

New U.S. LGM-35A “Sentinel” Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM): Dangerous Crossroads, Struggling with “Unknown Unknowns”, Says USAF Secretary

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Intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs for short, are the most important weapons a country that wants to preserve its sovereignty could possess.

The importance of these terrifying missiles cannot possibly be overstated, as they’re the fastest, the deadliest and generally the most effective way to deliver a crushing blow to any enemy, virtually anywhere on the planet.

They are the weapon of last resort and one of the very few things that could end human civilization.

It could easily be argued that [ICBM-armed states are the only truly independent and sovereign countries](#), as there is no one who could possibly force them to do anything. Thus, the importance of keeping these weapons up and running is a top priority for such powers.

And yet, it would seem some, such as the United States, have become far too lulled by their own [delusions of grandeur, indispensability](#) and other forms of self-styling, the most recent being that it’s supposedly “[the most powerful country in the history of the world](#)”. Some would probably say that “pride cometh before a fall”, but that’s probably just another “conspiracy theory”. In all seriousness, the belligerent thalassocracy seems to be going precisely through such a phase and it’s starting to show even in its strategic military might.

Namely, [on November 13 Secretary of the US Air Force \(USAF\) Frank Kendall admitted](#) that research and development work on the new ICBM slated to replace the atrociously outdated “Minuteman 3” missiles is struggling.

The weapon in question, designated LGM-35A “Sentinel”, is being developed by the notorious Northrop Grumman Corporation, one of the most prominent companies of the infamous US Military Industrial Complex (MIC). Kendall stressed that the program, officially known as the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), is one of the biggest and most complex ever undertaken by the US. While he praised the development of the B-21 “Raider” strategic bomber/missile carrier, which just had its maiden flight on November 10, stating that “[he’s] fairly optimistic comparatively about [it]”, but that “the ‘Sentinel’ is, quite honestly, struggling a little bit”. And indeed, despite being in the early stages of development, [the GBSD program is already in trouble](#).

It’s facing not only cost overruns and delays, but there are also serious problems with even the most basic technologies that shouldn’t really be a problem for a country like the US. Still, the issues that the USAF is facing, [along with the massive cost of the GBSD program](#), have resulted in proposals for it to retire the ancient LGM-30G “Minuteman 3” completely and divert the freed-up resources to LGM-35A “Sentinel”. However, this would leave Washington DC completely without the land-based leg of its triad, [effectively eroding it into a dyad composed of strategic bombers and SLBMs](#) (submarine-launched ballistic missiles). Some top NATO members, such as the United Kingdom and France, rely precisely on such [strategic posturing](#).

However, since the US is now faced with multiple near-peer and regional adversaries simultaneously, [primarily thanks to its virtually all-out aggression against the entire world](#), this isn’t a viable strategy for the foreseeable future. Namely, in the best-case scenario, the LGM-35A “Sentinel” would enter service in 2029-2030. This would mean that Washington DC would be left without strategic land-based missiles for at least five years (in case it decides to retire old “Minuteman 3” ICBMs). And yet, when taking into account recent setbacks, [this deadline could easily be pushed to the mid or even late 2030s](#), meaning that the US would be stuck with a dyad for over a decade, possibly even longer, [which is a highly unpredictable strategic risk](#).

Worse yet, all current projections by the Pentagon and its numerous think tanks suggest that several US adversaries, both global and regional, [would reach their peak precisely in this timeframe](#). What’s more, the LGM-35A “Sentinel” is most likely inferior to the already existing Russian equivalents such as the RS-24 “Yars”, [which boasts a depressed flight path and limited maneuvering capabilities](#). In addition, Russian Strategic Missile Forces (RVSN) already possess 150-160 of these ICBMs, 90% of which are road-mobile, meaning that they have a much higher survivability than the LGM-35A “Sentinel” which will be entirely confined to silos. All this is without even considering [hundreds of other strategic weapons in Moscow’s unrivaled arsenal](#).

For instance, [there are Russian monstrosities such as the RS-28 “Sarmat”](#), a superheavy ICBM that stands in a league of its own. This missile quite literally has no analogs in range (effectively unlimited), payload capacity (equivalent to 750 Hiroshima bombs) and technologies applied to it ([uses unique hypersonic maneuvering warheads](#)). “Sarmat” is also complemented by other weapons, such as the notorious “Poseidon” nuclear-tipped underwater drones [that are so destructive they can cause literal radioactive tsunamis](#). However, while being America’s deadliest rival, Russia is not the only one. Other countries, such as China and [North Korea](#), are already [upgrading their arsenals](#) with weapons that are much newer and more advanced than the old “Minuteman 3”.

[“You cannot life-extend ‘Minuteman 3’... It is getting past the point of \[where\] it’s not cost-effective to life-extend ‘Minuteman 3’. You’re quickly getting to the point \[where\] you can’t do it at all. That thing is so old that in some cases the \[technical\] drawings don’t exist anymore, or where we do have drawings, they’re like six generations behind the industry standard. And there’s not only \[no one\] working that can understand them – they’re not alive anymore,”](#) former head of the US Strategic Command [Admiral Charles A. Richard \(ret.\) warned back in early 2021.](#)

Indeed, the “Minuteman 3” is based on early 1960s technologies and has been in service for [over half a century at this point](#). The original designers have all probably died decades ago, while the technical documentation is beyond obsolete, as it predates the digital era. Secretary Kendall himself warned that the difficulties of developing a successor partially stem from the fact that the necessary know-how has been lost for decades. He said that [“there are ‘unknown unknowns’... ..that are affecting the \[LGM-35A ‘Sentinel’\] program”,](#) because “it’s been a very long time since we did an ICBM”. This notion is further reinforced by a string of [recent launch failures of both the existing “Minuteman 3”](#) missiles and [the new components in testing for the “Sentinel”](#).

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