

ICBM EAR Week of December 8th, 2024

Trump News Update [New!]

Mr. Trump separately weighed in on his plans to end the Ukraine war and his view of NATO in a major [interview](#) with NBC News. The President-elect said “Of course” the US would continue as the anchor NATO-- as long as its members contributed their share to the military alliance.

The President-elect also said that the US should militarily stay out of the fight in Syria, while saying that he was working to cement the Abraham Accords.

On Ukraine, the incoming administration notes that the US should lead in reducing the price of oil and natural gas, thus eliminating tens of billions in funding for Russia and Iran, both of whom experienced windfalls in revenue post February 2022 invasion and sanctions when prices went up significantly.

Quotes of the Week

Chelsey Wiley of IISS: “Should the **new US administration’s policies lead to a ratcheting** up of US–China tensions, the latter is likely to retaliate by implicating US allies, creating further security concerns in the region.” [Editors Note: The old always blame America first analysis. China is militarily threatening Taiwan, not the other way around.]

CSIS War Game: “The greatest pressure for nuclear use came when China teams reached a crisis: their invasion was in danger of a defeat that might threaten Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. To dissuade China [from using nuclear weapons] **U.S. diplomacy was much more important than nuclear brinksmanship.**” [Editors note: As Henry Kissinger once said, “Diplomacy without the threat of force is without effect.”]

Russian Navy Commander Admiral Moiseyev: “Russia's strategic naval nuclear forces **have been completely upgraded**, and this modernization remains a key priority.” .

Palantir CEO at Reagan Forum: “**I want people in the world who want to harm us to be afraid of us.** Attacking our allies; maligning us at the United Nations. These bad guys need to wake up scared.”

Admiral Tony Radakin, British Chief of General Staff: “The third nuclear era is altogether more complex, defined by multiple and concurrent dilemmas, proliferating nuclear and disruptive technologies, and the almost **total absence of the security architectures** that went before.”

Rep. Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN) “As Chairman of Energy & Water Appropriations, one of my highest priorities is modernizing and strengthening our nation's nuclear deterrent. China & Russia are aggressively investing in their nuclear arsenals, and for the safety of the free world, we cannot fall behind. America must remain the global nuclear superpower. **The FY25 NDAA ensures we remain so while greatly strengthening our nuclear deterrent.**”

Mike Cote of Providence: “America cannot be made to back down every time Putin intimates he will use nuclear weapons; if that became our policy, **it would be completely impossible to deter Russia from anything.** We are the primary world power and should not forget our own large nuclear arsenal. This is not to encourage belligerence generally, but that we should respond in kind to our foes so as to preclude further aggression on their part: escalating to de-escalate.”

Congressional Update on the NDAA

The House NDAA is at \$895 billion, which is within the budget caps the Congress had earlier adopted. The vote in the House was 236-173 in favor. The previous vote to concur with the Senate amendment was 281-140. HASC Press Release on the NDAA; fully funds the nuclear portions of the budget, including funding for the SLCM-N; prohibits any reduction in ICBMS or their alert status; fully funds the submarine leg of the TRIAD; re-organizes the DoD to have all nuclear matters under one Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters. Here follows the Senate material and the link to the HASC press release. <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/press-releases/sasc-and-hasc-release-text-of-fy25-ndaa-agreement>



Deterrence 127.pdf

Essay of the Week

From NIPP: “Call it Chinese Communist Imperialism” by Christopher Ford



Vol. 4 No. 11.pdf

Congressional Update: Summary of the New Members of the House and Senate

The US Congress in January 2025 with 535 Members when all seats are filled will have 31 New House Republican members; 35 new Democratic members, and six (6) new Republican and six (6) Democrat Senators for a grand total of 78 new members of the House and Senate combined, which comes to 18% of the entire membership.

And with the appointment of some members of the House and Senate as members of the new cabinet, the total change-over could approach twenty percent.

Critically important are the new members of the SASC, HASC and the HAC and SAC defense appropriations committees.

There are more than one dozen new members of the House and Senate that are military veterans.

For our ICBM forces, we have a new Senator from Montana and Utah; home of Malstrom and Hill USAF base. As well as a new at-large House member from North Dakota. Taking office is a new Colorado member representing Colorado Springs and USAF Space Command.

Utah's Representative Blake Moore will also be Vice President of the Republican Conference and head the House caucus responsible for working with the DOGE government efficiently initiative.

There are ten open seats on the House Appropriations Committee. Three open seats on the Senate Appropriations Committee. (2R and 1D) once the new ratios are adopted given the switch in control of the Senate.

The 7 Battleground States: Wisconsin has one R and one D Senator; Michigan has 2 D Senators. Georgia also has 2 D Senators. NC has 2 R Senators. Arizona has 2 D Senators. Nevada has 2 D Senators & PA now has 2 R Senators. In summary, we have seven battleground states with only 5 R but 9 D Senators including 4 states with 2 D Senators and 2 states with 2 R Senators. (Attached is a detailed look at each new member of the House and Senate as well as information about their legislative interests.)

The Reagan Defense Forum—December 7, 2024, Simi Valley, California

Introduction by Reagan Library Director: There are enormous changes in strategic environment since 2022 and we are looking forward to a new administration and a new strategic and defense policy.

Issue #1: 2027 deadline from China re invading Taiwan. With a new administration, what should be the US defense strategy?

Cong Calvert We should pass approps bills and get back to regular order. We passed all 12 approps bills by August and 5 through the floor. Need to get all these bills passed. We should also fund the unfunded priorities list that Admiral Pappano has proposed. Approps folks hate CRS. Have to bring back regular order. House should vote in January to get all the approps bills done. Even though a CR may continue into March 2025.

Marine Corps Head Gen Eric Smith: We have a lot of waste when we only get a CR and funding for part of the year. But I have to train and assume the forces might be needed tonight. We will lose an entire regiment if there is an additional CR although we have met our recruitment goals so far.

Navy Admiral Paparo, Indo Pacific Command: We deter with our strength any use of force to change conditions in the Western Pacific . If conflict, huge impacts on employment and hundreds of thousands of lives over 5 years. For 52 years we have provided this deterrent. The US has to take seriously the Indo-Pacific and what China has planned for Taiwan in 2027.

Rep Calvert: Xi is not building the China's military just to look at. Xi has made it very clear that he wants to go into Taiwan by 2027. The best thing is for a strong deterrent to be funded by the Congress to prevent that.

Admiral Paparo: We have to be ready every second of every day to deter conflict. The margin we have is eroding and have made great gains in our capability.

Marine Corps Smith: What would you pay the day after you lose the war? What would you pay not to have lost a war? Everything and Anything.

Admiral Paparo: Before Vietnam we were paying 11% of GDP on defense. The environment was not as grave. Today it is around 3% of our GDP. Although 77% of Americans are concerned that the nation's interest on the debt will cut into the defense budget

Rep Calvert: The first priority of the gov is the security of its citizens and protection of the country. We in Congress need a 3-4% growth in the country to bring in more revenue, add DoD efficiencies, fix the procurement system, and new technology. However direction we move to address the national debt, we have to continue to deter. And we fund all the intelligence agencies and the nuclear program in DOE.

A Reagan library survey found that 41% win wars against Russia and China simultaneously; 20% win wars against China and a lesser country; 12% win just against China; 12% defend our borders only; 5% fight to a draw with China.

Here is the link for panel #1. https://youtu.be/UcK0X4Uj_zc

Panel on Innovation and the Speed of relevance in the defense structure

DOD Official Heidi Shu: New companies that can manufacture and provide alternative supply chains and help companies overcome the supply chain problems. We also have an office that can provide key capital resources that can help small, innovative companies to grow. And not be bought out by China.

Senator Todd Young (R-Indiana) Gravest threats are biological and China is considerably ahead of the United States—bio surveillance; reduce signatures; , for example gene editing/biological engineering. And the US agriculture and health care systems & supply chains are deeply integrated within the Chinese system; there are big vulnerabilities in systems.

Palantir CEO wants to bring back tough testing and rid the DoD of identity politics; and have greater # of competitors. Also, the country is due every 80 years for a major change: 1776 founding, then the 1860 civil war, then the 32-45 great depression/WWII and now 2025---

Peace Through Strength Panel #2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgIJPn-AUvM>

Reagan: “The safety and security of our people is our top priority. And goodwill alone won’t protect our security. There are those who scorn our way of life. Peace does not come and freedom doesn’t come because of good intentions. America will always meet its responsibilities to keep the peace.”

Abby Phillips from CNN says that despite the election and an America First agenda that Americans (58%) according to surveys want the USA to be involved with the world.

Senator Deborah Fisher says that indeed 58% of American want the US to be more engaged in the world. Primarily as they have a better understanding of the threats America faces. Worrisome is certainly China is a peer nuclear armed adversary.

Ranking HASC Member Smith: Americans did not necessarily endorse an American First agenda. Economic uncertainty worries many Americans. They look at the world and see the same kind of problems. And the world is not convinced that the US has a positive role to play in the world--what is the challenge for the Trump administration to convince the world we are a power for good.

Palantir CEO: America is the most loving people in the world and the American people want to know why is China and Mexico sending fentanyl to this country and killing us, why are these enemies doing this? We spend \$1 trillion on defense but people are holding US hostages in dungeons; I want people in the world who want to harm us to be afraid of us. Attacking our allies; maligning us at the United Nations. These bad guys need to wake up scared. They want to know America is safe and they do not care about pagan wokeness. Many of the leftist intellectuals were captured by the Berkeley faculty which the American people didn't buy. [Applause]

Ranking HASC Member Smith (in response) says only our enemies should fear us. We need to convince our "friends" that we are ok. And the far left in the Democratic Party have far too much influence not because Americans endorsed an America First agenda.

Abby Phillips: A survey says 69% of Dems, 44% of Reps and 55% of all Americans support aid to Ukraine/; what's the likelihood of what happens re US policy in Ukraine?

Morgan Ortegas: I think Americans voted for an American First Agenda. And it was a reaction to what started in 2021: Russia invades Ukraine; the Afghan withdrawal was a disaster; Israel is attacked by Hezbollah missiles and slaughtered by Hamas/all backed by Iran and we only talk about reigning in Israel. Trump sanctioned Russia more than any other Prez since Reagan and deterred Moscow from invading.

Senator Fisher: The administration didn't ask the question what Ukraine needed to actually win and laid out a plan that was understood by the American people.

Rep Smith: If you allow autocrats through the use of military force to take Ukraine in this case, that emboldens China in Taiwan, and thus we need to stop Russia from destroying Ukraine.

CEO Palantir: But the opposite policy was used re the defense of Israel---the ideology was Israel is not allowed to win!! That is where the America first policy comes from.

The Reagan Forum also did a survey on Israel. Only 30% of Harris voters supported Israel winning while 64% of Trump voters did. In addition, only 46% vs 48% of Harris voters approved of sending weapons to Israel but 67% vs 29% of Trump voters did. Nationwide for all

Americans, 45% supported a cease fire and 45% supported Israel winning, while 54% supported sending weapons and 39% said no.

Senator Deborah Fischer: The reality e face is we have two peer nuclear adversaries. I focus on nuclear modernization and to maintain deterrence that maintains pace. When we do not invest at the need level, we will not be able to

Strategic Developments An Update

- **Wargaming at CSIS**
- **Deterrence Under Trump for Northeast Asia**
- **China's Breeding Nuclear Fuel**
- **Living in the Third Nuclear Age says British official**
- **Report from the Reagan Defense Forum re Senator Fisher & Representative Smith**
- **Heritage Foundation Update on Nuclear Modernization**
- **Report on Russian Escalation Strategy**

[Report: Wargaming Nuclear Deterrence and Its Failures in a U.S.–China Conflict over Taiwan](#)

Center for Strategic and International Studies, Dec. 12 | Mark F. Cancian, Matthew F. Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham

This study examines nuclear dynamics in a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, a war that the authors hope will never occur. What creates the greatest pressure for nuclear weapons use in such a conflict? What happens if nuclear weapons are used? To answer these questions, the CSIS-MIT team modified its existing U.S.-China wargame to include nuclear weapons and ran it 15 times.

The greatest pressure for nuclear use came when China teams reached a crisis: their invasion was in danger of a defeat that might threaten Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. To dissuade China from gambling for resurrection—using nuclear weapons to salvage a failing conventional campaign—**U.S. diplomacy was much more important than nuclear brinksmanship**. Favorable outcomes were possible, but total victory was unachievable. The United States must therefore be prepared to successfully prosecute a high-end conventional war while at the same time providing face saving off-ramps to the adversary. To do otherwise risks a nuclear holocaust, as indeed occurred in three game iterations.

[LINK TO PDF OF FULL REPORT](#)

What role for US extended deterrence in Northeast Asia under Trump?

While President Biden has taken steps to deepen Washington's defense ties with its Northeast Asian allies, these relationships – and US extended-deterrence policy at large – face new tests under Donald Trump as he establishes his national security priorities.

Excerpt: Under Trump, the focus of US deterrence and defense in the Asia-Pacific will shift further towards China, as he believes the DPRK threat can still be quelled through diplomacy

and economic enticements, rather than a defensive posture. Such a shift of US national security priorities will concern Japan and South Korea, **who may increasingly question the United States' willingness to defend them**, especially in a worst-case scenario where Washington faces a dual-front contingency.

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China 'is fast breeding nuclear weapons' on this tiny island

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/tiny-island-where-china-fast-160405606.html>

By: Kieran Kelly for the UK Telegraph // Thu, December 5, 2024 at 11:04 AM EST



Changbiao Island where the new CFR-600 nuclear reactor is being built - GOOGLE

Generate Key Takeaways

Changbiao in the eastern China Sea was, until recently, an unremarkable and largely uninhabited island.

But rapid construction in recent years has swept away trees and undergrowth to build one of the most sophisticated and closely-guarded government projects: “fast breeder” [nuclear reactors](#). The territory is now home to the first of two units, which [China’s Communist Party](#) says are purely for civilian purposes. Experts and Western officials, however, believe the tiny island could soon become the hub of Beijing’s [rapidly-expanding nuclear arsenal](#).

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, Chief of the Defense Staff, warned on Wednesday the world had entered a [“third nuclear age”](#), highlighting the rising threat from China. The country is rapidly expanding its arsenal and by some metrics is projected to soon catch up with Russia and the US, upsetting the balance of global nuclear superpowers. Once operational, China’s fast breeder reactors could be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium, which can be used in nuclear missiles, experts believe. But what may be more concerning for Western security officials is the fact that Russia appears to be playing a central role in helping China expand its nuclear capabilities by providing vital supplies that help the reactors operate.

How the fast breeder reactors work

[President Xi Jinping](#) had largely inherited a deterrent nuclear strategy from his predecessors, who viewed expansion as a waste of money as Russia and the US faced off during the Cold War. But [a recent paper by Rusi](#) suggested that China was “moving to a launch-on-warning posture akin to those maintained by Russia and the US”. Beijing has modernized its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which can be used to launch nuclear attacks, started construction on three new silo fields designed to store ICBMs, and is in the process of connecting two “fast breeder” reactors to the power grid.

China is expected to use its new CFR-600 reactors, alongside other nuclear reprocessing facilities, to produce plutonium for its rapidly-expanding arsenal, according to a report by the [US defense department](#). The first breeder was thought to be running at around 50 per cent of its capacity in April of this year and will likely be fully operational by the end of this year. The second is expected to become operational sometime in 2026.

A fast breeder reactor is a nuclear reactor that uses fast neutrons to generate more plutonium than the nuclear fuels it originally consumes. This can eventually lead to the production of ultra-pure plutonium-239, which is ideal for use in nuclear weapons. Each reactor could produce around 200 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium every year, enough for around 50 nuclear warheads, experts believe. However, plutonium produced in the fast breeder reactors cannot directly be used for nuclear weapons as they must be processed first.

While China is yet to complete a reprocessing plant, several are under construction in Jinta County in the country’s central Gansu province. There is also no direct evidence suggesting China plans to use plutonium to create nuclear weapons, according to [a 2021 report](#) by the Nonproliferation Education Policy Centre.

How Russia is helping

[Washington](#) is less hopeful and suspects Russia has been aiding China’s nuclear aspirations. The US has not published evidence to suggest [Russia and China are working directly together](#) to develop nuclear weapons but cooperation between the two countries has increased. Satellite images from Dec 2022 show Rosatom, Russia’s state-owned atomic energy corporation, shipped an initial load of fuel that is necessary for the operation of China’s fast breeder reactors in Changbiao.

Rosatom’s delivery of fuel to China is unlikely to be the last. On March 23, Rosatom signed a decades-long cooperation agreement with China’s atomic energy authority designed to “expand cooperation in current projects”, including the creation of fast breeder reactors. John F Plumb, a senior Pentagon official, told [Congress](#) last year that such cooperation was “very troubling to see”. “There’s no getting around the fact that breeder reactors are plutonium, and plutonium is for weapons,” John F Plumb, a senior Pentagon official, told Congress last year.

Why is China expanding its arsenal?

One factor behind China's nuclear program centers around Taiwan. President Xi has repeatedly vowed to "reunify" China with the east Asian country and has not ruled out using force to do so. Building up its nuclear arsenal could give Beijing leverage in any conflict over Taiwan with the United States, who under Joe Biden said it would send troops to defend the democratic nation. "China seems to be adopting the standard deterrence model.

Among elements of that model is the assumption that you cannot have a confrontation unless you have a very reliable deterrent element," Nikolai Sokov, who worked on nuclear treaties in Russia in the 1980s, told The Telegraph. "If you expect a conflict with the United States, say [with Taiwan](#)... it is preparation to enhance their ability to bargain and to reduce the ability of the United States to threaten." Mr. Sokov, who now works at the Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, likened it to the war in Ukraine, where Vladimir Putin frequently makes nuclear threats in an attempt to undermine Western support for Kyiv.

Resignation in the West

The West is seemingly awake to the threat posed by China's increasing nuclear capabilities. In his speech on Wednesday night, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin warned the world had left a period of nuclear stability, highlighting the dangers posed by Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. "China's nuclear build-up poses a two-peer challenge to the United States. Iran's failure to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency is a concern," Admiral Sir Tony said. Washington is also alive to the threat posed by China's nuclear ambitions, producing regular reports on its expanding arsenal.

"By the 2030s the United States will, for the first time in its history, face two major nuclear powers as strategic competitors and potential adversaries," the Pentagon said, referencing China and Russia. It took years for the US and Moscow to develop and implement nuclear treaties. There even exists nuclear de-escalation hotlines between the two cities, which was used when Vladimir Putin launched his new "Oreshnik" hypersonic missile at Ukraine last month.

No such line exists between Washington and Beijing, and President Xi has shown little sign of wanting to enter into nuclear arms talks with the Biden administration. Given Donald Trump's hawkish stance on China, this appears unlikely to change. "We are probably not going to be able to do anything to stop, slow down, disrupt, interdict, or destroy the Chinese nuclear development program that they have projected out over the next 10 to 20 years," Gen Mark Milley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, told Congress last year.

We are now living in 'third nuclear age' of expanding threats and arsenals, U.K. military chief warns

[World is entering 'third nuclear age' fueled by Russia and China, British admiral says \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

The post-Cold War era of nonproliferation and disarmament is over, Adm. Tony Radakin said, adding that it is being replaced by a time of uncertainty.

By: [Alexander Smith](#) for NBC News // Dec. 5, 2024, 11:37 AM EST

LONDON — The world is entering a [“third nuclear age,”](#) the head of the British armed forces has warned, with [world-ending weapons once again spreading globally](#) and international agreements to control them collapsing.

Adm. Tony Radakin, chief of the defense staff in the United Kingdom, on Wednesday [accused Russia of issuing “wild threats of tactical nuclear use”](#) and “simulated attacks against NATO countries.” Russian President Vladimir Putin has [repeatedly threatened the United States and the West](#) with nuclear retaliation [over its support for Ukraine](#), where his forces have been fighting since their invasion almost three years ago.

But Kremlin saber-rattling was not the only reason for Radakin’s words of caution at a lecture at the Royal United Services Institute think tank in London. He also cited [China’s rapid development](#) to become the world’s second fully-fledged nuclear competitor to the United States, alongside Russia. [North Korea](#) and [Iran](#), meanwhile, are upping the ante, all set to the backdrop of [collapsing nonproliferation agreements](#), which sought to reduce the risk posed by nuclear weapons after the Cold War, he said.

“The world has changed. Global power is shifting and a third nuclear age is upon us,” Radakin said. Describing this new era as “altogether more complex” than before, he said it is “defined by multiple and concurrent dilemmas, proliferating nuclear and disruptive technologies, and the almost total absence of the security architectures that went before.” As Radakin defined it, the first nuclear age was [during the Cold War](#), when the U.S. and Soviet Union amassed colossal arsenals and were “governed by the risk of uncontrollable escalation and the logic of deterrence.”

The second age started after the fall of the Berlin Wall and was an era of “disarmament efforts and counter-proliferation,” as these nuclear powers expressed willingness to row back from this apocalyptic face-off, he said. That era is over, he said, replaced by growing arsenals among established powers, development by newcomer upstarts and a backsliding of international agreements. To be clear, the admiral said that “there is only a remote chance of a significant direct attack or invasion by Russia” against NATO countries.

Alex Younger, former head of Britain’s MI6 foreign intelligence agency, [expressed a similar opinion on “The World” podcast](#) with NBC News chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel and Yalda Hakim, lead world news presenter at NBC News’ British partner Sky News. “I don’t think Putin is intent on firing a nuclear weapon at us,” Younger said, although he added it did not mean nuclear watchdogs are not alarmed at the current direction of travel.

The total number of nuclear weapons continues to gradually decline from the current number of around 12,000 worldwide, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a leading organization tracking armaments around the world. But that is only because the U.S. and Russia have been dismantling retired warheads, it said. There are 2,100 warheads “kept in a state of high operational alert” — around 100 more than last year, SIPRI said in its 2024 yearbook.

As well as China’s “significant modernization and expansion,” arsenals are also growing or set to grow in India, Pakistan, North Korea and the U.K. itself, SIPRI said. Meanwhile, “the entire six

decade-long nuclear arms control enterprise is at risk of terminating,” it said. Last year, Russia suspended its participation from New START, an agreement that sought to put verifiable limits on Washington’s and Moscow’s nuclear arsenals.

And in 2019, then-[President Donald Trump](#) withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, or INF, Treaty, accusing Russia of violating the agreement. And a year earlier, Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, which many experts say makes it easier for the theocratic state to build such a weapon. Radakin, the British admiral, said he hoped the world would not have to witness the horrors of nuclear war and do what’s necessary to avoid it, namely “stiffen its resolve.”

“We need to sense the risk of tragedy to ensure we avoid it,” he said. “And that risk of tragedy is growing. The world is more dangerous. The challenges are greater.”

President Trump Must Put the Nuclear Enterprise on a Wartime Footing

December 10, 2024 10 min read Download Report

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SUMMARY

The U.S. is building nuclear weapons at a glacial pace: At the current pace, it will be decades before the current arsenal is replaced. This is unacceptable. By operating at only a fraction of the level of production capacity that the U.S. did during the Cold War—and, subsequently, only producing a tiny fraction of the warheads that the United States produced in the Cold War—the U.S. runs the risk of undermining the credibility of its deterrence. Given the current security environment, the risk of a nuclear war is far higher—and has far greater consequences—than the risk of an environmental accident at a nuclear weapons lab. America must decide where it needs to best buy down risk.

The United States must have a larger and more diverse 21st-century nuclear deterrent given the nature and composition of modern enemies’ nuclear threats.

The incoming administration should not tolerate the continued failure to build the nuclear weapons that are the ultimate backstop of American security.

The President, the U.S. Secretary of Energy, and the NNSA Administrator can help complete the mission of stockpile stewardship and modernization.

The United States is currently modernizing and replacing its nuclear deterrent, to include the nuclear weapons themselves, all of which are relics of the Cold War. The modernization process

is moving too slowly. Further, the current nuclear modernization program of record is necessary, but insufficient, to deal with the threats that face the U.S.¹

Brad Roberts et al., “China’s Emergence as a Second Nuclear Peer: Implications for U.S. Nuclear Deterrence Strategy,” Center for Global Security Research, Spring 2023, <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/event-calendar/2023/2023-03-23> (accessed November 8, 2024).

While it made sense in 2010—an era in which it seemed nuclear-power nations would cooperate to combat nuclear terrorism and negotiate their way to ever lower numbers of deployed nuclear weapons—simply to replace the remaining Cold War nuclear weapons with the same number of the same types of weapons, the world of 2010 is gone. America’s adversaries in Beijing and Pyongyang are building nuclear weapons as fast as they can.²

Robert Peters, “Russia and China Are Running in a Nuclear Arms Race While the United States Is Jogging in Place,” Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 3787, September 13, 2023, <http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/russia-and-china-are-running-nuclear-arms-race-while-the-united-states-jogging-place>.

Iran is on the cusp of becoming a nuclear weapons state.³

Robert Peters, “Iran Is Inching Toward a Nuclear Weapons Breakout: What Does This Mean for the United States?” Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 3855, October 1, 2024, <http://www.heritage.org/middle-east/report/iran-inching-toward-nuclear-weapons-breakout-what-does-mean-the-united-states>.

Russia issues nuclear threats to the United States and its allies on a near-monthly basis.⁴

Hamish de Bretton-Gordon et al., “What Russia Says About Nuclear Weapons and What It Means,” Heritage Foundation Commentary, March 17, 2023, <http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/what-russia-says-about-nuclear-weapons-and-what-it-means>.

The nuclear modernization program that President Barack Obama began in 2010 is insufficient to deter the authoritarians of today.⁵

Madelyn Creedon et al., America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, Institute for Defense Analysis, October 2023, <http://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/A/Am/Americas%20Strategic%20Posture/Strategic-Posture-Commission-Report.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2024).

The United States must have a larger and more diverse nuclear deterrent of the 21st century, given the nature and composition of modern enemies’ nuclear threats.⁶

Robert Peters, “A Nuclear Posture Review for the Next Administration: Building the Nuclear Arsenal of the 21st Century,” Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 287, July 30, 2024, <http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/nuclear-posture-review-the-next-administration-building-the-nuclear-arsenal-the-21st>.

Indeed, America’s nuclear enterprise is failing to produce the new, fully constituted warheads (defined as new warheads with associated plutonium pits) needed for the 2010 modernization program—much less build the nuclear arsenal of the 21st century that the United States needs to deter its adversaries from carrying out a strategic attack on the American Homeland or that of its allies.

That must change in the upcoming Trump Administration. The incoming administration should not tolerate continued failure within the government agencies whose mission it is to build the nuclear weapons that are the ultimate backstop of American security.

A History Lesson

America's nuclear enterprise did not always fail at its mission. In 1951, the U.S. government acquired land in Rocky Flats, Colorado, to produce plutonium and other nuclear weapons components. Eighteen months after breaking ground, Rocky Flats produced the first nuclear weapons components.⁷

U.S. Department of Energy, Legacy Management, "Fact Sheet: Rocky Flats Site, Colorado," June 202, <http://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2020/06/175/RockyFlatsFactSheet.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2024).

From 1952 to 1957, the United States built five operational nuclear reactors, two large nuclear material reprocessing facilities, and a tritium separation plant across the country to support tritium and plutonium production for the nuclear weapons complex.⁸

U.S. Department of Energy, Savannah River Site, "SRS History Highlights," <http://www.srs.gov/general/about/history1.htm#:~:text=The%20Savannah%20River%20Site%20was,Fifty%2C%20our%2050th%20anniversary%20book> (accessed November 8, 2024).

By 1962, the U.S. was producing more than 6,000 nuclear warheads a year.⁹

U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, "Transparency in the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Stockpile," <http://www.energy.gov/nnsa/transparency-us-nuclear-weapons-stockpile> (accessed November 8, 2024).

In short, 70 years ago, the United States went from having a bespoke nuclear weapons production capability to one that was on an industrial scale, all in a little over a decade. In comparison, as of the fall of 2024, the United States has built roughly a dozen new plutonium pits and no new fully constituted nuclear warheads—despite being in year 14 of a nuclear modernization program that began in 2010.¹⁰

U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, "NNSA Completes and Diamond-Stamps First Plutonium Pit for W87-1 Warhead," October 2, 2024, <http://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-completes-and-diamond-stamps-first-plutonium-pit-w87-1-warhead> (accessed November 8, 2024).

According to the original plan drafted in the Obama Administration, the United States should have been able to produce 80 plutonium pits—the key material in a nuclear weapons—each year by the mid-2020s. Some government offices now estimate that it will be 2030 before the United States is able to build 80 pits a year.¹¹

U.S. Government Accountability Office, Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability, GAO-23-104661, January 12, 2023, <http://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104661> (accessed November 8, 2024).

Others, such as the current National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) chief, suggest it will be 2035.¹²

U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, "NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby Remarks at Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century Symposium," April 18, 2024, <http://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-administrator-jill-hruby-remarks-strategic-weapons-21st-century-symposium> (accessed November 8, 2024).

Or it could be even later.

The reality is that the United States does not have the sustained nuclear-warhead manufacturing capability that it needs to credibly deter America's adversaries. Considering that China is building more than 100 new nuclear warheads *each year, every year*, the NNSA must do better.¹³

U.S. Department of Defense, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2023, October 19, 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF> (accessed November 22, 2024).

It must change its culture and go on a “wartime footing.”¹⁴

Lara Seligman, “‘Major Expansion’: China Now Has More than 500 Nukes, Pentagon Says,” Politico, October 19, 2023, <http://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/19/major-expansion-china-now-has-more-than-500-nukes-pentagon-says-00122440> (accessed November 8, 2024).

Putting the NNSA on a Wartime Footing

A wartime footing means the next Secretary of Energy and the incoming NNSA Administrator must reassess how to interpret safety, security, and environmental regulations. This is not to say that the U.S. Department of Energy should work recklessly or without concern for the environment or safety of the NNSA workforce, but the NNSA has become captive to a work-free “safe zone” mentality.¹⁵

Alicia Inez Guzmán, “Workers Are Getting Paid to Do Nothing at Los Alamos National Laboratory,” The Nation, November 9, 2023, <http://www.thenation.com/article/society/los-alamos-laboratory-waste-fraud/> (accessed November 8, 2024).

Onerous regulatory interpretations have created an environment in which little, if any, progress is made in the production of plutonium pits or warheads at scale. In some cases, adherence to safety, security, and environmental regulations has created an environment in which, at best, things are done at a glacial pace—at worst, it has created paralysis. When the only metrics for success are for safety, security, and environmental goals, the mission of producing nuclear weapons becomes secondary.

This must change under the new NNSA Administrator. The NNSA must posture itself to produce at least 80 plutonium pits per year by 2030 and 200 a year by 2035. The U.S. must also recognize that American production capacity for other types of critical materials that go into nuclear weapons, such as tritium, is now insufficient to meet the needs of the forthcoming U.S. nuclear force.

Along with its nuclear weapon development and production infrastructure, the NNSA must maintain the capability to resume underground nuclear explosive testing within six months if called upon to do so. The NNSA must sustain and deliver on time the fully constituted warheads needed to support both strategic and non-strategic nuclear capabilities by building the W93 at scale by fiscal year (FY) 2026; complete the W80-4 Life Extension Project by FY 2031; and explore future ballistic missile warhead requirements based on the threats and vulnerabilities of potential adversaries, including the possibility of common Air Force–Navy reentry systems or requirements for warheads that go on hypersonic cruise missiles.¹⁶

Robert Peters and Ryan Tully, “The World Is Becoming Ever More Dangerous: The President Must Revitalize the U.S. Strategic Arsenal,” Heritage Foundation Issue Brief No. 5343, March 1, 2024, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-world-becoming-ever-more-dangerous-the-president-must-revitalize-the-us>.

The United States must field the necessary capability, capacity, and responsiveness of the nuclear weapons infrastructure and support the skills necessary to not only do all of the above, but also be ready to take upwards of 200 W80s and W79s out of the ready reserve stockpile and combine them with existing Tomahawks for Land-Attack and Anti-Ship Missions, Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles, and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles until the United States can build the new fully constituted warheads necessary for the new arsenal.

Culture as Inhibitor to Progress

The next NNSA Administrator must put the agency on a wartime footing. A wartime footing means that the United States will produce nuclear weapons at scale before the end of the 2020s. To do so, the next Secretary of Department of Energy and, perhaps more importantly, the next NNSA Administrator must reassess how to interpret safety, security, and environmental regulations.

This is not to say that the Department of Energy should work recklessly or without concern for the environment or for the safety of the NNSA workforce, but the NNSA has become captive to a work-free “safe and secure zone” mentality. As noted previously, onerous interpretations of regulations have created an environment in which little progress is made in the production of plutonium pits or warheads at scale.

In some cases, adherence to safety, security, and environmental regulations has created an environment in which, at best, things are done at a glacial sluggish pace—and at worst, it has created paralysis. When the only metrics for success are for safety, security, and environmental goals, the mission of producing nuclear weapons becomes secondary.

As a consequence, the United States is accepting greater strategic risk—that is, the risk that the United States will not field the arsenal that is necessary to deter nuclear aggression by its adversaries—in order to reduce the risk of industrial accidents within the nuclear enterprise.

What the Incoming President Should Do

The President and—by delegated authorities—the U.S. Secretary of Energy and the NNSA Administrator can waive or reinterpret regulations that allow a favorable environment for completing the mission of stockpile stewardship and modernization.¹⁷

White House, “Memorandum on the Presidential Waiver of Statutory Requirements Pursuant to Section 303 of the Defense Production Act of 1950, as Amended,” October 3, 2022, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/10/03/memorandum-on-the-presidential-waiver-of-statutory-requirements-pursuant-to-section-303-of-the-defense-production-act-of-1950-as-amended/> (accessed November 12, 2024).

The mission can be done safely and securely while protecting the environment but achieving the mission must be the highest priority.

The incoming Secretary of Energy and NNSA Administrator must develop expedited timelines for facilities construction and use appropriate contracting vehicles, direct the use of expedited hiring authorities, leverage Defense Production Act—funding to give loans and equipment to

contractors, and pay bonuses for expedited performance of construction to accelerate warhead production.¹⁸

The Defense Production Act of 1950, Public Law 81-774.

And, due to the critical nature of this mission, there must also be penalties for workers and managers—to include civil servants, senior executives, and political appointees—for failing to meet project milestones.

President Donald Trump must also issue an executive order exempting the NNSA from Department of Energy bureaucratic processes and policies below the Secretary level. This will jump-start the production complex, remove unnecessary distractions, and focus resources on building nuclear weapons.

To reiterate, the NNSA should not engage in reckless or unsafe behavior—but it must take necessary prudent steps to balance strategic risk against tactical, industrial risks and move away from the stagnant management policies that have taken a zero-risk tolerance policy toward everything related to the production of nuclear weapons. To ensure that forward progress is being made, the next NNSA Administrator should provide monthly briefings to the President on the status of these efforts.

The next NNSA Administrator should spend at least two days per month at the Savannah River site and an additional two days a month at Los Alamos. He or she should not only meet with laboratory leadership, but also with low- and mid-level bureaucrats, contracting officers, machinists, program managers, electricians, physicists, accountants, plumbers, and engineers to identify the barriers that exist to moving faster—and then knock down those barriers. If the NNSA Administrator is spending more than three weeks per month in Washington, DC, and less than one week per month in the field at Los Alamos National Lab, the Savannah River Site, Oak Ridge's Y-12 nuclear complex, or the PANTEX warhead assembly field in the Texas panhandle, then he is not doing his job.

Further, the next NNSA Administrator should ignore everything that is not weapons-related. The Secretary of Energy can focus on renewable energy and the power grid. The NNSA deputy administrators and associate administrators can focus on naval reactor fuel, counterterrorism, and nonproliferation. The next NNSA Administrator must laser focus on producing new warheads.

Conclusion

The United States is building nuclear weapons at a glacial pace. At the current pace, decades will pass before the current arsenal is replaced. This is unacceptable. By only operating at a fraction of Cold War—production capacity—and, subsequently, only producing a tiny fraction of the warheads produced in the Cold War—the United States runs the risk of undermining the credibility of its deterrent.

Given the current security environment, the risk of a nuclear war breaking out is far higher—and has far greater consequences—than the risk of an environmental accident at a nuclear weapons lab. The nation must decide where it needs to best buy-down risk.

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Reagan Defense Forum: Report Prepared by the ICBM EAR

Robert Wilkie, a former secretary of Veterans Affairs who is leading the Trump administration's Pentagon transition team, said, "The killing fields of Ukraine are a warning to us all, and a warning that this is a multi-headed monster that we have to prepare for multiple theaters... Weakening the Iranians, weakening the Russians in Eastern Europe weakens China." Wilkie did not address President-elect Donald Trump's [statements](#) that he might reduce or end U.S. military support for Ukraine, but did say the next administration will emphasize a return to large-scale production of key weapons to challenge increasingly coordinated adversaries.

"We will be focusing on producing artillery shells, producing precision-guided munitions, putting more hulls in the water and making sure more ships and submarines are at sea and more aircraft are in the air," he said, adding that he was not speaking in an official capacity for the Trump transition. Wilkie spoke as the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria was imminent. He called the fall of Assad—a close ally of Russia and Iran—"a welcomed development," though he noted the emergence of an [extremist organization](#) seeking to fill the power vacuum left by Assad's departure is not. He said the events in Syria are further proof that the West has overestimated the strength of adversary states.

RNDF 2024 — The House and Senate today released their compromise version of the National Defense Authorization Act, with a \$895.2 billion topline.

The newly revealed topline means the NDAA will come in under the congressionally mandated budget caps imposed by the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA), despite a push in the Senate to go over that number.

The bill authorizes \$883.7 billion for fiscal year 2025, including \$849.9 billion for Department of Defense programs. It also approves \$33.3 billion for national security programs in the Department of Energy and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board and \$512.4 million for defense-related activities. Other funds outside the jurisdiction of the NDAA boost defense funding to the \$895.2 billion topline.

The deal resolves one major question looming over the bill — whether congressional authorizers would approve a significant uptick in defense spending — but introduced a new potential headwind to the NDAA's ultimate passage in the form of provisions that would prohibit coverage of gender-affirming care for transgender children of servicemembers.

In an interview with Breaking Defense, Rep. Adam Smith, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said that he had not yet decided whether he would support the bill due to the language.

"I think that undermined the bipartisan tradition of the bill," the Washington Democrat said on the sidelines of the Reagan National Defense Forum this afternoon.

"I think there is some controversy about what treatments minors should receive for gender dysphoria," he said. "I said, look, if you want to ask DoD doctors and the DoD medical

establishment to take a look at those concerns and address them, I can absolutely be in favor of that. But if you want to play the role of doctor and ban the care for everybody when it is not debatable that there are some minors with gender dysphoria who benefit from the treatments that this bill would ban — so you are denying health care to the children of service members, that they need, to serve a partisan agenda — I think that’s extraordinarily problematic.”

Smith added that it is “difficult to say” whether Democrats will support this version of the NDAA, which typically receives overwhelming bipartisan support, adding that House GOP leaders hope to increase the bill’s chance of survival by adopting a rule that would allow it to move forward in a simple majority vote.

“I am not going to judge a Democrat who votes one way or the other on this. There’s a lot of good stuff in the bill,” he said. “So, I’m not going to say, ‘Oh, you have to vote for this or you have to vote against it.’ I’ll make my own personal decision, and other members will as well.”

The earlier version of the bill approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee included a total of \$878.4 billion for the Defense Department and \$33.4 billion for defense-related activities in the Department of Energy. When combined with an estimated \$11.5 billion in non-NDAA defense activities, the total national defense topline sought by the SASC was \$923.3 billion — blowing past the \$895.2 billion defense spending cap imposed by the FRA by a significant margin that staffers previously put in the range of \$25 billion. In contrast, the House version put forth \$883.7 billion, including \$849.8 billion for the Pentagon, in numbers designed to squeeze under the FRA topline.

Of course, the NDAA is the defense policy bill, not a funding bill. The ultimate topline will be decided by appropriators, and it is unclear when that will come. The expectation among attendees at this year’s Reagan National Defense Forum is that the continuing resolution funding the government, which expires on Dec. 20, will be extended to March. Updated 12/7/24 at 8:57 pm ET with Smith’s comments.

Misunderstanding Escalation Dynamics with Russia

By [Mike Cote](#) on December 4, 2024

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, significant existing fractures, especially on the right, have been exposed in American foreign policy. Democrats have largely aligned behind the policy of the Biden Administration, which has been one of strong rhetorical support though with often-lackluster material aid and an inordinate fear of “escalation.” That term has been the bugbear of the political right when it comes to this conflict, dividing traditionally hawkish Republicans from populist isolationists, who seek a much more limited American role abroad. Both groups criticize Biden’s Ukraine policy but for vastly divergent rationales: one because it is too weak and the other because it is too strong.

While the hawks complain that the White House has failed to deliver military aid in a timely and efficient manner, other Republicans are concerned that supporting Ukraine, in addition to dragging the U.S. into an unnecessary conflict, could potentially [spark WWIII](#). This [line of rhetoric](#), particularly with an impending second Trump Administration, may come to increasingly shape foreign policy.

Escalation is not a one-way street, yet these critics ignore the bigger half of the issue – [constant Russian aggression](#) – to focus narrowly and unfairly on Ukraine. This approach is detached from the reality of warfare in general, ignores the specific path of this conflict, lends undue credence to nuclear saber-rattling, and blames America for the belligerence of our enemies.

First, this inordinate fear of World War III and nuclear exchange is disconnected from how escalation dynamics actually work in modern conflict. For a conflict to de-escalate to a point where it is stable enough to reach a sustainable endgame, both sides must be deterred from further escalation. If one side sees it as in their interest to continue fighting, peace will not be reached. Counterintuitively, this often requires greater escalation ([escalation dominance](#)) to create a deterrent effect; each belligerent must understand that unacceptable costs will be imposed by continuing. But that escalation – or threat thereof – must be credible to the opposing faction to be successful. Warfare, particularly the existential kind in which Ukraine is currently embroiled, is not something that can be carefully micromanaged. Restrictions on warfighting are counterproductive, only serving to disadvantage the restricted side by reducing the credibility of its threats of escalation. And that prolongs wars and increases their potential to broaden, not the reverse.

Second, the Russo-Ukrainian War in particular has not been the story of Ukrainian escalation against Russia, but Russian aggression towards Ukraine. The current stage of the war began when Russia launched an unprovoked full-scale invasion in February 2022, intended to topple the government in Kyiv and turn the country into a pliant satrapy. Russia has attacked civilian targets, razed Ukrainian cities, massacred innocents, taken children captive, and interdicted food shipments. It has used ballistic missiles, naval bombardment, carpet bombing, and even North Korean auxiliary fighters. Ukraine, supplied by the West and at a major disadvantage in terms of total soldiers and firepower, has been restrained in response. It has barely attacked Russian positions in Russia, largely due to arbitrary constraints imposed by its sponsors, especially the United States. The reason Kyiv has been able to remain in this war is in spite of these restrictions: it has innovated tactically and technologically, as well as taking big chances on impressive attacks in the Black Sea, the Kursk salient, and against Russian military infrastructure. Some analysts claim this opportunistic and gutsy Ukrainian response to overwhelming Russian aggression is [a “maximalist” strategy](#) bringing doom to the world; the reality is precisely opposed, as a maximalist strategy of deterrent-creating escalation would have Ukraine in a far better position than it is today.

Third, the World War III predictors constantly buy into every rhetorical threat of nuclear escalation on the part of Vladimir Putin, allowing Russia to deter Ukraine and the West via belligerent speech. Moscow has set red line after red line, from the provision of main battle tanks, long-range fires, and fighter jets to Ukrainian incursions into pre-war Russian territory and the sinking of Russian naval vessels. They backed each of those hardline stances with ever-

increasing nuclear saber-rattling. Yet none of those eventual actions, even if deterred for months, were responded to with any sort of serious force on the part of Moscow. These were empty threats from the beginning, but they worked, hence why they have continued apace.

The same pundits also accuse America, via NATO expansion, of having caused the war in the first place. They argue that the growth of a purely voluntary defensive alliance in the former Warsaw Pact violated a nonexistent ‘commitment’ made to Russia after the Cold War and [created an untenable security threat on Moscow’s border](#). In reality, the voluntary accession to NATO by nations formerly under the boot of Soviet oppression is a logical response to the long-term historical danger of [Russian expansionism](#) – one that has repeatedly proven destructive over the past few centuries. Ukraine is the one being threatened by Russia, not *vice versa*. It is Russia that has subjugated, starved, and invaded Ukraine in recurring attempts to destroy it, not the reverse. It is an aggressive Moscow that poses a security risk to its peaceful European neighbors, not a defensive-minded NATO acting against Russia.

Not only are these doomsayers harming Ukrainian defense and self-detering American action, but they are also endangering our national security across a wide variety of theaters. Showing our adversaries that we will cower in response to any nuclear threat is an incentive for more nuclear threats and greater proliferation. Russia, China, and North Korea all have nuclear weapons and a good reason to threaten us to achieve their geopolitical aims. Other enemy and rogue regimes, including Iran and its terrorist proxies, would only be incentivized to pursue weapons of mass destruction.

The Soviet Union similarly engaged in nuclear brinkmanship, constantly provoking American reaction and testing our red lines. This included the Cuban Missile Crisis, testing weapons of mass destruction regularly, and supplying and reinforcing our enemies. Nikita Khrushchev’s infamous 1956 “we will bury you” speech is probably the most well-known example of this phenomenon.

America cannot be made to back down every time Putin intimates he will use nuclear weapons; if that became our policy, it would be completely impossible to deter Russia from anything. We are the primary world power and should not forget our own large nuclear arsenal. This is not to encourage belligerence generally, but that we should respond in kind to our foes so as to preclude further aggression on their part: escalating to de-escalate. But this strategy, one that worked to win us the Cold War, is incomprehensible to those who would cry ‘World War III’ at the earliest opportunity.

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Providence is the only publication devoted to Christian Realism in American foreign policy and is entirely funded by donor contributions.

New Senate Schedule

The Senate will be in session annually for some 180 days announced the new majority leader Senator Thune (R-SD). This compares to the 105 each year over the past two years under majority leader Senator Schumer. A key is that the Senate will be in session +34 days by including Friday in their ordinary work week. The new calendar is here.

2025 United States Senate

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