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INSIGHTS FROM UNODA: MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORKS AND THE HCOC

Rebecca Jovin is Chief of Office at the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) in Vienna. She reflects on the place of the HCoC within the broader disarmament architecture and the challenges ahead.



WHAT ROLE DOES THE HCOC PLAY IN A GLOBAL LANDSCAPE WHERE NO BINDING MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK ON MISSILES EXISTS?

The HCoC remains the only global instrument addressing ballistic missiles capable of delivering WMD. Through pre-launch notifications and annual declarations, it makes a crucial contribution to transparency and confidence-building. While the UN Register on Conventional Arms covers some missile systems under Category VII, it relies on voluntary national submissions, resulting in uneven reporting. Gaps therefore persist - including within the HCoC itself. Yet the Code was always envisaged as a living document, and annual meetings are a key opportunity for subscribing states to engage and advance outreach to non-members.

HOW HAVE THE EVOLVING USES OF MISSILES IN MODERN CONFLICTS AFFECTED THE RELEVANCE OF THE HCOC?

Since the Code was concluded, conventionally armed ballistic and cruise missiles have become central to contemporary military strategies, often used alongside UAVs and with significant humanitarian consequences. Cruise missiles are increasingly employed by both state and non-state actors. The HCoC does not yet address all these dynamics, nor has it achieved universality. Nevertheless, these developments reinforce the Code's value as a forum for dialogue and norm reinforcement at a moment of increasing complexity.

HOW DOES THE HCOC CONNECT WITH ONGOING UN PROCESSES, IN PARTICULAR THE NEW OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON PAROS?

The most significant link lies in pre-launch notifications, recognised as a model in reports of past Groups of Governmental Experts dealing with transparency and confidence-building and prevention of an arms race in outer space in both 2013 and 2024. The 2024 UNGA resolution on the HCoC, adopted with 172 votes in favour, shows strong support beyond the Code's 145 subscribing states. The 2025-2028 Open-Ended Working Group on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space - whose first session devoted fully to substantive matters takes place in Geneva in July 2026 - is expected to address missile-related issues, notably anti-satellite missile testing and transparency measures, areas where the HCoC's pre-launch notification regime is directly relevant.

25TH ANNUAL REGULAR MEETING OF THE HCoC



The [25th Annual Regular Meeting of the HCoC](#) subscribing states took place in Vienna on 28-29 May 2026, bringing together 74 registered delegations under the Chairmanship of Jordan for the period 2026-2027. The meeting provided a forum to exchange views on ballistic missile developments in the current international context. Participating states reaffirmed the value of the Code as a unique multilateral instrument for transparency and confidence-building, expressed concern over the continued proliferation of ballistic missile technology and its use in multiple conflicts, and reiterated their commitment to universalisation and full implementation of the Code. A [press release](#) was adopted at the conclusion of the meeting.

The meeting also marked an important moment in the institutional life of the Code. The Chairmanship was formally handed over from Ambassador Alejandro Garofali Acosta of Uruguay to Ambassador Mohamed Hindawi of Jordan, who will lead efforts for universalisation over the coming year.

For the first time, a Troika was established, bringing together the outgoing Chair (Uruguay), the current Chair (Jordan), and the Chair-designate for 2027-2028, Ambassador Matilda Aku Alomatu Osei-Agyeman of Ghana, to ensure continuity and strengthen the collective stewardship of the Code.



A [European Union statement](#) was also published reaffirming its strong support for the HCoC, condemning Russian missile strikes against Ukraine and the use of ballistic missiles in the Gulf region, and calling on all UN member states yet to do so to subscribe. The Code currently counts 145 subscribing states and will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2027.

Image credits: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

NEWS ABOUT THE PROJECT

WORKSHOP ON THE HCOC IN VIENNA



On 24 February 2026, the VCDNP, the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, the Permanent Mission of Uruguay, and the FRS co-hosted a [workshop on the HCoC](#). Supported by the EU, the event brought together ambassadors and diplomats for two expert panels addressing the Code's relevance in today's security landscape, the links between ballistic missile and space launch technologies, and the growing role of the commercial space sector in shaping future non-proliferation challenges.

SIDE EVENT ON HYPERSONIC MISSILES



On 28 May 2026, the FRS organised a [side event](#) in the margins of the 25th Annual Regular Meeting of the HCoC. Entitled Hypersonic Missiles: Challenges for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, the event brought together a panel of international experts before an audience of diplomats based in Vienna, including representatives of non-subscribing states.

The event was opened by welcoming remarks from Mme. Markéta Homolková on behalf of the EEAS, and by both the outgoing HCoC Chair, Amb. Alejandro Garofali Acosta (Uruguay), and the incoming Chair, Amb. Mohammed Hindawi, underscoring the continuity of political support for the Code's outreach activities.

Four expert panellists covered complementary dimensions of the hypersonic challenge. Magnus Evestedt (FOI) provided an overview of the history, technological implications, and dual-use nature of hypersonic systems. Zuzanna Gwadera (IISS) assessed the current state of national hypersonic programmes and the proliferation outlook. Emmanuelle Maitre (FRS) examined the implications of hypersonic weapons for strategic stability and arms control frameworks. Kolja Brockmann (SIPRI) addressed the specific challenges these systems pose for export control regimes and non-proliferation instruments. The discussion highlighted the challenges of applying existing frameworks, including the HCoC, to hypersonic glide vehicles, and reinforced the relevance of the Code as a forum for transparency and dialogue.



NEWS ABOUT THE PROJECT

SIDE EVENT ON THE HCOC AND SPACE LAUNCH TECHNOLOGIES



On 28 May 2026, the VCDNP co-organised a [side event](#) with the FRS, the Permanent Missions of Uruguay and Jordan, and the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Vienna International Centre. The event brought together diplomats, researchers, and representatives from UNOOSA and UNODA. Panellists discussed the growing overlap between space launch vehicles and ballistic missile technology, the rise of commercial space actors, and the potential to extend pre-launch notifications to cover reusable launch vehicles. *Credits: VCDNP.*

HCOC YOUTH GROUP – SECOND EDITION



The FRS, with the support of the European Union, has launched the second edition of the [HCoC Youth Group \(2026–2027\)](#). The programme offers an 18-month experience combining virtual and in-person activities, direct engagement with leading experts and diplomats, and individual research work culminating in a published edited volume. The programme is structured around two thematic pillars: technical issues related to new vectors of missile proliferation and dual-use space dynamics, and diplomatic questions concerning the HCoC in a multipolar world. Activities will include four thematic webinars and an in-person workshop. The programme is open to young professionals, graduate students, and early-career researchers under the age of 40 with demonstrated interest in ballistic missile technology, arms control, space policy, non-proliferation, or related fields. The application deadline is 31 July 2026. Applications must be submitted through the online form available on the project website. For further information, contact: m.garcia-carrasco@frstrategie.org.



An 18-month research and learning programme on ballistic missile non-proliferation, open to 15 fellows worldwide.

From Sept 2026 to Dec 2027

In-person workshop

Application Deadline:
31/07/2026



LAUNCHES UPDATES: A NEW SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS

Since early 2026, the FRS has been publishing a regular series of short analytical updates on its website, under the title Launches Updates. Each entry provides an overview of a significant missile test, space launch, or related development, with a focus on systems relevant to the HCoC's mandate. Recent entries have covered a diverse range of events, including the first combat use of the US Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) during the 2026 Iran conflict... The series aims to provide with reliable reference material on the fast-evolving missile and launcher landscape. All entries are freely accessible [here](#).

NEWS ABOUT MISSILE PROLIFERATION

IRAN'S BALLISTIC RESPONSE TO OPERATION EPIC FURY



Launched on 28 February 2026, Operation Epic Fury - a joint US-Israeli military campaign against Iran - triggered a significant Iranian ballistic response that not only targeted Israel but, also multiple [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\) countries](#)*. The initial phase featured large barrages aiming at saturating defences, directed against high-density population centres in Israel like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as US bases, naval facilities, and [key infrastructures in the Gulf](#), even attempting to reaching the US-UK base on [Diego Garcia](#) in the Indian Ocean.

As the conflict progressed through March, the volume and tactics of the launches evolved. After the first week, Iranian ballistic missile launches may have [dropped by 90%](#), according to the US Department of War, a decline attributed to the numerous strikes that may have reduced the stockpile but also the US and Israeli efforts to target mobile launchers. However, Tehran adapted its tactics: by the second week of March, Iranian forces increased the use of missiles equipped with [cluster munition warheads](#). This choice sought to complicate interceptions: by dispersing multiple sub-munitions, these warheads forced air defences to prioritise which projectiles to intercept in order to conserve ammunition. Iranian prioritised economic targets with strikes concentrating on energy and industrial infrastructure. This was visible in the efforts to hit the [Haifa oil refinery](#) and the [Neot Hovav petrochemical plant](#) in Israel, the [Pearl GTL facility in Qatar](#), and factories in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Faced with these barrages, regional missile defence architectures experienced a rapid learning curve. In the Gulf states, the interception rate of incoming attacks increased from [46% in the first week to over 70%](#) by the fifth week, according to ACLED data, aided by the growing predictability of Iran's targeting patterns. To counter the ballistic threat, the US and Israel relied on a [high volume of defensive fire](#), resorting to systems such as Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) interceptors from the sea, alongside land-based THAAD and Patriot (PAC-3 MSE) batteries. Ultimately, during March in Israel, about [15% of Iranian missile attacks would have](#) resulted in casualties and 17% caused property damage, according to ACLED data, while the remaining majority were either intercepted or landed in open areas. However, sustaining this defensive effort came at a cost: [according to RUSI](#), Israel's Arrow interceptor missiles are likely to be nearly exhausted, while the US is assessed to be within about a month of running out of THAAD interceptors, reflecting the depletion of high-end air- and missile-defence stocks. *Images: Iranian mobile missile launchers before US strikes. Credits: US Central Command.*

* Ballistic missiles have also been fired by Israel (*Rampage, Blue Sparrow*) and the United States (*MGM-140 ATACMS PrSM*) during the conflict, at [high rate and in combination to other types of weapons](#), also there is limited data to allow for analysis.

NEWS ABOUT MISSILE PROLIFERATION

DEGRADATION OF IRAN'S BALLISTIC MISSILE ARSENAL



Assessing the extent of the damage inflicted on Iran's ballistic missile arsenal during Operation Epic Fury remains both contested and highly politicised. Estimates diverge depending on the source, the methodology used, or whether the focus is on missiles capable of reaching Israel or on Iran's broader short- and medium-range inventory. Prior to the launch of Operation Epic Fury on 28 February 2026, Israeli intelligence estimated Iran's ballistic missile stockpile at approximately [2,500 launchers](#). The arsenal comprised both liquid-fuelled systems - including variants of the Shahab-3, Ghadr, Emad, and Khorramshahr families - and solid-fuelled missiles such as the Sejjil, Kheibar Shekan, and Fattah series.

The destruction of Iran's ballistic missile capabilities was set out as a [central war aim](#) from the very start of the operation. [US Central Command](#) announced strikes against more than 7,000 targets, including missile sites, launcher vehicles, production facilities, and storage bunkers. A [Washington Post review](#) based on satellite imagery and expert analysis found that, within the first four weeks, at least 29 ballistic missile launch sites and four key manufacturing facilities had sustained damage. According to [CSIS](#), Iran fired more than 500 ballistic missiles and over 2,000 drones in the first four days of the conflict alone - a rate of expenditure that, combined with coalition strikes, could have contributed to the 90% drop in launches recorded after the first week. However, assessments of the overall damage to Iran's stockpile diverge. A [Reuters investigation](#) estimated, as of late March, that Washington could only confirm the destruction of approximately one third of Iran's total ballistic missile inventory with certainty; the status of roughly another third remained unclear. The [Soufan Center](#) assessed in early April that, after five weeks of strikes against more than 13,000 Iranian military targets, US and Israeli operations had collectively degraded approximately half of Iran's combined missile and drone arsenal. Citing classified US intelligence assessments, the [New York Times reported](#) in May 2026 that Iran had retained approximately 70% of its pre-war missile stockpile, that 70% of its mobile launchers remained operational across the country, and that Iran had regained access to roughly 90% of its underground missile storage and launch facilities. Most notably, 30 of the 33 missile sites along the Strait of Hormuz were assessed as having restored operational access. These findings drew public pushback from senior US officials, who dismissed them without offering alternative figures.



The conflict thus seems to expose both the vulnerability of Iran's above-ground launch infrastructure and the resilience of its hardened subterranean assets. More broadly, the difficulty of independently verifying damage to missile infrastructure extended beyond Iran proper: [counter-launcher operations in Yemen](#) left significant questions unanswered about the residual state of Houthi ballistic missile stockpiles.

SELECTED MISSILE TESTS

LR-AShM:



- April 2026

Second flight test of India's hypersonic anti-ship missile [LR-AShM](#), developed by DRDO, off the Odisha coast. The test validated its two-stage hypersonic glide vehicle configuration.



SMASH:



- 15 April 2026

Test of an extended-range variant of the Pakistani anti-ship ballistic missile [SMASH](#) (P-282), developed by the Pakistani owned defence manufacturer GIDS.



RS-28 Sarmat:



- 12 May 2026

Successful test of the Russian ICBM [RS-28 Sarmat](#) after a long series of failures. This liquid-fueled heavy ICBM is capable of suborbital trajectories and ranges exceeding 15,000 km, according to the Russian authorities.



SELECTED SLV LAUNCHES

Ariane 64:



- 12 February 2026

Maiden flight of the [Ariane 64](#) (LE-01 mission) from the Guiana Space Centre, Kourou, a version of the Ariane 6 flying with four boosters.



Artemis II:



- 1 April 2026

Launch of the [Artemis II mission](#) aboard NASA's SLS rocket from Kennedy Space Center. The mission was delayed due to technical issues before successfully completing its crewed lunar flyby, carrying four astronauts.



Tianlong 3 :



- 3 April 2026

First flight of [Tianlong-3](#) from Jiuquan, operated by Space Pioneer (Beijing Tianbing Technology). The medium-lift launcher failed to reach orbit due to an in-flight anomaly.



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- 'National Security Snapshot: Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Modernization Faces Critical Risks and Opportunities,' GAO-26-108755, [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#), 18 February 2026.
- Harsa Kakar, 'The Dawn of 2026 and Challenges to Non-Proliferation,' [Global Security Review](#), February 2026.
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- Paul K. Kerr, 'China: Nuclear and Missile Proliferation,' CRS In Focus IF11737, Library of Congress, [Congressional Research Service](#), 19 May 2026.
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- Tom Karako, 'US–Australia Relations and the Future of Missilery: Long-Range Strike, Missile Defence and Export Controls,' [United States Studies Centre \(USSC\)](#), University of Sydney, 22 May 2026.
- Vann H. Van Diepen, 'Assessing North Korea's Five-Year Effort to Develop 13 New Nuclear and Missile Systems,' *38 North*, [Stimson Center](#), 30 January 2026.
- Decker Eveleth and Jeffrey Lewis, 'South Korea's Ominous Missile Deployments,' [Survival](#), vol. 68, no. 2, 27 March 2026.
- Zuzanna Gwadera, 'Russia's Sarmat Missile "Success"', [International Institute for Strategic Studies \(IISS\)](#), 19 May 2026.
- Stéphane Delory, 'Missile Manoeuvrability: What Lessons Can Be Drawn from Israeli Interceptions during the Iranian Strikes of 2024 and 2025', Recherches & Documents n°02/2026, [Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique](#), 11 May 2026.

INFORMATION AND CONTACT



- Organisation website: [Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique](#)
- Further information on the project implementation available [here](#).
- Project website: [Supporting the Hague Code of Conduct](#).

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