

October 31, 2025

Defense This Week

U.S.–Venezuela Tensions Simmer, Pentagon Shutdown Update

Notable Events

- On Tuesday at 9:30 a.m., the Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing to examine the nominations of Austin Dahmer to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities; Robert Kadlec to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical, and Biological Defense Policy and Programs; and Michael Borders to be Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations, and Environment, all of the Department of War/Defense (DOW/DOD).
- On Thursday at 9:30 a.m., the Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing to examine the nominations of Michael Payne to be Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation; Alexander Velez-Green to be Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; Timothy Dill to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; and Maurice Todd to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness, all of the DOW/DOD.

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Weekly Developments

U.S.-Venezuela Tensions Simmer; Trump Says No to Interior Strikes Debate

Over the past almost 2 months, the DOW/DOD has undertaken more than a dozen strikes on Venezuelan vessels deemed as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) that the Administration asserts were transporting illegal narcotics in international waters to the United States. Last Friday, Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell confirmed in a [statement](#) that War/Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had directed the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group and embarked carrier air wing to the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) region. According to Parnell, “*The enhanced U.S. force presence in the USSOUTHCOM AOR will bolster U.S. capacity to detect, monitor, and disrupt illicit actors and activities that compromise the safety and prosperity of the*

United States homeland and our security in the Western Hemisphere. These forces will enhance and augment existing capabilities to disrupt narcotics trafficking and degrade and dismantle TCOs [Transnational Criminal Organizations].”

This upcoming build-up of the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, including the largest aircraft carrier and warship in the world, to the Caribbean has signaled worsening tensions between the U.S. and President Nicolás Maduro’s Venezuela. Reports circulated today that the United States was debating striking inside Venezuela, however Trump [told reporters](#) “No” this afternoon when asked whether his Administration was in the midst of these debates. However, last week Trump said that *“land is going to be next,”* referring to drug targets his Administration had within the Latin American country.

Trump Announces South Korean Nuclear Submarine Construction

After meeting with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in South Korea this week, President Trump [announced](#) on Truth Social that the military alliance between Washington and Seoul is *“stronger than ever before.”* Based on this, Trump said that he has given South Korea *“approval to build a Nuclear Powered Submarine, rather than the old fashioned, and far less nimble, diesel powered Submarines that they have now.”* In a 2nd Truth Social message, the President [wrote](#): *“South Korea will be building its Nuclear Powered Submarine in the Philadelphia Shipyards, right here in the good ol’ U.S.A. Shipbuilding in our Country will soon be making a BIG COMEBACK.”*

South Korean shipbuilder Hanwha Ocean purchased a shipyard in Philadelphia in 2024, the Hanwha Philly Shipyard, and the South Korean government had pledged to invest \$150 billion to restore American shipbuilding capabilities. It is likely that Trump was referring to the Hanwha Philly Shipyard as the location for construction of the nuclear-powered submarine, and Hanwha Chief Strategy Officer Alex Wong is [reported](#) to have said that the business *“stands ready to support with our advanced shipbuilding scale.”* Wong added, *“Through Hanwha Philly Shipyard*

and other investments and partnerships, a revived American shipbuilding sector will benefit U.S. workers, foster prosperity for both the United States and Korea, and enhance our nations' shared security.”

U.S. collaboration with South Korean shipbuilders like Hanwha will be a useful tool in reviving America's sluggish ship industry. The fact that Trump has given a greenlight for collaboration on a nuclear submarine for South Korea shows the close nature of the allies' relationship, as China aims to control the South China Sea region.

Pentagon Shutdown Update

According to a White House official this week, the Trump Administration is preparing to reprogram \$5.3 billion in Pentagon funding in order to pay troops during this government shutdown. This is split between \$2.5 billion that was allocated by *The One Big Beautiful Bill Act* (OBBBA), \$1.4 billion from the Department's procurement funding, and another \$1.4 billion from their research, development, evaluations, and testing account. This is the 2nd time that the White House has reallocated funds to pay servicemembers' salaries, as the President had ordered the DOW/DOD to reprogram \$8 billion on October 15th. The Department indicated more issues due to the funding lapse, as an Air Force spokesperson told reporters this week that the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) and its innovation arm AFWERX have been operating without 80% of their civilian workforce during the shutdown.

On Capitol Hill, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee On Defense Ranking Member Chris Coons (D-DE) introduced “[The Armed Forces Pay Act](#),” which would fund the paychecks of active-duty and reserve troops, civilian workers of the DOW/DOD, the U.S. Coast Guard, and most of the intelligence agencies. This also comes as some Congressional staff have issued complaints that reallocating current funds to pay troops will only complicate future appropriations. However, Senator Coons' call for unanimous consent was denied for this bill, as Senate Majority Leader John

Thune (R-SD) has advocated against using legislation to fund individual parts of the government.

Trump to Restart Nuclear Weapons Testing

On Wednesday, President Trump [posted](#) to Truth Social to announce that he has ordered the DOW/DOD to begin nuclear weapons testing. He said that this decision was due to the growth of foreign nuclear arsenals, writing, “*Russia is second, and China is a distant third, but will be even within 5 years.*” It is unclear what the President meant by nuclear testing, as nuclear explosives testing has not been done by the U.S. since 1992, and no country has conducted an explosion test since 2017, with the last being done by North Korea. However, testing nuclear weapons delivery systems is a routine practice by the U.S. and most other countries with a nuclear arsenal. The DOW/DOD handles delivery systems while the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) under the Department of Energy (DOE) manages the warheads themselves, so it is likely that the President could just be referring to delivery system testing.

The announcement became the main issue discussed at Navy Vice Admiral Richard Correll’s nomination hearing to become the head of the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM), which was conducted by the Senate Armed Services Committee. Responding to a question from Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) that assumed the President was calling for nuclear explosives testing, Correll indicated that he does believe the President’s comments were referring to just nuclear delivery systems. Both Senators Tim Sheehy (R-MT) and Angus King (I-ME) called delivery systems testing “*reasonable.*” But when asked about whether the U.S. should resume explosives testing by Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV), who is concerned since those tests would likely occur at an NNSA facility in Nevada, Correll was not able to commit to a position on the issue.

Sen. Young Says “SHIPS Act” to be Completed Early Next Year

Senator Todd Young (R-IN) told reporters at the *Axios* Future of Defense summit this week that his shipbuilding legislation will most likely be passed by the Senate early next year. “*The Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security for America Act*” (SHIPS Act), which was also sponsored by Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and works to encourage domestic shipbuilding, is currently being discussed in the Senate Commerce Committee with bipartisan support. However, as the Senate works to end the current government shutdown, Senator Young believes the legislation will not be approved until next year. “*I think we’ve laid the groundwork with all of the stakeholders who associated themselves with this bill to make any necessary tweaks and accommodations and get this done by Q1 of next year,*” he said. While there is a chance that “*The SHIPS Act*” could be attached to the fiscal year (FY) 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Young says that this is unlikely. He also mentioned that in accordance with President Trump’s Executive Order entitled “[Restoring America’s Maritime Dominance](#),” the Trump Administration will submit a maritime action plan next week, which should inform some of the upcoming work on his legislation.

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