



# Global Threats & Challenges

## CAPSTONE Spouses Course

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OVERALL CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED



# Agenda



## ➤ Strategic Environment

- Security Environment Overview
- Global Priorities
- Defense Priorities

## ➤ Global Threats

- China
- Russia
- North Korea
- Iran
- Violent Extremist Organizations
- Health Security
- Additional Transnational Issues
- Threats on the Southern Border
- Sources

## ➤ Strategic Approach

- Integrated Deterrence
- Campaigning
- Advance Regional Goals with Allied Support
- Force Employment

## ➤ Q & A





# Strategic Environment



# Security Environment Overview



Now and over the next two decades, we face an array of strategic challenges that are interconnected. Our competitors deliberately link them to erode deterrence, exert economic coercion, and endanger political autonomy.

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

- **Complex interactions between a rapidly changing global balance of military capabilities**
- **Emerging technologies**
- **Competitor doctrines that pose new threats to the U.S. homeland and to strategic stability**
- **An escalation of competitors coercive and malign activities in the “gray zone”**
- **Transboundary challenges that impose new demands on the Joint Force and defense enterprise**





# 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.

## Out-Compete China and Constrain Russia

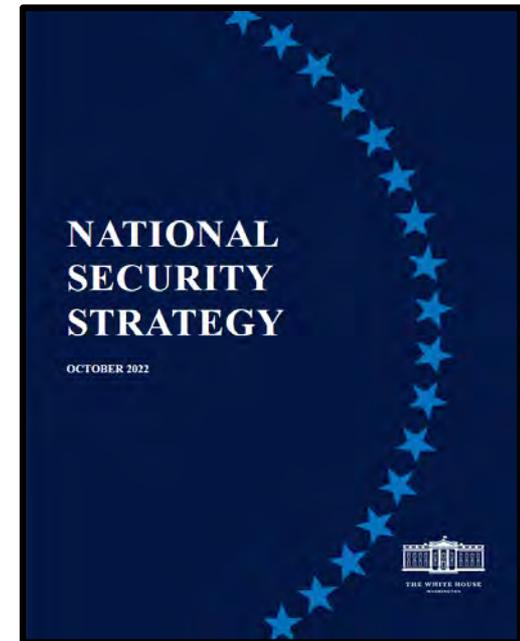
- **China:** Only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and the power to do it
- **Russia:** Pursuing imperialist foreign policy with goal of overturning the international order

## Cooperate on Shared Challenges

- Energy Security
- Pandemics and Biodefense
- Food Insecurity
- Arms Control and Non-Proliferation
- Terrorism

## Shape the Rules of the Road

- Technology
- Securing Cyberspace
- Trade and Economics



**Key Takeaway:** Out-compete our rivals to shape the international order while tackling the shared challenges that will define the next stage of human history.

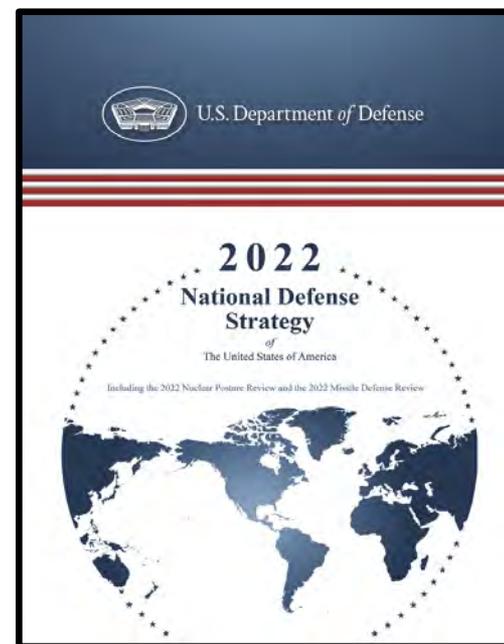


# Defense Priorities



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

- **Defend the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by China**
- **Deter strategic attacks against the U.S., Allies, and partners**
- **Deter aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary**
  - Prioritize China challenge in the Indo-Pacific region
  - Russia challenge in Europe
- **Building a resilient Joint Force and defense ecosystem**



**Key Takeaway:** Support a stable and open international system while honoring defense commitments.



# Global Threats



# *Who are we deterring?*



*We will reestablish deterrence by defending our homeland – on the ground and in the sky. We will work with allies and partners to deter aggression in the Indo-Pacific by Communist China, as well as supporting the President's priority to end wars responsibly and reorient to key threats. We will stand by our allies – and our enemies are on notice.*

- Secretary Hegseth's Message to the Force Jan 25, 2025



# 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

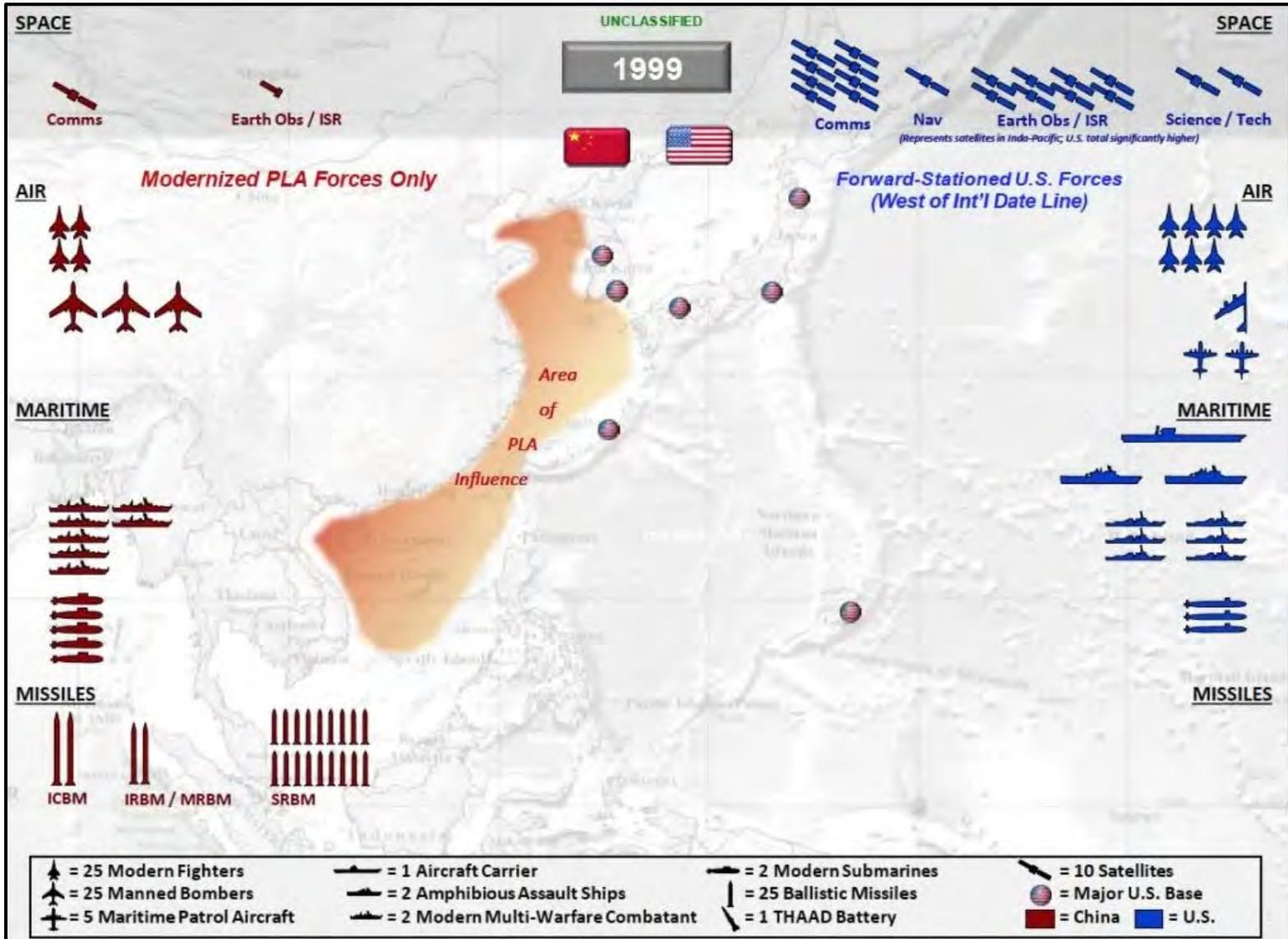
- **CONVENTIONAL:** Navy and Air Force largest in the region
- **WMD:** Building hundreds of new ICBM silos
- **SPACE:** Designed to advance global standing and erode US influence
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Top threat to US technological competitiveness
- **ECONOMICS:** Central to global supply chains
- **CYBER:** 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.

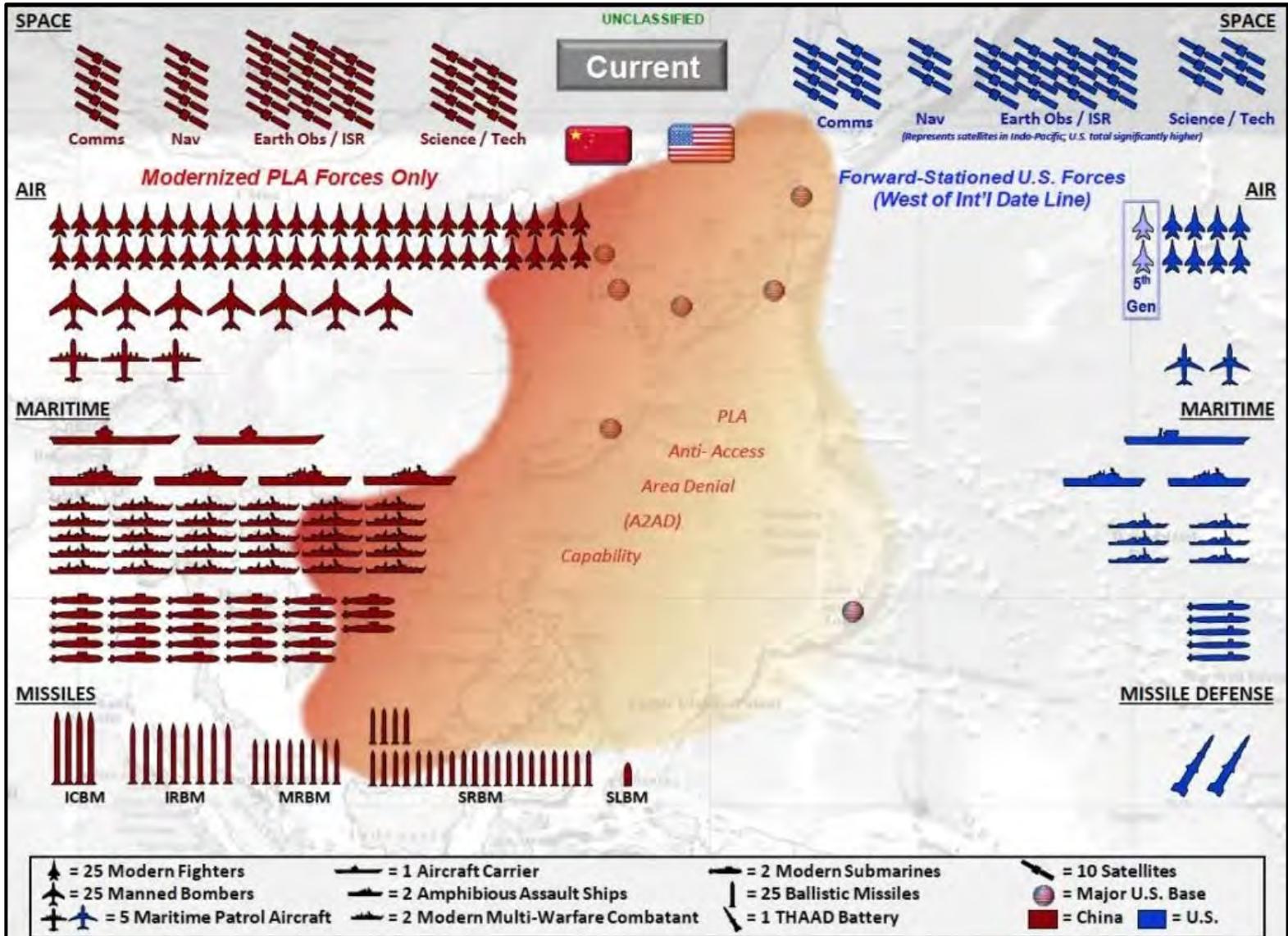


# China: Order of Battle (1999)



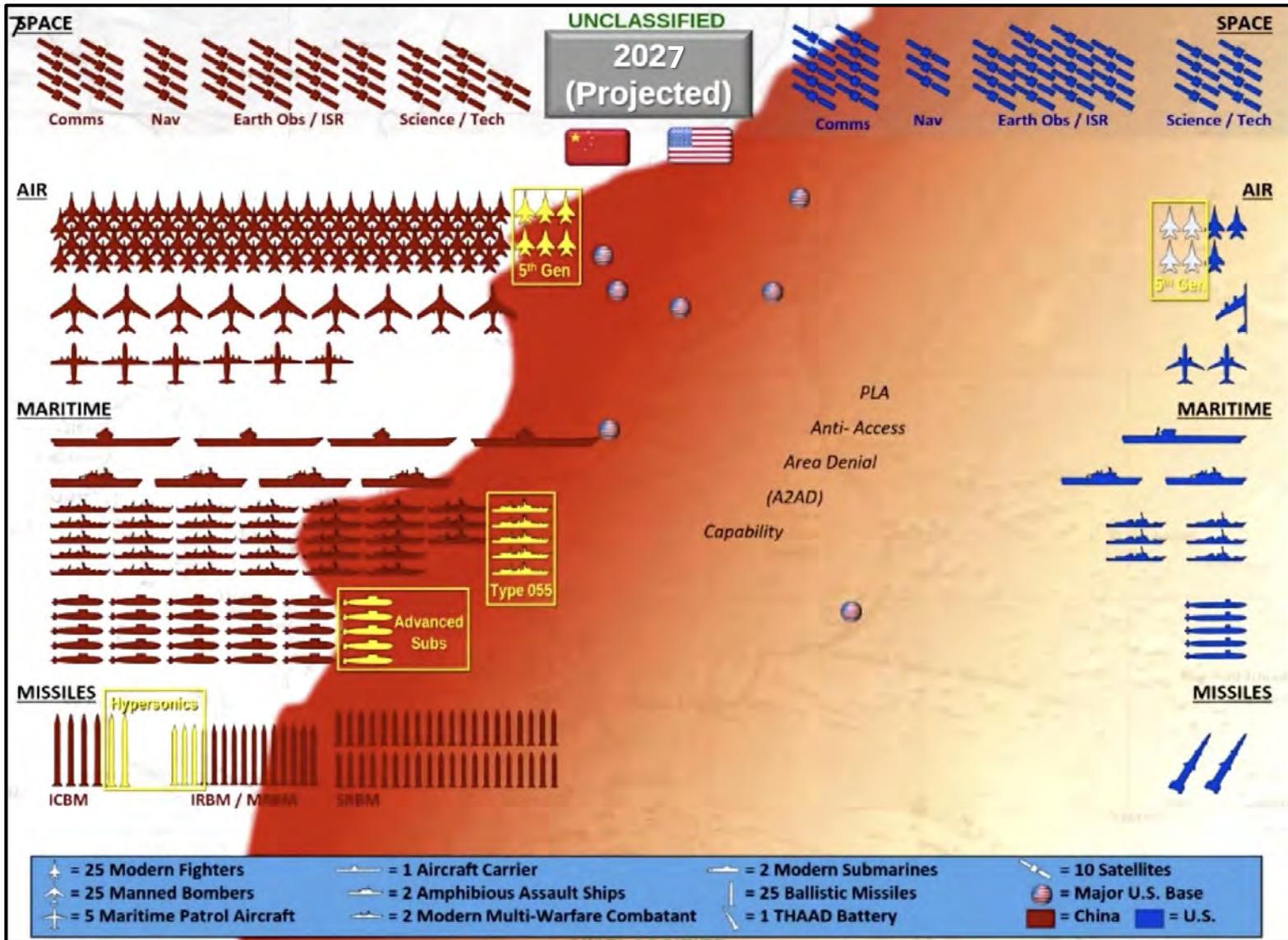


# China: Order of Battle (Current)





# China: Order of Battle (2027)





# 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.

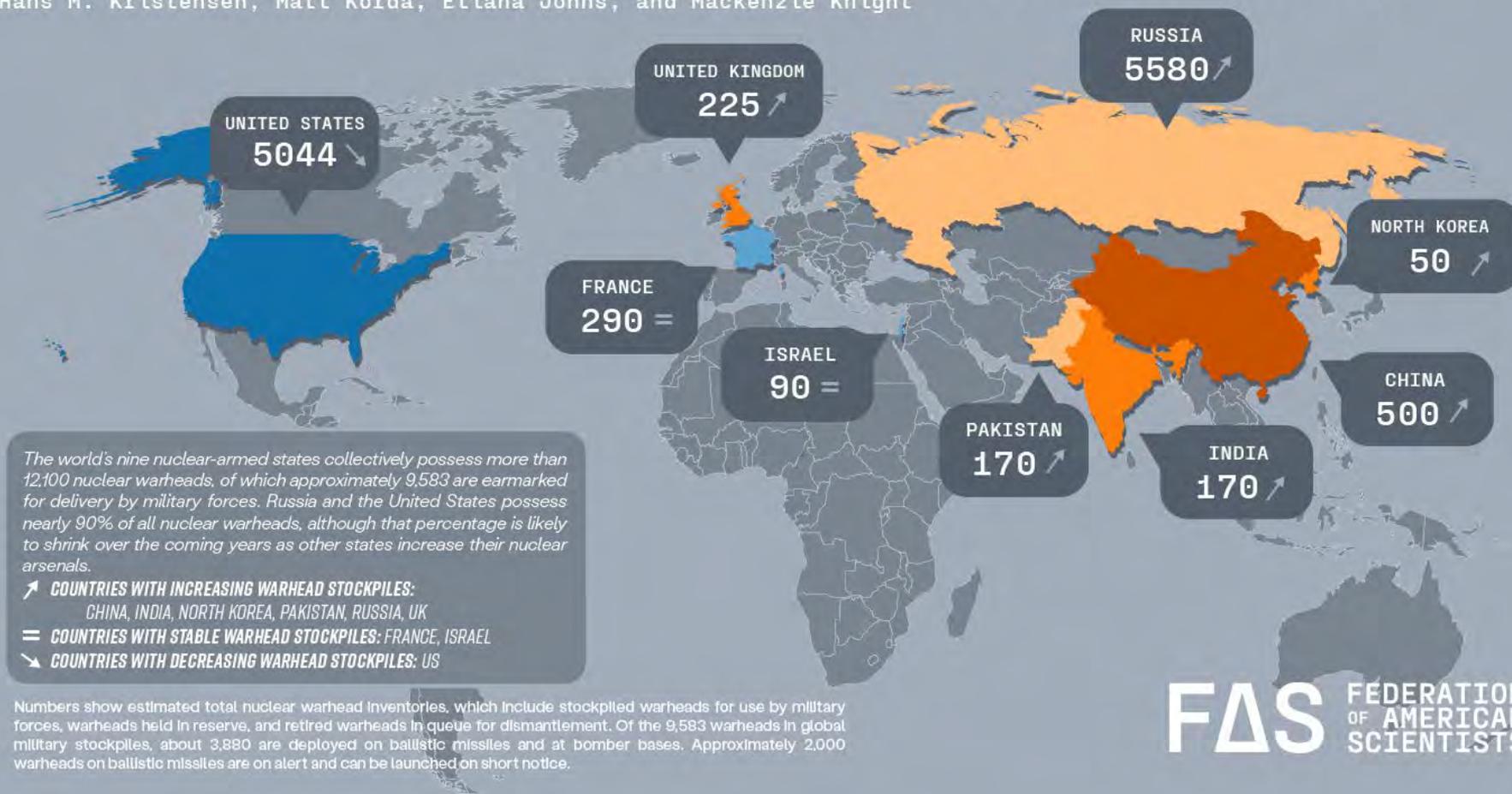


# Russia: Nuclear Inventory



## Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories, 2024

Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight





# Russia: Ukraine Battlefield



## How military control of Ukraine has changed

Feb 2022: Before the invasion

Mar 2022: Russia's rapid advance



Nov 2022: Ukraine regains ground

May 2024: Russia edges forward



- Russian military control
- Held or regained by Ukraine
- Limited Russian military control
- Russia annexed Crimea in 2014
- Russian-backed separatist-held areas

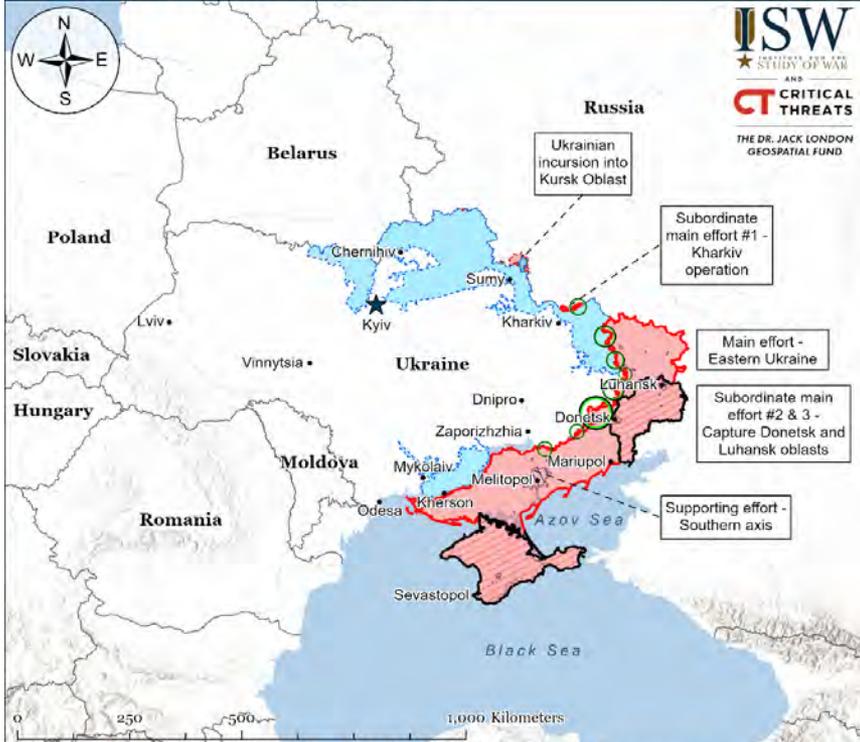
Note: Areas held or regained by Ukraine were reset by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) on 12 May 2023



# Russia: Ukraine Battlefront



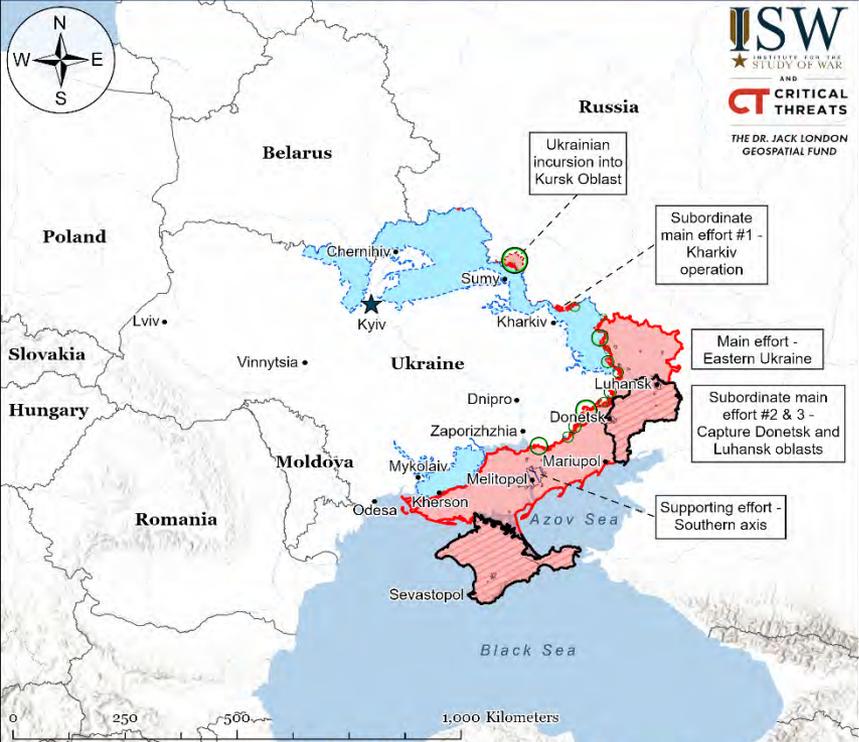
### Assessed Control of Terrain in the Russo-Ukrainian War February 20, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Map by George Barros, Katerina Stepanenko, Daniel Mealie, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, and David Schulert  
 © 2025 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the Past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before 24 February 2022
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian Advances in Russia
- Claimed Russian Advances in Russia
- Ukrainian Advances in Russia

### Assessed Control of Terrain in the Russo-Ukrainian War May 5, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Map by George Barros, Katerina Stepanenko, Daniel Mealie, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Benjamin Cordola, David Schulert, Julian Reich, and Carolyn Weinstein  
 © 2025 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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# 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

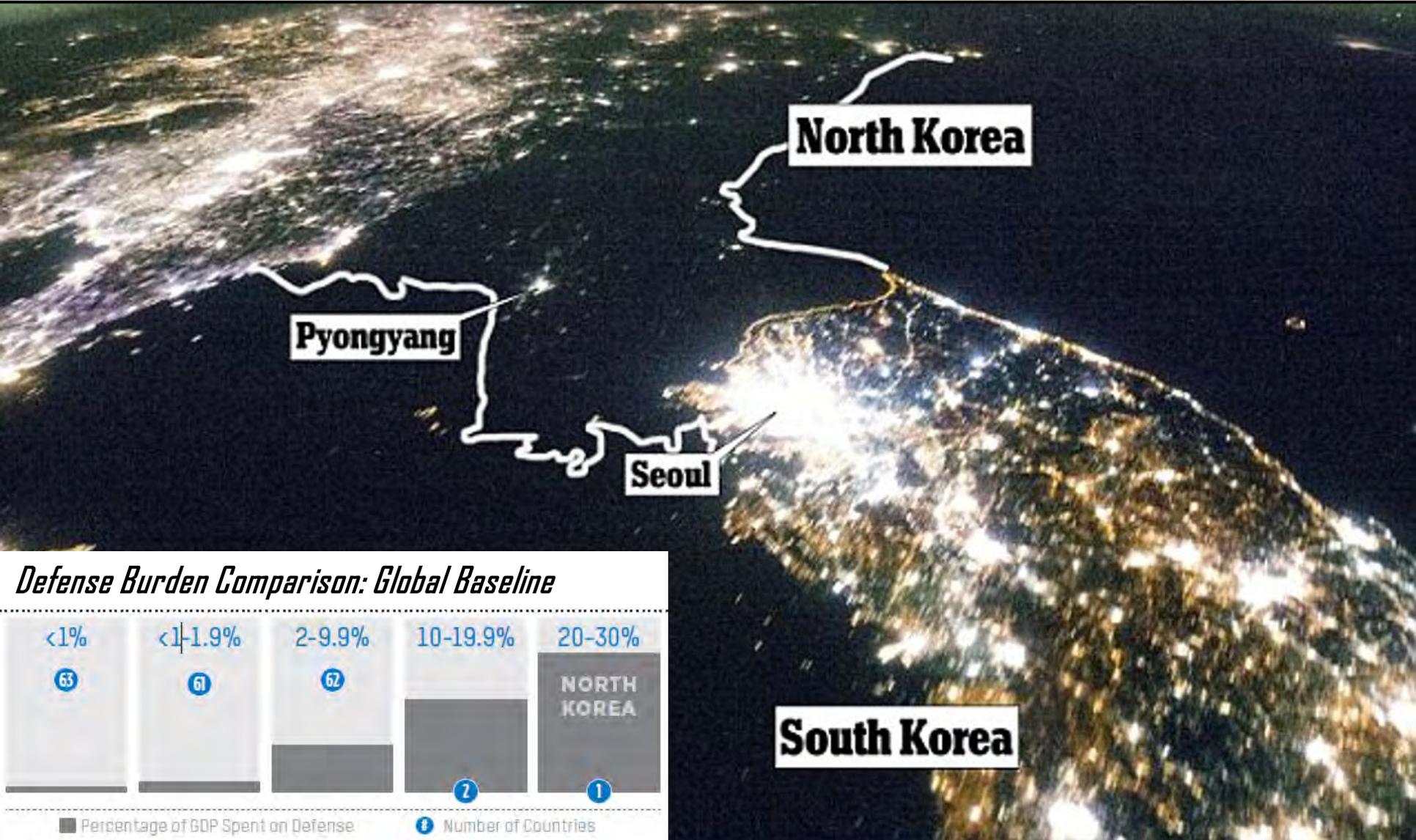
- **CONVENTIONAL:** World's fourth largest; 5% of population is active duty
- **WMD:** Nuclear weapons are centerpiece to its national security
- **SPACE:** Limited; first military reconnaissance satellite launch upcoming
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Conventionally outdated, nuclear tech advancing
- **ECONOMICS:** 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.



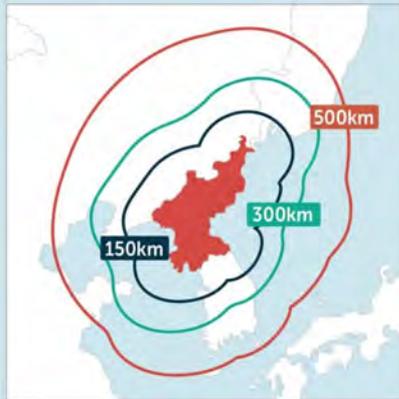
# North Korea: At What Cost?





# 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.



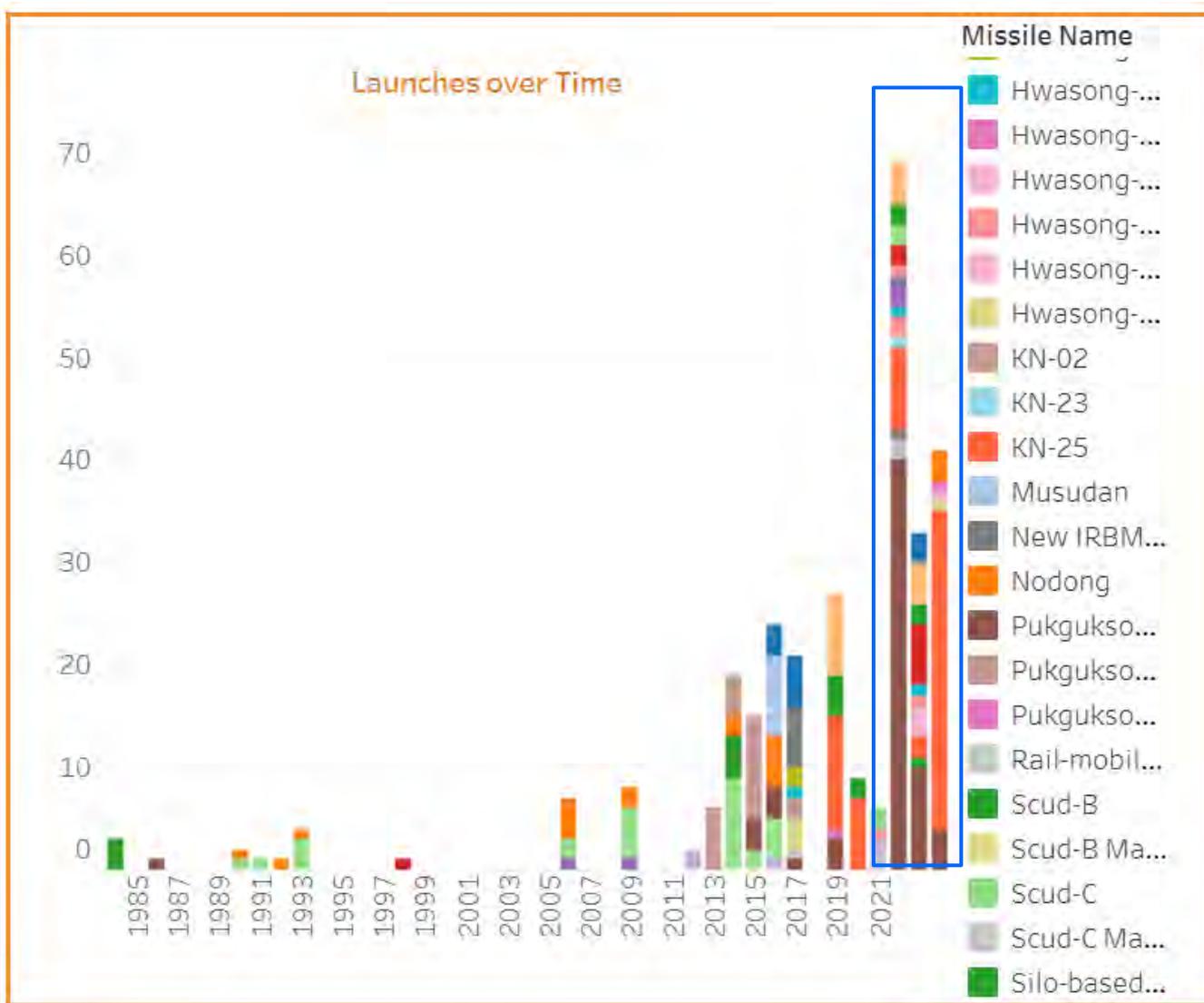
CSIS | MISSILE DEFENSE PROJECT

March 2022

Source: CSIS



# North Korea: Growing Missile Threat





# 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: Proxy Networks





# Iran: Proxy Networks



Main area of activity	Militia	Iranian influence	Estimated size
BAHRAIN	Al-Ashtar Brigades	Strong	Unknown
IRAQ	Kata'ib Hezbollah	Strong	20,000–30,000
	Badr Organization	Strong	30,000–60,000
	Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq	Strong	20,000–30,000
	Hezbollah Harakat al-Nujaba	Strong	10,000–20,000
	Kata'ib Sayyed al-Shuhada	Strong	10,000–20,000
LEBANON	Hezbollah	Strong	30,000–45,000
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	Hamas	Moderate	30,000–40,000
	Palestinian Islamic Jihad	Moderate	1,000–15,000
SYRIA	Fatemiyoun Brigade	Strong	10,000–15,000
	Zainabiyoun Brigade	Strong	2,000–5,000
	Quwat al-Ridha	Strong	3,000–3,500
	Baqir Brigade	Strong	3,000
YEMEN	Houthi movement	Moderate	10,000–30,000



# 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.



# Additional Transnational Issues



Transnational threats interact in a complex system along with more traditional threats such as strategic competition, often reinforcing each other and compounding risks to U.S. national security.

- **Technological Developments:** Developing and proliferating faster than companies and governments can shape norms or prevent bad outcomes
- **Digital Authoritarianism:** Digital repression more pervasive, automated, targeted, and complex
- **Economic Fallout of RUS/UKR War:** Fueling market volatility, and contributing to food insecurity
- **Migration:** Displacement, exploitation, and irregular flows continue
- **Organized Crime:** Illicit drug production/trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, and cybercrime threaten public safety



**Key Takeaway:** Some issues have a direct and immediate impact on U.S. interests, such as narcotics trafficking, and terrorism. Others seem to be building, or pose chronic, indirect challenges.



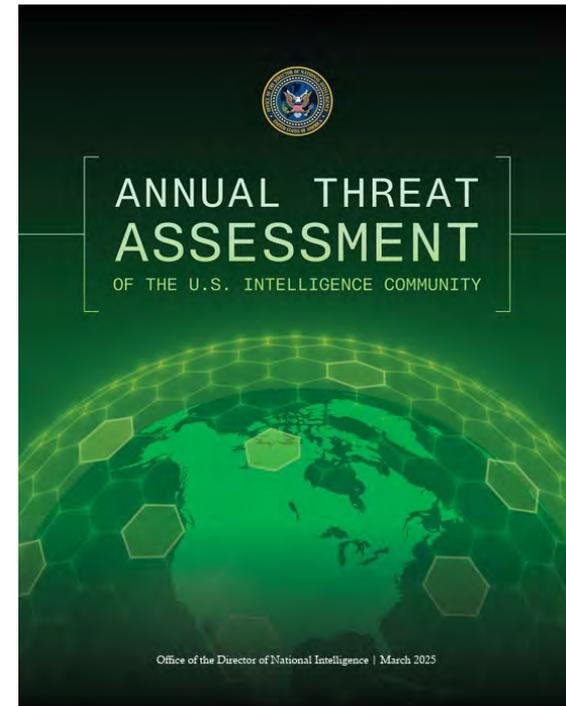
# Sources



**Summary:** The main source for this brief is the Global Threat Assessments done by the IC, however there are a lot of great sources that you can use to find information on these critical issues.

## Websites

- **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/>





# Strategic Approach



# Integrated Deterrence



Our central charge is to develop, combine, and coordinate our strengths to maximum effect. This is the core of integrated deterrence, a centerpiece of our National Defense Strategy.

## How We Will Deter

- Deterrence by Denial
- Deterrence by Resilience
- Deterrence by Direct and Collective Cost Imposition
- Effective Operations in the Information Domain

## Tailored Deterrence Approaches

- Deterring Attacks Against the Homeland
- Deterring Strategic Attacks
- Deterring China/Russia/North Korea/Iranian Attacks



## Escalation Management

- Develop tailored approaches to assess and manage escalation risk in crisis & conflict

**Key Takeaway:** We will use every tool at the DoD's disposal and collaborate with our counterparts across the U.S. government, Allies, and partners to ensure potential foes understand the cost of aggression.



# Campaigning



Synchronize the DoD's activities and investments to aggregate focus and resources to shift conditions in our favor. The DoD must focus on the most consequential competitor activities.

## CAMPAIGN GOALS

- Gain Military Advantages
- Enhance Deterrence
- Address Gray Zone Challenges



## GLOBAL FORCE POSTURE FOCUS

- Expand access and enable warfighting requirements
  - Deter PRC and Russian aggression against vital U.S. national interests
  - Prevail in conflict if deterrence fails



**Key Takeaway:** Campaigning gains and sustains military advantages, counters acute forms of our competitors' coercion, and complicates our competitors' military preparations.



# Advance Regional Goals with Allied Support



Close collaboration with Allies and partners is foundational for U.S. national security interests and our ability to address challenges China and Russia present while dutifully managing other threats.

## ANCHORING OUR STRATEGY

- Strive to be a trusted defense partner
- Prioritize interoperability
- Enable coalitions

## REGIONAL GOALS

- **Indo-Pacific Region:** Reinforce and build a resilient security architecture
- **Europe:** Maintain bedrock commitment to NATO collective security
- **The Middle East:** Address security challenges in sustainable ways
- **Western Hemisphere:** Build partner capabilities; promote stability
- **Africa:** Prioritize disrupting VEO threats
- **The Arctic:** Promote adherence to international rules and norms



**Key Takeaway:** Early and continuous consideration, engagement, and where possible, collaboration with Allies and partners in planning is essential for advancing our shared interests.



# Force Employment



Sustaining and strengthening deterrence requires that the DoD design, develop, and manage a combat credible U.S. military fit for advancing our highest defense priorities.

## FUTURE FORCE DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

- **Lethal:** Possesses anti-access/area denial strike capabilities
- **Sustainable:** Provide logistics/sustainment to operate in contested environment
- **Resilient:** Maintains advantages, preserves C3 systems, ensures operational effectiveness
- **Survivable:** Continual combat power despite adversary attacks
- **Agile and Responsive:** Operate effectively despite adversary advantages and climate change



**Bottom Line:** The DoD will remain prepared to employ combat-ready forces to address aggression or crisis to strengthen deterrence and maintain readiness for future missions.



# Q & A