

World-Ending Maneuvers? Massive 2 Trillion Multiyear Plan to Develop Nuclear Weapons

Inside the Nuclear-Weapons Lobby Today

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The Pentagon is in the midst of a massive [\\$2 trillion](#) multiyear plan to build a new generation of nuclear-armed missiles, bombers, and submarines. A large chunk of that funding will go to [major nuclear weapons contractors](#) like Bechtel, General Dynamics, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman. And they will do everything in their power to keep that money flowing.

This January, a review of the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program under the [Nunn-McCurdy Act](#) — a congressional provision designed to rein in cost overruns of Pentagon weapons programs — found that the missile, the crown jewel of the nuclear overhaul plan involving 450 missile-holding silos spread across five states, is already [81%](#) over its original budget. It is now estimated that it will cost a total of nearly \$141 billion to develop and purchase, a figure only likely to rise in the future.

That Pentagon review had the option of canceling the Sentinel program because of such a staggering cost increase. Instead, it doubled down on the program, asserting that it would be an essential element of any future nuclear deterrent and must continue, even if the funding for other defense programs has to be cut to make way for it. In justifying the decision, Deputy Defense Secretary William LaPlante [stated](#):

“We are fully aware of the costs, but we are also aware of the risks of not modernizing our nuclear forces and not addressing the very real threats we confront.”

Cost is indeed one significant issue, but the biggest risk to the rest of us comes from continuing to build and deploy ICBMs, rather than delaying or shelving the Sentinel program. As former Secretary of Defense William Perry has [noted](#), ICBMs are “some of the most dangerous weapons in the world” because they “could trigger an accidental nuclear war.” As he explained, a president warned (accurately or not) of an enemy nuclear attack would have only minutes to decide whether to launch such ICBMs and conceivably devastate the planet.

Possessing such potentially world-ending systems only increases the possibility of an unintended nuclear conflict prompted by a false alarm. And as Norman Solomon and the late Daniel Ellsberg once [wrote](#),

“If reducing the dangers of nuclear war is a goal, the top priority should be to remove the triad’s ground-based leg — not modernize it.”

This is no small matter. It is believed that a large-scale nuclear exchange could result in more than five billion of us humans dying, once the [possibility](#) of a “nuclear winter” and the potential destruction of agriculture across much of the planet is taken into account, according to an [analysis](#) by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

In short, the need to reduce nuclear risks by eliminating such ICBMs could not be more urgent. The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*’ “[Doomsday Clock](#)” — an estimate of how close the world may be at any moment to a nuclear conflict — is now set at 90 seconds to midnight, the closest it’s been since that tracker was first created in 1947. And just this June, Russian President Vladimir Putin [signed](#) a mutual defense agreement with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, a potential first step toward a drive by Moscow to help Pyongyang expand its nuclear arsenal further. And of the [nine countries](#) now possessing nuclear weapons, it’s hardly the only one other than the U.S. in an expansionist phase.

Considering the rising tide of nuclear escalation globally, is it really the right time for this country to invest a fortune of taxpayer dollars in a new generation of devastating “use them or lose them” weapons? The American public has long said no, according to a 2020 poll by the University of Maryland’s Program for Public Consultation, which showed that [61%](#) of us actually support phasing out ICBM systems like the Sentinel.

The Pentagon’s misguided plan to keep such ICBMs in the U.S arsenal for decades to come is only reinforced by the political power of members of Congress and the companies that benefit financially from the current buildup.

Who Decides? The Role of the ICBM Lobby

A prime example of the power of the nuclear weapons lobby is the [Senate ICBM Coalition](#). That group is composed of senators from four states — Montana, North Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming — that either house major ICBM bases or host significant work on the Sentinel. Perhaps you won’t be surprised to learn that the members of that coalition have [received](#) more than \$3 million in donations from firms involved in the production of the Sentinel over the past four election cycles. Nor were they alone. ICBM contractors made contributions to 92 of the 100 senators and 413 of the 435 house members in 2024. Some received hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The nuclear lobby paid special attention to members of the armed services committees in the House and Senate. For example, Mike Turner, a House Republican from Ohio, has been a relentless advocate of “modernizing” the nuclear arsenal. In a June 2024 [talk](#) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which itself has received well [over a million dollars](#) in funding from nuclear weapons producers, he called for systematically upgrading the nuclear arsenal for decades to come, while chiding any of his congressional colleagues not taking such an aggressive stance on the subject.

Although Turner vigorously touts the need for a costly nuclear buildup, he fails to mention that, with \$305,000 in donations, he’s been the fourth-highest recipient of funding from the ICBM lobby over the four elections between 2018 and 2024. Little wonder that he pushes for new nuclear weapons and staunchly [opposes](#) extending the New START arms reduction treaty.

In another example of contractor influence, veteran Texas representative Kay Granger secured the largest total of contributions from the ICBM lobby of any House member. With

\$675,000 in missile contractor contributions in hand, Granger went to bat for the lobby, lending a feminist veneer to nuclear “modernization” by giving a speech on her experience as a woman in politics at [Northrop Grumman’s Women’s conference](#). And we’re sure you won’t be surprised that Granger has anything but a strong track record when it comes to keeping the Pentagon and arms makers accountable for waste, fraud, and abuse in weapons programs. Her X account is, in fact, littered with [posts](#) heaping praise on Lockheed Martin and its overpriced, underperforming [F-35](#) combat aircraft.

Today’s tour of [@LockheedMartin’s](#) F-35 plant with [@SecAFOfficial](#), [@SenTedCruz](#), and Lockheed leaders Marillyn Hewson and James Taiclet highlights Fort Worth’s Texas-sized role in providing for our common defense and the contributions made by our world-class workforce. pic.twitter.com/gEXSRrXSVa

— Rep. Kay Granger (@RepKayGranger) [June 12, 2020](#)

Other recipients of ICBM contractor funding, like Alabama Congressman Mike Rogers, have lamented the might of the “[far-left disarmament community](#),” and the undue influence of “anti-nuclear zealots” on our politics. Missing from the statements his office puts together and the speeches his staffers write for him, however, is any mention of the \$471,000 in funding he’s received so far from ICBM producers. You won’t be surprised, we’re sure, to discover that Rogers has pledged to seek a provision in the forthcoming National Defense Authorization Act to support the Pentagon’s plan to continue the Sentinel program.

Lobbying Dollars and the Revolving Door

The flood of campaign contributions from ICBM contractors is reinforced by their staggering investments in lobbying. In any given year, the arms industry as a whole [employs](#) between 800 and 1,000 lobbyists, well more than one for every member of Congress. Most of those lobbyists hired by ICBM contractors come through the “revolving door” from careers in the Pentagon, Congress, or the Executive Branch. That means they come with the necessary tools for success in Washington: an understanding of the appropriations cycle and close relations with decision-makers on the Hill.

During the last four election cycles, ICBM contractors spent upwards of \$226 million on 275 extremely well-paid lobbyists. For example, Bud Cramer, a former Democratic congressman from Alabama who once sat on the defense subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, [netted \\$640,000](#) in fees from Northrop Grumman over a span of six years. He was also a cofounder of the [Blue Dog Democrats](#), an influential conservative faction within the Democratic Party. Perhaps you won’t be surprised to learn that Cramer’s former chief of staff, Jefferies Murray, also [lobbies](#) for Northrop Grumman.

While some lobbyists work for one contractor, others have shared allegiances. For example, during his tenure as a lobbyist, former Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Trent Lott [received](#) more than \$600,000 for his efforts for Raytheon, Textron Inc., and United Technologies (before United Technologies and Raytheon merged to form RX Technologies). Former Virginia Congressman Jim Moran similarly [received](#) \$640,000 from Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics.

Playing the Jobs Card

The argument of last resort for the Sentinel and similar questionable weapons programs is that they create well-paying jobs in key states and districts. Northrop Grumman has played the jobs card effectively with respect to the Sentinel, claiming it will [create](#) 10,000 jobs in its development phase alone, including about [2,250](#) in the state of Utah, where the hub for the program is located.



A view of the Northrop Grumman Mission Systems headquarters facility on West Nursery Road in Linthicum, Maryland. (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

As a start, however, those 10,000 jobs will help a miniscule fraction of the [167-million-member](#) American workforce. Moreover, Northrop Grumman claims facilities tied to the program will be set up in 32 states. If 2,250 of those jobs end up in Utah, that leaves 7,750 more jobs spread across 31 states — an average of about 250 jobs per state, essentially a rounding error compared to total employment in most localities.

Nor has Northrop Grumman provided any documentation for the number of jobs the Sentinel program will allegedly create. Journalist Taylor Barnes of ReThink Media was [rebuffed](#) in her efforts to get a copy of the agreement between Northrop Grumman and the state of Utah that reportedly indicates how many Sentinel-related jobs the company needs to create to get the full subsidy offered to put its primary facility in Utah.

A statement by a Utah official justifying that lack of transparency [suggested](#) Northrop Grumman was operating in “a competitive defense industry” and that revealing details of the agreement might somehow harm the company. But any modest financial harm Northrop Grumman might suffer, were those details revealed, pales in comparison with the immense risks and costs of the Sentinel program itself.

There are two major flaws in the jobs argument with respect to the future production of nuclear weapons. First, military spending should be based on security considerations, not pork-barrel politics. Second, as Heidi Peltier of the Costs of War Project has [effectively demonstrated](#), virtually any other expenditure of funds currently devoted to Pentagon programs would create between 9% and 250% *more* jobs than weapons spending does. If Congress were instead to put such funds into addressing climate change, dealing with future disease epidemics, poverty, or homelessness — all serious threats to public safety — the

American economy would gain hundreds of thousands of jobs. Choosing to fund those ICBMs instead is, in fact, a job killer, not a job creator.

Unwarranted Influence in the Nuclear Age

Advocates for eliminating ICBMs from the American arsenal make a strong case. (If only they were better heard!) For example, former Representative John Tierney of the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation [offered](#) this blunt indictment of ICBMs:

“Not only are intercontinental ballistic missiles redundant, but they are prone to a high risk of accidental use...They do not make us any safer. Their only value is to the defense contractors who line their fat pockets with large cost overruns at the expense of our taxpayers. It has got to stop.”

The late Daniel Ellsberg made a similar point in a February 2018 [interview](#) with the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*:

“You would not have these arsenals, in the U.S. or elsewhere, if it were not the case that it was highly profitable to the military-industrial complex, to the aerospace industry, to the electronics industry, and to the weapons design labs to keep modernizing these weapons, improving accuracy, improving launch time, all that. The military-industrial complex that Eisenhower talked about is a very powerful influence. We’ve talked about unwarranted influence. We’ve had that for more than half a century.”

Given how the politics of Pentagon spending normally work, that nuclear weapons policy is being so heavily influenced by individuals and organizations profiting from an ongoing arms race should be anything but surprising. Still, in the case of such weaponry, the stakes are so high that critical decisions shouldn’t be determined by parochial politics. The influence of such special interest groups and corporate weapons-makers over life-and-death issues should be considered both a moral outrage and perhaps the ultimate security risk.

Isn’t it finally time for the executive branch and Congress to start assessing the need for ICBMs on their merits, rather than on contractor lobbying, weapons company funding, and the sort of strategic thinking that was already outmoded by the end of the 1950s? For that to happen, our representatives would need to hear from their constituents loud and clear.

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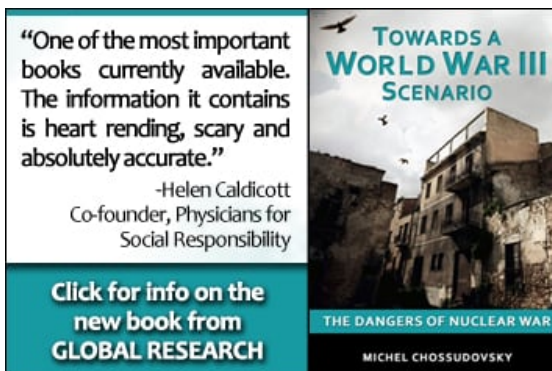
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[“Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War”](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

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[PDF Edition](#): \$6.50 (sent directly to your email account!)

[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website www.globalresearch.ca. He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Reviews

“This book is a ‘must’ resource – a richly documented and systematic diagnosis of the supremely pathological geo-strategic planning of US wars since ‘9-11’ against non-nuclear countries to seize their oil fields and resources under cover of ‘freedom and democracy’.”
–John McMurtry, Professor of Philosophy, Guelph University

“In a world where engineered, pre-emptive, or more fashionably “humanitarian” wars of aggression have become the norm, this challenging book may be our final wake-up call.”
–Denis Halliday, Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations

Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

–Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute

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