

ICBM Ear for the week of January 23, 2025 Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis and Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrent Studies

Key Events

Congressional Developments

Administration Developments

Russia Defense Budget

Hruby on US Nuclear Policy

Kendall on the USAF and Nuclear Policy

General Kevin Chilton on Nuclear Mythologies

Huessy Essay on Nuclear Balance

Huessy Essay on Ukraine and Extended Deterrence

Commentary and Quotes of the Week

President Trump calls for reductions in nuclear forces

Global Zero Proposals re Sentinel, SLCM-N, and POTUS Authority

Key Events

Key Events January 31, 10-11am our next NIDS seminar featuring Shoshana Byren of the Jewish Policy Center and Ilan Berman of the American Foreign Policy Council who will discuss the Iranian security threat to the United States and our allies, including an assessment of Iran's nuclear weapons and missile capability. "Two Iranian cargo vessels carrying a crucial chemical ingredient for missile propellant will sail from China to Iran over the next few weeks, according to intelligence from security officials in two western countries." And "Iran tries to calm nuclear concerns as UN warns on enrichment," Reuters posted.

TRIAD SYMPOSIUM June 24th LSUS/NIDS/BF

On June 24th, NIDS, Barksdale Forward and LSUS will, with the help and cooperation of the USAF Global Security Command, host a TRIAD Symposium on the campus of the school, featuring top US officials and experts on nuclear deterrence matters.

On August 6th, NIDS will also host a gala at the Truman Library in Missouri and we will feature a 4-star USAF officer as our featured speaker.

Congressional Developments

Senator Marco Rubio is now the US Secretary of State, winning unanimous approval from the US Senate. Former Representative Radcliffe was also approved for the position of Director of Central Intelligence. Secretary of Defense nominee Peter Hegseth won approval from the Senate Armed Services Committee, although Alaskan Senator Murkowski announced her opposition, as did National Review magazine.

The House Budget Committee laid out the projected budget for the next decade, with current policy leading to \$21.6 trillion in additional debt over the next decade, assuming current policy remains in place. Details are below. The debt assumes that tax rate changes from the expiration of the Trump tax reform go into place, raising revenue according to CBO by roughly \$5.6 trillion, but still production over \$2 trillion debt annually.

Administration Developments

Elbridge Colby was nominated to the policy position in the Department of Defense. Also nominated were the new Air Force and Navy Secretary's. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/sub-cabinet-appointments/>

Its Budget Time Again.

Seven organizations were asked to lay out a ten year budget for the United States. The Peterson Foundation asked experts from seven leading organizations (links are here) — the [American Action Forum](#), the [American Enterprise Institute](#), the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#), the [Center for American Progress](#), the [Economic Policy Institute](#), the [Manhattan Institute](#), and the [Progressive Policy Institute](#) for their proposals.

- Two organizations propose increases in defense spending (AAF and AEI)
- Four organizations would limit its growth by a set amount (BPC, CAP, EPI, and MI)
- PPI mostly adheres to the CBO baseline but encourages that spending be done more efficiently

President Trump Announces Sub-Cabinet APPOINTMENTS

January 20, 2025

To the Senate of the United States, I nominate

Keith Bass, of Texas, to be an **Assistant Secretary of Defense**, vice Lester Martinez-Lopez. Elbridge Colby, of the District of Columbia, to be **Under Secretary of Defense for Policy**, vice Colin Hackett Kahl, resigned. Michael Duffy, of Virginia, to be **Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment**, vice William A. LaPlante Jr., resigned. Stephen Feinberg, of New York, to be **Deputy Secretary of Defense**, vice Kathleen Holland Hicks, resigned. Christopher Landau, of Maryland, to be Deputy Secretary of State, vice Kurt Campbell, resigned. **Troy Meink to be Secretary of the Air Force**, vice Frank Kendall III, resigned. **Emil Michael, of Florida, to be Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering**, vice Heidi Shyu, resigned. John Phelan, of Florida, to be Secretary of the Navy, vice Carlos Del Toro, resigned. **Brandon Williams, of New York, to be Under Secretary for Nuclear Security**, vice Jill Hruby, resigned.

International Developments

On 21 November 2024, the Russian State Duma adopted the federal budget for next year. Military spending is set to increase significantly: the defense budget will rise by one quarter to **13.5 trillion rubles**, which, at the current exchange rate, is equivalent to 130 billion euros. Given that Russia is waging a war against Ukraine, this sum might seem rather small. However, the **purchasing power** of military spending in Russia must be taken into account. Translated into German prices, Russia's defense budget amounts to **some 350 billion euros**. Russia's total military spending will be somewhere between 7 per cent and 8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), **similar to the 2024** level, which was a record in Russian post-Soviet history. In 2021, the year before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, military spending was just **3.6** per cent of GDP. How much of Russian budgetary expenditures do, in fact, go towards the war is very difficult to assess. Spending not directly related to the military, such as healthcare and construction in the illegally annexed Ukrainian territories, inflates the overall bill.

Retiring NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby and US Nuclear Strategy

Answering an audience question at the Hudson Institute, Jill Hruby said, “just building a lot of weapons over the long run does not seem like a winning strategy” for deterrence. She added, “we’re going to be in a big competition with Russia and China” in the decade ahead. As she leaves office, Hruby pointed to the modernized and variety of weapons in the Kremlin’s arsenal and to **Beijing’s accelerated nuclear weapons procurement and deployment**, aided by “its gigantic economy.”

[In her opening remarks](#), Hruby said, “for the first time in our history, we must prepare for a world with two nuclear peers. China is different [from Russia] because we are facing a nuclear adversary that is also an economic peer and an important global trade and technology influencer.” Looking at what Russia has embarked on since she took office and its invasion of Ukraine, [Hruby said](#), “we can reflect on how that conflict has involved both novel and traditional nuclear threats.

Retiring Secretary of the USAF, Frank Kendall, report on the state of the United States Air Force.



DAF_2050_Final_30_
Dec.pdf

Excerpt: ***Nuclear Deterrence***

Between now and 2050, we do not envision a departure from reliance on a triad of capabilities of which the Air Force will provide the air- and ground-launched legs. Sentinel has just been certified to continue in development. The B-21 is moving into production. By 2050, the Minuteman IIIs will have been replaced and a substantial inventory of B-21s will have been fielded. We will also maintain a robust and secure suite of nuclear C3BM capabilities.

Given trends and recent developments in both China and Russia, we do expect that between now and 2050 there will be several reviews of our nuclear posture in which nuclear force adequacy, strategic stability, and, possibly, arms control, will play a part. We are just entering a new and more dangerous period of human history with increased risk and uncertainty.

We may well need new concepts for dealing with the problem of multipolar nuclear powers, escalation management, the expansion of the range of novel strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, increased nuclear proliferation, and the potential integration of nuclear and conventional weapons. It is possible that in a tri-polar nuclear world without arms control constraints, other steps may be taken to enhance nuclear deterrence and increase strategic stability. **These could include a more survivable, mobile ground-based intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), an expansion of the long-range airborne leg in some form, additional dual use aircraft, or other means to achieve a larger, more survivable suite of capabilities. We are not considering those options at this time, but they may well be required by 2050 if current trends continue.**

New Special Report: [Russia & China Will Have 11,000 Nuclear Warheads by 2035 - Warrior Maven](#)

Quotes and Commentary of the Week

In a Truth Social post, President Trump said that he would “have no other choice” but to put sanctions and tariffs on Russia if President Vladimir Putin does not reach a deal to end the war in Ukraine, according to the Wall Street Journal,

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte: “A Russian victory over Ukraine would undermine the alliance’s deterrence mission and restoring its credibility could cost trillions. “

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte: Ukraine “cannot at this moment negotiate [with Russia] from a position of strength...”

Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall, “Underscored that the Sentinel ICBM system and the B-21 Raider will remain foundational to U.S. national security through 2050, and suggested that the USAF should consider shifting its conventional force to emphasize the long-range strike of bombers

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in a phone call with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, reaffirmed the United States’ iron-clad defense commitment to South Korea.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov: “Moscow is interested in resuming nuclear talks with Washington “as soon as possible,” while insisting that “the ball is in the Americans’ court, [since it was the U.S. that] stopped all substantive contacts” on the issue.

Secretary of the Russian Security Council Sergei Shoigu, “The risks of a violent clash between major states, including with the participation of nuclear powers, are growing.” Belarus was now protected under Russia’s “nuclear umbrella.

President Trump says he will reach out to North Korea’s Kim again.”

President Donald Trump: “A new nuclear agreement with Iran is possible, but any deal would need to be carefully negotiated and ‘verified times 10’ He stressed Iran cannot have nuclear weapons, warning it would lead to disaster

Key Strategic Issues on the Horizon

Fearing US ‘hostility,’ Russia could ‘escalate early’ in a space conflict – RAND

BreakingDefense.com, Jan. 23 | Theresa Hitchens...Russia’s “inflated” fears of a potential US first strike in space, as well as Moscow’s increasing “risk tolerance” present challenges to US efforts to keep the peace in the heavens, a new Space Force-commissioned think tank study finds.

Seoul envoy pledges to ensure South Korea, U.S. remain on same page for N.K. denuclearization goal
Yonhap News Agency (South Korea), Jan. 23 | Song Sang-ho and Cho Joon-hyung.South Korea's top envoy to the United States vowed Thursday to ensure that Seoul and Washington maintain the goal of North Korea's denuclearization, after U.S. President Donald Trump described Pyongyang as a "nuclear power" earlier this week. Pentagon board completes study on bombing hardened targets.

Washington Times Online, Jan. 23 | Bill Gertz...The Pentagon's Defense Science Board recently completed a study on how strategic nuclear forces will be used to blast deeply buried and hardened underground targets.

Trump's 'Iron Dome for America' missile shield now within reach

Washington Times Online, Jan. 23 | Ben Wolfgang. It's an undoubtedly ambitious proposal. Some critics have even framed it as the "most ridiculous" plan ever floated by new President Donald Trump, one that's unrealistic for a country as sprawling as the United States. But analysts and national security insiders say that Mr. Trump's unwavering pledge to build an "Iron Dome for America" offers concrete proof that the new president is serious about safeguarding the homeland by constructing a state-of-the-art missile shield. Such a shield would aim to protect the U.S. from the increasingly dangerous, sophisticated missile threats posed by China, Russia, Iran and North Korea — or even a coordinated assault by all or some combination of those nations.

Russia and China Will Have 11,000 Nuclear Warheads by 2035

WarriorMaven.com, Jan. 23 | Peter Huessy The US is indeed facing two nuclear armed peer adversaries in China and Russia which are projected to have combined as many as 11,000 strategic and theater nuclear warheads by 2035, some multiple thousands greater than their combined number of warheads today.

Russian diplomat says strikes inside Russia bring world to brink of nuclear war

TASS (Russia), Jan. 23 | Not Attributed . . .Western countries have brought the world to the brink of nuclear war by allowing missile strikes from Ukraine inside Russia with the purpose of provoking a retaliation, said Gennady Gatilov, Russia's envoy to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

USAF Nuclear Mythologies

General Kevin Chilton (retired) lays out common mythologies about nuclear deterrence based on a previous 2018 essay. Must reading.



Defending_Deterrence_Policy_Paper_55-FII

I am running a few minutes late; my previous meeting is running over.

Peter Huessy's Special Report: Nuclear Extended Deterrence and Negotiating an end to the Russian war against Ukraine

Summary:

What is at stake in Ukraine? The sustainment of extended deterrence in Europe under the US and NATO nuclear umbrella. Putin's objective as it was for all previous Russian and Soviet leaders was to eliminate NATO as a security framework for all of Europe.

Introduction:

To explain and understand this Russian objective, we should start at the beginning. The establishment of NATO in 1949 was in the face of massive Soviet tank armies having already taken most of Eastern Europe at the end of World War II as well as renegeing on an agreement at Yalta to allow for free elections in the states liberated from Nazi occupation. The alliance was not offensive-minded, as US forces in Europe were dwarfed by Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces at the time.

Massive Retaliation to Flexible Response

The US policy to deter the Soviets was not implemented through matching conventional Soviet power tank for tank or artillery piece for artillery piece. It was the US nuclear deterrent both strategic and theater forces, which was the ultimate hammer to stop Soviet conventional attacks going westward through the Fulda Gap into the Federal Republic of Germany. President Eisenhower described his policy of one of "massive retaliation" which prior to the acquisition of submarine and silo based missiles relied primarily on massive numbers of strategic bombers. The US deterrent force was augmented by large liquid fueled ICBMs in Turkey, but which were traded away during the Cuban missile crisis, as the US was initially deploying Minuteman I ICBMs that October in Montana, missiles that remained on alert continuously 24/7/365.

Massive retaliation was gradually changed to a policy of flexible response starting with President Kennedy and President Johnson with US strategic ICBM and SLBM and bomber forces exceeding Soviet forces by 10 to 1 by 1965.

Force Structure from SALT to START

With the SALT arms agreements, and even with détente and peaceful coexistence as platforms on which US security policy rested, by 1983 the Soviet strategic missile warheads had reached some 7900 warheads compared to US forces of 8700. With the end of the USSR and START I arms reductions, by 2010 with the adoption of New START both nations were slated to keep strategic forces somewhere between 1500-2000 deployed day to day. In addition, while the US kept some few hundred gravity bombs deployed aboard fighter aircraft in Europe as a theater nuclear deterrent, Moscow kept some 1900 such weapons throughout western Russia which had the capability of targeting most of Europe.

Russian Aggression 2014 and 2022

When Putin invaded Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, obviously the US and NATO deterrent did not deter him from his brazen violation of international law. Whatever deterrent value US conventional or nuclear deterrent forces had, they did not deter Putin from invading either in 2014 or 2022. To some extent this may have been due to Ukraine not

being part of NATO and thus the article 5 requirement that NATO at least consider coming to the defense of one of its members (it is not automatic) did not apply. Many critics of the US approach have assumed that a pending membership of Ukraine into NATO precipitated Putin's invasion in 2022, but if so, why did Putin invade in 2014?

The absence of any US or NATO military response to the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine may very well have persuaded Putin that no US or NATO action would occur should Moscow take another significant bite out of Ukraine territory.

Avoid Escalation, Weaken Deterrence?

Then with the 2022 invasion, the US and most of NATO assumed the defense of Ukraine, but with the supply of advanced weaponry but not troops. Putin made it clear that any formal NATO troop involvement would trigger a wider war, and over the past 3 years has made well over four dozen explicit threats to use nuclear weapons against NATO should the US or a NATO member nations provide certain advanced weaponry to Ukraine or troops from another nation. The US and NATO have provided Ukraine certain advanced missile capability with which to strike into Russian territory, acts which Putin repeatedly declared would trigger a wider war. Recently, certain members of the Russian military have declared that general military conflict between the US and NATO on the one hand and Russia on the other is inevitable.

On the surface, the US nuclear and conventional or extended deterrent has kept Putin from using nuclear force of any kind. But Putin's own conventional and nuclear forces, it could be argued, have also prevented NATO in general and the United States specifically, from moving "too aggressively" against Moscow. In fact, the previous administration repeatedly said its fears of escalation prevented the US from moving too forcefully against Moscow, calling into question the oft-proclaimed "whatever it takes" pledge from the Biden administration. And by fearing escalation, the US implicitly called into question the credibility of its own deterrent against Moscow, as we appeared to have ceded control over the escalation ladder to Moscow.

Defending Ukraine: Nuclear Implications

Michaela Dodge in a new essay from NIPP has in her always brilliant way also underscored how the 1994 decision by Ukraine to remove all Soviet era nuclear weapons was done with a quid pro quo of the United States and Great Britain guaranteeing Ukraine's sovereignty, as well as a pledge from Russia not to use military force or economic coercion against Ukraine. And if that pledge is not fulfilled, then the message will be to nations to secure their own nuclear weapons to secure their own safety, with huge implications for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, or NPT. Already, opponents of Israel are asserting that Iran would have no choice but to build its own nuclear weapons, as they have to defend themselves from Israeli bullying and "genocide" against Gaza. Which of course is precisely what North Korea claims justifies its own nuclear forces---a US "hostile policy!"

Now US Ukraine policy has not been consistent with the now much repeated rhetoric about supporting Ukraine. After all, in 2014, the US actually pushed for an arms embargo against Ukraine, although the keepers of conventional wisdom never claimed such a policy---certainly contrary to the 1994 agreement---was somehow evidence that the US administration had become a hand maiden or tool of Moscow!

Surrendering to Moscow would not help sustain a long-term fight against China, nor would it help either strengthen NATO or its individual members. It might very well dissolve NATO, which of course is Moscow's objective.

Is there a Plan for Victory?

However, there is unfortunately no plan on the table to win, no theory of victory, on the part of the US and Ukraine, and the battlefield is becoming more and more like Verdun from World War I. US economic policy does have the capability to seriously degrade Russia's economy, not the least of which should be a major US increase in oil and gas production and exports, we can secure Europe's energy independence from Moscow and the US independence from OPEC.

Despite media reports to the contrary, Russia is not winning, the Russian economy is in very bad shape due to the war, and a settlement that ends the conflict is possible, although giving Putin one square foot of Ukraine territory is a

repugnant outcome for any agreement. Moscow, too, has no plan for victory except for an outcome where the West, the United States and NATO simply give up after years of Ukraine becoming a battlefield meatgrinder. .

What kind of end to this conflict can be molded together by the new Administration remains to be seen. We may have to live with that we had from 2014-2022. Going back to pre-2014 let alone 1994, however wished for, is probably not in the cards. As for Ukraine becoming a member of NATO, some arrangement for its future sovereignty and safety has to be secured but joining NATO may take some time.

The Endgame: Extended Deterrence Matters

However, establishing the long-held principal that aggression to change borders is a violation of the world order at the highest level is still our objective. And it is obvious that Russia has paid a price measured in over half-a-million casualties and multiple hundreds of billions in war costs.

Of critical importance is that the US extended deterrent be enhanced not only in Europe but the Pacific. Extended deterrence, especially extended nuclear deterrence, has been identified by the Strategic Posture Commission as the one key weakness of the US and its allies, notably in the Pacific but also in Europe and the Middle East.

The US in 1991 put together what was known as the PNI, or Presidential Nuclear Initiative, that unilaterally eliminated US theater nuclear weapons from around the world with the exception of a few hundred gravity bombs in Europe.

One common element of the global zero nuclear campaign has been to eliminate the remaining such forces in Europe and to stop production of the Navy's nuclear armed cruise missile, both of which would secure for Moscow the long held objective of eliminating the US theater nuclear extended umbrella from Europe. Even though Russia never followed through on its pledge to follow the US lead in 1991, and now according to Dr. Mark Schneider has between 1900-4000 such theater nuclear weapons, while China has some 600 such weapons deployed in the Pacific theater according to estimates by Dr. Chris Yeaw.



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