



Rivalry of Giants: Geopolitical Competition with China and our standing on the Global Stage

Topic Overview

As part of the Biden Administration, you will tackle a complex and demanding roster of issues. First and foremost, you will counter geopolitical rival China's efforts to wage a multi-front competition, with actions ranging from the Taiwan Sea to Africa, and Eastern Europe. This is a now or never crisis as China's economy continues to grow by leaps and bounds, as China's BRI initiative helps it create a consortium of allies, and as China's nuclear stockpile only grows more advanced and dangerous. The troubles don't end with China unfortunately. Russia continues to amass forces that could threaten Eastern European Allies. Autocrats continue to spit in the face of democracy and freedom in Belarus, Myanmar, and elsewhere. While Europe resembles a chaotic group of interests more than a unified ally. Finally, and no less importantly, the midterm season is in full swing and Biden's sinking approval ratings spell disaster for this administration. This is your last chance to get the Biden Administration to gain control of its own destiny.

Historical Background and Current Situation

Countering the Belt Road Initiative - the Build Back Better World Initiative

The People's Republic of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a cornerstone of Xi Jinping's infrastructure development plans, as well as his "Major Country Diplomacy" style

since its introduction in 2013.¹ The Belt and Road Initiative is a multi-billion dollar project, intended to develop economic and physical infrastructure from Asia to South America, while shoring up diplomatic relations with other nations along the way. Another major tenet of the BRI is the development and encouragement of the clean energy revolution (hydroelectric plants, solar farms, offshore wind turbines, etc.)

Given the long-standing rivalry between the United States and the People's Republic of China, it is only natural that the Biden administration, alongside G7, has developed a response to BRI, in the form of the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative.² The B3W initiative “will collectively catalyze hundreds of billions of dollars of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries in the coming years.”³ This initiative will hopefully provide an American counterpoint to BRI, improve global perception of the American response to climate change, and further develop U.S. influence in low- and middle-income countries. It is especially important that the U.S. maintain its influence in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia considering the rising tensions and loosening grip of democracy that is currently bubbling up in the region. For example, a tentative PRC ally, Russia, has been building up troops on the border that they share with Ukraine.

For these reasons, it is imperative that the Biden Administration maintains a strong stance in this modern-day manifestation of Cold War-Esque tensions through the lens of clean energy and infrastructure initiatives.

¹ <https://www-tandfonline-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/doi/full/10.1080/10670564.2018.1497907>

² https://www.voanews.com/a/usa_us-offer-alternative-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/6206928.html

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>

Fall of Democracies and the Rise of Authoritarianism

Democracies from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia have been struggling under the burdens of rising authoritarianism, conditions that are only exacerbated by the global pandemic. The Biden Administration knows firsthand the fragility of democracy, given the controversy over the President's 2020 election, which led to an attempted coup. Among the critics of the election was Belarusian dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, who publicly questioned the legitimacy of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. This critique is somewhat ironic, coming from the 6-term leader of 26-years who has faced much scrutiny for the legitimacy of his nation's own elections. This scrutiny has been boiling over in the past two years, leading to some of the largest anti-government protests in the history of Belarus due to electoral fraud, political repression, and unpopular domestic policies.⁴ Though the protests have died down in recent months, there is no doubt that Belarusian democracy is in an unstable state at the moment. President Lukashenko has recently started to use Syrian and Middle Eastern Refugees as pawns to attempt to negotiate a lifting of European sanctions. He has invited refugees to his country and encouraged them to cross the border into Europe, especially Poland. Poland and other bordering countries have responded with force, pushing the refugees back into Belarus and creating an immigration crisis at the border. This crisis shows no signs of letting up and the real victims are those who have been trapped between Belarus and European forces. (See Appendix Map).

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also struggled with maintaining democracy in recent years. Ethnic tensions have long been an issue in the nation, which have only exacerbated the country's ability to maintain a stable democracy. The current president, Bosnian Serb Milorad Dodik, has been

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/world/europe/whats-happening-in-belarus.html>

exploiting religious and ethnic tensions to push for Serbian secession.⁵ Such sentiment coming from the highest levels of the government has the potential to destabilize the nation, and the region, even further. The U.S. has a complicated relationship with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many feel as though the nation got involved in peacekeeping when it benefited American foreign policy goals, but abandoned Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus leaving the nations and their democracy to suffer under corrupt officials when it was no longer useful to U.S. interests.⁶ The U.S. has recently sanctioned Dodik for allegations of corruption which will, he implies, send the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina running into the arms of Russia, China, Serbia and - the less democratic members of the European Union.⁷ This can only lead to further corruption and the decline of democracy - perhaps even ethnic violence on a grand scale.

Myanmar is facing similar issues with democracy and identity-based violence. The country had only been a democracy for about 10 years, when democratic icon and elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi was deposed in a military coup in February 2021. The new regime has cracked down on pro-democracy movements violently, and has continued its exploitation of ethnic and religious tensions.⁸ The genocide of the Rohingya Muslims, led by Myanmar's army has been ongoing since 2017 and is another marker of the military's unstable hold on democratic ideals.

Crackdowns on rebel groups have intensified in recent weeks, leading to high levels of displacement, and even death, at the hands of the military regime.⁹ As the world's foremost

⁵<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/08/1071537135/how-bosnias-dodik-went-from-a-moderate-reformist-to-genocide-denying-secessionis>

⁶ <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/10/27/the-time-for-electoral-reform-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-is-now/>

⁷<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/08/1071537135/how-bosnias-dodik-went-from-a-moderate-reformist-to-genocide-denying-secessionis>

⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-myanmar-democracy-c9d36177732fcb20a7fd70d0002cba85>

⁹<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/fight-between-military-and-rebels-intensifies-as-hundreds-of-monks-flee-myanmar-report-445219>

protector of democracy, the U.S. is developing plans to deescalate these situations in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, and promote democracy. It is of the utmost importance that democracy is upheld, both for the safety of these nations, and for the democracies of nations across the globe.

Domestic Discord

The Biden Administration inherited a troubled nation: COVID-19 ravaged the population as well as the economy, while civil political discourse had entered a state of decline. Naturally, the administration has struggled to find its footing in these turbulent times, which has been noticed by the American public. A January 2022 Reuters poll found that 50% of Americans disapprove of President Joe Biden, the lowest approval rate of his presidency thus far, a disapproval that has extended to many Democrats, particularly at the federal level.¹⁰ This has raised the alarms of the Democratic National Committee, who have become increasingly worried about next year's midterm elections.

One major point of contention has been the administration's COVID response, which is generally seen as repressive by conservatives, yet insufficient by liberals, due to the increasing politicization of the virus.¹¹ To many, even worse than his administration's handling of the pandemic has been their inability to combat the economic impacts of COVID-19. Inflation has been on the rise during the Biden administration, manifesting in decreased purchasing power. Which, in turn, has led to higher than usual gas prices - a touchy issue for Americans.¹²

¹⁰ <https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-BIDEN/POLL/nmopagnqapa/>

¹¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/biden-approval-rating/620751/>

¹² <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/biden-approval-rating/620751/>

Awareness of income inequality is on the rise. Relatedly, there has been increasing labor agitation, which some have called “The Great Resignation,” or “The Great Strike,” which has deepened the tensions between some organized labor and Democrats. Underneath it all lies the issue of climate change, which, like COVID-19, is increasingly politicized. People have already begun to notice the rise in natural disasters, whether or not they believe in the idea of climate change. It is unanimously agreed upon within the scientific community that these disasters are a result of the changing climate. The Biden Administration will need to tackle these issues quickly and effectively in order to secure a second term, as well as the Democratic majority in congress.

Key Terms

- Build Back Better (BBB) Initiative
- 2016 EU-Turkey Deal¹³
- Asylum
- Asylum-seeker
- Exclusion Clauses
- Gender-related persecution
- Local integration
- Resettlement
- Dayton Accords
- Build Back Better World (B3W)
- Belt Road Initiative (BRI)
- Cold War
- Strategic Nuclear Warhead
- Nuclear Arsenal
- Nuclear Demilitarization
- Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)
- Hybrid and Multi-Facet Conflicts
- Uyghur Muslims

Discussion Questions

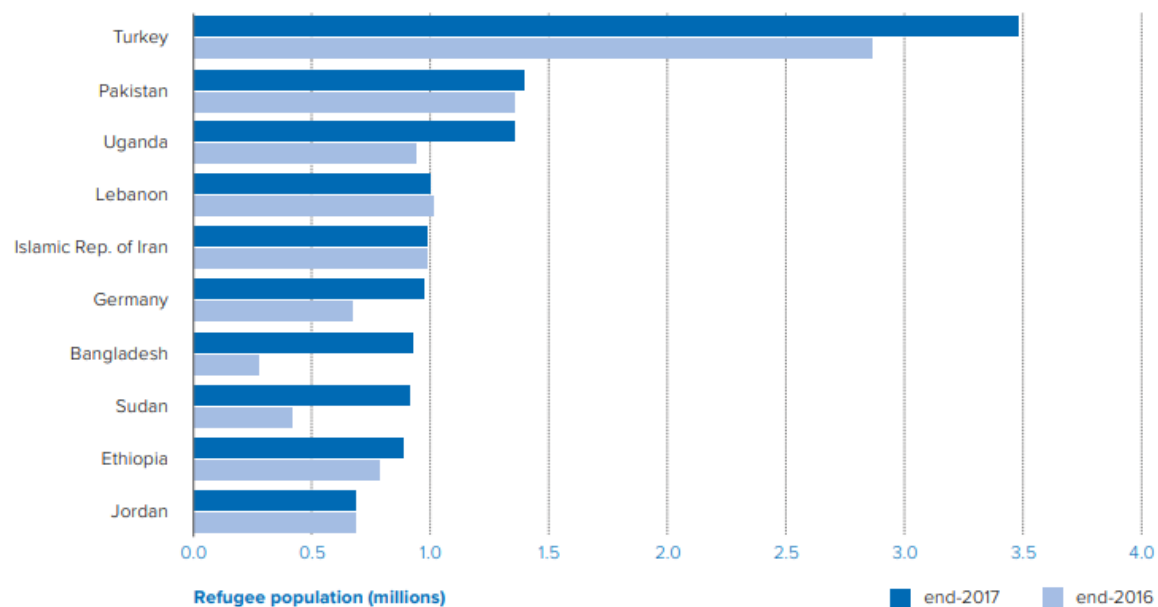
- How can the Biden Administration best recover from sagging poll numbers in time for the Midterm?
- The Biden Administration inherited a US-China relationship that was antagonistic and fraught with overt insults. They have sought to repair the relationship while maintaining a hard stance on several key issues but have been largely unsuccessful in bringing Xi's administration on board on everything from trade to the treatment of Uyghur Muslims. How can the U.S. force China to play ball in international political and economic institutions? What levers does the U.S. have that they haven't played yet?
- China is building a formidable nuclear arsenal. How can the U.S. best protect itself while also encouraging nuclear demilitarization across the globe?
- Turkey, Belarus, and Europe are stuck in a geopolitical conflict that has led to claims of human rights offenses inflicted against refugee groups, especially along the Belarus-Poland Border. Is the U.S. obligated to have a voice in this struggle, and if so, what is the best way to do so?
- Several countries, including Myanmar and Bosnia-Herzegovina, are flirting with authoritarianism or even outright secession. What is the best way to bring democracies back into the fold and encourage peaceful western ideals?

¹³ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eu-turkey-deal-five-years-on>

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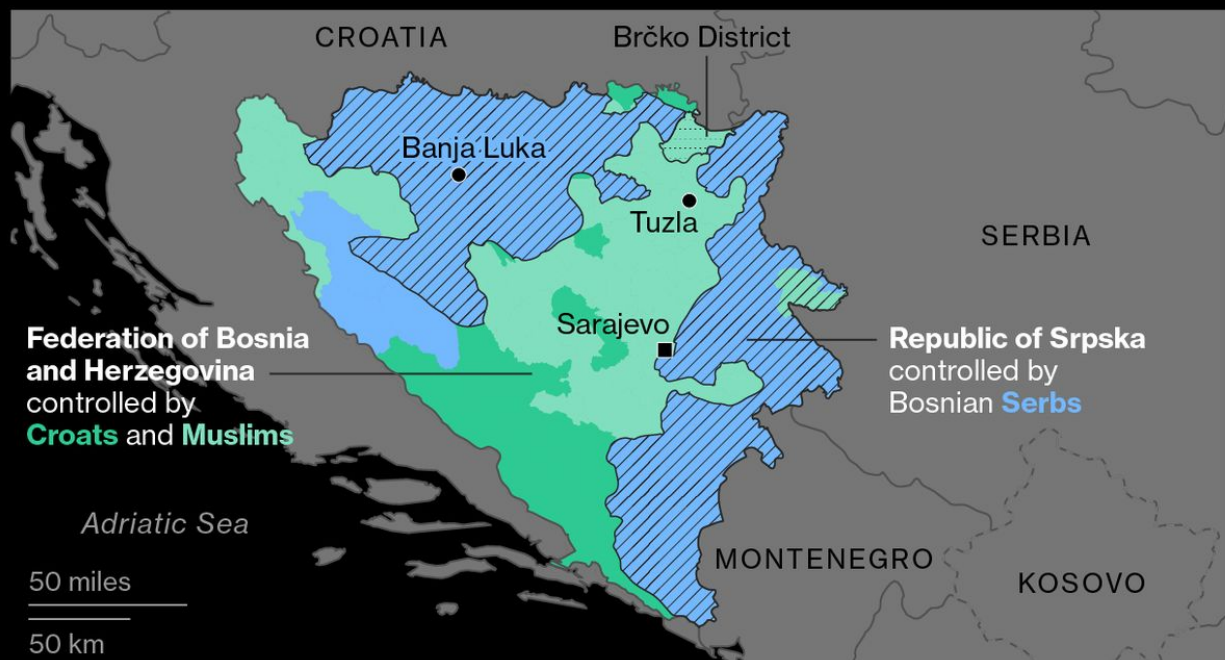
Figure 4 | Major host countries of refugees



An Uneasy Peace

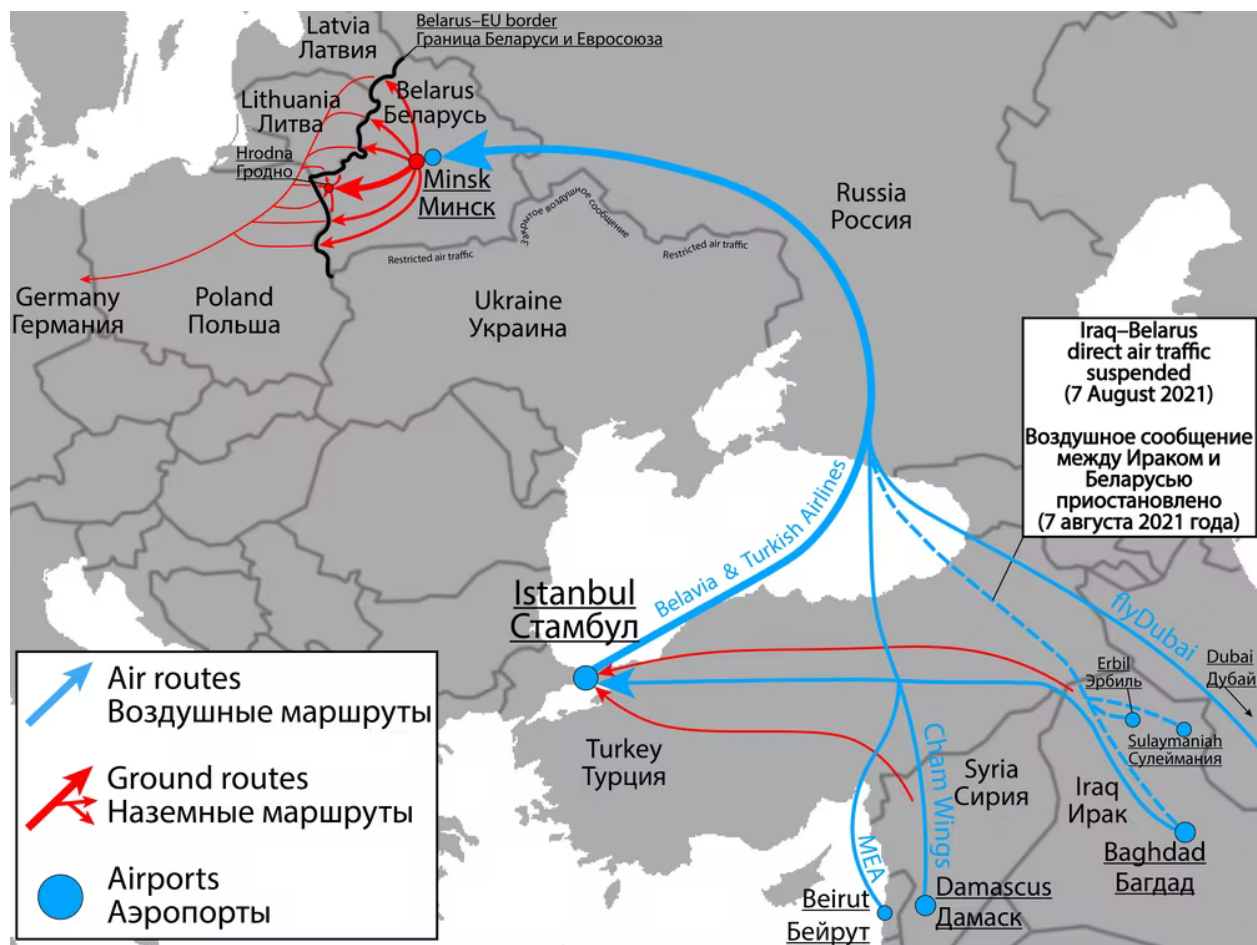
Bosnia has held together since 1995, though ethnic tension has never been far away

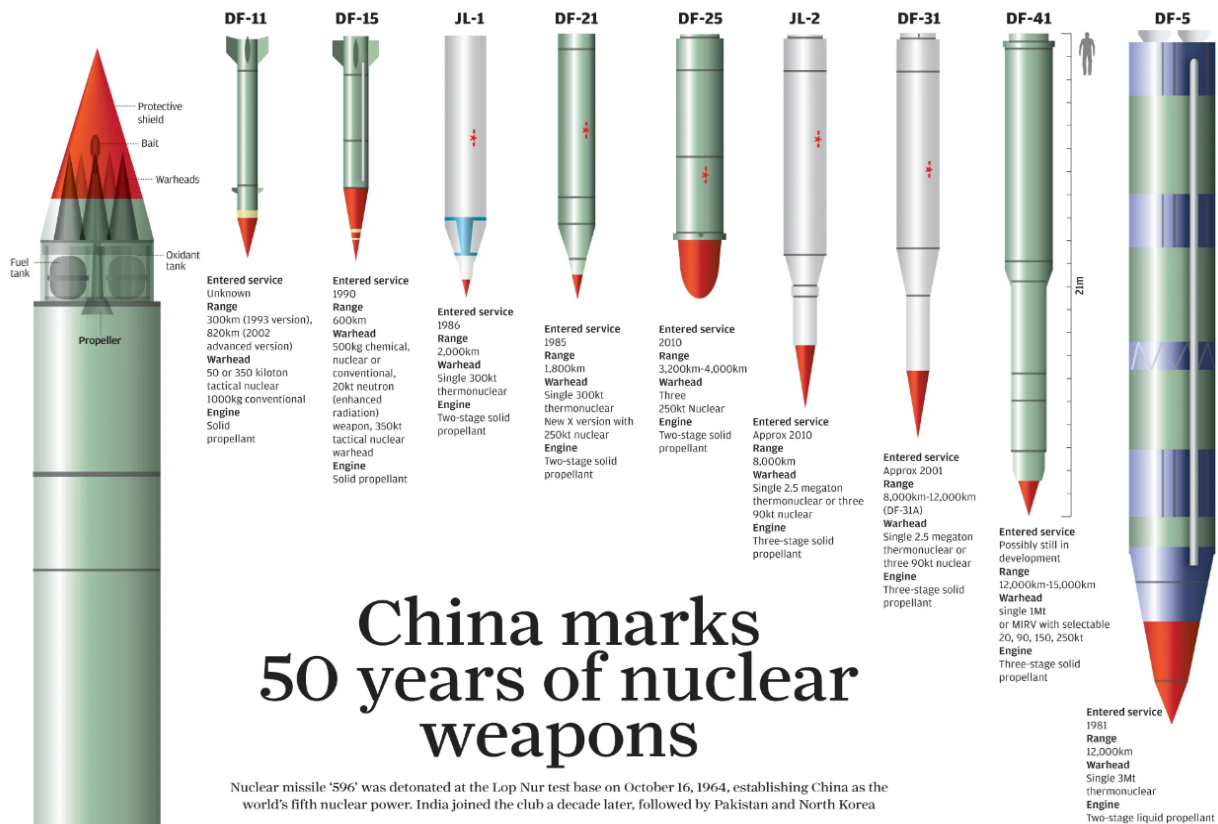
■ Bosnian Serbs ■ Bosnian Muslims ■ Bosnian Croats



Source: 2013 Census in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bloomberg

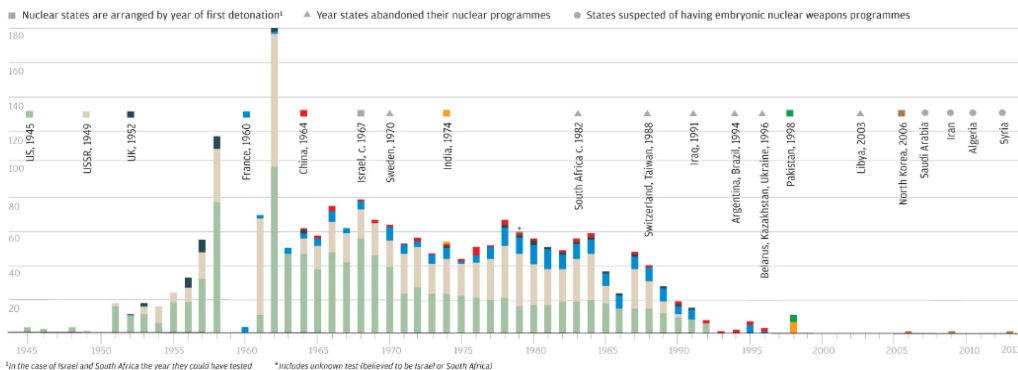




China marks 50 years of nuclear weapons

Nuclear missile '596' was detonated at the Lop Nur test base on October 16, 1964, establishing China as the world's fifth nuclear power. India joined the club a decade later, followed by Pakistan and North Korea

Nuclear weapons tests by country

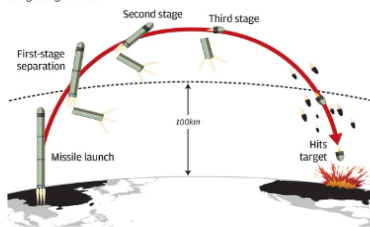


DF-41

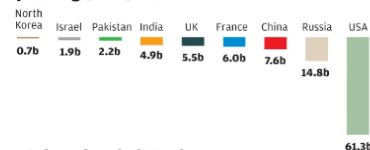
China's newest generation of intercontinental ballistic missile is the Dongfeng-41 (East Wind-41). With an estimated operational range between 12,000km and 15,000km this will be one of the world's longest range missiles. The defence ministry responded to reports in January, that it had tested a hypersonic missile delivery vehicle by saying any military experiments were "not targeted at any country and at any specific goals"

Wider reach

The DF-41 allows China to deliver up to 10 nuclear warheads 12,000km away using a single missile



Spending (2011) US dollars



Total warheads (2014)



Global distribution of nuclear weapons

