

Purge of the Pentagon Deserves To Be a Priority of the Next President



by Conrad Black

One of the great mysteries of the current correlation of strategic forces in the world is the apparently large advantage that both China and Russia have over the United States and other Western powers in the area of hypersonic weapons.

These are missiles that can carry conventional or nuclear warheads and travel at between five and 15 times the speed of sound. In addition to their extraordinary speed and because of it, they have a much lower arc than traditional supersonic missiles and so they have much less distance to cover to get to their target, a smaller fuel requirement, and are therefore a lighter missile.

The most advanced hypersonic missile can get to almost anywhere in the world in about an hour. Understandably, reliable defenses against such weapons are extremely complicated and as generally happens, they lag the offensive technology that they are trying to counter.

The Chinese and the Russians possess operational hypersonic missiles against which the United States does not have a reliable defense. At this point, the American side of the global strategic balance is effectively back to the power of massive retaliation, which in the Kennedy-Johnson era carried the lugubrious name Mutual Assured Destruction.

The theory of Defense Secretary McNamara in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was that if the United States just passively allowed the Soviet Union to draw even with the United States in deliverable nuclear weapons capacity, it would engender a climate conducive to arms control. Instead the Soviet regime took it as an enhancement of their ability to achieve nuclear military superiority.

President Nixon negotiated the greatest arms control agreement in the history of the world with the first session of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in 1972. The United States effectively regained nuclear superiority with intercontinental ballistic missiles carrying ten independently targeted nuclear warheads.

All that President Nixon and Henry Kissinger achieved in triangulating the superpower relationship with China and extracting the United States from the Vietnam War while preserving a non-Communist government in Saigon was compromised by the Democrats in the Congress ending all assistance to South Vietnam, President Carter betraying the Shah of Iran, and inciting Soviet ambitions with his critique of America's "irrational fear of communism."

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and the arms war was

resumed. President Reagan decisively countered the Soviet regime with a serious arms buildup topped out with a proposal for a leak-proof, space-based, laser anti-missile defense. His critics railed at what they called "Star Wars," which was officially known as the Strategic Defense Initiative, but it completely demoralized the Soviet government, which was spending approximately 50 percent of Soviet GDP on military procurement and maintenance of very large Armed Forces – eight times the U.S. percentage.

The Gorbachev government became desperately uneasy that Moscow was about to lose its first strike and retaliatory capability to American missile defenses. The Soviet Union peacefully disintegrated, international communism collapsed, the Cold War ended, and the West enjoyed the greatest and most bloodless strategic victory in the history of the nation-state.

Since then, the Obama and Biden administrations have effectively greenlighted nuclear weapons for Iran, and the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations were all swindled by North Korea, which is now at least on the verge of being a full-fledged nuclear power.

The Russians, however sluggish their army has proved to be in Ukraine, have advanced to a new generation of hypersonic ballistic missiles, and China has become a prodigious threat in the Far East. There are inadequate defenses at the great forward American base of Guam and the giant Nimitz-class aircraft carriers would apparently be sitting ducks reminiscent of battleship Row at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, if attacked by sophisticated Chinese missiles.

The George W. Bush administration, perhaps understandably over-focused on counter-terrorism at the expense of fundamental great power national security, and the Obama administration starved the military and appeased China and Iran and Russia, withholding anti-missile defense systems from the Czechs and Poles contrary to prior agreements.

President Trump found a deteriorated military and gave the Pentagon virtually a blank check to rebuild it. Like children in a candy store, the senior military brass indulged themselves, but they completely missed the significance of hypersonic missile development, even though the Russians in particular have been boasting about their advances in that field for more than five years.

With the onset of the Biden administration, the Defense Department also mismanaged gender issues, tolerated the distraction and demoralization of the forces with racial nonsense, has depleted oil and ammunition reserves, and has been sluggish and ineffectual in catch-up hypersonic development and has even attracted the mockery of the Chinese and the Russians.

This is yet another fiasco to the account of the outgoing chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Mark Milley, following his disgraceful conduct after the extinguishing of the fire set by arsonists at the Church of the Presidents near the White House, and his outrageous call to his Chinese analog opening the possibility that the president whom he served and appointed him might do something reckless with America's military.

Additional highlights of the Milley blunderbuss term as joint chief's chairman include the horrendous debacle in Afghanistan and his professional assurance to a congressional committee that Russia would occupy Kiev within a few days and the entire Ukraine within a few weeks. General James Mattis, when he was Defense Secretary, warned Trump against appointing Milley to the highest military office.

On that point, President Trump should have listened to him. Among the highest priorities of the next president will be to tear the Pentagon apart and give involuntary early retirement to anyone tainted by the poor judgment, racial obsessions, operational failures, collapse of recruitment, grave national

security misjudgments, and misplaced extravagance of the last 15 years.

First published in the [*New York Sun*](#).