resistance” and nuclear weapons pursuit
- **DPRK** – Threat to neighbors and U.S. Homeland
- **The Simultaneity Problem and Burden-Sharing**





# Global Priorities



The National Security Strategy is prepared periodically by the executive branch and lists the **national security concerns** and how the administration plans to deal with them.

## Asia: Wing the Economic Future, Prevent Military Confrontation

- Leading from a position of strength
- Economics: The ultimate Stakes
- Deterring Military Threats

## Promoting European Greatness

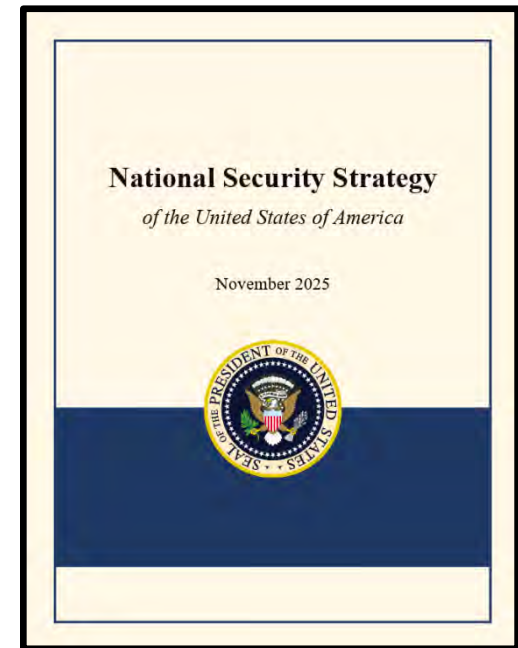
- European stability within and with Russia
- Enable European self-security
- Open EU markets to U.S.

## The Middle East: Shift Burdens, Build Peace

- Iran
- Domestic U.S. Energy Productions

## Africa

- Partner to ameliorate conflict, foster trade, investment instead of aid-focus



**Key Takeaway:** Stopping regional conflicts before they spiral into global wars that drag down whole continents... A world on fire, where wars come to our shores, is bad for American interests.

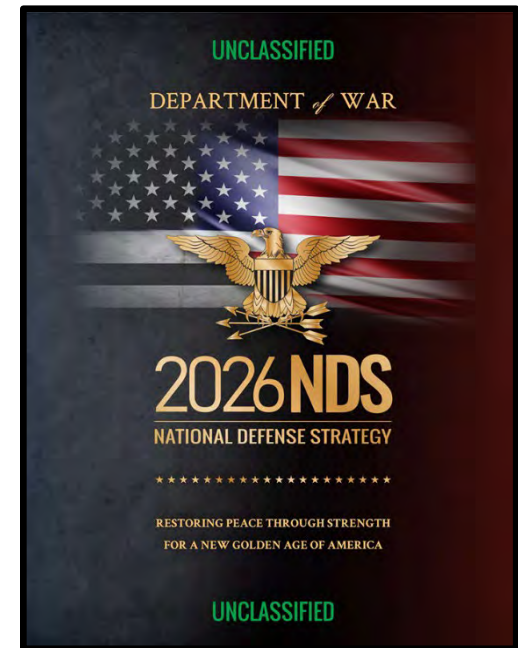


# Defense Priorities



The National Defense Strategy details the DoW's path forward to protect Americans, promote global security, seize new strategic opportunities, and defend our democratic values.

- **Defend the homeland**
- **Deter China in the Indo-Pacific Through Strength, Not Confrontation**
- **Increase Burden-Sharing with U.S. Allies and Partners**
  - “Simultaneity Problem”
- **Supercharge the U.S. Defense Industrial Base**



**Key Takeaway:** Prioritize missions that matter most for Americans' security, freedom, and prosperity.



# Global Threats



# Iran



Iran has crafted its military strategy to serve two important functions: ensure the survival of the regime and secure a dominant position in the region.



## REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OBJECTIVES

- Erode U.S. influence in the Middle East
- Project power in the neighboring states; threaten Israel
- Minimize threats to the regime



## MILITARY CAPABILITIES

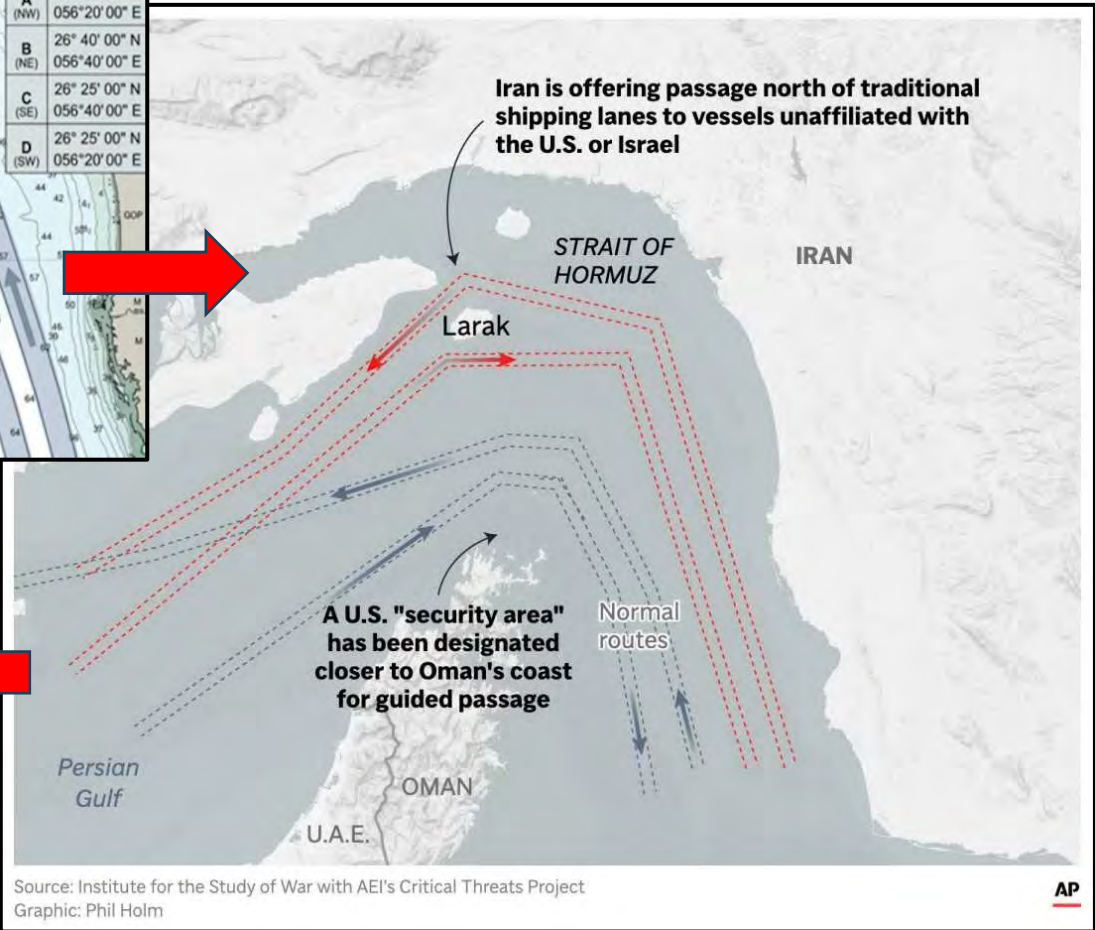
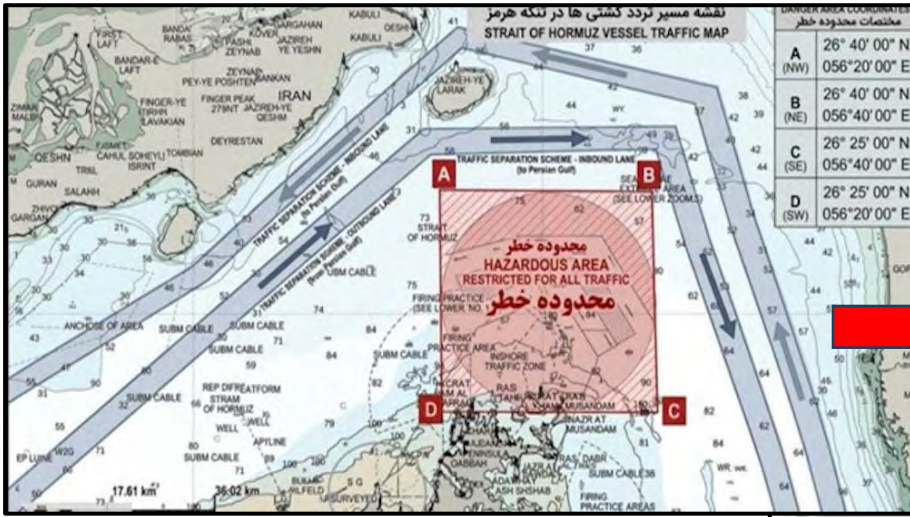
- **CONVENTIONAL:** Hybrid approach; leverages proxy networks
- **WMD:** Taking actions to pursue a nuclear weapon if it so chooses
- **SPACE:** Limited, though advancing counter-space capabilities
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Lack of access to modern technology and weapons
- **ECONOMICS:** Seeks lessened effects of U.S. and multilateral sanctions
- **CYBER:** Conducts malicious information operations
- **MALIGN INFLUENCE:** Cyber, drone, and proxies demonstrate aggression



**Key Takeaway:** Tehran will try to leverage diplomacy, its expanding nuclear program, conventional, proxy, and partner forces, and its military sales and acquisitions to advance its goals.



# Iran: Attempting SoH Control



**Key Takeaway:** Iran attempted to control the Strait of Hormuz (SoH) by introducing alternative transit corridors, directing vessels away from traditional shipping lanes, and claiming Iranian-controlled areas.

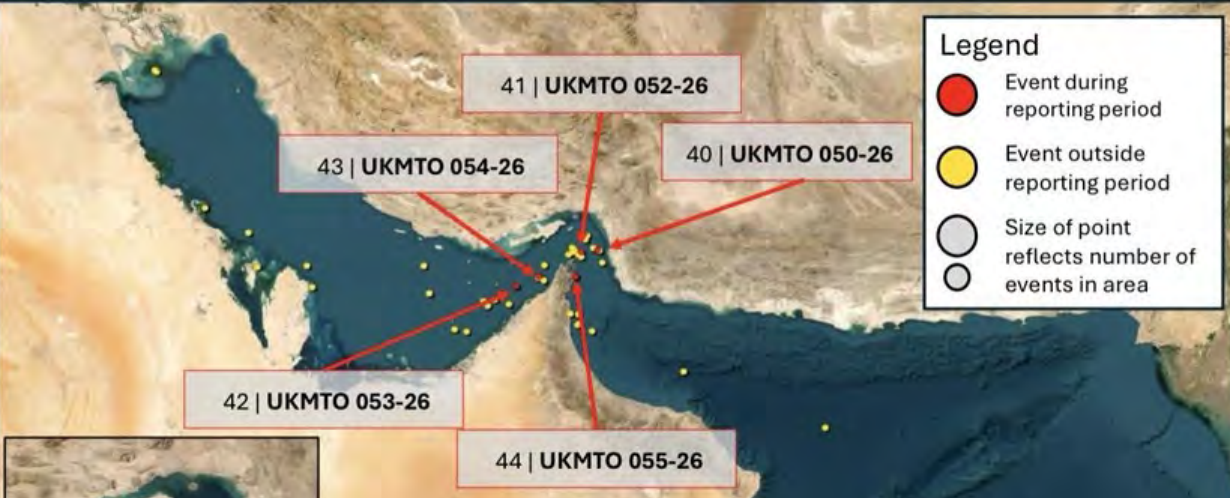


# Iran: Impacts to Shipping



MARITIME EVENTS REPORTED TO UKMTO 02 May – 07 May 26

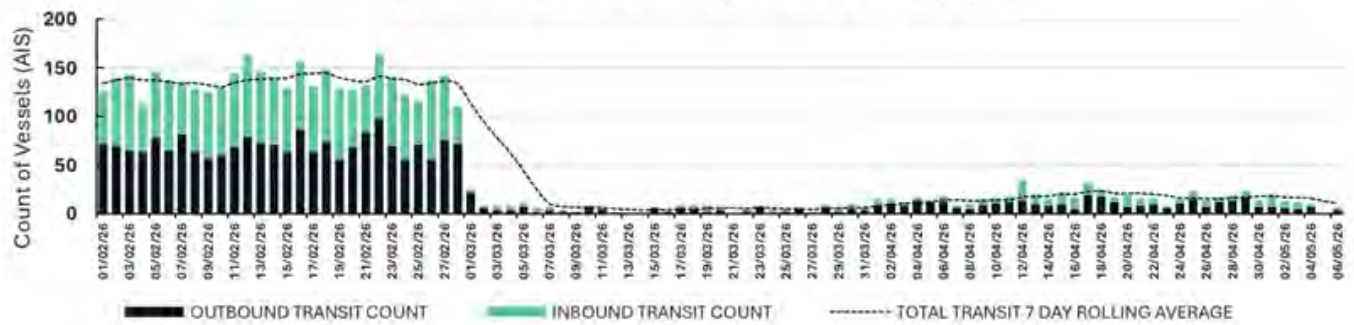
ICOD: 07/05/2026 10:00UTC



Joint Maritime Information Center (JMIC) Update 042

## UKMTO transits

Strait of Hormuz Transits (Vessel Count) 1 Feb 26 - 6 May 26





# Houthi Attacks: Impact on Shipping

## Houthi attacks in Red Sea are driving commercial shipping towards longer and costlier routes



Shipping Rates from Asia to Europe	
Shanghai to Rotterdam route	
Mix FAK* & Contract Average Levels	40' HC** Dry Cargo Container
Oct-Nov 2023	\$1,000
Dec 2023	\$1,200-1,800
Start of Jan 2024	\$3,000-3,500
End of Jan 2024	\$5,500-6,000
Feb 2024	\$5,500-6,500

\*Freight All Kinds \*\*High Cube

- - - Red Sea route (19 days)  
 — Alternative routes (up to 31 days)

1,500 km

Sources: Washington Institute for Near East Policy; EIU.



# China



China's Communist Party will continue efforts to achieve President Xi Jinping's vision of making China the preeminent power in East Asia and a major power on the world stage.



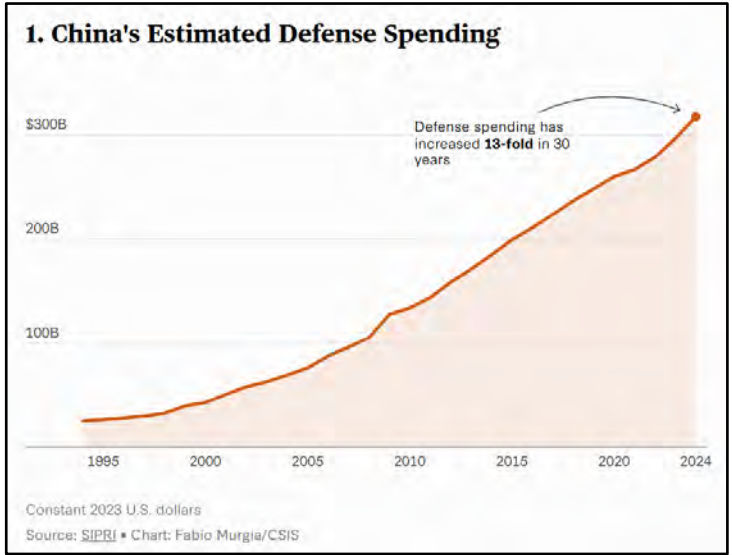
## REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OBJECTIVES

- Secure what it views as its sovereign territory, including Taiwan
- Attempt to establish its preeminence in regional affairs
- Project power globally; offset U.S. military superiority



## MILITARY CAPABILITIES

- **CONVENTIONAL:** Navy and Air Force largest in the region
- **WMD:** Building hundreds of new ICBM silos
- **SPACE:** Designed to advance global standing and erode US influence
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Top threat to US technological competitiveness
- **ECONOMICS:** Central to global supply chains
- **CYBER:** Broadest, most active, and persistent cyber threat
- **MALIGN INFLUENCE:** Wants to sow doubts & damage democracy



**Key Takeaway:** China has the capability to alter the rules-based global order in every realm and across multiple regions and is increasingly pushing to change international norms.



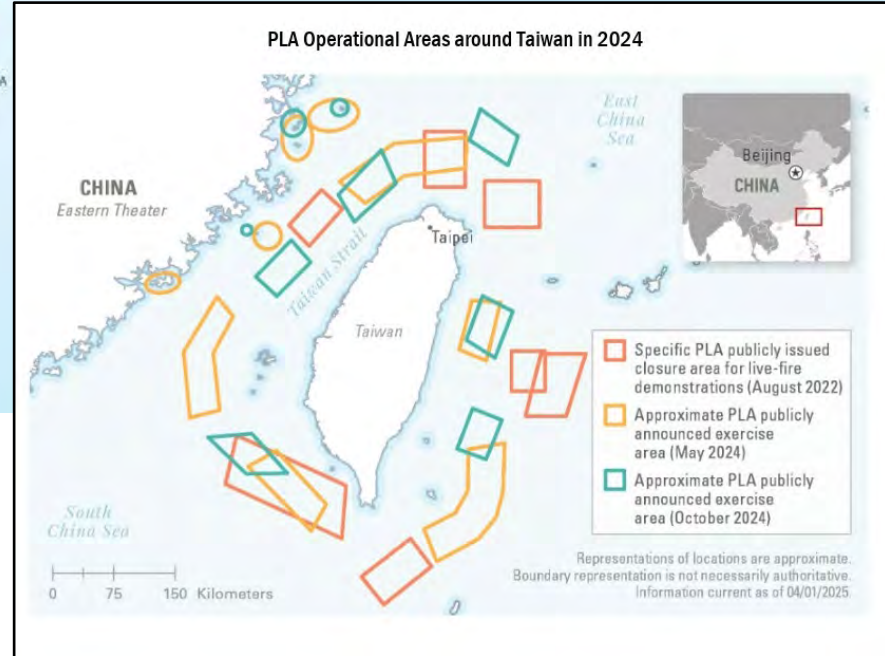
# PRC: Taiwan & Maritime Ambitions



### 3. The Growth of the PLA Navy

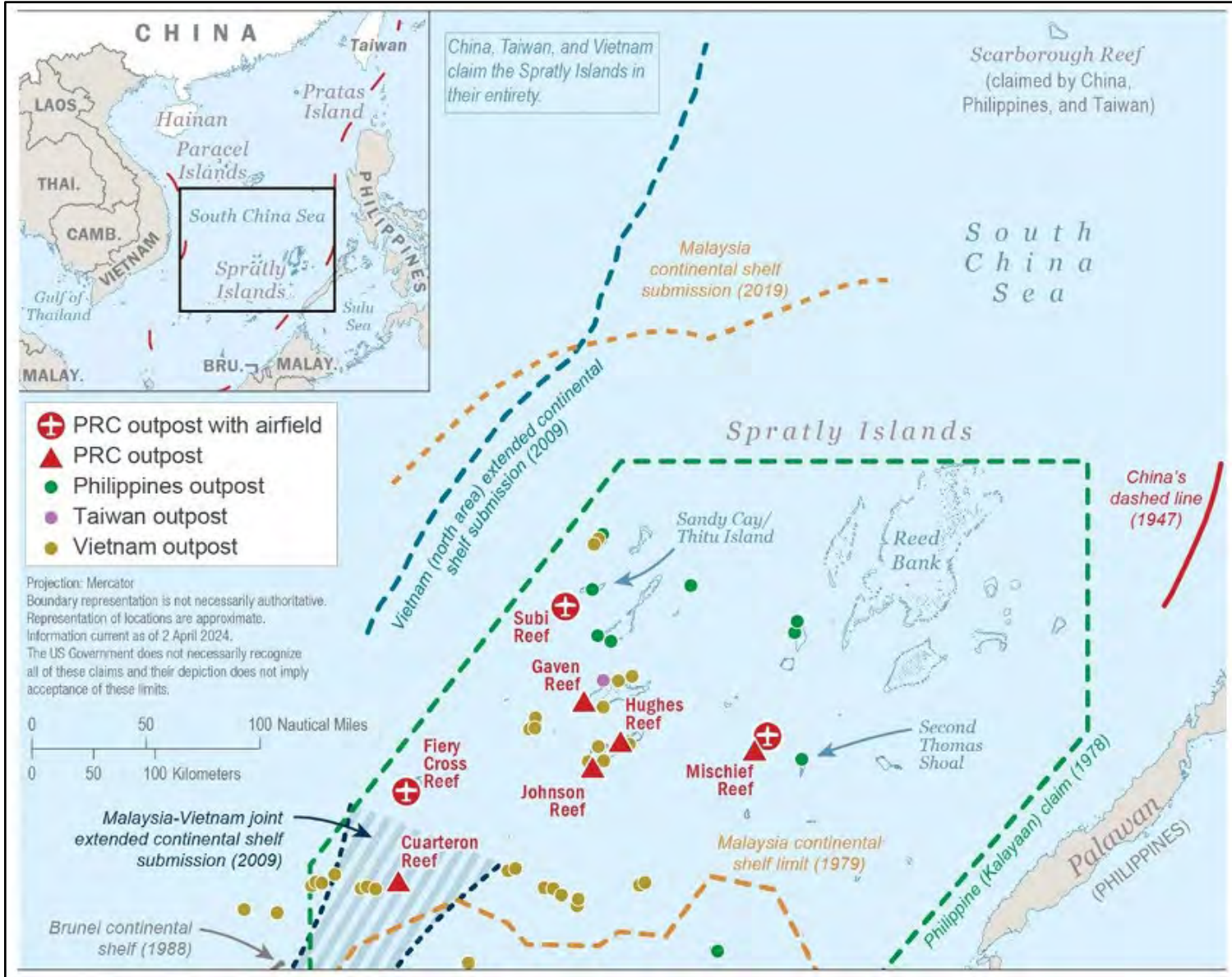


Source: CRS, DOD • Chart: Fabio Murgia/CSIS





# South China Sea Disputes





# PLA Military Outposts in the SCS



## Antelope Reef

Total area of reclamation: 1,490 acres

17 Mar 2026



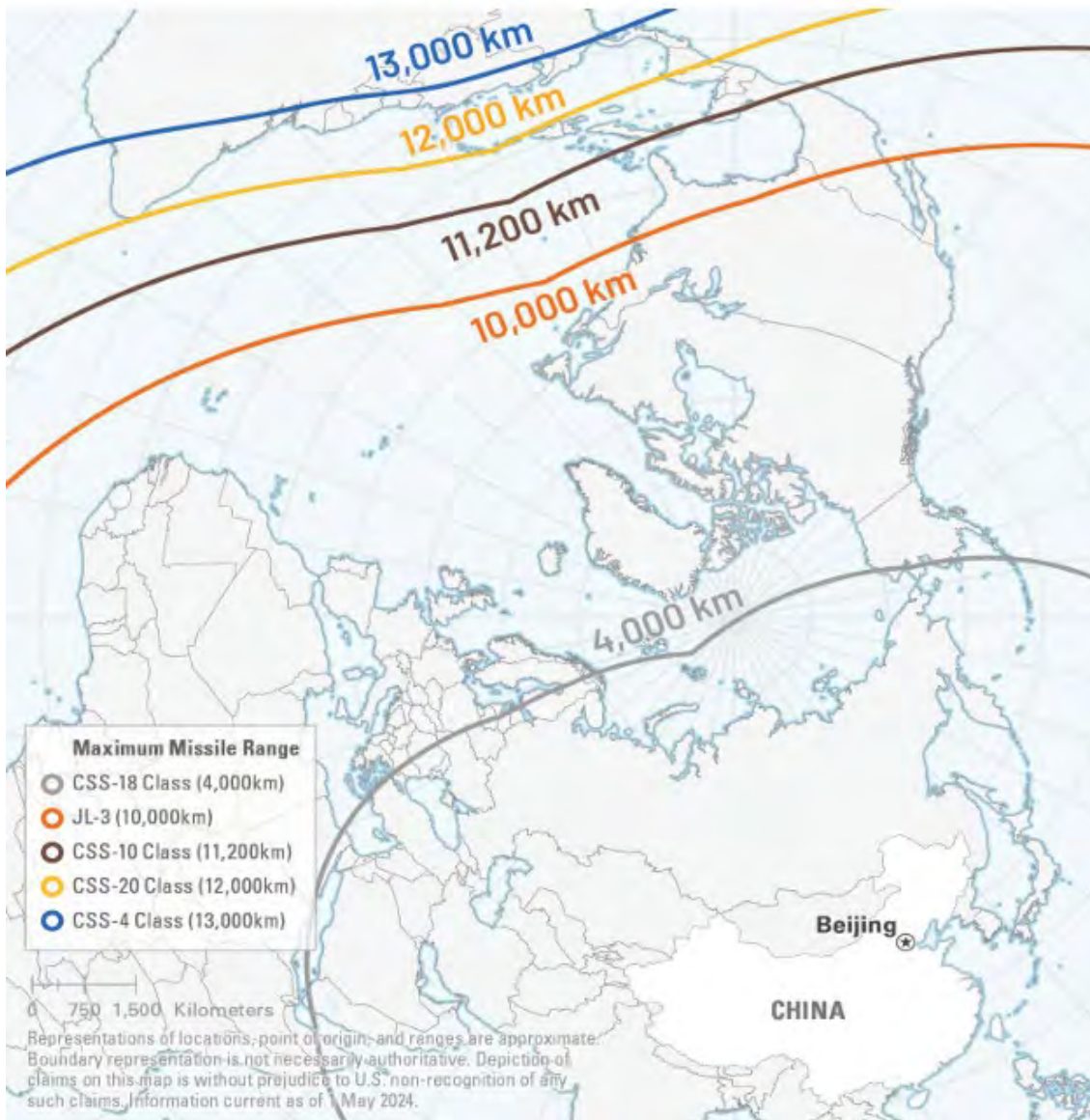
**Key Takeaway:** Since 2014, China has substantially expanded its ability to monitor and project power throughout the South China Sea via the construction of dual civilian-military bases



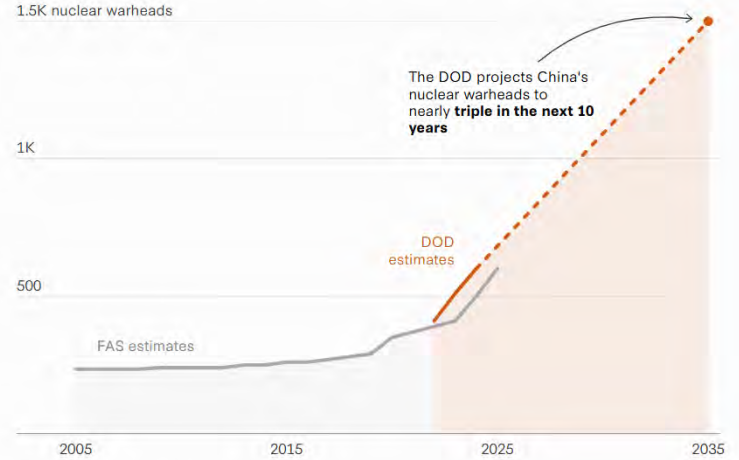
# PLA: Nuclear Capabilities Developments



## Fielded Nuclear Ballistic Missiles

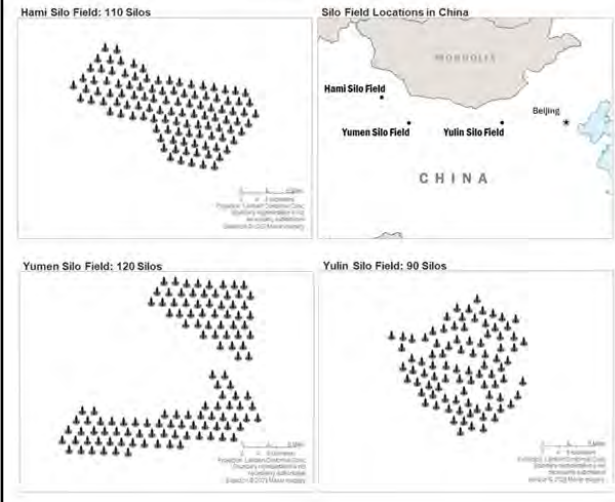


## 6. China's Growing Nuclear Warhead Stockpile



Source: FAS, DOD • Chart: Fabio Murgia/CSIS

## Expanding Silo Fields





# China: Cyber Threat



February 7, 2024

- The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), National Security Agency (NSA), and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) assess that People's Republic of China (PRC) state-sponsored cyber actors are seeking to pre-position themselves on IT networks for disruptive or destructive cyberattacks against U.S. critical infrastructure in the event of a major crisis or conflict with the U.S.
- PRC state-sponsored cyber group known as Volt Typhoon\* has compromised the IT environments of multiple critical infrastructure organizations—primarily in Communications, Energy, Transportation Systems, and Water and Wastewater Systems Sectors—in the continental and non-continental U.S. and its territories, including Guam.

\*also known as Vanguard Panda, BRONZE SILHOUETTE, Dev-0391, UNC3236, Voltzite, and Insidious Taurus



# Russia



Russia's military action against Ukraine demonstrates its intent to reestablish a perceived sphere of influence despite what its neighbors desire for themselves.



## REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OBJECTIVES

- Build partnerships aimed at undermining U.S./NATO influence
- Use force to impose border changes, starting with Ukraine
- Reimpose an imperial sphere of influence

## MILITARY CAPABILITIES

- **CONVENTIONAL:** Losses during Ukraine conflict require years of rebuilding
- **WMD:** Rivals U.S. as most capable in the world; largest nuclear stockpile
- **SPACE:** Key competitor; myriad of factors limiting its long-term goals
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Military innovation to build deterrence and defense posture
- **ECONOMICS:** Affected by sanctions, withdrawal of investors, and demand
- **CYBER:** Views cyber disruptions as a foreign policy lever
- **MALIGN INFLUENCE:** Uses tools to try to divide and increase its sway



**Key Takeaway:** Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine is a tectonic event that is reshaping its relationships with the West and China.



# Russia: Ukraine Battlefield

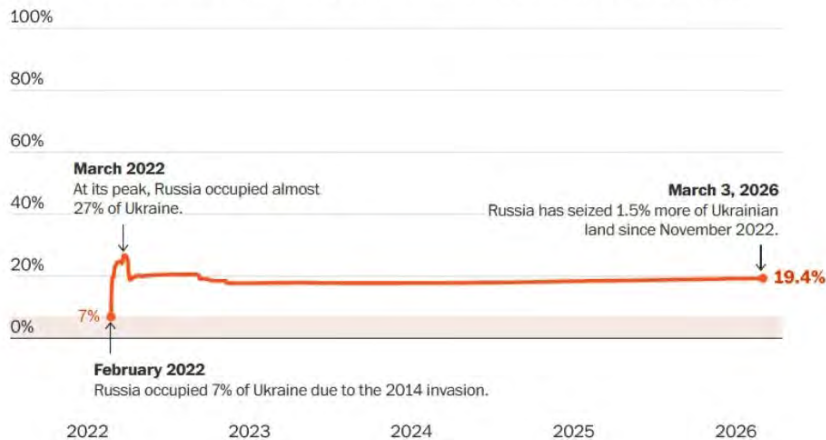


## Assessed Control of Terrain in the Russo-Ukrainian War May 2, 2026 at 1:30 PM ET



### Russia's slow crawl in Ukraine

Percent of Ukrainian territory held by Russia, February 2022 to March 3, 2026

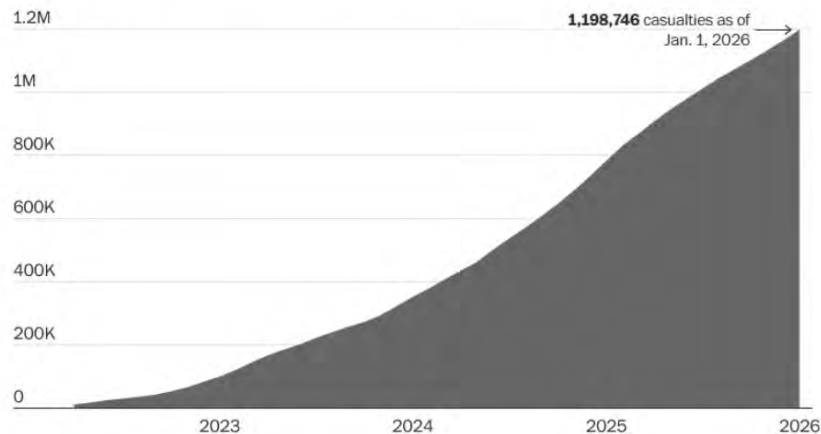


Data as of March 3, 2026

Source: Institute for the Study of War

### Meanwhile, Russian casualties stacked up

Cumulative estimates of Russian soldiers killed, wounded or missing



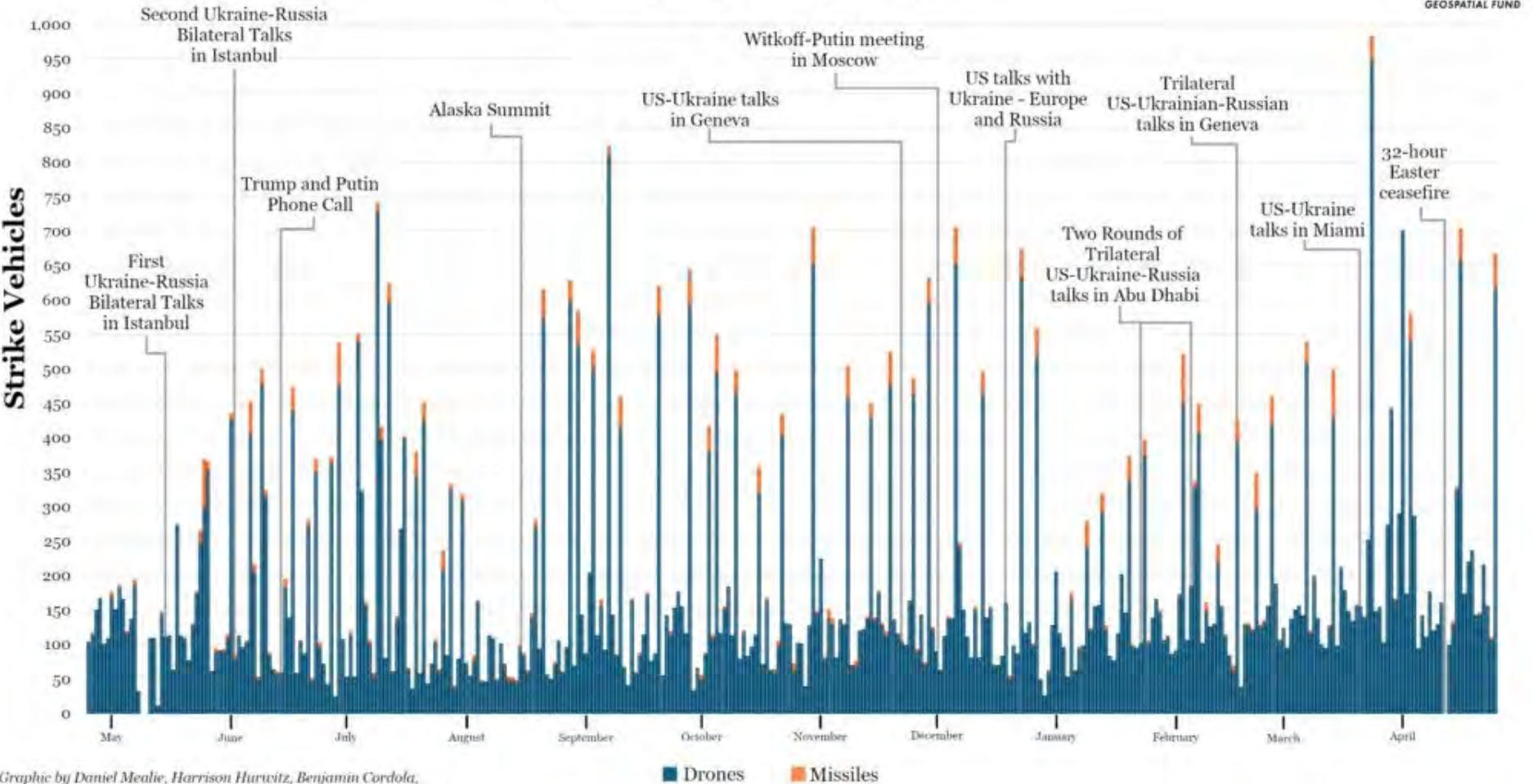
Source: CSIS



# Russian Strikes on Ukraine



## Russian Drone and Missile Strikes on Ukraine April 25, 2025 to April 25, 2026



Graphic by Daniel Mealie, Harrison Hurwitz, Benjamin Cordola, David Schulert, Megan Ewert, Nathaniel Kramer, Carolyn Weinstein, Eliana Ornelas, Samuel McRee, and Natalie Mesplay  
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# Russia: Nuclear Inventory

## RUSSIA'S LAND-BASED MISSILES



Russia boasts the widest inventory of ballistic and cruise missiles in the world. Moscow's strategic rocket forces perform a variety of missions, from anti-access and area denial to the delivery of strategic nuclear warheads. Significant modernization efforts include new heavy ICBMs and a long-range ground-launched cruise missile that prompted the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Russia has also begun to equip some of its ballistic missiles with its new Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle.





# Russia: Asymmetric Undersea Threat



COVERTSHORES  
www.hsutcon.com

Deep Diving minisub carried on back

Uncrewed Underwater Vehicle (UUV)

Two nuclear reactors

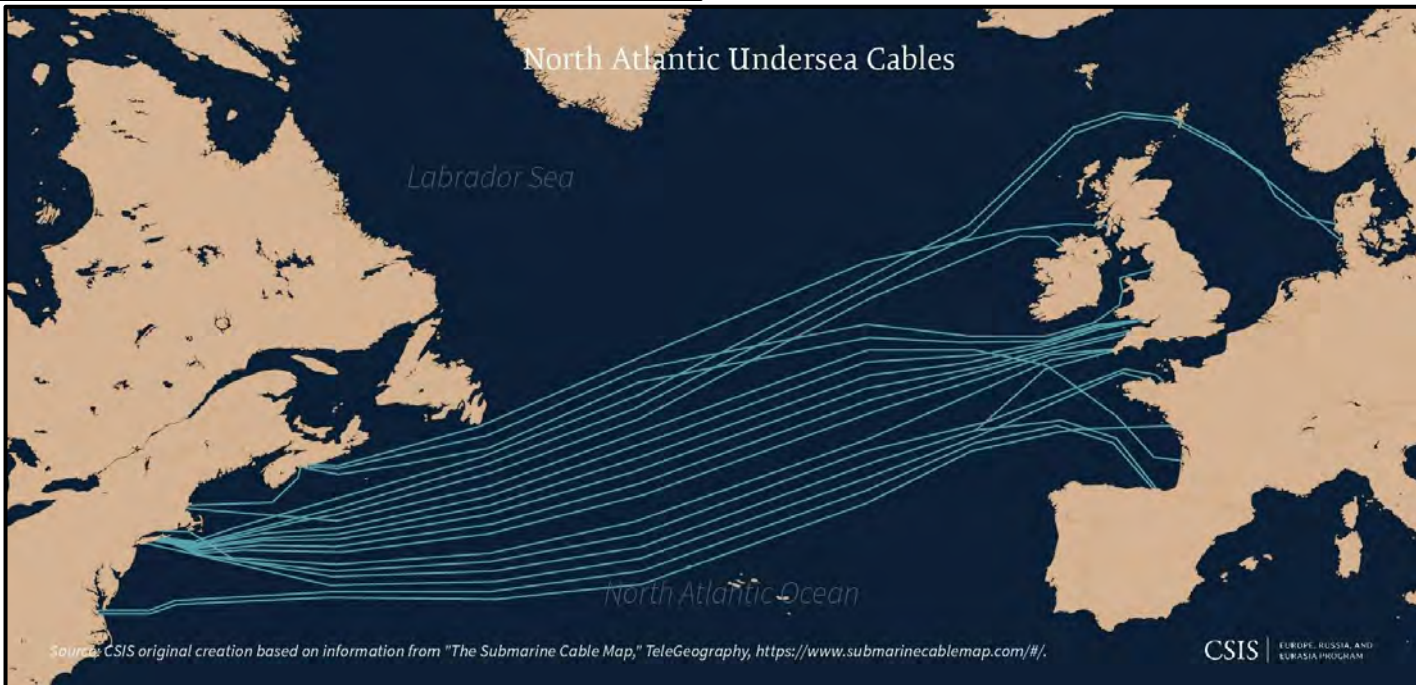
@ H. Sutton, 2021

Weapons and sonar of a regular nuclear submarine

"Lozhnik" deep-diving minisub carried under the mother submarine. This is nuclear-powered, has a titanium hull and can pick objects off the sea floor.

Weapons and infrastructure of interest on the sea floor, at depths of over 1,000 meters (3,300 ft)

Project 09787  
**BS-64 'Podmoskovye' Spy Submarine**  
NATO: **DELTA-IV STRETCH**  
Provisional. Based on Analysis of Open Sources





# North Korea



Dictator, Kim Jong Un is attempting to secure North Korea's position in what he perceives to be an international environment conducive to his brutal authoritarian system.



## REGIONAL AND GLOBAL OBJECTIVES

- Build nuclear capabilities to ensure regime survival
- Establish strategic dominance over South Korea
- Undermine U.S. alliances in the region

## MILITARY CAPABILITIES

- **CONVENTIONAL:** World's fourth largest; 5% of population is active duty
- **WMD:** Nuclear weapons are centerpiece to its national security
- **SPACE:** Limited; first military reconnaissance satellite launch upcoming
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Conventionally outdated, nuclear tech advancing
- **ECONOMICS:** Affected by sanctions, cut off from global market
- **CYBER:** Sophisticated and agile espionage, cybercrime, and attack threat
- **MALIGN INFLUENCE:** Engages in illicit activities to fund WMD program



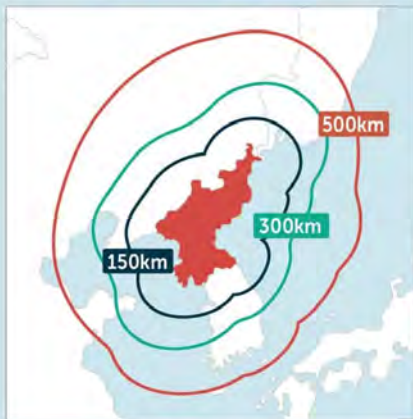
**Key Takeaway:** North Korea's military will pose a serious threat to the U.S. and its allies by investing in niche capabilities designed to provide Kim with a range of options to deter outside intervention.



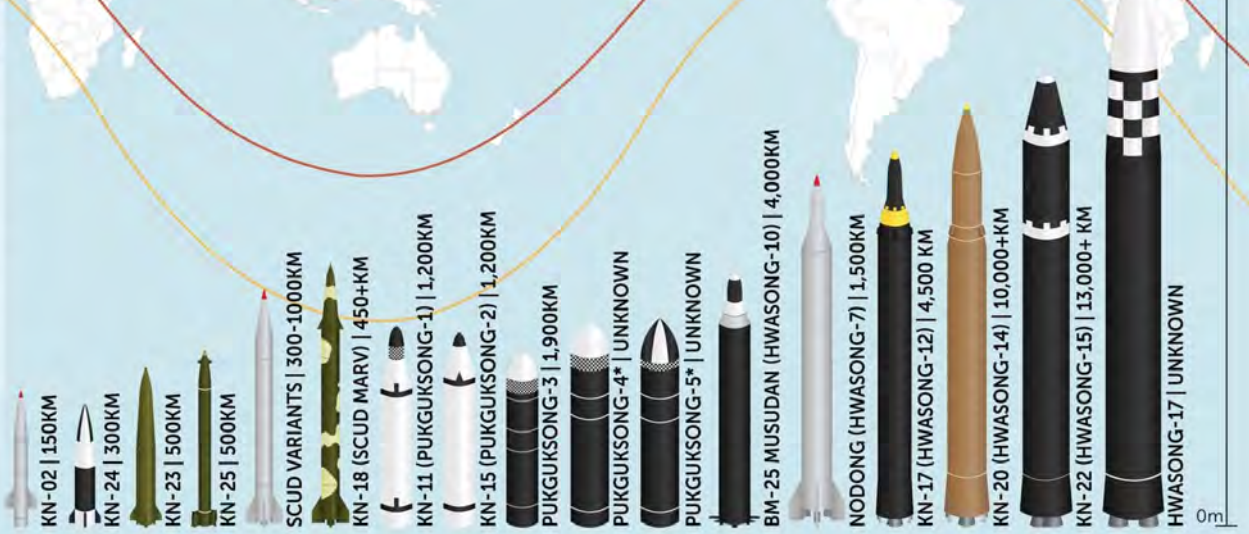
# North Korea: Growing Missile Threat



## NORTH KOREA'S BALLISTIC MISSILES

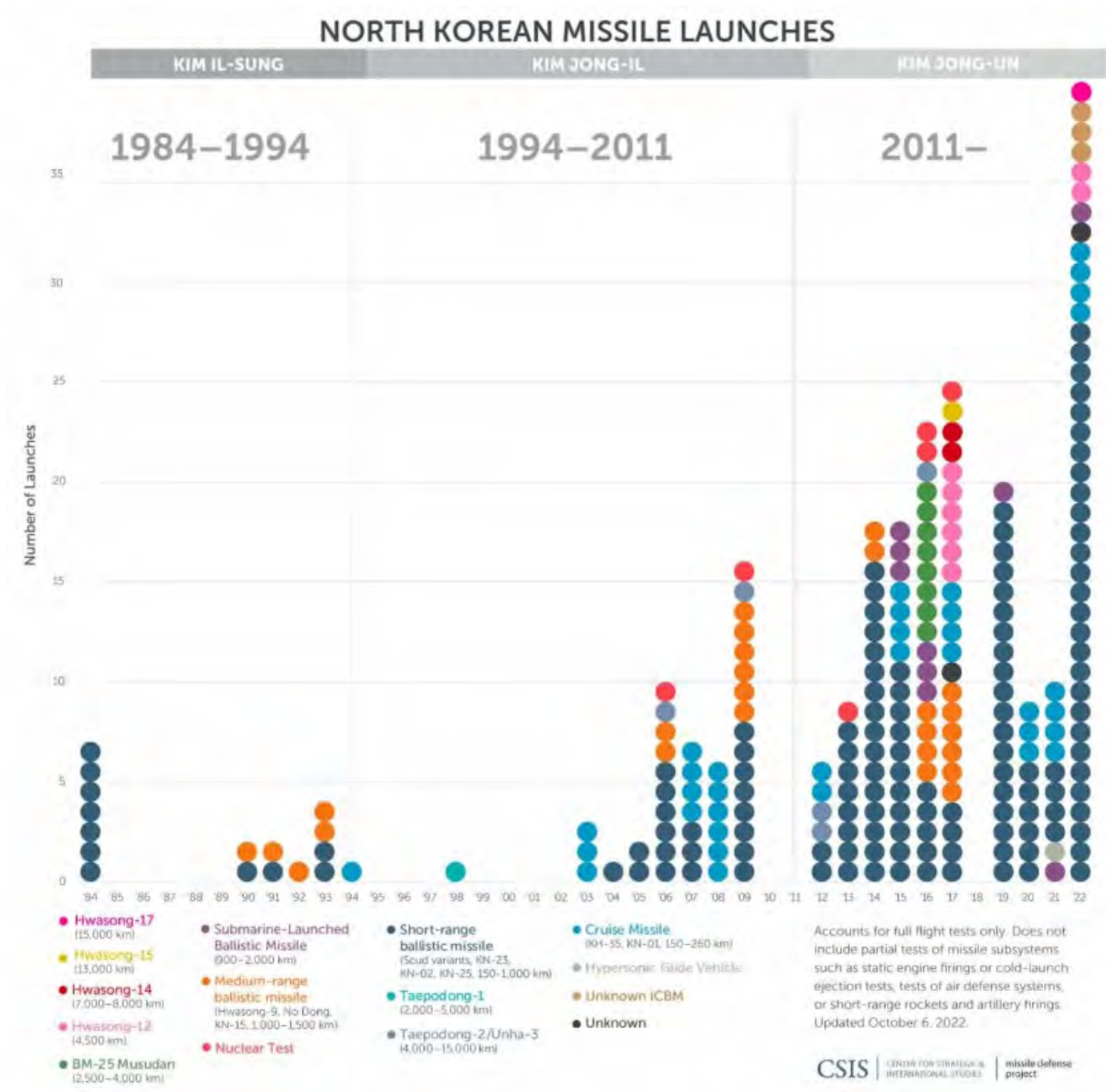


North Korea's ballistic missile program is a rapidly developing threat to global security. Since Kim Jong-un assumed power in 2011, North Korea's missile testing has included new and longer-range missiles, increased use of solid propellant, and the orbiting of satellites. Notable advances have included flight tests of two intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15, which can likely reach the continental United States. Pyongyang displayed an even larger ICBM in 2020 but has not yet tested it.





# North Korea: Growing Missile Threat





# Violent Extremist Organizations

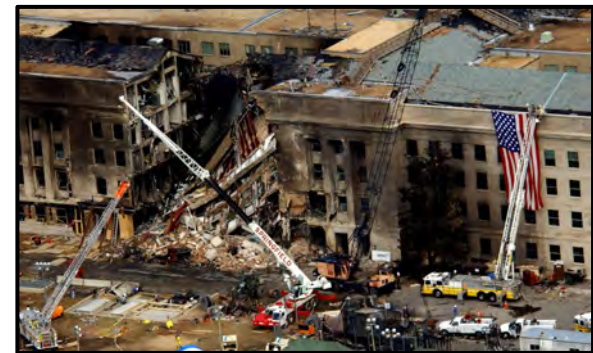


Terrorists adhering to ideologies espoused by ISIS, al-Qa'ida, or racially-motivated extremists pose a significant threat to U.S. interests. Many remain committed to planning terror attacks, including on U.S. soil.



## TERROR THREAT GROUP OBJECTIVES

- **\*HAMAS\***
  - Charter calls for establishing Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel
- **\*Lebanese Hizballah\***
  - Reduce U.S. influence in Lebanon and the broader Middle East
  - Threaten Israel and enable Iran's power projection
- **ISIS**
  - Rebuild capabilities and replenish its ranks
  - Spread ideology/propaganda to inspire attacks against the West
- **Al-Qa'ida**
  - Maintain safe haven in Iran, adapt to Taliban restrictions in Afghanistan
  - Expand territorial control and challenge local security forces
- **Transnational Racially/Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists**
  - Sow social divisions, support fascist-style governments
  - Attack government institutions





# Threats on the Southern Border



Western Hemisphere-based TCOs involved in illicit drug production and trafficking bound for the United States and partner nations, endanger the health and safety of millions of individuals.

- **Organized Crime:** Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) threaten U.S. and allied public health systems, exploit the international financial system, and degrade the safety and security of the United States and partner nations.
- **Human Trafficking:** TCOs and criminal actors view human trafficking, including sex trafficking and forced labor, as low-risk crimes of opportunity.
- **Drugs:** Illicit fentanyl will continue to pose a major threat to the health of Americans. In 2023, a majority of the more than 100,000 annual drug overdose deaths in the United States are attributed to illicit fentanyl mostly supplied by Mexican-based TCOs.



**Key Takeaway:** TCOs incite instability and violence, drive migration, and provide some U.S. adversaries with additional avenues to advance their geopolitical interests.



# Sources



## Websites

- **Defense Intelligence Agency: Military Power Publications** <https://www.dia.mil>
- **Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Involvements Involving the People's Republic of China 2025**
- **Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)** <https://www.cisa.gov/>
- **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS):** Think tank, some foreign funding, well established <https://www.csis.org/>
- **Institute for the Study of War (ISW):** Think tank ran by former senior military leaders, exceptional Middle East and Russia coverage. <https://www.understandingwar.org/>
- **Stimson Center:** Think tank, strong Asia program - <https://www.stimson.org/>
- **Russia Matters:** Academic funded, ran by the Belfer school at Harvard, second to none on Russian matters, source documents and Russian nukes. - <https://www.russiamatters.org/>
- **Royal United Service Institute (RUSI):** UK Academic ran, focusing on application of military power- <https://www.rusi.org/>
- **Chatham House:** UK academic source, the original forum for debate, excellent Europe analysis. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/>
- **U.S. Naval Institute:** Independent non-profit seeking to advance understanding of sea power and other issues critical to global security. <https://www.usni.org/>





# Strategic Approach



# Defend the Homeland



More direct military threats to the American Homeland have also grown in recent years, including nuclear threats as well as a variety of conventional strike and space, cyber, electromagnetic warfare capabilities.

## Secure our Borders and counter Narco-Terrorists in the Hemisphere

- Seal Borders
- Develop Partners' ability to degrade NTOs

## Secure Key Terrain

- Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine
- Golden Dome, Drone Defense

## Modernize/Adapt U.S. Nuclear Forces

- Deterrence and escalation Management

## Deter/Defend against Cyber Threats

- Bolster Cyber defenses for U.S. military and certain civilian targets



**Key Takeaway:** The DoW will restore American military dominance in the Western Hemisphere.



# Deter China



More direct military threats to the American Homeland have also grown in recent years, including nuclear threats as well as a variety of conventional strike and space, cyber, electromagnetic warfare capabilities.

## Peace Through Strength

- Enable POTUS to Negotiate from Position of Strength

## Work with Allies in area for Collective Defense

- Akin to “Burden Sharing”

## Build Strong Denial Defense

- Ensure Joint Force strikes anywhere



**Key Takeaway:** DoW will provide the military strength to set conditions for a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific that allows all of us—the United States, China, and others in the region—to enjoy a decent peace



# Increased Burden Sharing



Relies on sensibly and prudently pressing and enabling U.S. allies and partners to take primary responsibility for defending against those other threats, with critical but more limited U.S. support.

## Strengthen Incentives for Allies/Partners

- Nations take primary responsibility for own defense
- Close collaboration on force/operational planning

## Regions:

Western Hemisphere

Europe

Middle East

Africa

Korean Peninsula

Defense investment  
by Allies safeguards  
freedoms for all of us.

— U.S. AMBASSADOR TO NATO  
MATTHEW G. WHITAKER



**Key Takeaway:** Prioritize cooperation and engagements with model allies—those who are spending as they need to and visibly doing more against threats in their regions, with critical but limited U.S. support



# Defense Industrial Base



DIB is the foundation to rebuilding and adapting our military

## DIB

- Arm U.S. Military
- Arm Allies / Partners
- Deterring Strategic Attacks

## Secured development

- Grow organic sustainment
- Protect U.S. Military Options



**Key Takeaway:** Our readiness, lethality, range, and survivability—and, ultimately, the military options we provide—are directly linked to the DIB



# Q & A