ICBM EAR Week of March 17-23, 2025 Prepared by Peter Huessy, President of Geostrategic Analysis and Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies

Quotes of the Week

General Anthony Cotton: "When I was at Global Strike Command, I predicted that Sentinel would be a mega project, with breathtaking scope and cost—including a new missile, launch silos, civil engineering, and upgraded command, control, and communication. That doesn't mean it's a project that does not need to be accomplished given the rising importance of deterrence programs as the U.S. faces not one but two peer nuclear competitors."

General Anthony Cotton: I regret that the U.S. did not tackle the various strategic modernization programs in a staged, sequential fashion—one a decade—instead of all at once. There is no margin left and no extra time left to get these projects accomplished.

Strategic Command: "The Nuclear Triad is vital to national security. As @US_STRATCOM's commander said at #McAleese, nothing provides national power like a modernized Triad & NC3. Satellites are key to NC3 enabling threat detection, secure communication, & precision strikes."

Miller and Edelman: "President Trump affirmed his support of NATO's key Article 5, a statement later confirmed to NBC News by a National Security Council official in a written statement that said: "President Trump is committed to NATO and Article V." [Full article is below]

The Federation of American Scientists: "There is "no evidence that China's ongoing nuclear expansion will result" in parity. (Editor's Note: the 300+ new Chinese ICBM missile silos can hold the DF-31 and DF-41 ICBMs which can carry 3-10 warheads, respectively. When added to their mobile ICBMs, China has more ICBMs than does the United States. Arming half its new ICBM silos with the DF-31 and DF-41 would give China some 1950 ICBM silo-based warheads alone, more than the entirety of the current US deployed strategic nuclear weapons inventory. Three experts including Dr. Rick Fisher, Dr. Chris Yeaw and Dr. Mark Schneider all have concluded in recent studies that China is indeed seeking to achieve at least parity with the United States and probably primacy."

USAF Vice Chief of Staff General James Slife: "The only thing more expensive than an effective nuclear arsenal is the lack of one."

Vice USAF Chief of Staff General James Slife: "Periodically, we get questions, 'Why shouldn't we have a dyad?' The national policy is a triad. It's where we're going."

ICBM EAR Essay of the Week:

Ukraine, Proliferation, & Deterrence

By Peter Huessy, President, Geo-Strategic Analysis and Senior Fellow, The National Institute for Deterrence Studies

The US has a number of choices on what to do about Ukraine, NATO and the defense of Europe. A 30-day ceasefire has the support of Ukraine and the United States. Russia agrees with "nuances"--with conditions such as how to determine violations and prevent regrouping but in the end does not appear ready to stop fighting.

Although severe critics of the Administration are highly skeptical that a cease fire with Russia will hold, let alone lead to the protection of Ukraine's sovereignty, some such as Graham Allison of Harvard University now argue that absent Ukraine being able to repel Russia from the Crimea and Donbass, a cease fire that includes Russia withdrawing from land seized since 2022 may be the only achievable path forward.

But even with a ceasefire, there remains a concern in Europe that the US has implicitly withdrawn its extended deterrent from Ukraine---implied with a ceasefire and the absence of NATO membership for Ukraine. Serial nuclear proliferation among other NATO nations, and its consequent high instability, is feared. But no European NATO nation advocates sending any military forces to Ukraine or elsewhere as an alternative deterrent except for in a peacekeeping role.

In that light, the future of NATO and the US role in providing a deterrent needs a sober assessment. Especially of how we got where we are, where we are now, followed by an assessment of possible paths forward, particularly what security framework is possible that would prevent any further Russian aggression against not only Ukraine but other neighboring nations.

Keep in mind as Victor Davis Hanson explained March 22 in his Blade of Perseus remarks, Europe does have 500 million people compared to Russia's 140 million. And a GDP some 10-fold greater, nearly twice the fighter jets, and 500,000 armed forces personnel while Russia's depleted force is 800,000. And Europe has ten times the artillery platforms, and 2000 fighter jets.

Hanson notes the Baltic states and Poland have pulled out of a landmine treaty and are placing landmines and other fortifications/barriers on their border with Russia, reflected of their growing concern with protecting themselves from potential future aggression.

Yet while moving in the right direction, still one-third of NATO nations are not spending the promised 2% of their GDP on defense. Although the good news is that the European NATO nations have pledged to boost defense spending by additional multiple hundreds of billions.

Let us start with where have we been?

Ten points need to be made.

First, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 did not cause most of the current critics of the Trump administration to demand that the US send forces to the region to push the Russians back.

Second, the then Obama administration said the US was uninterested in what happened in Ukraine and when criticized decided as a humanitarian gesture to only send blankets. Given the criminal nature of Russia's grizzly war against Ukraine and the atrocities committed by Russian troops, that 2014 failure undid whatever deterrent pressure Moscow may have had pre-invasion #2 in 2022.

Third, the Obama administration pushed for an arms embargo against Ukraine, not Russia.

Fourth, two agreements, Minsk I and Minsk II were signed and not one of the agreements forced Russia to give up all the territory grabbed in 2014, let alone the fruits of aggression in Georgia and Moldova in 2008.

Fifth, no NATO country has proposed to send their military forces to Ukraine to push the Russians back to 2022 or 2014 borders, although they have now suggested that upwards of 100,000 soldiers could serve as a peacekeeping force.

Sixth, in the period between 2017-2020 US military spending increased an average of $54 billion annually, while from 2009-2016 annual defense spending adjusted for inflation declined $140 billion.

Seventh, the first Biden administration ten-year budget plan cut defense by $169 billion below the then current baseline, dropping to 2.3% of GDP, some 45% of discretionary spending, levels seen only prior to WWII.

Eighth, no formal US or NATO effort was made from 1994-2024 to make Ukraine a member of NATO, despite repeated requests from Ukraine to be made part of the transatlantic defense consortium.

Ninth, throughout the past four years, the Biden administration doled out military assistance haphazardly to Ukraine.

Tenth, the United States prohibited the transfer of certain advanced military hardware to Ukraine and had an off limits target list of Russian assets that Ukraine was told not to destroy.

That is no way to "win" a war despite nice rhetoric about "whatever it takes."

So, while these ten mistakes were not carried out by the current administration, a cacophony of critics have demanded that all of these someone be remedied. But before these serial failures or mistakes can be remedied, the US needs to carefully assess where things are now.

There are ten current factors that need to be on the table.

First, European NATO is finally adding significant military resources—some hundreds of billions over four years according to some press reports-- to their admittedly relative week military capability, despite having already increased military spending by the urging of the previous Trump administration by hundreds of billions.

Two, the United States has according to the administration provided Ukraine with over $350 billion worth of stockpiled munitions and financial assistance, including $118 billion in military hardware. European NATO has provided roughly $100 billion in military assistance, some $18B less than the United States, and apparently in the form of a loan that has to be repaid.
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Third, the US is planning to add some $20-25 billion annually to our own defense budget for each of the next ten years according to the House and Senate budget resolutions and plans by the Secretary of Defense.

Fourth, the US is proposing a major missile and air defense for the US homeland and our allies, including NATO.

Fifth, the US has repeatedly underscored its support for the full-up modernization of America's nuclear deterrent and robust sustainment of its current nuclear forces.

Sixth, in parallel to the deployment of such military forces around the globe, the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State have both hammered home the US "ironclad" commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Japan, our European allies, and Israel, including continued support for article 5 of the NATO treaty.

Seventh, the internal DoD transfer of $10 billion a year from low to high priority programs is not a cut to the defense budget but a necessary internal audit and transfer.

Eighth, Ukraine now according to many analysts is the best armed military within NATO excluding the United States.

Ninth, no member of European NATO have proposed that going forward their armed forces be deployed in Ukraine to push back the Russians from the territory Moscow illegally and recklessly grabbed in 2014 and 2022.

Tenth, in the absence of an adopted plan to defeat Moscow (however one may define that), the available options will largely reflect the current situation on the ground, however unjust such an eventual outcome may be, given the self-imposed limits NATO has put on the war effort.

Given these realities, at issue is what kind of security arrangement the US/NATO and Ukraine can jointly adopt that will also secure an agreement from Russia, with the full knowledge that Russia historically and across the board does not fulfill its promises or keep its word. President Trump got out of the INF treaty and the JCPOA with Iran for precisely this reason, (remember Moscow is a party to both).

Making Ukraine a full up member of NATO will not change the required commitment by Europe and the US to protect Ukraine. Any guarantee absent NATO membership requires the same political and military commitment by the NATO nations---who would come to the military assistance of Ukraine including contemplating the use of nuclear force, should Russia in the future move its forces beyond where a cease fire and/or settlement would be secured.

The previous administration feared escalation if Ukraine with US and NATO assistance seriously threatened Russian forces in Ukraine. The previous administration took off the table the US deterrent by declaring in a sense that the US no longer believed our deterrent was able to prevent Russian escalation, especially to the nuclear level, over Ukraine. And while many repeated the mantra of "whatever it takes" the flow of arms and assistance did not include any plan for victory, however defined. That alone was highly immoral and dangerous.

As the Strategic Posture Commission has acknowledged, Moscow's at least 20-1 advantage in theater nuclear forces in Europe and the complete absence of such US forces in the Pacific gives Russia the tool with which to engage in blackmail and coercion. Moscow's policy of adopting an "escalate to win" strategy started at least as early as the April 1999 decree by then President Yeltsin to build a force of "small, highly accurate, low yield" battlefield nuclear weapons.

That brings us back to our role in NATO and nuclear deterrence. Critics from the Quincy Institute, for example, declare that our extended nuclear umbrella over Europe and Asia risks bringing nuclear war to the US mainland, and have thus proposed US forces in both regions be withdrawn.

Any withdrawal of US forces in the Pacific, especially from the ROK, for example, would probably precipitate a communist North Korea invasion. And not guarantee the US homeland would remain a sanctuary from nuclear attack.

A US withdrawal from NATO or a withdrawal of the US extended deterrent shield would precipitate the same kind of Russia aggression. However, a joint US-Ukraine economic investment plan for rare-earth mineral development and a companion Marshall plan for Ukraine's recovery, plus a NATO commitment to the defense of Ukraine which includes European peacekeepers in a demilitarized zone may have a chance of success.

The administration's outlook is to re-balance the NATO commitment to Europe's defense while adding considerably to the defense of the Pacific against China's hegemonic objectives. The Indo-Pacific region will around 2048 have 5 billon people and is projected to have some $62 trillion in GDP, in which the emerging dominant power over the region will be the world's premier hegemon.

The US is indeed shifting some of the defense of Europe to some of the 29 other nations of NATO--- not to disassemble the alliance but to make it better reflect the realities of the world today and not the way it was for much of the past seventy five years. Given the US debt now approaching $37 trillion, our defense commitments can remain significant but cannot be open-ended.

The pressures for proliferation have, however, not come from this administration. The Chinese in 1982 deliberately adopted a secret plan to complete nuclear weapons development in Pakistan and subsequently to North Korea, Iran and Libya as former Secretary of the Air Force Tom Reed detailed in his "The Nuclear Express". That same year some analysts speculate that General Secretary Andropov adopted a similar policy in a secret meeting of the Soviet politburo.

At the end of the USSR, President Bush 41 then got rid of all our theater weapons worldwide except gravity bombs in Europe. Russia did not reciprocate keeping somewhere between 1900-4000 such weapons. At the same time, North Korea and Iran both decided to move toward a nuclear weapons capability, with the DPRK utilizing the Six Party Talks and Agreed Framework to do so. Eventually the Iranian's couldn't hide their nuclear work any longer so they cleverly adopted the JCPOA or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which guaranteed a unique "right to enrich" and a pathway to nuclear weaponry.

Today, the USA has not withdrawn its physical nuclear deterrent from Europe. Nor are there any plans to do so.

But the United States in 2014 and then again in 2022 took our deterrent off the table by (1) not responding to Russian aggression and (2) responding only within limits for fear of escalation, especially escalation to the nuclear level. And if NATO armed forces are necessary to be in Ukraine to kick Russia out, what difference does it make whether Ukraine is in our out of NATO? And if you think Putin will be deterred, well why don't we go in a kick Putin out of Ukraine? And can we give Ukraine the weaponry to do so. But there is no weapon that can magically lead to Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine, except NATO armed forces.

The proliferation pressures re ROK, Japan, and Poland among others started decades ago. But the one new proposal for a theater nuclear deterrent came from Trump 1.0---the SLCM-N. Although the Biden administration initially dropped the program, strong support in Congress and support by the administration has the program in this year's NDAA. We are building a strong theater deterrent precisely to lessen pressures for proliferation.

Russia invaded Ukraine twice to sever the US from NATO and to split NATO---Putin assumed given the imbalance in the theater nuclear balance that NATO would not risk escalation. He was proven right in 2014 and 2022.

Having taken our nuclear deterrent off the table it is very hard to put it back---otherwise why would Germany, Hungary and France all be trying desperately to get Putin to fear nuclear escalation on our part as opposed to the other way around?

That is why a cease fire and subsequent security arrangement is one way forward that avoids a feared escalation to the nuclear level—as Putin may very well be ready to go there. If, however, his threats are bluff, then why not send the necessary armed forces to the region to achieve the victory the West wants?

The discussion of "going nuclear" in the Pacific, such as in the Republic of Korea, or in Eastern Europe, as in Germany and Hungry, grew out of the US removing its extended deterrent in 2008, 2014 and 2022, while also often pulling back on defense spending and missile defense deployments. The administration's defense proposals will restore deterrence over tome but that requires more buy-in from allies.

In the past few months, the US has demonstrated its resolve on multiple occasions by deploying US nuclear capable strategic bombers in various theaters in joint cooperation with our allies, including those in NATO and the ASEAN.

Finally, going as far back as the administration of President Reagan, the United States has discussed the idea of going to zero nuclear weapons. Reagan discussed banning fast flying missiles, but not theater or bomber weapons, nor the other nuclear powers beyond the US and the Soviet Union.

President Bush 41 unilaterally eliminated thousands of theater nuclear weapons, while President Bush 43 reduced forces from 6000 to 1700-2200 with the Moscow agreement, which was formalized in the New START treaty agreement of 2010 at around 1700-2000 allowed deployed warheads when the special counting rules are taken into account.

And President Obama called for a global push for zero nuclear weapons in a Prague speech, although the President like his predecessors knew such an agreement was far over the horizon.

As does President Trump. His current budget and policy prescriptions are building a robust and strong deterrent, and nuclear deterrent remains the top priority of each of the new relevant service chiefs and the Secretary of Defense and head of NNSA.

The only way this works is we and our allies are all in this together. America first is not America alone. Its America leading and in so doing protecting herself and those that join her in this endeavor. Things must also be done in sequence. As it will take time to rebuild the deterrent envisioned for our future. The risk of course is the calendar the bad guys keep is not ours to determine, and as Israel's UN Ambassador Dori Gold warned us, the two clocks of the bad guys and good guys have not been moving at the same pace.

But Europe and the US allied with Ukraine can build on a cease fire and remove Russia from territory grabbed since 2022 as well as create a security for the future, as Allison wrote this week as he admitted the only viable plan is the one put forward by the US administration.

<u>Event of the Week</u>

650 defense specialists attended a highly valuable conference hosted by Jim McAleese in Arlington, Virginia featuring top US military officers from all branches of the Armed Services. The highlight of the event was the remarks by General Antony Cotton, the Commander of the US Strategic Command. He spoke about the critical nature of the US nuclear Triad and the progress the US is making in recapitalizing the entire nuclear deterrent. He

also called for more B21 strategic bombers. The story is posted below and the link is here: **STRATCOM Chief: Air Force Needs 145 B-21s and More New Strategic Systems.**

Administration Developments

The Defense Secretary's Corner

As the Pentagon weighs shifting billions of dollars in funding, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth said the Trump administration plans to step up spending on offensive and defense space operations. "I feel like there's no way to ignore the fact that the next and the most important domain of warfare will be the space domain," Hegseth told senior leaders from the Air Force and Space Force on March 19.

The AF Chiefs Corner

As the Pentagon begins a major reshaping of the nation's defense budget, ***the Air Force chief*** sees an opportunity to secure additional funding—highlighting its role in the new defense secretary's priority missions. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's ***push to shift 8% of funds to*** priorities such as missile defense and nuclear modernization could open up new funds to service—since the air and space domains are central to Golden Dome, and the service owns two-thirds of the nuclear triad and three-fourths of nuclear command and control, Air Force Chief Gen. David Allvin said during Defense One's State of Defense series.

New space-based interceptors called for in President Donald Trump's Golden Dome missile defense initiative are all about addressing threats as quickly and as far away from the U.S. homeland as possible, according to U.S. Space Force's top officer. The Golden Dome (formerly known as Iron Dome) plans come amid broader discussions and concerns about the weaponization of space.

The Commanders Corner: General Cotton Calls for 145 B21 Bombers and Underscores Urgency to Complete Nuclear Modernization

John A. Tirpak for the AFSF magazine writes: The Air Force should buy 145 stealth B-21 bombers to cope with the increased threats to U.S. security since that program came into being, **Gen. Anthony J. Cotton,** head of U.S. Strategic Command, said at the McAleese and Associates annual Defense Programs Conference. Cotton also said the Air Force should reassess the planned number of AGM-181 Long Range Stand-Off weapons and "pay attention" to the progress of the B-52J upgrade program. The Navy probably needs to up the number of ballistic missile subs it is planning for as well, he added. "I, as a customer, want to see increased rates" of B-21 production, Cotton said, noting that the program's low production rate was set "when the geopolitical environment was a little bit different than what we face today."

While Cotton said the current plan of 100 B-21s should be the absolute minimum, he favors a figure of 145, which he said was the sense of Air Force Global Strike Command when he commanded that organization—his last assignment before taking the helm at STRATCOM. This is not the first time Cotton has indicated he would like more Raiders. Last year, he told lawmakers that he would "love" to have more than 100 of the bombers, but he did not offer the 145 figure he presented now. "That gives us 220 bombers when the BUFFs (B-52s) are included," Cotton said at McAleese. Cotton also said he's "really happy with the work Northrop Grumman is doing" with development and testing of the B-21. He also praised Raytheon for its "amazing" work on the LRSO, the new nuclear missile the Air Force is working on to succeed the AGM-86B Air-Launched Cruise Missile. Like the B-21, though, he suggested the program needs to grow. "Again, we have to question now, what are we looking for, as far as capacity [and] sufficiency, there," Cotton said, due to the evolving security situation, without specifying how many additional LRSOs he thinks should be acquired. He's ready to "move out" with that program, he said. The Air Force plans to buy 1,087 LRSOs, 67 of which would be used for development and test. That figure was set in the early 2010s and was largely based on the nuclear capabilities of Russia, before China embarked on an aggressive campaign of building strategic weapons and developing new hypersonic missiles.

The LRSO is highly classified and is set to enter operational service in the late 2020s. Cotton also said that the Navy's new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine also likely needs to be built in greater numbers than were originally envisioned, for all the same reasons. The threat is "significantly greater" than it was in an earlier era, and "this is not 'Cold War 2.0,'" he said. While Cotton was pleased with progress on the B-21 and LRSO, he said he is "a little worried" about the B-52J upgrade, which comprises new engines, navigation, radars and other improvements that will extend that bomber's service life to 2050 or beyond.

"It is my LRSO carrier," he said, "so I need to make sure the Air Force is paying attention to that—to the acquisition strategy—and gets the B-52J out on the ramp as soon as we can." He did not explain why he is concerned about the upgrade's progress, or why the Air Force might not be giving the program the attention it deserves. The program has experienced some delays and cost increases as it has transitioned from a fast-tracked prototyping program to a major acquisition program. The final leg of the new nuclear triad, the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile, is also struggling with delays and cost concerns. Cotton said that when he was at Global Strike Command, he predicted the program would be a "mega project," with breathtaking scope and cost—including a new missile, launch silos, civil engineering, and upgraded command, control, and communication.

Still, "that doesn't mean it's a project that does not need to be accomplished," given the rising importance of deterrence programs as the U.S. faces not one but two peer nuclear competitors, he said. Noting that he will retire in the coming months, Cotton said he regrets that the U.S. did not tackle the various strategic modernization programs in a staged, sequential fashion—"one a decade"—instead of all at once. There "is no margin" left and no [extra]time left to get these projects accomplished.

Elbridge Colby: Nominated to be Senior Defense Official for Policy: A Review of Elbridge Colby's Strategy

Colby commands attention not as a partisan operator but as a genuine analytical thinker. As the chief architect of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, he orchestrated the United States' pivot to Asia through changes to force posture, acquisition priorities and strategic focus. His 2021 book *The Strategy of Denial* has become required reading for defense planners. In it, Colby argues that the US must direct its military power to deny China hegemony over Asia, rather than pursue global primacy or retrenchment.

The vision he laid out before the Senate Armed Services Committee was neither the primacy-obsessed neoconservatism of the Bush era nor the strategic restraint and belt-tightening advocated by US progressives and libertarians. Instead, Colby argued for 'prioritized engagement'—a strategy that recognizes the limits of US power while refusing to abandon core commitments.

https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/elbridge-colbys-vision-blocking-china/

ICBM News

Air Force says it "neglected" Sentinel infrastructure

https://www.axios.com/2024/09/11/hunter-nukes-sentinel-spending?utm_medium=partner&utm_source=microsoft-start&utm_content=link&utm_campaign=subs-partner-msoft-world

By: Colin Demarest for Axios World // 20 March 2025

Driving the news: The U.S. Air Force and its collaborators suffered such intense tunnel vision working on the new Sentinel nuclear missile that they "really neglected" other pieces of the puzzle, like siloes and launch networks, according to the service's acquisitions chief, Andrew Hunter.

- ***Those missteps hurt the program and forced the Pentagon to publicly recommit to the effort.***

Catch up quick: The Air Force wants to replace hundreds of aging Minuteman III missiles with the Northrop Grumman-made Sentinel, tipped with the National Nuclear Security Administration's **W87-1** warhead. The initial price tag read $78 billion. But estimates ballooned to $141 billion, or even more without intervention. The Pentagon in July said Sentinel was necessary and peerless, and that the Air Force should proceed, albeit with major changes. The head of the program was fired, Defense One reported weeks prior.

Hunter this month told the Defense News Conference failure thus far was "collective" and included flubs by the Air Force, Northrop, the acquisition community and more. Not even Boeing's participation would have helped, he said. "We underestimated the complexity of it because we only do it roughly every 75 years or so," Hunter added. "This is our chance to get it right." Between the lines: Bloated prices and timelines are red meat to watchdogs. They also nourish a decades-old debate: Why have missiles in the ground when you have bombers in the air and submarines underwater?

Two experts, Mackenzie Knight and Stephen Young, told me such major defense overhauls are often plagued by management lapses and archaic thinking. "Good on them for admitting the exact mistake that was made," said Knight, a senior research associate with the Federation of American Scientists. "But I think there has to be more intense oversight from the earliest stages of these massive defense programs." "I don't think we're going to see Sentinel halted or canceled or anything like that," she added. "But I do think what we will see is further cost increases."

“The fact that it's policy that we have a triad is, indeed, policy, but it's just inherited policy. I think the thinking is old," said Young, a senior Washington representative with the Union of Concerned Scientists. "If we had 10,000 nukes, it wouldn't have stopped Russia from invading Ukraine," he continued. (Saber rattling from Russian President Vladimir Putin also hasn't kept Kursk safe.)

Yes***, but: Air Force leadership is going "line by line" to limit costs, an "exhaustive process," according to Vice Chief of Staff Gen. James Slife.***

- ***Slife also said the only thing more expensive than an effective nuclear arsenal is the lack of one.***
- ***"Periodically, we get questions, 'Why shouldn't we have a dyad?' The national policy is a triad. It's where we're going."***

Be smart: Sentinel stumbles are a symptom of a larger fiasco playing out across the U.S. nuclear weapons ecosystem, from crumbling Cold War-era infrastructure to cleanup and storage squabbles to broken promises about plutonium pits.

Strategic Developments

Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te said Thursday that the island's defense budget will exceed 3% of its economic output as it overhauls its military in the face of the rising threat from China.

NATO Air Command wrote: “Bomber Task Force 25-2 accomplished mission in Europe demonstrating interoperability and transatlantic unity. During the deployment, the [U.S. B-52] bombers completed integrated missions with Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden, Turkey and Great Britain

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Shoigu on Friday arrived in Pyongyang, where he is expected to meet with Kim Jong Un and other top North Korean officials.

Top Essays of the Week: Proliferation Concerns and Extended Deterrence

Essay #1: US allies question extended deterrence guarantees, but have few options

US nuclear extended deterrence has long-served as a backstop of its allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Only a few months into his second term, President Donald Trump has raised doubts as to the extent of Washington's commitment to the continent's security, not just its willingness to use nuclear weapons.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS – UK), Mar. 19 | Zuzanna Gwadera

The foundation of nuclear deterrence is as much about credibility as it is certainty. The United States has provided this credibility through extended deterrence to its allies for three-quarters of a century, but this guarantee now faces creeping uncertainty. Only weeks into his second term, President Donald Trump's transactional approach to defense and security relations has begun to erode decades of assurance.

NATO has long sheltered under US extended deterrence, while Washington has also provided Australia, Japan and South Korea with its nuclear umbrella. But any perceived weakening in the strength of the US guarantee could risk long-standing nuclear weapons non-proliferation norms.

Current arrangements

The United States' extended nuclear deterrence policy emerged after the Second World War in response to the conventional military threat that the Soviet Union posed to Western Europe. The US pledged to protect NATO members with its strategic arsenal and subsequently forward-deployed nuclear weapons to Europe in 1954. NATO's nuclear-sharing and forward-deployed nuclear arrangements comprise an estimated 100 US B61 gravity bombs stored at six bases in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkiye. Seven NATO members contribute dual-capable aircraft (DCA), which can deliver B61 bombs; a portion of allies also conduct joint nuclear exercises.

Apart from France, all NATO members participate in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), the Alliance's senior body on nuclear policy. However, the US has full custody of weapons it forward-stations in Europe and the US president maintains the sole authority over employing them.

Australia, Japan and South Korea are provided similar cover, though the US does not station nuclear weapons on their soil. In light of growing threats from China and North Korea, the Biden administration sought to reassure its allies in the Indo-Pacific, including through increased deployments of strategic bombers and submarines, joint military exercises and greater inter-government engagement, notably through the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) enshrined in the 2023 Washington Declaration between the US and South Korea.

A tattered umbrella?

The Trump administration has long criticized European allies for not spending enough on defense. The US has now ramped up that pressure, with Trump calling for NATO members' minimum defense expenditure to increase to 5% of GDP – a level not even the US meets. He has also publicly mused about refusing to defend allies that, in his view, don't pay.' Combined with his push for a quick ceasefire in Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine without security guarantees, and the pause in US military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine (since resumed), US behavior has caused some in Europe to question Washington's commitment to the continent's security.

Nuclear extended deterrence, while not explicitly addressed by the Trump administration, is to the fore of these concerns. Allies now doubt whether Trump would ever consider using US nuclear weapons to defend Europe.

In contrast, the Trump administration has so far publicly embraced its security guarantees to its allies in the Indo-Pacific. In a trilateral statement with Japan and South Korea in February 2025, the US reaffirmed its commitment to the defense of these two allies, including with its nuclear weapons, and to the 'complete denuclearization' of North Korea. However, both during his campaign and as president, Trump suggested that South Korea should take on a greater share of the financial burden for defense and questioned the logic of its extended deterrence support for Japan. Neither sentiment is likely to be well received in Seoul and Tokyo, especially as they observe events in Europe.

Proliferation pressures

For decades, the US has deemed extending nuclear deterrence valuable. It strengthened the US defense and political ties to its allies, provided the US with greater strategic depth, and perhaps most importantly, eased the pressure on US allies to pursue their own nuclear weapons if they found themselves threatened.

The premise of extended deterrence arguably contributed to building strong non-proliferation outcomes, most importantly through the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The introduction of new nuclear-sharing arrangements would be a blow to an already weakened treaty, as opponents would likely point to their illegitimacy under the NPT.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has made repeated nuclear threats towards Europe, credible or otherwise, and Moscow has also likely deployed nuclear weapons to Belarus. The continent's response to the activity of the new US administration has been to revisit potential alternatives to US extended nuclear deterrence. French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his openness to holding talks on his country's nuclear weapons' possible role in European security, a proposal that was well-received by several allies.

Recasting French-provided nuclear arrangements at pace will face technical and political challenges, and its effectiveness and longevity could come under question. Marie Le Pen, who opposes Macron's plans, is a contender for France's presidency in 2027.

Europe's loss of confidence in US extended nuclear deterrence also courts it losing credibility in Moscow's eyes. Were a viable alternative to US guarantees to fail to emerge, some NATO members might even choose to pursue an indigenous deterrent.

The Indo-Pacific poses a yet more immediate proliferation concern. Amid North Korea's expanding nuclear and missile arsenals, high-level South Korean officials have repeatedly called for nuclear armament, an idea now embraced by the majority of the South Korean public.

But for many states, a journey towards a credible minimum deterrent could prove long, lonely and perilous. Many non-nuclear weapon states lack the infrastructure to produce fissile material and are bound by non-proliferation agreements, including the NPT and the 123 Agreements with the US. They would probably struggle to find willing partners to assist with an explicit nuclear weapons program, and any such assistance would very likely be detected. Exiting non-proliferation agreements could alienate potential proliferators, with consequences for their economies, alliances and defense cooperation. Some potential proliferators could face the prospect of a sabotage campaign, or, in the most extreme circumstances, a military intervention aimed at nipping their weapons program in the bud.

The second Trump administration's early policies towards its long-standing allies may well contribute towards their greater self-sufficiency, but the predictability of the US as a security guarantor now needs to be increasingly reckoned with. Just how much unpredictability with regards to extended nuclear deterrence US allies are comfortable with remains to be seen. The price to pay may be a world with more countries with nuclear weapons, and one that may leave the US with fewer commitments, but at best, no more secure.

New Essay #2 "America's Nuclear Umbrella is Open" by Frank Miller and Eric Edelman: Link:

America's Nuclear Umbrella Is Open and Must Stay Open

MANY EUROPEANS ARE BEGINNING to question (some honestly and some self-servingly) whether the United States' extended nuclear deterrent still provides a shield over its allies. In fairness, this is a time for some transatlantic introspection. That said, it is also a time to be clear-eyed about what can and cannot be accomplished.

First, despite the official statements and pundits' predictions emanating from Europe, there is no indication that the Trump administration is planning to modify the United States' more than seventy-year pledge to use our conventional and nuclear forces to defend NATO. In a February 27 press conference, Trump affirmed his support of NATO's key Article 5, a statement later confirmed to NBC News by a National Security Council official in a written statement that said: "President Trump is committed to NATO and Article V."

Second, there is no European substitute for the U.S. nuclear umbrella. The independent British deterrent, while committed to NATO and coordinated with U.S. forces in NATO plans, is designed principally to impose unacceptable costs on Russia in response to an attack on Britain—and therefore to deter such an attack. But it has always been assumed that the U.K.'s extended deterrence commitments would be supported by much larger and more flexible U.S. forces. As for France, despite recent, repeated posturing by President Emmanuel Macron that the French nuclear deterrent force can assume the role currently played by the United States, the so-called *force de frappe*—by design and by doctrine—is, as French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu stated in late February, "French, and it will remain French." Lecornu has also specifically rejected any pooling of France's nuclear weapons capability. A strategy of "tearing an arm off the aggressor" may have made sense in the Cold War, when American nuclear forces were always the ultimate backstop (or backup), but such a strategy cannot be a substitute for the U.S. defense commitment under Article 5.

NATO, for over sixty years, has followed a policy of "flexible response," planning to deter aggression by threatening to respond as the situation requires. NATO's integrated response plans are developed according to this principle. NATO nations agree on a combined nuclear policy by participating in a variety of NATO forums, especially the Nuclear Planning Group. Some NATO nations have committed their aircraft to carry out wartime missions carrying U.S. nuclear weapons, while those planes (and American ones) are protected by fighters from other NATO states.

From the beginning of its nuclear weapons program, France has refused to take part in coordinated NATO activity involving nuclear weapons policy or planning. (One of the authors of this article was intimately involved in reaching out to the French in this regard for over a decade.) It has disdained joining NATO's nuclear forums, even as an observer. It is notable, in this regard, that even when France returned to the alliance's integrated military structure in 2009, it specifically chose not to join the Nuclear Planning Group. Its nuclear doctrine differs dramatically from NATO's, advertising rigidity rather than flexibility. Even accepting the extremely unlikely hypothetical (for the sake of argument) that French policy would change, it is inconceivable that Paris would share with other allies the burden and risk of its nuclear deterrent, which was entirely predicated on the need to maintain national sovereignty.

Third, the idea that NATO would be strengthened if two or more of its members opted out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to develop their own nuclear weapons is risible. Opening Pandora's box to allow proliferation will create global uncertainties, as European proliferation would almost certainly propel proliferation elsewhere: There is a growing discussion in South Korea about restarting its nuclear weapons program, and the greater Middle East could see a proliferation race among several rival powers. A proliferated world, in which the possibility of the actual use of nuclear weapons is dramatically higher, would be extraordinarily dangerous. Even allowing the argument that the new nuclear states themselves might be more secure against direct coercion and aggression, the rest of Europe would be left in the cold. The American nuclear umbrella has been the most effective nonproliferation policy imaginable.

Finally, the idea that the United States should establish a nuclear weapons site in Poland (at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars) is unlikely to fly with a Trump administration already seeking to cut infrastructure funding. It might even, paradoxically, be more of an accelerant than a deterrent, since it might become a tempting target for Russian pre-emptive strikes in a crisis. If Warsaw desires a nuclear role, it should have some of its pilots join existing NATO dual-capable squadrons.

The answer, however unsatisfactory to those neo-Gaullists seeking to achieve the impossible dream of a French-led Europe, is that every effort must be made to keep the American umbrella in place—and even to strengthen it—in the near term with a nuclear sea-launched cruise missile and in the mid-term with a standoff weapon for NATO's dual-capable aircraft. If the French are serious about strengthening deterrence rather than virtue signaling about the European dimension of their independent deterrent, they should consider how Paris can practically add to NATO's collective nuclear deterrent capabilities. A first step would be to join the Nuclear Planning Group, its subordinate bodies, and the alliance's nuclear planning arrangements."

Congressional Budget Developments

<u>Congress offers defense spending tips after punting on a budget</u>

By: Courtney Albon, Stephen Losey, Jen Judson and Noah Robertson for Defense News //Mar 20, 2025, 10:34 AM

The Republican leaders of the House and Senate appropriations committees have sent the Pentagon detailed plans for how they think it should spend fiscal 2025 funding, following the passage of a six-month stopgap spending bill that largely freezes funding at prior-year levels.

The 181-page document, obtained by Defense News, includes the standard funding tables attached to lawmakers' annual defense spending legislation, which call for cuts to major service-led efforts like the Air Force's drone wingmen program, Army missile procurement and the Space Force's missile warning and tracking satellite architecture. But the FY25 appropriations process has not been standard.

The full-year continuing resolution passed by Congress may lower defense spending, but it also grants the Defense Department far more authority to decide how to spend its budget. Because Congress failed to pass a full FY25 appropriations bill, the plans now sent to the Pentagon are not legally binding, instead serving merely as spending recommendations, according to Todd Harrison, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

"Congress ceded a significant degree of authority to the executive branch in the FY25 defense budget, and they can't get that back by issuing a letter that basically says, 'This is what we intended,'" Harrison told Defense News. "Good luck getting DoD to adhere to this."

Climate change out, lethality' in

Congressional appropriators recommend a $1.2 billion cut from the Army's FY25 request for operations and maintenance FY25 but add an additional $501 million to the service's personnel account to cover pay raises for junior enlisted service members, according to the document. Additional funding — to the tune of $265 million — would bolster Army procurement. Another $248.7 million would be added to RDT&E accounts.

While missiles have flowed from the U.S. to Ukraine and the Army has led the way in replacing and replenishing those munitions, lawmakers are recommending a cut of $247 million in missile procurement. The Army's future missile defense radar — the Lower-Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor, or LTAMDS, is recommended for a $129 million cut. The most capable variant of the Army's Patriot missile would also be cut by $58 million due to a delivery backlog. The delayed Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon program would be cut by $75 million.

Yet Congress is recommending a $100 million increase for the legacy Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS, beyond just the $3.3 million the Army asked for in its FY25 budget as it works to phase the missile out and field the longer-range Precision Strike Missile. Congress proposes a $25 million cut for Prism procurement and another $10 million for the Army's pursuit of a second variant.

Certain vehicles buys would also take a hit if the Army took the congressional recommendations. Lawmakers recommend slashing Armored Multipurpose Vehicle procurement by $134 million. The document contains an increase for the Paladin Integrated Management System by $158 million at a time when the service is looking at exactly how it might modernize its howitzer fleet. Congress also suggests a major funding boost of $248 million for a modular artillery production facility and another $41 million for Army ammunition plant modernization.

Army aviation procurement would be increased as well, to include $240 million for National Guard-bound Gray Eagle unmanned aircraft systems and another $60 million for National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. Lawmakers recommend an injection of cash into Humvee modernization for both the active ($90 million) and reserve forces ($50 million) as well as additional $120 million for the Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles, or FMTV. Congressional appropriators would also add $167 more in funding for the Family of Heavy Tactical Vehicles, or FHTV.

In RDT&E funding, lawmakers cut more than $140 million deemed to be associated with climate change initiatives, including $29.5 million from the Next-Generation Combat Vehicle program and $7.4 million from a “soldier lethality technology” line. They also recommended cuts to all hybrid electric vehicle prototyping efforts in the force. Lawmakers proposed additional funding in technology development areas affiliated with lethality enhancements.

Cuts to future Air Force programs

The document recommends a nearly $3.2 billion spending reduction from the Air Force’s original 2025 budget request. That includes cuts of $2.3 billion from research and development funding, $1.4 billion from operations and maintenance. $130 million from personnel, and nearly $115 million from missile procurement. Aircraft procurement would receive almost $64 million more than originally requested, and “other” procurement programs would see a plus-up of about $679 million.

Lawmakers proposed a $325 million cut to the Next Generation Air Dominance program, which they didn’t justify but simply called a “classified adjustment.” This would bring funding for NGAD — the Air Force’s effort to build a sixth-generation crewed fighter that would fly alongside autonomous drone wingmen and other systems — down to $2.4 billion in FY25. The document also breaks the high-priority drone wingman program, known as Collaborative Combat Aircraft into its own line item but also proposes trimming more than $70 million.

CCAs would have nearly $487 million in funding this year if the document’s funding levels were enacted. Travis Sharp, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments who studies the defense budget, noted that CCA is one of the programs Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has indicated as a priority for funding. “This seems to be a case where mostly everyone agrees that CCA is a promising capability, but they don’t agree with what [that] means in spending terms,” Sharp told Defense News in an email.

Funding for the Air Force’s advanced engine development programs would get another $100 million. This would be apart from the program to build cutting-edge adaptive engines for NGAD — known as next-generation adaptive propulsion, or NGAP — which would retain the original 2025 budget request’s proposed funding of $562 million. The E-7 airborne battle management program would get an overall bump up of $189 million over the 2025 budget request.

This is the Air Force’s program to acquire a fleet of up to 26 of the Boeing-made aircraft, sometimes referred to as the Wedgetail, to replace the aging E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control system, or AWACS, planes. Lawmakers want to strike $50 million in funding proposed in the 2025 budget proposal — called an “unjustified request” — for prototyping the Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile, or HACM. This would leave HACM with nearly $467 million in funding.

Lawmakers would also provide the services with money to buy six more F-35 Joint Strike Fighters than originally requested. The Air Force would get another $196 million to buy two more F-35As, and the Navy would receive another $524 million to buy four more carrier-based F-35Cs. The F-35 program would also get a $10 million bump to improve its power thermal management system. The F-35′s Continuous Capability Development and Delivery, or C2D2, approach to developing, testing and delivering incremental improvements to the fighter will receive more than $1.1 billion in 2025. And the document recommends providing another $200 million for the HH-60W Jolly Green II combat rescue helicopter program to buy two more aircraft than requested.

Space Force missile tracking cuts

The Space Force’s fiscal 2025 funding would drop $700 million under this proposal — a seemingly small decrease presented as the service pushes for its nearly $30 billion budget to triple amid growing threats in orbit. The reductions include $222 million from the service’s operations and maintenance request, $147 million from research and development and an increase of about $1.4 million to its personnel account.

As the Trump administration crafts a plan to develop a homeland missile defense shield composed of advanced space sensors — a project known as “Golden Dome” — lawmakers are proposing cuts to the space-based missile warning and tracking systems that would likely make up the foundation of that system. The proposal includes a $283 million reduction to that layered architecture, including $33 million from the Space Development Agency's low-Earth orbit satellite constellation.

Another $180 million could come from the spacecraft the service is developing to monitor missile threats from geostationary orbit and $170 million from its medium Earth orbit layer. Lawmakers also recommend cutting $246 million from the Space Force's classified procurement account and adding $351 million to its classified development account. While details on those funding lines are largely veiled, a large portion is used to develop counter space weapons and defensive systems.

The document lays out some potential additions for the Space Force, including $30 million for a Resilient Global Positioning System program that's being designed to augment the current GPS fleet. The proposal would also create a new funding line for commercial services, appropriating $40 million in FY25. Lawmakers also suggest an $80 million add to fund additional satellite payload processing capabilities at the Space Force's overtaxed launch ranges. --- About Courtney Albon, Stephen Losey, Jen Judson and Noah Robertson

Economic Developments

Federal revenue is critical to bringing the debt down. If the economy does well, the revenue will climb and lessen the extent to which the Federal Reserve has to borrow to pay for the government. Current annual debt is $2 trillion. The change being sought for the US economy is based on three things: Deregulation, energy production and spending cuts. This essay by Stephen Moore lays out these policy initiatives. It is reprinted here to help our readers understand the connection to bringing not only inflation down but closing the budget gap, which if successful, will free up the necessary funding for the US Department of Defense and the nation's nuclear deterrent. Below is an essay by Stephen Moore on the state of the US economy and the current economic policies of the Administration.

."***Essay #4: From Stephen Moore: Producer Economy Is Winning the Fight Against Inflation***

The economic story of 2025 is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. America's production engine is roaring back to life. February's economic data provided a striking contrast to the narrative of stagnation and uncertainty that has dominated discussions of the U.S. economy in recent weeks. While consumer spending and business sentiment have shown signs of caution, the **industrial and housing sectors tell a different story**—one of expansion, renewed confidence, and a steady ramp-up of supply-side economic activity.

Industrial production surged 0.7 percent in February, blowing past expectations for a 0.2 percent gain. The increase pushed **total industrial output to an all-time high**, surpassing its previous peak from Trump's first term. Manufacturing output rose 0.9 percent, the strongest gain in a year, with a particularly dramatic 8.5 percent surge in auto production. That recovery is no fluke. Motor vehicle and parts output had been declining by an average of 0.5 percent per month in Biden's final year in office. Now, it's roaring back.

Housing construction is also shifting into high gear. Housing starts jumped 11.2 percent in February, rising to an annualized pace of 1.5 million, the highest level in nearly two years and far exceeding economists' expectations of 1.38 million. Single-family home construction surged 11.4 percent to an annualized 1.11 million, the fastest pace since early 2023. After two years of stagnation, **builders are clearly confident enough to ramp up supply**.

That confidence extends beyond housing and manufacturing. Mining output, including oil and natural gas extraction, climbed 2.8 percent, reflecting **renewed investment in U.S. energy production**. The U.S. is now the largest net exporter of natural gas in the world, a position strengthened by Trump's reopening of 625 million acres for offshore drilling, the reversal of Biden's LNG export ban, and the administration's broader push to unleash American energy.

A Structural Shift: From Demand Stimulus to Supply Side Growth

These are not just random data points. They reflect a structural shift in the economy—**from stimulus-driven demand to supply-driven expansion**. The early results are already showing up in inflation data.

Consumer prices cooled in February, with CPI falling to 2.8 percent year-over-year, down from 3.0 percent in January. Core CPI, which strips out food and energy and is often viewed as the best measure of underlying inflation, declined to its lowest level since April 2021. Producer prices, as measured by the PPI, remained flat, while economists had expected a 0.3 percent increase. The trend is clear: **production is expanding, and inflationary pressures are easing** as supply catches up with demand.

The impact on prices is already being felt across key goods and services. **Gas prices have declined nationally** for four straight weeks, with 34 states now seeing averages below $3 per gallon. The price of crude oil has dropped more than 11 percent since Trump took office and is now down over 40 percent from its peak under Biden. One of the starkest examples of this supply-side disinflation is in food prices: egg prices, which hit a record $6.55 per dozen in January, have now fallen nearly 50 percent to $3.45 per dozen, thanks in part to USDA efforts to stabilize the market.

Despite these shifts, much of the media coverage continues to frame this economic acceleration as temporary or artificial. The legacy media reports on Tuesday suggested that the surge in manufacturing and construction is **just a weather-driven rebound**, arguing that an unusually cold January delayed projects that simply resumed in February. But that explanation fails to account for the scale of the expansion. Industrial production is not just recovering—it has now exceeded its previous peak. Single-family home construction has accelerated to its fastest pace in a year. Mining and energy production are growing despite higher interest rates and regulatory constraints that remained in place under Biden.

In any case, the Cold January narrative doesn't explain why the February results exceeded expectations. After all, Wall Street's economists knew January was a harsh month and this was **incorporated in their forecasts**. The results beat what weather alone would have suggested.

The shift in economic conditions is a direct result of policy changes. The previous administration relied on demand-side intervention—subsidies, tax credits, and government spending—while leaving supply-side bottlenecks untouched. That approach produced rising prices, supply shortages, and **an inflationary spiral that proved difficult to contain**. The Trump administration has taken the opposite course, focusing on removing constraints on domestic production, expanding energy output, and creating an environment where builders and manufacturers are willing to ramp up capacity.

Reprivatizing The U.S. Economy

This shift toward production is not happening in isolation—it is part of **a broader effort to reprivatize the American economy** by reducing reliance on government spending and empowering private sector investment. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has been clear about the administration's goal: to transition away from an economy propped up by public-sector job growth and stimulus-driven demand, and toward one **driven by business investment, industrial expansion, and productivity gains**. Bessent has described the economy under the prior administration as "brittle underneath," with nearly all job growth concentrated in government and government-adjacent sectors such as healthcare and education. In contrast, the current trajectory is one where private capital, not federal intervention, fuels growth—a model that strengthens the real economy rather than inflating it artificially.

The data bear this out. The surge in industrial production, manufacturing output, and mining activity reflects a return to real, supply-side economic growth, rather than temporary boosts from government-driven demand. Bessent has acknowledged that this shift will require an adjustment period as the economy detoxes from years of public-sector overexpansion. But the ultimate goal is clear: **a revitalized Producer Economy**, where businesses, not bureaucrats, allocate resources and drive innovation. The early signs—rising factory output, a booming energy sector, and a sharp rebound in home construction—suggest that this transformation is already underway.

The **National Energy Emergency declaration has been one of the most significant policy moves**, unlocking domestic energy production and cutting costs for American families. The Department of Energy's deregulatory efforts have reversed burdensome Biden-era mandates that were set to increase the cost of air conditioners, water heaters, gas stoves, and even light bulbs. In total, deregulation efforts since Trump took office have already saved American consumers an estimated $180 billion, or $2,100 per family of four.

This is not just a shift in policy—it is **a shift in the structure of the U.S. economy itself**. The return to production marks a fundamental departure from the stimulus-fueled, consumption-driven model that defined the past decade. This shift also explains the stock market's recent volatility, as investors recalibrate their portfolios out of the investment strategies built around Biden's unsustainable deficit policies toward the Trump economy.

Jared Woodard of Bank of America recently captured the shift in a note to the bank's clients:

It may take time for private sector job growth to accelerate, for government workers to resettle, for broad-based corporate profits to rise, and for global trade to find a new equilibrium. In our view, the likely productivity gains from a market-based economic reboot are greater than risks; and the risks from the unsustainable status quo of debt financed, tepid, and narrow economic growth are severe.

The story told by February's data is clear: when production expands, prices fall. Supply-driven disinflation is finally bringing relief to consumers after years of elevated costs. The media may continue to search for ways to downplay this shift, but the numbers tell a different story. **The U.S. economy is no longer running on government stimulus** and consumption-driven policies. It is being powered by a return to production, and that is the defining economic shift of 2025.

Proliferation Concerns Rise

A new nuke wave washes over the world

https://www.msn.com/en-us/politics/international-relations/a-new-nuke-wave-washes-over-the-world/ar-AA1Be5RX

By: Colin Demarest for Axios World // 1d

There's an uneasy nuclear weapons future ahead.

The big picture: Decades of order now feel disordered. Proliferation is again a kitchen-table topic; your parents are probably sending you headlines right now. An ascendant China, a trigger-happy Russia and rollercoaster politics in the U.S., among other factors, are prompting conversations of the deadliest stakes. Nukes are no joke. Driving the news: The Federation of American Scientists warned in its latest accounting that Beijing has "significantly expanded" its program by "fielding more types and greater numbers of nuclear weapons than ever before." The effort includes continued development of missile silo fields and bases for road-mobile launchers as well as reassignment of bombers with an air-launched ballistic missile that "might have nuclear capability."

- ***Meanwhile, weapon whispers are heard in:***
- ***France, where President Emmanuel Macron is mulling the reach of his nuclear umbrella.***
- ***Germany, where Friedrich Merz, the soon-to-be chancellor, welcomed discussions about shared arsenals while also acknowledging the heft of U.S. arms.***
- ***Poland, where President Andrzej Duda called on Washington to send some of its weapons into his country — a move that would abbreviate flight times and anger Russia.***

South Korea, where a cocktail of concerns, namely its neighbors, spur repeat conversations. (Gideon Rose, an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said Japan would likely follow Seoul in a piece titled "Get Ready for the Next Nuclear Age.") And it's all everyone's talking about, from large organizations like the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Chatham House to the smaller expert blogs like Strategic Simplicity.

Ukraine Corner

Western allies are trying to hash out a bold European idea: sending 10,000 to 30,000 troops to Ukraine to help enforce any eventual peace deal with Russia.

Essay #3: By Clifford May, founder and President of Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, as provide by the Washington Times.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin may have agreed in principle to a limited ceasefire in Ukraine. But for the U.S. president, it's the next steps that are the most important. Threat Status contributor Clifford D. May argues in a new piece for The Times that dictators in Beijing, Tehran and Pyongyang are all watching the Ukraine-Russia diplomacy as a "test of Mr. Trump's strength" and that the president's actions will shape global affairs for years to come. Mr. May, the founder and president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, lays out what he believes should be a realistic goal for the Trump administration's peace push.

"I don't think Mr. Trump or anyone else can put Russia and Ukraine on a 'path to peace.' Predators don't make peace with their prey. What is achievable is a cessation of hostilities leading to a frozen conflict," he writes. "How long can the conflict remain frozen? The conflict between the two Koreas has been on ice for 72 years, thanks to the United States." "Such an outcome would not represent a victory for justice, but it would be preferable to the bloody status quo," Mr. May says. "If Mr. Trump achieves this, he will deserve plaudits and be able to turn his full energies to the many other foreign policy crises he has inherited from President Biden.

Media Error of the Week

Two writers at the Wall Street Journal appear to be seeking to come to the rescue of an Iranian military proxy. Both complain that taking out the Houthis terrorists who continue to threaten international shipping in and around the Red Sea will get the United States involved in an open-ended conflict, and the kind of endless war the new Administration has pledged to avoid. [See Yemen Strikes Test Trump Vow to Avoid Forever Wars, Wall Street Journal, Mar. 20, Pg. A6| Michael R. Gordon and Nancy A. Youssef.]

I suppose the United States could leave the Houthis alone, let them cripple international shipping to and from the Middle East and drive up the price of ocean-borne freight including oil and gas, or we could take down the Houthis as the Trump administration did ISIS, which the Reagan administration did the USSR and which Bush did kicking Saddam out of Kuwait. A prescription for endless war is seeking to negotiate with such terrorists thinking they have sincere "grievances" to redress. For example: Oslo and the wondrous Middle East Peace Process.

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