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President Donald Trump

What the election of the new US President means for CND campaigns

The world was shocked when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in November 2016. That a racist, homophobic, misogynistic candidate could become arguably the most powerful person in the world heralds exceptionally dangerous times ahead. In a ComRes/*The Independent* poll, 66% of British people think he will make the world a more dangerous place.¹

Trump's numerous Executive Orders in the early stages of his presidency angered and galvanised campaigners on a wide range of subjects. For CND there are very specific dangers of which we need to be aware. It is horrifying that an apparently volatile man with a track-record of acting impulsively and little detailed grasp of the implications of nuclear use has access to the nuclear codes. There are also great dangers to world peace from his views on increasing the US nuclear arsenal, nuclear proliferation, the United Nations and missile defence.

Nuclear weapons arms race

In uncertain times the last thing anyone needs is the most powerful man on earth kicking off a new nuclear arms race. But that's exactly what then president-elect Trump did in 2016, tweeting that *'the United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes'*.²

President Trump expanded on this in February 2017 in his first comments on the US nuclear arsenal since taking office. He said that the US *'had fallen behind on nuclear weapon capacity'*³, despite the US already having 7,300 nuclear warheads, with plans to spend over \$350 billion over the next decade modernising and maintaining them.

While Trump did say he would like to see *'nobody have nukes'*, he went on to state *'we're never going to fall behind on nuclear power... we're going to be at the top of the pack'*.⁴

The US nuclear weapons are many times the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, so the US already has the capacity to destroy all life on earth. What conceivable reason could Trump possibly have for wanting to increase the US arsenal? Indeed Trump's ignorance about nuclear matters and his seemingly

cavalier approach to their use is extremely alarming given that he now has his finger on the nuclear button.

Trump has repeatedly promised to cancel the nuclear deal with Iran, saying *'it's one of the worst deals ever made'*.⁵ This agreement was a huge achievement which came about after a decade of talks. Iran will accept some restrictions in return for the easing of economic sanctions. Abandoning the agreement may well push Iran down the road to nuclear weapons, potentially opening the door to Egypt and Saudi Arabia going down the nuclear route as well.

Possibility of a new missile defence system

The United States already has a missile defence system - now integrated as part of the NATO Ballistic Missile Defence network - which is making the world a more dangerous place by leading the world into a new arms race. The US missile defence system is made up of a series of ground based radar, command and missile interceptor bases around the world. They are supported by satellite and sea-based facilities, designed to detect and shoot down incoming missiles.

The US and NATO are surrounding Russia and China with missile defence and other military installations which are continually upgraded and moved closer to their borders, surrounding them and threatening their territories. Having US missile defence bases near their borders means that Russia and China are less likely to discuss taking steps towards nuclear disarmament, as any reduction in their nuclear arsenals makes missile defence more likely to be effective.

One of the first military policies to be published on the new White House administration's website was a commitment to the missile defence system, though it is not clear whether a new system is planned or further investment in the current one:

*'We will also develop a state-of-the-art missile defense system to protect against missile-based attacks from states like Iran and North Korea.'*⁶

Following months of tension with North Korea over its continued ballistic missile testing, the US administration announced in May 2017 that its

THAAD missile defence system in South Korea was operational, though not currently operating at full capability. As well as incurring protests from local residents who fear the weapon could make them a target, China and Russia are also concerned that the system could impact their nuclear capabilities. The move looks set to further antagonise the US and its allies' relations in the region.

Missile defence does nothing to encourage international understanding and cooperation. It is actually offensive, expensive, destabilising and extremely dangerous.

Changes in NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a nuclear-armed military alliance which is an obstacle to a peaceful world and global nuclear disarmament. It currently comprises 28 member states, including the United Kingdom and United States. NATO was first established during the Cold War, and since its inception has expanded both its sphere of influence and the scope of its activity, destabilising international relationships as it does so.

Trump's rhetoric on NATO has been confused. In an interview just before his inauguration, he said the following:

I said a long time ago – that NATO had problems. Number one it was obsolete, because it was, you know, designed many, many years ago...

*And the other thing is the countries aren't paying their fair share so we're supposed to protect countries but a lot of these countries aren't paying what they're supposed to be paying, which I think is very unfair to the United States. With that being said, NATO is very important to me.'*⁷

Prime Minister Theresa May has subsequently secured a commitment from Trump that the US is fully behind NATO, stating the following in a joint press conference with the President:

*We're united in our recognition of NATO as the bulwark of our collective defence and we reaffirmed our unshakeable commitment to this alliance. We're 100% behind NATO.'*⁸

While it does not therefore look like the alliance could be dismantled under Trump's Presidency, what is likely is that states could be forced to spend more money on their military.

United Nations Peacekeeping Missions

The Trump administration has confirmed it wants to cut the amount of money it gives to the United Nations by more than half.⁹ The UN, as well as international diplomats, have warned that this would have a disastrous effect, including on UN peacekeeping missions, which are currently protecting lives and infrastructure in countries including South Sudan, Haiti and Cyprus. Politicians in the US have previously complained that the US contribution (22% of the total UN budget and 29% of peacekeeping operation costs) was disproportionate. Japan pays a further 10%, then China, Germany, France and the UK all pay about 4.5% of the budget, with the rest distributed among other states.

Peacekeeping not only saves lives but ensures countries don't collapse, creating even more chaos on the international stage.

The UN is also a forum for agreeing treaties that make the world a safer place, such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

Moratorium on New Multilateral Treaties

A draft Executive Order calling for a review of all current and pending treaties with more than one other nation was leaked in January 2017. It asks for recommendations on which negotiations or treaties the United States should leave.¹⁰

This would presumably include the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which came into force in 1970. Of course there are major flaws with the treaty, most pressing that it hasn't been able to bring about nuclear disarmament. But it is an indication of what is expected of the international community and a benchmark which is aimed for: a world without nuclear weapons.

With this review, coupled with his support for more countries getting their own nuclear weapons, Trump is effectively calling into question what has been a bipartisan policy in the United States for the better part of the last 70 years: making sure more countries do not acquire nuclear weapons. And this is not only a US position but a globally endorsed position.

Torture

CND deplores torture and we have called for all militaries to comply with the Geneva Convention.

Former President Barack Obama banned torture as an interrogation technique in 2009 and the US Senate has concluded that it does not provide important intelligence information. But Trump has now re-ignited the debate, saying he believes waterboarding works.¹¹ Although the new US Defence Secretary James Mattis and new CIA director Mike Pompeo have both indicated their opposition to torturing, Trump's rhetoric on the issue is troubling.

There have also been reports that the Trump administration has drafted an Executive Order putting an end to any effort to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and reviewing whether to re-start using 'black sites' (CIA bases not in the US where the country's laws and rules would not apply) and revoke Red Cross access to detainees.¹²

Increased tensions with China

CND has previously commented that the 'pivot', or a shift in focus, to Asia was perhaps the most significant foreign policy statement of President Barack Obama's first term of office.¹³ This 'pivot' is already raising tensions around existing territorial disputes in the region and helping to militarise the entire Asia-Pacific region. The situation has deteriorated further following Trump's election, with his statements on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea, Taiwan and China's alleged manipulation of its currency, angering Beijing.

Experts believe that relations between the two countries could deteriorate so badly as to risk a potential conflict.

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- 2 Twitter account of Donald J. Trump, @realDonaldTrump, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/811977223326625792>
- 3 'Trump wants to make sure U.S. nuclear arsenal at 'top of the pack'', *Reuters*, 24 February 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-idUSKBN1622IF>
- 4 *ibid*
- 5 'Full transcript of interview with Donald Trump', *The Times*, 16 January 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/full-transcript-of-interview-with-donald-trump-5d39sr09d>
- 6 The White House website, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/making-our-military-strong-again>
- 7 'Full transcript of interview with Donald Trump', *The Times*, 16 January 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/full-transcript-of-interview-with-donald-trump-5d39sr09d>
- 8 'Theresa May says Nato has 100% support of Donald Trump', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/27/theresa-may-white-house-visit-donald-trump-nato>
- 9 'Why Trump's plan to slash U.N. funding could lead to global calamity', *The Washington Post*, 18 March 2017
- 10 'Trump Prepares Orders Aiming at Global Funding and Treaties', *The New York Times*, 25 January 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/us/politics/united-nations-trump-administration.html?_r=2
- 11 'Donald Trump says he believes waterboarding works', *BBC News*, 26 January 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-38753000>
- 12 *ibid*
- 13 'Falling eagle, Rising dragon: The dangers of a new arms race in the Asia Pacific region', *CND*, February 2014, http://cnduk.org/images/stories/briefings/anti_war/falling%20eagle.pdf

