



Rebuttal to Maj Mike Faunda's piece, *America's Last ICBM*

By Mark Stout

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A review of a graduate's recently published article gives me cause for concern. It is my opinion that the article, "America's Last ICBM—Why now is the best time to eliminate land-based ICBMs," contains flawed logic, basic inaccuracies, and self-contradicting statements. In response to that article, I offer an alternative approach to examining this important part of the US' nuclear triad. First, let's review some very basic background regarding ICBMs. In the cons column: they can't be recalled; they are expensive; and, they are disfavored due to their potentially apocalyptic destructive power. In its favor are the ICBMs' attributes: cheaper than other nuclear delivery systems; has the requisite apocalyptic destructive power; speed, responsiveness, reliability, and availability are all outstanding; and finally, they are very hard to defend against. ICBMs exist to support nuclear deterrence. One reasonable definition of deterrence is "A military capability sufficiently strong to discourage any would-be aggressor from starting a war because of the fear of retaliation."

The concept of deterrence is essential to understanding the value of the ICBM, as the ICBM "exists" at a couple of levels. First, its capabilities exist as a deterrent in the minds of our adversaries, in which the fear of nuclear punishment restrains them from doing certain things. Second, ICBMs also clearly exist in the physical domain, where it is arguably the weapon of last choice. In fact, the bar for launching an operational ICBM against a foe is set so high that it's never been done, either by the United States, or by our adversaries. Similarly, no operational nuclear Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) or Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) has ever been fired "for effect."

ICBMs provide complimentary and redundant support to the air- and sea-based nuclear deterrent force, just as the air and sea forces do for the ICBM. For example, if an adversary had a breakthrough in anti-submarine warfare or air defense systems that brought the efficacy of the air- and sea- based portions of the nuclear deterrent forces into doubt, the ICBM would still be capable of fulfilling the mission. Just for clarification, no weapon system, once it has been released, can be recalled. Once an SLBM, ALCM, or gravity bomb has been released, it's all Slim Pickens.

Here is an incomplete, but representative rebuttal regarding *America's Last ICBM* arranged to correspond with the paper's layout:

Misleading, Incorrect, or Logically Flawed Statement	Reality
The ICBM is the perfect weapon	There is no perfect weapon; that is, there is no one weapon whose use is appropriate to all warfighting circumstances
These powerful weapons were built to contend with the worst of possible situations- -an all-out nuclear exchange	On the contrary, ICBMs were built to <u>prevent and avoid</u> an all-out nuclear exchange
The ICBM mission became one of deterrence	The ICBM mission has been one of deterrence since its existence
Missileers are merely caretakers for these relics of past glory	Error of dismissal. Parents are mere caretakers of children? Pilots mere caretakers of aircraft? Teachers are mere caretakers of students?
The current number of ICBMs is still being justified based on a 1960's bi-polar calculus that assumed Russia had a superior nuclear bomber and missile force	The USAF had over a thousand ICBMs in the 1960s and has 450 now. Using the author's logic, did we 1) not have enough then or, 2) do we need more now? Numerous nuclear reviews have been done since the 1960s. This is why the ICBM count has gone from 1050 to 450, and the weapon account has decreased from approximately 2500 to 450. The upcoming 2009 Nuclear Posture Review will be the third since the end of the Cold War.
While the U.S. has reduced its total number of ICBMs, it has done so in a piece-meal effort without thoroughly analyzing how the ICBM fits into U.S. national security strategy or how deter aggression	The ICBM reduction has been done via established and sound USAF processes. The USAF provides its ICBM deterrent capabilities to USSTRATCOM, who determines the adequacy/inadequacy based on their Unified Command Plan responsibilities
America's vast nuclear capability failed to deter Al Qaeda from attacking the U.S. homeland.	All elements of American power, not just our vast nuclear capability, failed to stop Al Qaeda. Since the ICBM is only a part of America's nuclear capability included in this

	<p>statement, it is unclear why the author focuses solely on the ICBM and does not make the points regarding SLBMs and air-delivered weapons. One of the paper’s logical fallacies is that it simultaneously presents itself as both pro- and anti-nuclear deterrence, while being entirely anti-ICBM.</p>
<p>U.S. nuclear capabilities have even failed to deter other states from acquiring their own nuclear weapons</p>	<p>Again, none of the elements of American power deterred other states from acquiring their own nuclear weapons. Similarly, the U.S. acquisition of fighters, tanks, aircraft carriers, etc., has failed to deter other states from acquiring their own fighters, tanks, aircraft carriers, etc.</p>
<p>While prudence dictates that the U.S. remains a nuclear-capable nation, the deterrence argument has lost its luster due to America’s unwillingness to use nuclear weapons against its adversaries.</p>	<p>Author’s argument is self-contradicting. Deterrence works precisely because no nuclear state is willing to use nuclear weapons against its adversaries due to the irrevocable consequences.</p>
<p>Launching an ICBM may open “Pandora’s Box” as ICBMs cannot be recalled or stopped mid-flight</p>	<p>Submarine launched ballistic missiles are not recallable, nor are air launched weapons, once they have been released by the aircraft</p>
<p>Should the U.S. decide to conduct a nuclear strike, it would most likely be with an aircraft or other delivery system that could be recalled if desired, vice an ICBM.</p>	<p>Agree in part, but the author’s scenario has to be put in context: he appears to be describing a situation where one airplane would strike one target with one weapon--for example, to rubbleize a threatening nation’s capital city. If a gravity weapon, or air or sea launched systems could not strike the target due to weather, timing, refueling, overflight, anti-access, air defense, etc., what would the weapon of choice become? Also, see comment above referring to the inability to recall a weapon, after release.</p>
<p>Thus, the unlikely use of ICBMs, coupled with the adversary’s perceptions of capability and will, suggest that America’s ICBMs no longer deter or pose a threat to anyone other than</p>	<p>It should be self-evident that America is interested in deterring nuclear war with <u>all</u> adversaries, including peers, near-peers, and non-peers. The author’s position, when</p>

<p>peer- or near-peer competitors who are not prone to conducting a first-strike against the U.S. using nuclear weapons anyway.</p>	<p>followed to its logical end, would advocate for unilateral U.S. disarmament, as other nuclear nations are assessed as “not prone” to use these weapons.</p>
<p>In eliminating the land-based ICBMs, the U.S. has a unique opportunity to remove a financially burdensome weapon system from its inventory and to lead by example in the non-proliferation arena.</p>	<p>The financial burden, as a portion of all U.S. government obligations, is negligible. A priori, the costs of America’s ICBMs probably compares favorably to the air and sea launched counterparts. That is, are things generally done more cheaply from an airplane, from under the water, or from the ground? Unilaterally deactivating ICBMs while other nations continue to modernize and build capability seems to offer negative security benefits rather than positive ones.</p>
<p>Eliminating ICBMs gives America a chance to regain its credibility as the global leader in nuclear non-proliferation</p>	<p>Error of assertion. Russia and China have had ICBMs for decades. If the U.S. has lost credibility, it must have had it at one time, correct? When was credibility possessed; when was credibility lost; what caused this to occur? Consider who has had the most detrimental effect in non-proliferation, the U.S., China, or Russia? Also, Iran and North Korea are pursuing ICBM capabilities. Is that because of the U.S.’s lost credibility? It is more likely Iran and North Korea are pursuing nuclear programs because they feel it will provide them with “can’t be ignored” stature than as a reaction to a loss of US credibility.</p>

In conclusion, the pros and cons of nuclear deterrence, to include the value of their delivery systems are well established. However, if they are to be intellectually argued, let’s agree to use facts, logic, and reason instead of assertions, errors, and fallacy. No one wants nuclear war, and that is one of the great desires that motivates both missile defense advocates (realists) and arms controllers (idealists).

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