
RUSSIA

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Andrey Baklitskiy reports from Moscow:

THE 2018 NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW AND RUSSIA'S POSITION.
EXPRESS ANALYSIS

SUMMARY

On February 2, the US new nuclear doctrine was announced. The US new Nuclear Posture Review increases the importance of nuclear weapons in military planning and involves the development of new types of nuclear weapons. At the same time, it allows for the extension of the START Treaty and conclusion of new agreements with Russia in the field of arms control.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has already pointed to the "confrontational charge and anti-Russian orientation of this document". PIR Center consultant Andrey Baklitskiy examines the main provisions of "the nuclear strategy of the Trump era" and finds out not only risks, but also positive aspects for Russia.

Speaking at a meeting with his defense and security chiefs in July 2017, President Trump announced his plans for an almost tenfold increase of the US nuclear arsenal. The statement, which was leaked to NBC by unnamed sources present at the meeting, came as a response to a graph showing a steady reduction of the US nuclear forces since the late 1960s. The people present at the meeting were somewhat taken aback - but they did manage to explain to Trump the legal and economic difficulties his plans would run into, and to demonstrate to him that the US military power and security have actually increased in recent decades.

The story is a perfect illustration of the complexity of formulating a new US nuclear policy under the new administration. Like his predecessors, Trump has ordered the Pentagon to draw up an updated Nuclear Posture Review, which outlines the administration's vision of the role, size, and structure of the US nuclear arsenal. The new strategy was drafted by the professional military-political community using the traditional Republican approaches - as well as the president's aspiration to have the world's most powerful nuclear forces. On February 2, the document was presented at the News Briefing on the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review at the US Department of Defense.

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review can hardly be described as "a Donald Trump nuclear strategy". The 60-page document is quite technical; it was produced by the Pentagon and the Department of Energy, and it's not clear whether the president has actually studied it very closely. But it is perfectly safe to describe the review as "the nuclear strategy of the Donald Trump era" - an era that, according to Washington, calls on America to use its military power very decisively in order to contain its adversaries.

During the Obama presidency, the Nuclear Posture Review was based on the notion that the role of nuclear weapons will continue to decline; that high-precision weapons would supplant nuclear weapons in most of their traditional roles (even though the latter will of course have to be upgraded as they gradually age); that the reduction of their nuclear arsenals by the key nuclear powers will also reduce the interest in nuclear-weapons programs among potential newcomers; and that nuclear terrorism will become the key threat facing the United States.

The new NPR regards nuclear weapons as a crucial instrument of US national security. It does not call for any reductions of the US nuclear arsenal in the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (which will undoubtedly have an impact on the NPT Review Process). It unequivocally rejects the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and leaves the door open for a resumption of nuclear tests.

According to Jon Wolfsthal, former special aide to the US President, the earlier versions of the new NPR were even more confrontational. They included, for example, the development of a hypersonic delivery system for nuclear warheads, and a refusal by Washington to assure the non-nuclear-weapon states that it will never use nuclear weapons against them. Nevertheless, even the current "moderate" version of the draft represents a notable departure from America's previous nuclear posture.

One of the key changes involves a **much broader set of scenarios involving the use of nuclear weapons**. Apart from responding to a nuclear attack against America,

Washington will be prepared to **use nuclear weapons in the event of significant non-nuclear strategic attacks** - which could include "an attack against US, allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks against US or allied nuclear forces, their command and control, or warning and attack assessment capabilities". Meanwhile, the vagueness of the phrasing used in the document actually makes it **more difficult for the US adversaries to understand where the red line lies**, and blurs the boundaries of nuclear deterrence. As Kingston Reif, a nuclear weapons expert, ironically puts it, "Does Russia election interference constitute such an attack?"

To make the US nuclear triad more flexible, the NPR proposes to develop two new types of low-yield weapons:

- a light nuclear warhead for the Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles,
- and a new sea-based, nuclear-armed cruise missile.

According to the authors of the strategy, having such weapons would enable the United States to deliver a proportionate response to the use of nuclear weapons by an adversary, thereby removing the incentive for other countries to use nuclear weapons. Russian and many US experts have already explained that these new weapons systems will actually increase the risk of a nuclear war.

In the **North Korea** section of the NPR, the deterrence strategy boils down to vowing to **destroy the North Korean regime** in response to any use of nuclear weapons. In the **China** section, Washington warns Beijing against using nuclear weapons and notes that the United States "is ready for a **decisive response to a non-nuclear aggression**". But the main focus of the document is on **Russia - America's main "sparring partner"**.

In addition to its usual claims that Russia is in breach of several international treaties, the United States for the first time accuse Moscow of pursuing a strategy of "escalating to de-escalate", i.e. plans for a limited first use of nuclear weapons in order to stop a military conflict in its tracks. Despite the absence of any serious facts to back that theory, the implausibility of such scenarios, and the gradual reduction of the role of nuclear weapons in the Russian military doctrine, the NPR sites the threat of a limited first strike by Russia as a justification for modernizing America's own nuclear arsenal. According to that document, Russian nuclear as well as non-nuclear attacks (including space and cyber-attacks) will be deterred by a combination of the US nuclear forces, the NATO nuclear forces deployed in Europe, and the nuclear arsenals of Britain and France.

For those who like conspiracy theories, the new US Nuclear Posture Review fully confirms all of Moscow's fears about Washington's plans. Everything the Russian foreign and defense ministries have complained of for years:

- America's willingness to deliver a first nuclear strike under an extremely vague pretext,
- its plans to develop more "usable" nuclear weapons,
- the involvement of Britain and France in US nuclear planning,
- close cooperation with the non-nuclear NATO members in the framework of "joint nuclear missions",
- and even the threat to the Russian nuclear deterrent posed by missile defense systems

All these fears have proved justified and indeed amplified. **The liberalism of Barack Obama has been defenestrated in favor of extreme pragmatism as far as America's nuclear posture is concerned.**

On the other hand, the new version of the NPR is not all doom and gloom for Russia. The document does not say anything about:

- America's plans to walk out of the existing international agreements.
- plans for developing a land-based cruise missile (despite pressure from Congress).
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So, there is still **hope that the INF Treaty will survive. The United States does not rule out the prolongation of the New START treaty beyond 2021** or the signing of new arms control treaties with Russia.

When the Obama administration released the previous version of the Nuclear Posture Review - which drastically reduced the role of nuclear weapons in US national security - Russian generals and experts would often complain off the record that **Washington was way ahead of Russia in conventional weapons** and could therefore afford to maintain its military superiority relying mostly on non-nuclear weapons. A lot has changed since then. Moscow has made an emphasis on bolstering its own conventional and high-precision capability. **"Strategic non-nuclear deterrence"** is now a routine element of its new doctrines. The effectiveness of such an approach has already been demonstrated by the Russian campaign in Syria.

The Russian strategic nuclear forces are guaranteed to deliver a retaliatory strike if America were to attack first. Washington is currently planning to develop a new sea-based cruise missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead - but Moscow already has the Kalibr cruise missile, which has acquitted itself very well. Whereas America is only just embarking on a new trillion-dollar cycle of upgrading its existing nuclear forces (the NPR says the funding for such an endeavor is uncertain) and planning to develop new systems (which is even less certain in terms of funding), Russia will have modernized 90% of its nuclear triad by 2020.

It is hard to predict to what extent Trump will go along with the proposals drafted by the Pentagon. On the whole, however, **Moscow is in a fairly comfortable situation: it has no need to get involved in a new nuclear arms race, or to try to come up with responses to nonexistent challenges.** Instead, it can make use of the situation. Now that America is worried by the real or imaginary inadequacies of its nuclear deterrent, it is **an opportune time to start discussing with it specific issues of mutual concern** - such as nuclear arms control and ways of reducing the escalation risks.

This article is written by Adrey Baklitskiy, PIR Center's Consultant. Material based on article Andrey Baklitskiy "Hard power: as Trump has done with "Obama's nuclear liberalism" (in Russian), RBC, January 15, 2018

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In 2018 Club members will continue to receive exclusive analytics on Russian foreign policy priorities and key challenges and threats to international security. We have scheduled **six meetings of Trialogue Club International** in 2018. Club Members will receive a series of articles in electronic form, **eight issues** of the Russia Confidential analytical bulletin, as well as other information and analytical bulletins.

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Period	Individual	Corporate
01.01.17 – 31.12.17 (1 year)	50 000 roubles	80 000 roubles
01.01.17 – 31.12.18 (2 years)	90 000 roubles	140 000 roubles

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Sincerely,

Evgeniy Buzhinskiy

Chairman of the *Trialogue Club International*

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