

Nuclear Weapons: The Anatomy of a U.S. STRATCOM “Disinfographic”

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In-depth Report: [Nuclear War](#)

United States Strategic Command, the branch of the US military responsible for the nation’s nuclear weapons, recently released an [imperialy](#) misleading [infographic on Twitter](#). The graphic is confused—not only about when to use bold typeface, but also about the facts.

“The threats we face today and in the future are real, and have not changed during the pandemic. While we continue to seek and provide for a safe and secure world, others continue to act provocatively and irresponsibly.” – ADM Richard pic.twitter.com/8RJXS10ZE9

— US Strategic Command (@US_Stratcom) [May 3, 2020](#)

The *Bulletin’s* editorial team has annotated the graphic as a service to readers.

The first section purports to show how China, Russia, and the United States will be upgrading their respective nuclear forces over the coming years. The graphic is hard to decipher, not least because it contains many acronyms, mixes strategic and tactical systems, and commingles NATO’s naming system with indigenous ones.

THE 21ST CENTURY THREAT

THE STRATEGIC THREATS AMERICA AND ALLIES FACE FROM DESTABILIZING NATIONS AREN'T GOING AWAY



[Click the image to read the annotations.](#)

The overall impression, though, is that Russia and China will be rolling out many more new systems than the United States over the coming years, and so the danger to “America and allies” is growing.

But that’s wrong for several reasons. First, the chart is not making an apples-to-apples comparison. Although it purports to show “future capabilities,” it includes many Russian and Chinese weapons that are already partially or mostly deployed, while conveniently omitting deployed US weapons.

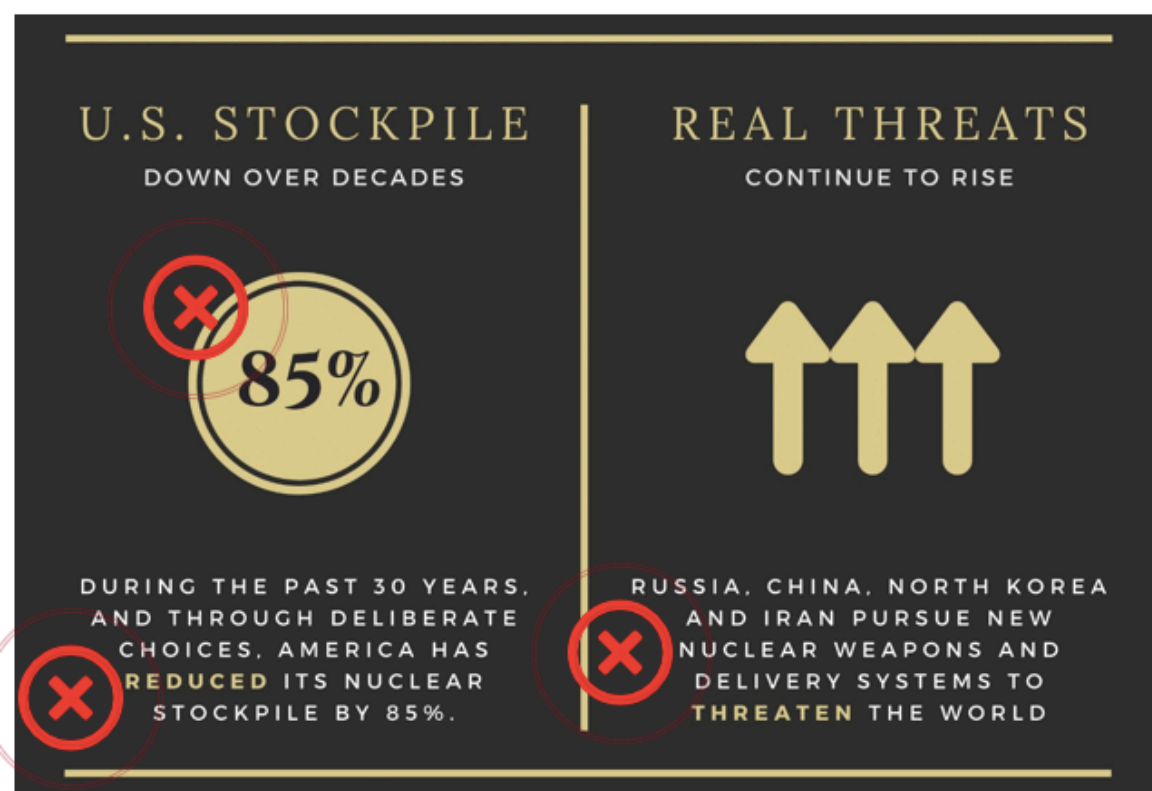
Second, more systems does not equate to more capabilities. Many of the systems shown, such as Russia’s Sarmat, the United States’ GBSD (Ground Based Strategic Deterrent), and China’s DF-41, are slated to replace older systems that have broadly similar capabilities. Moreover, in at least one place the chart duplicates two versions of the same system. The Pentagon has [described](#) China’s DF-31AG as simply “an enhanced version of the DF-31A,” but they appear as separate systems on the chart. Even where systems are entirely new, they will hardly alter the overall strategic balance.

Third, the chart gets the size of the pies wrong—it doesn’t say anything about how many of each system will be built. For example, it shows two icons for Chinese submarines and only

one icon for US submarines. But China will likely build at most six of each type. The United States, meanwhile, plans to build 12 Columbia-class submarines.

Similarly, the United States plans to build more than 400 land-based missiles through its GBSD program, so that single icon in the pie chart will represent far more intercontinental ballistic missiles than China will have in its [entire arsenal](#).

Overall, while all three countries are in the midst of [expansive \(and expensive\)](#) nuclear modernization programs, the United States has a nuclear arsenal that is more than adequate, and it will remain so over the coming decades.



[Click the image to read the annotations.](#)

The second section of the infographic juxtaposes a decrease in the US nuclear stockpile on the left with an increased threat level on the right. This section, too, is full of inaccuracies.

For instance, the assertion that the US stockpile has decreased by 85 percent in the last 30 years is slightly off. According to the authoritative Nuclear Notebook, the United States has reduced its stockpile from around [21,400](#) warheads in 1990 to around [3,800](#) in 2020, an 82 percent decrease.

More important, there's no mention of Russia's dramatic reductions, which have outpaced those of the United States. Since 1990, the Russian stockpile has declined from roughly 37,000 warheads to [4,310](#)—an 88 percent decrease. So it is not as though US reductions were unilateral—quite the opposite. (China, with perhaps [300](#) warheads, is not likely to make any reductions until Russia and the United States reduce their own stockpiles further.)

It is true that the United States has reduced its stockpile through “deliberate choices” over the decades. Scholars and policymakers have long understood that arms racing makes all

sides less safe, while arms control can [make war less likely](#). The fact that mutual nuclear arms reductions have enjoyed bipartisan support in the United States for longer than 30 years should be a strong signal that this is sound policy.



[Click the image to read the annotations.](#)

The final section paints a picture of a law-abiding United States victimized by rogue countries that are “taking advantage of the situation.”

It suggests that China and Russia are developing new weapons that will “bypass treaty obligations.” This may be true for some of the [more fanciful](#) Russian systems under development. However, others, such as the Avangard and the Sarmat, [can be incorporated](#) into New START—the relevant existing treaty—quite smoothly. For China, none of the new systems listed above will violate or bypass any treaty, because no such agreement exists.

Meanwhile, the graphic makes no mention of agreements from which the United States has withdrawn, in some cases against the counsel of its allies. The Trump administration withdrew from the [INF treaty](#) in August 2019 and [quickly began working on a weapon](#) that the treaty would have banned. So although the Russians may have been [guilty](#) of breaking the law, the United States did one better by eliminating the law itself.

And although the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major world powers was a political agreement rather than a legally binding treaty, it was the United States that withdrew and reimposed sweeping sanctions on Iran. So there would be little basis for claiming that Iran is “using aggressive behaviors” to “intimidate” the United States—rather, the opposite may be true.

There’s truth to the assertion that China, [Iran](#), North Korea, and Russia have all tested weapons over the last several months, even as the entire world grapples with the COVID-19

outbreak. But so has the United States: It tested [an intercontinental ballistic missile](#) in February and a [hypersonic missile glide body](#) in March.

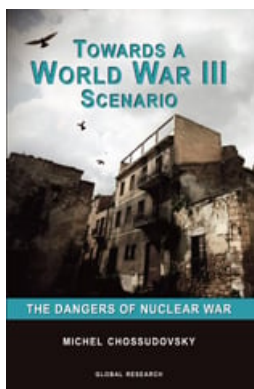
The final paragraph states that these countries “have shown no regard for nuclear reductions,” although by all accounts Russia, the United States’ main competitor in terms of nuclear arsenals, has [abided](#) by nuclear reduction agreements. In fact, it is the Trump administration that stands in the way of extending the only remaining agreement that would keep such reductions in place—New START. The Russians are [ready to extend](#) the treaty for five years without imposing or even discussing new conditions.

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

by Michel Chossudovsky

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Reviews

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–John McMurtry, Professor of Philosophy, Guelph University

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–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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