

Incoming & Former Pentagon Chiefs, Commanders Say: “IBCMs are too dangerous”



Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis / AP photo

Recently retired Secretary of Defense, **Marine Corps General JAMES MATTIS** questioned the purpose of the Minuteman III missile system. General Mattis told the Senate Armed Services Committee in January 2015, “You should ask, ‘Is it time to reduce the triad to a diad, removing the land-based missiles?’”¹ (The “triad” is the three-part nuclear arsenal of submarines, bombers and missiles.) Gen. Mattis is a friend of former **Secretary of Defense WILLIAM PERRY** who has repeatedly called for completely eliminating the missile system.

Speaking Dec. 3, 2015, **Sec. PERRY** called for the retirement of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMS), the Air Force’s so-called Minuteman IIIs. Perry, who headed the Pentagon under President Bill Clinton said, “ICBMS aren’t necessary ... they’re not needed. Any reasonable definition of deterrence will not require that third leg.”² *Defense News* reports that Sec. Perry said ICBMs, “are simply too easy to launch on bad information and would be the most likely source of an accidental nuclear war.”

The “William J. Perry Project” website notes that Perry has said, “A lifetime immersed in special access to and top-secret assessment of strategic nuclear options has given me a unique, and chilling vantage point from which to conclude that *nuclear weapons no longer provide for our security, they endanger it.*” (emphasis added)

Gen. Mattis’s and Sec. Perry’s declarations amplify and strengthen the message of Nukewatch’s book on the subject, *Nuclear Heartland, Revised: A guide to the 450 land-based Missiles of the United States.* (On sale for \$20.00 from Nukewatch.)

Sec. Perry’s call for eliminating ICBMS was repeated Dec. 28, 2015 and again in an Op-Ed, Sept. 30, 2016, where he wrote, “First and foremost, the United States can safely phase out its land-based ICBM force.... Retiring the ICBMs would save considerable costs, but it isn’t only budgets that would benefit. These missiles are some of the most dangerous weapons in the world. They could even trigger an accidental nuclear war.”³

“Perry thinks the US nuclear force no longer needs land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, and can rely on the other two ‘legs’ of the force — bomber aircraft and submarine-based missiles. ICBMs should be scrapped, he says, adding, ‘I don’t think it’s going to happen, but I think it should happen. They’re not needed’ to deter nuclear aggression,” the AP reported.

Other Generals and Experts Call ICBMs Needless, Dangerous

Sec. Perry’s analysis echoes that of other high-level military officials who have called the Minuteman missile system completely expendable and recommended getting rid of them.

¹ Julian Borger, “James Mattis warned that land-based nuclear missiles pose false alarm danger,” *The Guardian*, Dec. 4; CBS News online, Dec. 1, 2016.

² Aaron Mehta, “Former Sec. Def. Perry: US on ‘Brink’ of New Nuclear Arms Race,” *DefenseNews.com*, Dec. 3, 2015.

³ Robert Burns, “Former Pentagon chief Perry: nuclear dangers are growing,” AP, Dec. 29, 2015; Wm J Perry, “Why It’s Safe to Scrap America’s ICBMs,” *New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2016.

General GEORGE BUTLER (USAF, Ret.), a former Chief Commander of Strategic Air Command, says in his 2016 memoir that the ICMBs are “an anachronism,” because they are vulnerable to preemptive attack, and he said earlier that the nuclear arsenal as a whole is “obscene” and that “... nuclear weapons are a pernicious anachronism, and they are the greatest threat to our survival.”⁴ In 2014 **Lt. General JAMES KOWALSKI**, Vice Commander of US Strategic Command, also warned about the instability of the missile force, saying, “The greatest threat to my force is an accident. The greatest risk to my force is doing something stupid.”⁵

Chaired by **General JAMES CARTWRIGHT**, a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a former commander of US nuclear forces, this blue-ribbon commission called for elimination of the Minuteman missile system in a 2012 study.⁶

The Cartwright report, which was signed by **Senator CHUCK HAGEL**—who would later become the Secretary of Defense—concluded that a US nuclear weapons arsenal *with none left on ICBMs* was big enough. At a 2012 Senate hearing, Gen. Cartwright testified that the ICBMs could be eliminated without leaving the US at risk.⁷ (emphasis added)

And **PAUL NITZE**, a former chief advisor to Ronald Reagan and a life-long, hardline anti-communist Cold War hawk, writing in the *New York Times*, said, “I see no compelling reason why we should not unilaterally get rid of our nuclear weapons. To maintain them ... adds nothing to our security.”⁸

⁴ R. Jeffrey Smith, “The Renegade General Who Believes Hiroshima Could Happen Again,” *Politico*, May 27, 2016; Frank Gaffney, “One-Time Hawk Now Defends Disarmament,” *Kansas City Star*, March 22, 1998.

⁵ Robert Gard and Greg Terryn, “American Nuclear Strategy: The Case for a Minimal-Deterrence Policy,” *TheNationalInterest.com*; Dec. 1, 2014.

⁶ Thom Shanker “Former Commander of US Nuclear Forces Calls for Large Cut in Warheads,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2012.

⁷ *Ibid*; and Josh Harkinson, “Death Wears Bunny Slippers,” *Mother Jones*, Nov./Dec. 2014.

⁸ Paul Nitze, “A Threat Mostly to Ourselves,” *New York Times*, opinion, Oct. 28, 1999