

By Robert S. Dudley

Buck's Last Blast

"I hope sometime next year a compromise can come to this floor that will end sequestration. ... Remember the great sacrifice our troops are making around the world. ... They take those risks, they make those sacrifices, because of you. They do it for you. They do it for us. For their families, for their flag. For our freedom. And how we have repaid them? With equipment that is falling apart. By laying them off while they're off in war zones. By docking their pay and their medical benefits. By throwing them out of the service and onto a broken economy. ... They never failed us. Not once. So shame on us, if we're unwilling to pay back the debt we owe them. Shame on all of us, from the White House down."—*Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-Calif.), chairman of House Armed Services Committee, farewell address to the House, Dec. 4.*

The Bad New Normal

"I think we are in a new normal, and the new normal is bad. The new normal is not quite the Cold War. ... We're not quite there. But the new normal will be an aggressive, revanchist Russia that seeks to reconstruct a Warsaw Pact-lite around its borders. ... I think it is probably the most significant strategic shift that is underway in the world today."—*Retired Adm. James G. Stavridis, former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, quoted in Military Times, Dec. 2.*

From Out of the Past

"On the back of Ukraine, they [Russians] are more assertive in their behavior. We've seen the instances in the Black Sea flying aircraft at NATO ships; their surface ships have [been] interfering with NATO operations in the Baltic Sea, shadowing and intelligence collection. We've seen a more assertive posture over the past 12 months, behavior we haven't seen for 25 to 30 years [since] the Cold War."—*British Royal Navy Vice Adm. Peter Hudson, head of the NATO maritime mission, quoted in Military Times, Dec. 2.*

Long Nuclear Haul

"We are all on board that the changes need to happen and that it can't be a one-shot deal for one month or one year. Rather, we all have to keep on

it. ... Secretary Hagel predicted—and I think it's a good prediction—that you're going to see even more resources; it will go into the billions of dollars that end up being redirected to the nuclear enterprise, but of course, until it's done, it's not done. So that's why we are continuing to say that we're working on it."—*Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James, on efforts to fix US nuclear forces, Associated Press dispatch, Dec. 2.*

Kill All the Pundits

"During air-focused interventions, it is common for pundits to declare authoritatively—and ultimately incorrectly—that airpower is indecisive, local partners are weak, and victory can only be achieved with US 'boots on the ground.' This was most recently illustrated last month when more than a few experts publicly concluded that the limitations of airpower were being revealed by its apparent failure to stop ISIL from overrunning Kobane—just before air strikes did in fact halt that offensive."—*Karl P. Mueller, RAND Corp. senior political scientist, op-ed in defenseone.com, Nov. 25.*

No Exit

"Presidents propose action, and then reality intervenes. This cycle holds special irony in the case of President Obama. A year ago, it looked like he might end two of the longest wars in US history by the time he left office. As of today, President Obama has involved the United States in five evolving conflicts, and there is little prospect any of them will be over by the time the next president is inaugurated, unless the United States chooses to disengage and lose."—*Anthony H. Cordesman, Center for Strategic and International Studies, essay at csis.org, Dec. 3. He refers to war against Islamists in Afghanistan and Yemen, civil wars in Iraq and Syria, and against ISIS fighters.*

"Only"?

"The United States currently maintains 4,804 nuclear weapons. If you include retired weapons that are awaiting dismantlement and the thousands of components in storage, the United States has the equivalent of around 10,000 weapons. When you consider

that the weapons we maintain today are up to 100 times more destructive than the ones used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it becomes clear that the only value they offer is in deterring a nuclear attack."—*Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), op-ed in Washington Post, Dec. 3.*

Bring Back Testing

"We should get rid of our existing [nuclear] warheads and develop a new warhead that we would test to detonation. We have the worst of all worlds: older weapons and large inventories that we are retaining because we are worried about their reliability."—*Former Deputy Secretary of Defense John J. Hamre, commenting on deterioration of US nuclear weapons and lack of testing since the early 1990s, Los Angeles Times, Nov. 30.*

Nuclear Knees

"In the nuclear issue, America and colonial European countries got together and did their best to bring the Islamic Republic to its knees, but they could not do so—and they will not be able to do so."—*Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, commenting on the failure of nuclear talks with Iran, New York Times, Nov. 25.*

Party Line

"I had them tear it out while I was standing there. I told the commanders, 'If you get a call from the White House, you tell them to go to hell and call me.' ... When a President wants highly centralized control in the White House, at the degree of micromanagement that I'm describing, that's not bureaucratic; that's political."—*Former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, referring to his discovery of a direct telephone line from a military headquarters in Afghanistan to the White House, Associated Press dispatch, Nov. 29.*

It's a Fine Line

"The interesting thing about a nuclear deterrent is that enough of it has to be visible to scare the living daylights out of the enemy, but if you are not careful, you scare the living daylights out of yourself."—*Joe Braddock, Pentagon science advisor and nuclear weapons effects expert, Los Angeles Times, Nov. 30.*