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## **Donald Trump's Nuclear Strategy: First Outlines**

*V. Kozin*

U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP has inherited large strategic and tactical nuclear arsenals from his predecessor, Barack Obama, and a strategy of “unconditional offensive nuclear deterrence,” which allows for the possibility of a preemptive nuclear strike against practically any country that is not an ally, friend or partner of the United States.

### **The Rich Legacy**

AS OF SEPTEMBER 1, 2016, the U.S. strategic nuclear forces consisted of 681 weapon delivery vehicles – intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched strategic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy strategic bombers – that had 1,367 nuclear warheads installed on them. Russia possessed 508 strategic delivery vehicles with 1,796 nuclear warheads. Specifically, the U.S. strategic nuclear triad was comprised of 416 Minuteman III ISBMs, 209 Trident II SLBMs, and 56 heavy strategic bombers – ten Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit and 46 Boeing B-52 Stratofortress aircraft.

These figures fail, however, to draw an accurate picture of the power of the U.S. nuclear forces. They don't include air-launched cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads. Nor do they include nuclear bombs that B-2A and B-52 aircraft can carry since, under accepted statistical rules, each bomber of either kind is counted as a single strategic armaments unit regardless of how many nuclear bombs it can carry.

In January 2017, outgoing Vice President Joe Biden announced that, as of September 30, 2016, the United States possessed a total of 4,018 deployed and undeployed strategic and tactical warheads that were in service “and approximately 2,800 in line to be destroyed.”

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**Vladimir Kozin**, Professor, Chief Adviser to the Director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies; [Vladimir.kozin.riss@yandex.ru](mailto:Vladimir.kozin.riss@yandex.ru)

The Obama administration drew up and launched a program to create a qualitatively new strategic triad. This program was to be started by building heavy bombers. Within the next 15 years, the United States is going to manufacture new heavy bombers of the Northrop Grumman B-21 Raider type, which is sometimes unofficially called B-3. The B-21s are due to be in service from 2025 to between 2075 and 2080. Altogether between 80 and 100 B-21s are to be built. There will also be new ICBMs of the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) class, which is referred to as Minuteman IV for simplicity's sake. GBSDs would be in service from 2029 to 2080 and increase in number to between 400 and 420.

Intensive design work is underway on Columbia-class "experimental" nuclear submarines, which would be armed with nuclear missiles and begin to be put in service in 2028. Altogether 12 submarines of this class are to be built. Each would carry 18 SLBMs.

As a result of this overhaul of the triad, the United States may acquire up to 692 essentially new delivery vehicles by the mid-21st century, excluding long-range air-launched nuclear cruise missiles.

According to former defense secretary Ash Carter, this reform was expected to have a budget of \$500 billion. However, nongovernmental American experts predicted that between \$800 billion and \$1 trillion would be allocated for the project.

Trump, immediately after taking office, revealed a plan to continue to modernize both the strategic and the tactical nuclear forces. According to an announcement made in Congress in mid-February, \$400 billion is to be spent on this modernization. Obama had planned a budget of \$348 billion – 15% less – for this purpose for the period from 2015 to 2025.

Forty-seven percent of the \$400-billion sum or \$188 billion would be spent on the strategic and 2% or \$8 billion on the tactical forces. The rest of the money would go into financing laboratories designing new nuclear weapons, into developing command and control systems for the nuclear forces, and into modernizing missile early warning systems.

Trump has inherited four types of B61 tactical nuclear bombs, whose number is not disclosed. U.S. experts believe that the United States possesses several thousand B61 bombs, some of which are deployed in four European countries – Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany – and in the Asian part of Turkey.

A new-generation modification of the B61 has been designed, called the B61-12. It is a guided precision nuclear bomb. The Obama administration was determined to organize its mass production by 2020 or earlier.

er. The new bomb is to replace the current four B61 types. Tests of the first- and second-strike B61-12's that were finished in October 2015 opened the door to their mass production. The B61-12 can be used both as a strategic and as a tactical weapon. It is to be carried by Lockheed Martin F-35A and F-35C fighter-bombers, which are to remain in service until 2075, and by above-mentioned B-21's. During Obama's presidency, the Pentagon announced it would seek the allocation of a maximum of \$65 billion, or even more, for the manufacture of B61-12 bombs for the next two decades.

Obama made insignificant changes to the U.S. nuclear doctrine. He announced that the United States would not use nuclear weapons against cities but with the reservation that this would only apply to non-nuclear conflicts. During his presidency, the United States pledged not to use nuclear weapons against Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty (NPT) signatory states that were in full compliance with the treaty, but Obama did not specify which international body would be authorized to verify whether all such states honored the pact. His administration assumed that such verification should be the mission of Washington rather than any international body, say the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Obama left behind an extensive negative nuclear policy record. The 44th president left over to Trump 15 unsolved problems to deal with, primarily the nuclear deterrence doctrine, the increased American military presence in Europe and Asia, initial stages in the deployment of the planned global layered missile defense, and modernization programs for the strategic and tactical nuclear missile forces. Had Hillary Clinton won the presidential election, solutions would have been put off indefinitely. She would even have gone further than Obama in nuclear rearmament, according to an article that appeared on October 28, 2016 in *The New York Times*, an openly pro-Democratic daily.

While verbally championing a nuclear-free world, Obama carried out

Russia should by no means cut its strategic nuclear forces any further. Some of these forces have been designed to overcome the American missile defense system, which is expanding uncontrollably; this expansion is dangerous and may set off a missile defense arms race.

much smaller reductions of the United States' stockpiles of nuclear warheads than his three immediate predecessors. He cut them by 10% while George Bush Sr slashed them by 41%, Bill Clinton by 22%, and George Bush Jr by 50%. Obama disposed of 507 warheads while Republicans George Bush Sr and George Bush Jr got rid of 29 times as many – 14,801.

The Obama administration spent more money on modernizing the United States' nuclear arms and developing new-generation delivery systems than any of the previous U.S. administrations, though in a speech at Hankook University of Foreign Studies in Seoul in March 2012 Obama said that the United States possessed more nuclear weapons than it needed. Obama urged his successor not to adopt a minimal nuclear deterrence strategy. He never replaced the doctrine of mutual assured destruction with a more constructive mutual assured security doctrine. He also refused to adopt a no-first-use strategy.

The 44th president turned down proposals from numerous American civilian and military experts for lowering the alert status of the U.S. nuclear forces. He didn't set up a system for counting undeployed but deployable nuclear weapons, which make up a significant proportion of the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal and would enable the United States to quickly boost its nuclear potential.

During Obama's presidency, wide-scale discussions began in U.S. political and military circles on the possibility of a limited nuclear war as a means of de-escalating a non-nuclear conflict. Debates also started on proposals for the combat use of "suitcase nuclear devices" ("mini-nukes"), and military exercises were held that began as conventional forces maneuvers but later involved tests of nuclear weapons.

Senior officials in the Obama administration openly called for a balance between nuclear deterrence and escalation and for a policy of combined nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence. Some senior U.S. officials even suggested limited use of nuclear weapons. Senior civilian officials were authorized to take part in nuclear decision-making and were involved in command post exercises. The Obama administration effectively refused to comply with the 2000 Russian-U.S. agreement on the disposition of excess weapons-grade plutonium, as a result of which Moscow suspended the accord. Under the agreement, each country had pledged to dispose of 34 tonnes of plutonium that was believed to be no longer required for military purposes though, according to the United Press International news agency, would have been sufficient for making 17,000 nuclear warheads.

Will Trump stick to the nuclear legacy of his predecessor or take another route? There is no clear answer yet to this fundamental and multifaceted question. Why?

### **Trump's Military Policy: First Outlines**

UNTIL NOW, Trump has made rather few statements about the United States' future nuclear policy. He made most of them before the presidential election, mainly in Republican Platform 2016, the Republican election manifesto, of which he was one of the authors, and in some of his interviews. Republican Platform 2016 is so far the only detailed document setting out what appear to have become the priorities of Trump's military policy and strategy.

The platform states the Republican Party's principles for the organization and use of the armed forces. "The Republican Party is committed to rebuilding the U.S. military into the strongest on earth, with vast superiority over any other nation or group of nations in the world," it says. It reiterates a task set by former Republican president Ronald Reagan – "we need a Reagan-era force that can fight and win two-and-one-half wars ranging from counterterrorism to deterring major power aggressors."

The platform, which underlies the entire military policy of the United States, at least for Trump's first presidential term, includes the "peace through strength" formula, a principle that, according to some of his closest aides, Trump has been espousing for a long time. America First Foreign Policy, the foreign policy program posted on the White House website, says in part, "Peace through strength will be at the center of that foreign policy."

The platform criticizes the state of the U.S. strategic nuclear forces and insists on the modernization of the country's traditional classic strategic nuclear triad. It attacks New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), a Russian-American agreement of 2010 that "has allowed Russia to build up its nuclear arsenal while reducing ours" and is "so weak in verification and definitions that it is virtually impossible to prove a violation." Trump launched a new attack on New START in an interview with Reuters on February 23, 2017, branding it as "a one-sided deal" advantageous to Russia. As Obama, Trump accused Russia of departing from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty by allegedly developing a new cruise missile. But, as his predecessor, he provided no evidence of this.

Trump and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis have called for the modernization of the U.S. strategic nuclear forces. Trump said on Twitter on December 22, 2016: "The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes." Mika Brzezinski, a host on the MSNBC news television network, quoted Trump as saying the same month: "Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all." Soon after that, Trump's press secretary, Sean Spicer, interpreted this statement as a warning to other nations not to seek to undermine the United States' sovereignty.

At the same time, in one of his pre-election interviews, Trump said that his administration would be prepared to sign a legally binding agreement with Russia under which each country would pledge not to be the first to use a nuclear weapon against the other. During a hearing in Congress in January, Mattis said that the administration would like to hammer out a policy that would rule out the possibility of the United States ever using nuclear weapons. He questioned an initiative by the Obama administration to make a new air-launched nuclear cruise missile. The Obama administration wanted between 1,000 and 1,100 such missiles to be made. In his interview with Reuters on February 23, Trump said that he wanted the world to be nuclear-free but didn't say how long, even approximately, he would expect complete global nuclear disarmament to take. Obama had also called for a nuclear-free world in 2009 but hadn't suggested any timeframe either.

Trump's military policy is under heavy pressure from the Democratic Party. Two days before Trump's inauguration, two Democratic lawmakers, Senator Edward Markey and Representative Ted Lieu, introduced a bill to prohibit the new president from ordering a preemptive nuclear strike against anyone before the declaration of war by Congress. Markey and Lieu claimed that, during his election campaign, Trump had made contradictory statements on proliferation and on the first-strike issue. Before taking office, Trump did say that he would never order a preemptive nuclear strike but added that he would be prepared to use any of the resources offered by the United States' nuclear status. In October 2016, ten former nuclear launch control officers wrote an open letter asking for Trump to be denied access to the country's nuclear launch codes because of his alleged incompetence.

As of March 1, 2017, there remained a whole range of aspects of the United States' extensive and multifaceted nuclear policy that Trump still

hadn't got down to despite North Korean nuclear missile tests in 2016 and the political and military antagonism of India and Pakistan, both of which are nuclear powers. (Obama had spoken on those issues frequently.)

For this reason, on January 26, 2017, the Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* set the symbolic Doomsday Clock on the homepage of the magazine's website at two and a half minutes to the "catastrophic" midnight instead of three minutes as had been the case before Trump was sworn in as president.

Trump has neither expressed support for nor modified Obama's proposal for an agreement with Moscow to further reduce the American and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals by about one third from levels set by New START, which was signed in Prague in April 2010. Under New START, each country was to bring its number of nuclear warheads to 1,550 and its number of deployed delivery vehicles to 700 by 2018. Trump has proposed no other reduction options yet. After taking office, he has just said that he is open to an agreement with Moscow to substantially reduce nuclear stockpiles in exchange for lifting some of the economic sanctions against Russia. Moscow has turned down the idea at official and expert level because of the unequal terms suggested by Trump.

When Clinton said during a televised election campaign debate with Trump in October 2016 that the main threat to the world was global warming, the Republican candidate responded that it was "nuclear global warming" that was the world's number-one menace, apparently referring to nuclear weapons buildups by many countries.

Trump avoids withdrawing American tactical nuclear warheads deployed in four European countries and the Asian part of Turkey to the continental United States, something that Russia has insisted on for a long time. Moscow pulled all former Soviet tactical nuclear weapons from Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine to Russian territory by the mid-1990s. General Mattis advocates sales of Lockheed Martin F-35C fighter-bombers, which can carry nuclear bombs, to European member states of NATO. The Pentagon sticks to an "extended nuclear deterrence" strategy, which involves bringing 32 countries that are allies of the United States under an American nuclear umbrella. Some of these countries are members of NATO and some are not. Trump has pledged to comply with "nuclear sharing" arrangements (agreements on joint nuclear missions) with NATO member countries having no nuclear weapons of their own.

The 45th president hasn't stated his position on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a document the Senate refused to rati-



fy in 1999. Obama repeatedly promised to put the CTBT through Congress, but in his eight years of presidency he didn't even try to. The CTBT is an extremely important treaty. The United States is one of the 44 nations whose ratification of the CTBT is mandatory for the accord to come into force. The treaty can't take effect if it hasn't been ratified by at least one of them. As a result, this cornerstone nonproliferation document has been in limbo for more than 30 years. Russia ratified it back in 2000.

Will the United States resume full-scale compliance with the plutonium agreement of 2000 during Trump's presidency? His position on this accord will be a litmus test – will his administration accumulate excess weapons-grade plutonium in a bid to make nuclear warheads?

Trump has not announced whether he will stick to the “Chicago triad,” a war mechanism created at a NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012 – a trans-Atlantic group of nuclear, missile defense and conventional forces to be deployed near Russian borders. Nor has he evinced any desire to initiate the termination of Baltic Air Policing, an anti-Russian and anti-Belarusian NATO mission in which the air forces of 15 of NATO's 28 member states have been patrolling and monitoring the airspace over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 24 hours a day all year round since 2004. The patrolling aircraft include British, U.S. and French planes that can carry nuclear as well as conventional bombs.

Trump has repeatedly slammed the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, often calling it the “worst deal ever negotiated,” but has shown no intention to seek its renegotiation.

Neither has he shown any desire to end the policy of blocking a proposal by some Arab and other states for creating a zone in the Middle East free from all three classical types of weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical and biological. Previous U.S. administrations constantly torpedoed the proposal.

Summing up, the new president's nuclear creed needs clarification. Sooner or later, he will have to make clear whether he wants his country's nuclear stockpiles to be enlarged or reduced. Most likely, at some point he will initiate some changes to two documents underlying the United States' nuclear policy – the Nuclear Posture Review and U.S. Nuclear Employment Strategy.

In an executive order of January 27, Trump directed Mattis to “initiate a new Nuclear Posture Review to ensure that the United States nuclear deterrent is modern, robust, flexible, resilient, ready, and appropriately tailored to deter 21st-century threats and reassure our allies.” This effec-

tively means a task to modernize the nuclear forces and make them more efficient.

### **Will Trump Agree?**

RUSSIA should come up with some practical armaments control proposals without waiting for Trump to clarify his position. Moscow should seek no-first-use treaties with the United States and other nuclear member countries of NATO or treaties completely banning the use of nuclear weapons. These should be legally binding documents with no expiration dates. It would, however, be the wrong decision for Russia to agree to the extension of New START or to signing an updated bilateral START because of the uncontrolled deployment of the global missile defense and the modernization of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons deployed near Russian borders. New START is the last bilateral deal that made sense for Russia to enter. All nuclear countries, especially Britain and France as allies of the United States with mutual commitments concerning strategic nuclear forces, should become involved in nuclear arms control negotiations. Russia should by no means cut its strategic nuclear forces any further. Some of these forces have been designed to overcome the American missile defense system, which is expanding uncontrollably; this expansion is dangerous and may set off a missile defense arms race.

Moscow should, moreover, protest the counting system where one heavy strategic bomber is considered a single unit of strategic nuclear armaments regardless of how many bombs it can carry.

Other key issues for Russia to work on are the development by the United States of conventional long-range precision weapons, Washington's opposition to proposals for banning the deployment of weapons in outer space, lack of progress in the United States toward CTBT ratification, and uncontrolled and increasing imbalances between conventional arsenals.

Russia should propose a restrictive multilateral treaty on missile defenses, an agreement that would set range limits for missile interceptors and delineate deployment areas for them outside the territory of the state they belong to. Moscow should reiterate its demands that the United States and its allies withdraw all their forces, especially heavy armaments, and new command facilities from European countries where they were deployed after April 1, 2014.

In putting forward such proposals, Moscow should stress that it is

against nuclear war on any scale – limited, regional or global. At a meeting in Sochi in October 2016 of the Valdai Discussion Club, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a firm promise that Russia would always take its nuclear status very responsibly. He said that nuclear saber-rattling was “a despicable thing to do,” and that the use of nuclear weapons would mean an end to world civilization.

In a telephone call on January 28, Putin and Trump spoke about strategic stability and nonproliferation among various bilateral and international issues and agreed to organize cooperation on these and other problems. This cooperation would be very important from the viewpoint of global peace and security. The Doomsday Clock of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, which has got so close to a critical point since it was designed 70 years ago, must be turned back.

*Key words:* strategic nuclear forces, nuclear triad, Donald Trump, New START, Democratic Party, Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), long-range precision weapons.