

The First 100 Days of Donald Trump's Presidency in Military Terms

A Russian Perspective

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Global Research, April 30, 2017

[Oriental Review](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

April 29 marks the 100th day in office of Donald Trump – a man who, unlike many of his predecessors in recent decades, lacks any practical experience serving in the government's executive or legislative branches, or even in the military.

This 45th US president – whose bid for office was supported by military officials and lobbyists for the military-industrial complex who are focused on shoring up “American supremacy” over all other countries – has managed during this short period to either resolve or demonstrate the readiness to resolve the following military and political challenges.

Both the bold platitude of “Peace Through Strength” as well as the strategy of building up the might of the military-industrial complex have been endorsed. That second component would allow the US military to “[successfully fight two-and-a-half wars at the same time](#),” even if those were against two major nuclear powers (in this context, Russia and China), plus one regional war (as in Iraq or Afghanistan) anywhere else on the globe.

Donald Trump has promised to increase the military budget, spending more on nuclear missiles in particular. And he will increase that budget. Updates to the classical, strategic nuclear triad as well as to tactical nuclear weapons continue, some of which are positioned very close to the borders of Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and a number of other states.



The key concepts underlying America's nuclear doctrine will remain unchanged: its “offensive, unconditional nuclear deterrence strategy” will be preserved as a core element, as will the country's readiness to inflict a first nuclear strike. An important related component will also be maintained – the strategy of “extended nuclear deterrence,” premised on the unfurling of the American “nuclear umbrella” over the 27 US NATO allies and four of their non-NATO allies (Australia, Israel, South Korea, and Japan). There will be no changes to the programs that dispatch American strategic aircraft on patrols through the airspaces of various countries or those that send missile-carrying nuclear submarines and attack submarines – as well as submarines equipped with long-range cruise missiles – prowling through the Pacific Ocean.

There is no doubt that the Pentagon will retain and soon replace America's tactical nuclear weapons that are currently stashed in four countries on the European continent (Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany), as well as in the Asian portion of Turkey, by upgrading to more up-to-date models – like the variable-yield [B61-12 nuclear bomb](#).

Nor will there be an end to the [Baltic Air Policing patrols](#) that have been flown over the skies of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia 24/7, year-round since March 2004 by the air forces of fifteen NATO member countries, using “dual-capable” aircraft that can carry either conventional or nuclear weapons. The air forces of all three Western nuclear powers have taken part in this operation.

The recent sharp deterioration in the political and military relations between Washington and Pyongyang has made the current US administration more anxious to fortify its [missile-defense shield on Korean peninsula](#), not yet completed when the new president took office on Jan. 20. The program to deploy this anti-missile defense system on a global scale will continue beyond the year 2022, as per the Obama administration’s adjusted time frame, and even beyond the years 2041-2042, i.e., after one-third of the US fleet (as many as 90 cruisers and destroyers) have been equipped with the Aegis command-and-control weapons system.



South Korean protesters shouting slogans as an advanced U.S. missile THAAD defense system is being installed at their location, April 2017

In violation of the [1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#), the new Republican administration continues its construction of an American missile-defense complex in the town of Redzikowo, in northern Poland. Launch installations will be based there, for not only defensive interceptor missiles but also offensive strike weapons, i.e., high-precision, land-based, extended-range cruise missiles. It should also be kept in mind that under the terms of the US-Polish agreement governing the establishment of such a base of operations, the “launch” button will be kept solely in the hands of American military commanders. As we know, Barack Obama [placed a similar complex on alert](#) at the Romanian air base in Deveselu last May.

The Pentagon also continues to violate the provisions of the 1987 treaty when testing interceptor missiles by using those missiles as targets.

Donald Trump has in no way curtailed the program to deploy American offensive weapons in outer space, and the nature of that program would even preclude the Pentagon from working in tandem with its closest NATO allies.

The new White House boss intends to beef up the US military’s general purpose forces, which are tasked with operating far outside that country’s borders, in “forward-deployed” zones. The main issues center around: the preservation of carrier strike groups; the continuation of the program to boost the potential capacity for transcontinental, strategic redeployments of armed forces and weapons with the help of the air force and navy; the increase in the number of amphibious assault ships and “green-water” ships; and the ramped up anti-submarine and anti-mine activity in remote, plausible theaters of combat, such as in Europe and its adjacent offshore zones, in the Middle East, in the northwestern Indian Ocean and around the Persian Gulf, in the Asia-Pacific region, and also in the Arctic.

This may mean that Donald Trump has no intention whatsoever of limiting himself to his country’s domestic political issues and, [contrary to his promises during his marathon campaign](#), will not forgo attempts to “meddle in the affairs of other states.” On the

contrary, under his political and military leadership, American armed forces will continue to strengthen their hand in various parts of the globe and “demonstrate the might of US military power.” Washington is about to preserve the extensive logistics infrastructure and footprint of its military in every strategically significant region of the world.

Earlier this month the US Navy [launched a Tomahawk strike](#) from the eastern Mediterranean against a military airfield in Syria without the sanction of either the Syrian leadership, the UN Security Council, or even its own Congress. Besides the recently [announced plan](#) to make the newly deployed THAAD systems “operational within days”, the US navy has concentrated [three aircraft carrier groups in the waters just off North Korea](#) – clearly an excessive number. Moreover, the Pentagon [dropped a massive bomb on Afghanistan](#) just this month. These are all clear signs of the willingness of the White House’s new administration to flex its military might outside the American continent.



These actions revealed character traits within Donald Trump such as his resolve to act despite the constraints placed upon him by circumstances, his inconsistent decision-making that often veers away from previously stated positions, and also his unwavering narcissism. His undue faith in the “America First” adage and in “American exceptionalism” when it comes to military matters could prove detrimental to the US.

The new president has backed down from his earlier criticisms and negative assessments of NATO. Intent on unearthing the sizable chunk of cash he’ll need in order to update the nation’s strategic nuclear-missile forces (as much as \$400 billion in the next decade), he has set his sights on reducing the US share of the transatlantic military pact’s consolidated military budget – according to Donald Trump the US shoulders as much as 80% – and he has also emphatically demanded that other NATO members lift the ceiling on their contributions to meet the target of 2% of their GDP.

The alliance’s next summit, which Donald Trump is scheduled to attend in late May in Brussels, will reaffirm NATO’s readiness to use military force at Washington’s urging, “anywhere and everywhere” outside the borders of the alliance’s member states. The planned forum will retain its commitment to the decisions made at the bloc’s three previous summits regarding the existence and preservation of the “Chicago triad” – a quick strike force that includes nuclear, anti-ballistic, and conventional weapons, many of which will remain “forward deployed” against Russia and China. The resulting documents from this upcoming top-level meeting, where the 45th US president will be calling the tune, will once again contain a skewed assessment of the current military and political picture, both throughout the world and regionally, and will include propaganda and defamatory clichés and multidimensional anti-Russian and anti-Chinese rhetoric.

In the three months since his inauguration, President Donald Trump has unfortunately not been able to articulate a single, coherent description of his ideas – or even a rudimentary outline of them – about how to address the vast, multifaceted problem of arms control, an issue that previous US administrations have stymied many efforts to resolve. The new president has not evinced any clear and unambiguous interest in applying the principle of equality and equivalent security to the resolution of global problems related to the surfeit of weaponry and wide-scale military activities. He has thus far been unable to draft a more constructive version of the Nuclear Posture Review or the Nuclear Weapons Employment Strategy – America’s key strategic military directives governing nuclear missiles. He has

thus far not even roughed out any approximation of a plan to effectively maintain global stability, nor a way to cut short the second phase of the Cold War that was artificially triggered by NATO's leading members and spearheaded by the United States even before Donald Trump took office. Hints made by his official and unofficial representatives in regard to the selective resolution of arms-control issues – in isolation from solutions to other problems that directly affect the world's strategic stability – cannot be viewed as practical or constructive approaches.

Aggravating these facts of life is the deep degree of mistrust between Washington and Moscow, which the Americans spawned and have continued to nurse. A vicious circle has emerged in the interrelationship between weapons and trust, which was described by another Republican president named Ronald Reagan: *"Nations do not distrust each other because they are armed. They arm themselves because they distrust each other."*

Clearly such an irrational phenomenon cannot go on indefinitely.

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