

SPECIAL INTERESTS OR THE NATIONAL INTEREST? Inside the ICBM Lobby

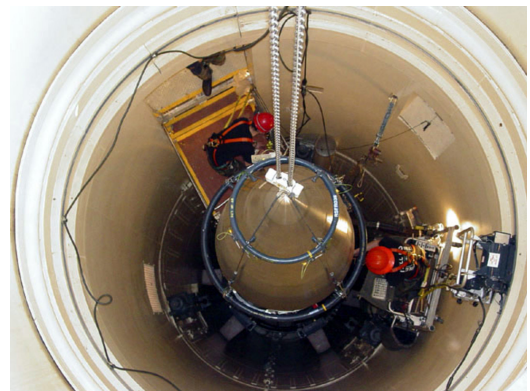
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The size and composition of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be determined by what is needed to deter potential adversaries from attacking the United States or its allies. But too often other factors come into play, most notably the vested interests of the lobby for Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs).

Former Secretary of Defense William Perry has described ICBMs as “some of the most dangerous weapons in the world” because the president would have mere minutes to decide whether to launch them in the face of a perceived nuclear attack, greatly increasing the risk of an accidental nuclear war.¹ The ICBM lobby is a major reason the United States continues to invest in ICBMs despite the obvious dangers of continuing to deploy them. The new ICBM – known formally as the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) -- is slated to cost between \$85 billion and \$150 billion, money that could be better spent on other priorities.²

Congressional Boosters: The ICBM Coalition

The ICBM Coalition is composed of senators from states that host ICBM bases (North Dakota, Montana and Wyoming) or major support activities for the ICBM mission (Utah). Over the years the coalition has had remarkable success in limiting any and all changes to U.S. ICBM policy. The coalition was instrumental in everything from bolstering the Air Force’s effort to limit the reduction of the ICBM force under the New START Treaty, to ensuring that empty ICBM silos are kept on “warm” status ready to be reused in case of a decision to increase the force, to blocking efforts to explore alternatives to current plans for the development and deployment of new ICBMs.



A Malmstrom Air Force Base missile maintenance team removes the upper section of an intercontinental ballistic missile at a Montana missile site. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman John Parie)

Industry Beneficiaries: The Northrop Grumman Team

Northrop Grumman has emerged as the sole contractor bidding for the new ICBM, known formally as the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD). The company flexed its lobbying muscles in 2019 when it helped kill an amendment that would have required the Pentagon to explore alternatives to a new ICBM. And it will only have more lobbying clout going forward, as it has named a dozen major subcontractors to work on the project, while claiming that the next phase of work will generate 10,000 jobs nationwide.³

The Northrop Grumman team has powerful tools at its disposal for fending off any changes in the ICBM program. Northrop Grumman and its major subcontractors have given \$1.6 million to members of the ICBM

1. William Perry, “Why It’s Safe to Scrap America’s ICBMs,” New York Times, September 30, 2016.

2. Marcus Weisgerber, “New Nuclear Missiles’ Cost Estimate Changes Again,” Defense One, April 17, 2019.

3. Marcus Weisgerber, “Northrop Announces Suppliers for New ICBM. Boeing Is Not on the List.,” Defense One, September 16, 2019. Suppliers include Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, L3Harris, Collins Aerospace (United Technologies), Textron, Aerojet Rocketdyne, Honeywell, Parsons, BRPH, Clark Construction, Bechtel, and Kratos.

Coalition since 2012, and over \$4 million more to key members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. The firms involved in the ICBM program employ a total of 524 lobbyists, many of whom have passed through the revolving door from senior positions in government.⁴

The Battle to Come

There are better uses of scarce funds than spending tens of billions of dollars on a new ICBM. And virtually any other use of the funds will create more jobs than building and deploying the GBSD. For the same amount of spending, clean energy and infrastructure create 40% more jobs than spending on the military, and healthcare creates 100% more.⁵ Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) has called for reducing funding for the new ICBM and using the funds freed up for coronavirus relief. It's an initiative well worth supporting given the immense costs and real dangers of building and deploying the GBSD.

Lobbying Spending on ICBM Coalition
by GBSD Contractor, 2012-2020 Cycles

| Company | Lobbying Expenditures | Number of Lobbyists (2019) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Boeing | \$361,628 | 106 |
| Lockheed Martin | \$297,702 | 69 |
| Northrop Grumman | \$274,558 | 57 |
| Honeywell | \$182,075 | 50 |
| General Dynamics | \$150,843 | 80 |
| United Technologies | \$145,606 | 53 |
| Bechtel | \$87,825 | 16 |
| Textron Systems | \$58,604 | 19 |
| Parsons | \$41,411 | 3 |
| L3 Harris Technologies | \$19,500 | 40 |
| Orbital ATK (2012-2016) | \$17,900 | 12 |
| Collins Aerospace (2012-2018) | \$15,165 | 3 |
| Aerojet Rocketdyne | \$6,828 | 16 |
| Total | \$1,659,645 | 524 |

4. Data on campaign contributions and lobbying are from the Center for Responsive Politics "Open Secrets" data base. Contributions to key House members are based on donations to committee leadership and members of the strategic forces subcommittee.

5. On jobs from defense versus other types of expenditure see Heidi Peltier, "War Spending and Lost Opportunities," Costs of War Project, Watson Institute, Brown University, March 2019.