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Trump's tweet and the danger of nuclear war

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23 December 2016

A tweet sent Thursday by President-elect Donald Trump advocating the expansion of the US nuclear weapons arsenal has become the top news story around the world. Trump wrote: “The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes.”

Trump's tweet was almost certainly a response to a speech delivered by Russian President Vladimir Putin to a meeting of top Russian military figures. Putin, noting the provocative build-up of US and NATO forces on the Russian border and the deployment of US anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe, reportedly stated: “We need to strengthen the military potential of strategic nuclear forces, especially with missile complexes that can reliably penetrate any existing and prospective missile defence systems.”

The open discussion on nuclear weapons by Trump and Putin—whose militaries deploy over 7,000 nuclear warheads each—underscores the tremendous dangers facing the world's population from the steady growth of geopolitical conflicts.

There have been numerous signals from Trump, including the figures he has appointed to his cabinet, that he represents a wing of the American elite that views nuclear-armed China—not Russia—to be the greatest and most immediate challenge to its global hegemony. His incoming

administration is mapping out a bellicose agenda of trade war and military confrontation with Beijing. His tweet, however, is a clear warning to Moscow that it remains firmly in the Pentagon's sights, particularly if the Putin regime provides support to China or in other ways attempts to thwart the plans of a Trump White House.

For all the assertions by the Democratic Party and much of the American media that Trump is a "Siberian candidate" and "pawn" of Putin, his administration will ruthlessly assert the strategic and corporate interests of the American ruling class against any and all perceived rivals, unchecked by even token adherence to the legal and diplomatic norms of the post-World War II order or the traditions of American bourgeois politics.

Trump, a billionaire demagogue, surrounded by a cabal of other billionaires, generals, extreme militarists and right-wing reactionaries, feels so unrestrained that he sets out nuclear policy via Twitter and leaves his staff to work out the details. This is the man who in four weeks will be handed the nuclear codes and the power to set in motion the destruction of the planet.

Throughout the presidential election, Trump repeatedly suggested the use of nuclear weapons to achieve American imperialist ends and impose Washington's dictates.

On March 23, Trump told Bloomberg News that he wanted the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) "to think maybe we would use them." In a formulation he has used a number of times, he declared that he wanted a climate of "unpredictability," in which the entire planet was unsure what he was prepared to do. "Frankly," he said, "I don't want the enemy to know how I'm thinking."

On March 30, he told MSNBC that he would be prepared to use nuclear weapons in the Middle East if the United States was "hit" by ISIS. On March 31, he told Fox News that he would not "take off the table" ordering nuclear strikes in Europe—presumably against Russian targets—because it "is a big place."

In August, MSNBC reported that Trump had repeatedly challenged a "foreign policy expert" to explain "why we can't use nuclear weapons." That such an exchange actually took place has not been confirmed.

The *New York Times* and other media outlets in the US and internationally are attempting to portray the tweet of the president-elect as a historic shift in US nuclear doctrine. The *Times* wrote Thursday that Trump was "appearing to embrace an end to decades of bipartisan presidential efforts to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in American defenses and strategy."

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) described the tweet as a "radical departure from President Obama's current policy" to "seek peace and security without nuclear weapons."

It is nothing of the sort, nor was it Obama's policy to dismantle the US nuclear arsenal. Barely a year after Obama was absurdly awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review restated the "right" of the United States to launch a nuclear first strike against states deemed to be in violation of the non-proliferation treaty. In 2014, his administration ordered a

massive “modernisation” to develop and deploy more advanced missile delivery systems carrying greater destructive payloads than the existing warheads.

The plans initiated by Obama, estimated to cost \$355 billion over 10 years and more than \$1 trillion over three decades, also involve the acquisition of new strategic bombers and ballistic missile submarines and upgrades to existing nuclear weapons plants and laboratories. In Asia, the US has been deploying anti-missile systems in Japan and now South Korea to facilitate a nuclear first strike against either North Korea or China—using the defense systems to shoot down any retaliation. Similar systems have been erected in Europe, provoking Putin’s recent statements.

The ability of an incoming Trump administration to threaten the nuclear destruction of alleged enemies and hundreds of millions of people has been dramatically enhanced, not lessened, by the policies of the administrations that preceded it, especially Obama’s.

The American ruling class saw the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist regime in December 1991 as initiating a “unipolar moment.” The United States set out, through continuous wars and diplomatic intrigues—backed, in the final analysis, by its nuclear arsenal—to tear down all restraints to the untrammelled global domination of US banks and conglomerates.

Twenty-five years later, the Trump administration, with its vows to “make America great again,” embodies the seething frustration in American ruling circles over their failure to achieve their ends. In particular, the capitalist states in China and Russia, due to their economic resources and relative military strength, including nuclear weapons, are considered obstacles that must be shattered, by war if necessary. Trump brings into world politics an element of uncertainty and instability unlike anything that has previously been seen.

The international working class cannot leave its fate—and the survival of humanity—in the hands of any section of the capitalist class.

The response of the capitalist states in China and Russia to the steady build-up of imperialist pressure is opposed to the interests of the mass of the world’s population. They are not regimes that should be given the sympathy of the working class and oppressed. The policy of both Beijing and Moscow is the inherently reactionary policy of threatening the American people with nuclear annihilation to protect the ill-gotten wealth of a tiny layer of capitalist oligarchs. Likewise, the only answer of the ruling elites in Germany, Japan and elsewhere to the inevitable growth of international tensions is their own agenda of militarism and acquisition of nuclear weapons.

The only force that can stop the catastrophe of war is the unified action of the international working class, fighting for the only viable solution to the bankruptcy of capitalism and the national-state system. World socialist revolution must become the guiding perspective of the struggles of the working class in every country.