

# MyStratWeekly Market views and strategy

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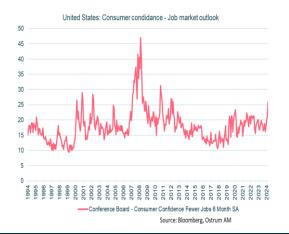
#### Topic of the week: Hawkish Fed mindful of liquidity risks amid debt ceiling challenges by Axel Botte

- The Federal Reserve maintained interest rates at 4.50% in January due to inflation concerns, while discussions at the FOMC meeting indicated a potential slowdown in quantitative tightening (QT) amid debt ceiling uncertainties;
- Despite a hawkish tone from Chair Jerome Powell, the Fed is considering adjusting the pace of QT to avoid adverse effects on economic activity and inflation resulting from fluctuations in bank reserves;
- The Fed's operational guidelines involve rolling over a portion of its Treasury securities and MBS, with significant maturities of nearly \$400 billion due between April and August 2025, coinciding with potential debt ceiling issues;
- Upon a debt-ceiling deal, bank reserves could shrink fast as the Treasury replenishes its cash buffer leading to liquidity challenges in the financial system;
- Slowing QT could lead to a flatter yield curve, providing the Treasury with greater flexibility to manage federal debt. The Fed's future bond reinvestments may focus on shorter maturities to mitigate interest rate risk.

 Market review: Is the U.S. Consumer on the Brink? by Axel Botte

- United States: Consumer confidence erodes as spending plunges in January;
- Eurozone: Inflation is expected to retreat to 2.2% in February;
- Flight to safety: The 10-year Treasury note hovers near 4.25%;
- Risky assets: The credit market resists the Nasdaq's 7% decline this week.

#### Chart of the week



According to a survey conducted by the Conference Board, U.S. households' perceptions of the labor market have significantly deteriorated since Donald Trump took office.

More than 25% of households believe that job availability will decline over the next six months, marking the highest proportion since 2013 when the U.S. job market was still in a sluggish recovery following the Great Financial Crisis of 2008-2009.

The highly publicized layoffs from the Department of Government Enterprises (DOGE) resonate throughout the population, as a notable shift in unemployment claims is already being observed in the Washington, D.C. area.

Figure of the week

0.9

This reflects the level of harmonized inflation in France for February 2025, according to INSEE. The decline in electricity prices, which have dropped by 5.7% year-on-year, significantly contributes to the overall deceleration of consumer prices. Source: Bloomberg

#### **Topic of the week**

## Hawkish Fed mindful of liquidity risks amid debt ceiling challenges

The Fed kept rates unchanged at 4.50% in January on inflation concerns. The FOMC minutes however revealed that policymakers discussed slowing the pace of QT from roughly \$40-45 billion per month as the debt ceiling dynamics may cause unwelcome variations in bank reserves.

#### The Fed considers slowing QT

The latest Fed decision to hold interest rates after three consecutive cuts worth a total of 100 bps reflect lingering concerns about inflation and rising consumers' price expectations. The University of Michigan consumer survey indeed showed that inflation expectations over 1 year or 5 to 10 years moved up significantly in response to tariff announcements (even though only Chinese goods face tariffs at this juncture). To be fair, other household surveys including the New York Fed's consumer survey paint a more benign picture of the price outlook. Still, the Fed may pause its easing cycle until the middle of the year.

With Chair Jerome Powell sounding hawkish at the Fed's press conference, it came as a surprise that slowing the pace of the balance-sheet unwind was discussed at the January FOMC meeting. This is surprising because keeping the price of money (i.e. the interest rate) in check whilst expanding money supply is hard to do in practice. The table below shows that Fed bond holdings declined by \$1.6 trillion since the start of 2023.

Fed Balance Sheets (Wednesday Close) (H.4.1) (USD, Millions)	19-Feb-25	4-Jan-23	Chg
Total Factors Supplying Reserve Funds	6 833 408	8 557 971	
Securities Held Outright	6 471 169	8 101 500	-1 630 331
US Treasuries Securities	4 251 251	5 457 751	-1 206 500
Treasury Bills	195 343	289 338	-93 995
Nominal Notes and Bonds	3 629 177	4 688 163	-1 058 986
Inflation Indexed Notes and Bonds	320 005	377 416	-57 411
Inflation Compensation	106 726	102 833	3 893
Federal Agency Debt	2 347	2 347	0
Mortgage-Backed Securities	2 217 572	2 641 402	-423 830
Unamortized Premiums on Securities Held Outright	245 980	313 543	-67 563
Unamortized Discounts on Securities Held Outright	-24 238	-27 479	3 241
	Source: Bloomberg & Ostrum AN		

ce: Bloomberg & Ostrum AM

In the minutes from the FOMC meeting held on January 28-29, 2025, participants engaged in a thorough discussion about the Federal Reserve's plans for quantitative tightening (QT), emphasizing the need for contingency plans given the current economic uncertainties. The ongoing dynamics surrounding the debt ceiling were a significant concern, with several members expressing that it may be wise to consider pausing or slowing the balance sheet runoff until the debt ceiling situation is resolved. This cautious stance reflects the Committee's awareness of the potential risks that could arise from tighter monetary conditions. In discussing the pace of QT, the Committee considered the potential ramifications of significant swings in reserves resulting from the debt ceiling dynamics. Participants noted that these fluctuations could necessitate a reassessment of the current pace of QT, especially if tightening financial conditions began to adversely impact economic activity and inflation. When the debt ceiling is MyStratWeekly - 03/03/25 - 2

Fed is making contingency plans amid debt ceiling issues

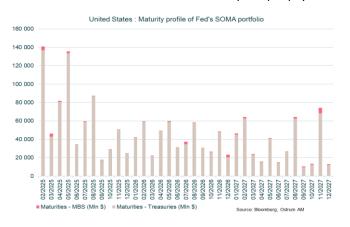
**Slower QT debated** at January FOMC



in effect, the Treasury can no longer borrow to fund its deficit, and must drive down its cash holdings with the Fed and/or use extraordinary measures to keep spending.

#### Fed portfolio: \$400 billion maturities between April and August

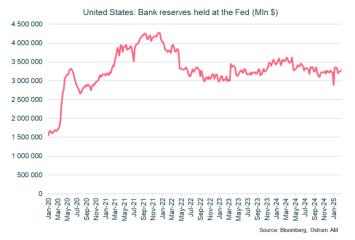
Fed portfolio maturities are large over the coming months The FOMC specifies operational guidelines for managing its securities portfolio as follows. It currently instructs the Federal Reserve Bank of New York to roll over the principal payments from Treasury securities at auction, but only above a monthly cap of \$25 billion. Additionally, the Committee decided to reinvest the principal payments from agency debt and MBS that



exceed a cap of \$35 billion per month into Treasury securities. This strategy is intended to ensure that the composition of the Federal Reserve's portfolio remains consistent with the overall maturity profile of the Treasury debt, while also aiming to minimize disruptions in the financial markets. By reinvesting MBS proceeds into U.S. government bonds

(beyond the theoretical \$35 billion cap that was never binding since QT started), the Fed also aims at rebalancing its portfolio gradually away from mortgages. The decision to modify the pace of QT may depend on the upcoming maturities of the Fed's SOMA portfolio, as shown in the chart. Close to \$400 billion worth of Treasury bonds and MBS held by the Fed will come due between April and August 2025, which covers the period when the U.S. government could default if the debt ceiling is not lifted. The so-called X-date is generally forecasted to fall in early June given the seasonality in the federal deficit in May. There is a case to be made that all maturities should be rolled over during this period. Higher reinvestments will add liquidity to the TGA, buying the Treasury some time to deal with the political deadlock.

The Treasury General Account (TGA) appears on the liabilities side of the balance sheet of the Federal Reserve system. A plunge in the TGA must be compensated by changes in other liabilities including bank reserves or deposits at the Fed's reverse-repo facility, but the net



impact on reserves can be hard to apprehend as the balance sheet shrinks (and money is destroyed). The decline in the TGA will accelerate in April/May with outlays linked to the federal tax refunds to households and the Medicare program. Conversely, when the Treasury's cash buffer is rebuilt upon resolution of the debt limit, bank reserves

might decline quickly and, at the current pace of balance sheet runoff, might potentially reach levels below those viewed by the Committee as appropriate. That bank reserve level may be in

Fed to pay close attention to bank reserves, post debt ceiling deal



the ballpark of \$3 trillion.

Furthermore, there is a risk that one bank counterparty with a dominant position in interbank repo lending markets could squeeze other market participants. This is because reserves are not equally distributed through the financial system. When aggregate liquidity shrinks, some market participants will be affected more than others resulting in tensions on market interest rates.

A decision to roll over all maturities should exert flattening pressure on the yield curve. The Fed buys new securities at auctions with maturities ranging from 2 to 30 years. It would be a surprise if the Fed decided to limit the maturities of new bond purchases, but it could make sense from a balance sheet and reserve management standpoint. Dallas Fed President Lorie Logan indicated that she would favor buying of shorter-dated securities if purchases were to resume. Buying more bills and short-term securities could mitigate the impact on bank reserves when the TGA will be fast replenish. Furthermore, the Federal Reserve does not have to assume duration risk. Swap spreads, or the gap between OIS rates and T-note yields, may widen further as higher reinvestments will exert pressure on coupon securities. Slower QT would give the U.S. Treasury greater flexibility to term out the federal debt, if it chooses to do so. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent appears undecided on this matter but pays a close eye on long-term interest rates.

#### Conclusion

The Fed held interest rates at 4.50 % in January. Tariffs and strong consumer spending into year-end represent upside risks to U.S. inflation in the near term. It thus came as a surprise that slower QT was on the table at the January FOMC. In discussing the pace of QT, the Committee considered the potential ramifications of significant swings in reserves resulting from the debt ceiling dynamics. Upon a debt ceiling deal, bank reserves may shrink fast, which could be compensated by more bond buying from the Fed.

**Axel Botte** 

#### Market review

### Is the U.S. Consumer on the Brink?

Bond yields are plunging amid declining consumer confidence in the United States, undermined by Donald Trump's detrimental tariff policies towards the EU and China. While American and Asian equities wobble, Europe shows resilience. Gold retreats, and cryptocurrencies are in freefall.

The Trump administration's policies are proving harmful to the U.S. economy. A drop in consumer confidence surveys marks a second alarm bell following a downturn in retail sales in January. Households are bracing for a significant deterioration in employment prospects, leading them to curb spending, which fell by 0.5% in volume in January, despite nominal income growth of 0.9% during the same month. Inflation, which had fueled demand at the end of the previous year, is now prompting a precautionary savings approach, particularly as credit quality in sectors like auto loans and credit cards declines. Furthermore, the uncertainty stemming from Trump's erratic statements is weighing heavily on business investment, with capital goods shipments decreasing by 0.3% in January. Investment and employment decisions are closely intertwined for companies, making February's employment report particularly critical this week amidst rising public layoffs. Should the demand slump be confirmed, the tariff policies will likely exert only a transient effect on prices, prompting the Fed to prioritize employment, especially if financial turbulence escalates. In the euro area, inflation may fall to 2.2% in February, influenced by declining electricity prices in France. Negotiated wages are rising at an annual pace exceeding 4%, yet the European Central Bank remains hopeful that wage growth will eventually decelerate, bringing service inflation back down to around 3%.

In this environment, government bonds are favored. The 10-year Treasury note is trading around 4.25% at week's end, down 32 bps since the beginning of the year. The House's passage of an unrealistic budget adding \$3.4 trillion to the federal debt over ten years has had no effect on the downward trend in yields. Markets are once again pricing in three rate cuts in 2025, anticipating that the Fed will respond to the demand slowdown. In Europe, announcements of military budget increases, particularly in Germany and the UK, have limited the weekly decline in long-term rates to about 10 bps while maintaining some pressure on swap spreads. The 10-year Bund is trading 3 bps above the swap rate. Conversely, profit-taking is evident in peripheral sovereign debt after a strong start to the year, as a recent issuance of Spanish Bonos was met with lukewarm reception by the markets. Credit spreads are also widening slightly, suggesting profit-taking at month-end. Euro-denominated credit is trading around 80 bps over swaps. In the high-yield segment, the primary market is a bit sluggish, lacking an issuance premium. The market is losing steam, yet the iTraxx crossover widens by only 6 bps this week to 290 bps.

Equity indices are anxiously awaiting Nvidia's quarterly earnings release. The semiconductor giant continues to show robust growth, yet this is largely priced in, leading to profit-taking instead. The Nasdaq tumbles by 7%, while Chinese and Korean indices, sensitive to global growth and American protectionism, drop between 2% and 4%. European markets are treading water, buoyed by a monetary policy that supports a weak euro. The performance of cyclical stocks is surprising, as bank shares outperform the market by over 10% in 2025.

#### • Main market indicators

2.06% 2.46% 39.9 bp 4.03% 4.25% 21.8 bp 4.57% 1.41% 03-Mar-25 73 bp 110 bp 62 bp 03-Mar-25 1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp 51 bp	-3 -2 +1 -15 -15 -15 -1 +1 -2 1wk (bp) -2 -4 -4 -2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	+3 +8 +5 -22 -31 -9 +9 +13 1m (bp) -1 -1 -3 -2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp) -14	-2 +10 +12 -22 -32 -11 +1 +1 +9 2025 (bp) -10 -5 -5 -8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6 2025 (bp)
39.9 bp   4.03%   4.25%   21.8 bp   4.57%   1.41%   03-Mar-25   73 bp   110 bp   62 bp   03-Mar-25   1.97%   2.49%   3.47%   03-Mar-25   91 bp	+1 -15 -15 -1 +1 -2 1wk (bp) -2 -4 -2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	+5 -22 -31 -9 +9 +13 1m (bp) -1 -3 -2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	+12 -22 -32 -11 +1 +9 2025 (bp) -10 -5 -8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
4.03% 4.25% 21.8 bp 4.57% 1.41% 03-Mar-25 73 bp 110 bp 62 bp 03-Mar-25 1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-15 -15 -1 +1 -2 1wk (bp) -2 -4 -4 -2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-22 -31 -9 +9 +13 1m (bp) -1 -3 -2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -9 -14 1m (bp)	-22 -32 -11 +1 +9 2025 (bp) -10 -5 -5 -8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
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21.8 bp   4.57%   1.41%   03-Mar-25   73 bp   110 bp   62 bp   03-Mar-25   1.97%   2.49%   3.47%   03-Mar-25   91 bp	-1 +1 -2 1wk (bp) -2 -4 -2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-9 +9 +13 1m (bp) -1 -3 -2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	-11 +1 +9 2025 (bp) -10 -5 -8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
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73 bp 110 bp 62 bp 03-Mar-25 1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-2 -4 -2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-1 -3 -2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	-10 -5 -8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
110 bp 62 bp 03-Mar-25 1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-4 -2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-3 -2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	-5 -8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
62 bp 03-Mar-25 1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-2 1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-2 1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	-8 2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
03-Mar-25 1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	1wk (bp) -1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	1m (bp) -6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	2025 (bp) +4 +3 -6
1.97% 2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-1 -7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-6 -9 -14 1m (bp)	+4 +3 -6
2.49% 3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-7 -6 1wk (bp) +4	-9 -14 1m (bp)	+3 -6
3.47% 03-Mar-25 91 bp	-6 1wk (bp) +4	-14 1m (bp)	-6
03-Mar-25 91 bp	1wk (bp) +4	1m (bp)	
91 bp	+4		2025 (bp)
•		-4	
51 bp			-11
	-1	-5	-11
46 bp	-1	-5	-10
297 bp	+3	-15	-21
03-Mar-25	1wk (bp)	1m (bp)	2025 (bp)
53 bp	+0	-2	-4
286 bp	0	-9	-27
49 bp	+1	+0	0
310 bp	+9	+7	-2
03-Mar-25	1wk (bp)	1m (bp)	2025 (bp)
328 bp	+8	+7	+3
03-Mar-25	1wk (%)	1m (%)	2025 (%)
\$1.044	-0.296	1.576	0.9
\$1.264	0.016	2.001	1.0
JPY 150	-0.598	2.778	4.6
03-Mar-25	-1wk (\$)	-1m (\$)	2025 (%)
\$72.5	-\$1.8	-\$2.6	-1.8
\$2 869.8	-\$73.6	\$52.6	9.4
03-Mar-25	-1wk (%)	-1m (%)	2025 (%)
5 955	-0.98	-0.67	1.2
5 487	0.62	5.17	12.1
8 141	0.62	3.64	10.3
37 785	-2.56	-1.91	-5.3
3 317	-1.66	2.04	-1.0
19.79	4.27	6.28	14.1
	03-Mar-25 53 bp 286 bp 49 bp 310 bp 03-Mar-25 328 bp 03-Mar-25 \$1.044 \$1.264 JPY 150 03-Mar-25 \$72.5 \$2 869.8 03-Mar-25 5 955 5 487 8 141 37 785 3 317	03-Mar-25   1wk (bp)     53 bp   +0     286 bp   0     49 bp   +1     310 bp   +9     03-Mar-25   1wk (bp)     328 bp   +8     03-Mar-25   1wk (bp)     328 bp   +8     03-Mar-25   1wk (%)     \$1.044   -0.296     \$1.264   0.016     JPY 150   -0.598     03-Mar-25   -1wk (%)     \$72.5   -\$1.8     \$2 869.8   -\$73.6     03-Mar-25   -1wk (%)     \$ 955   -0.98     5 487   0.62     8 141   0.62     3 7785   -2.56     3 317   -1.66	03-Mar-25   1wk (bp)   1m (bp)     53 bp   +0   -2     286 bp   0   -9     49 bp   +1   +0     310 bp   +9   +7     03-Mar-25   1wk (bp)   1m (bp)     328 bp   +8   +7     03-Mar-25   1wk (bp)   1m (bp)     328 bp   +8   +7     03-Mar-25   1wk (%)   1m (%)     \$1.044   -0.296   1.576     \$1.264   0.016   2.001     JPY 150   -0.598   2.778     03-Mar-25   -1wk (\$)   -1m (\$)     \$72.5   -\$1.8   -\$2.6     \$2 869.8   -\$73.6   \$52.6     03-Mar-25   -1wk (%)   -1m (\$)     \$75.5   -0.98   -0.67     \$ 5487   0.62   5.17     8 141   0.62   3.64     37 785   -2.56   -1.91     3 317   -1.66   2.04



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