

Trump order sets military buildup in motion

By [Jeremy Herb](#)



President Donald Trump on his first Friday took the first formal step to undertake a costly military buildup, signaling what could be a major turnaround from years of relying on a smaller, more agile force and within strict spending limits mandated by Congress.

In an executive memorandum he signed during his first visit to the Pentagon, Trump detailed plans to fulfill his campaign promises to invest in a bigger military — including more troops, warships and a modernized nuclear arsenal — declaring he was beginning "a great rebuilding of the armed services of the United States."

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"Developing a plan for new planes, new ships, new resources and new tools for our men and women in uniform — and I'm very proud to be doing that," Trump said at a ceremonial swearing in of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. "As we prepare our budget request for Congress — and I think Congress is going to be very happy to see it — our military strength will be questioned by no one, but neither will our dedication to peace."

Trump's proposed military buildup is one of the key ways he's planning for a major departure from the Obama administration on national security issues. The new president also signed an executive action Friday on stricter immigration vetting, and there have been draft executive orders floating around Washington this week that call for safe zones in Syria, a review U.S. interrogation policies and the use of "black sites" for captured terror detainees.

"There's no doubt he's trying to signal a new direction," said Mackenzie Eaglen, a defense analyst at the American Enterprise Institute.

Trump's order to make preparations for a military buildup — and to craft a budget plan to support it — will ultimately require the backing of Congress. But the Pentagon will have significant influence on setting the foundation and building the political support, according to experts.

Trump bars Syrian refugees, halts entry of citizens from some Muslim states

By [Nahal Toosi](#)

"When you have an outfit with \$500 [billion] or \$600 billion a year to play with, there are a lot of possibilities to reprogram immediately," said retired Army Col. Joseph Collins, who teaches national security strategy at the Pentagon's National Defense University. "That takes the permission of Congress, but Congress is not going to say no to improving the readiness of the armed forces. Congress would undoubtedly support many of the measures that are on the Pentagon's wish list here."

Still, a sustained effort faces major roadblocks, in the view of other close observers, with the potential for turf battles within Trump's administration over priorities as well as resistance from Democrats and fiscal conservatives in his own party in Congress.

The [executive action](#) itself appears to be mostly symbolic, according to text released Friday. It calls for a review of the military's readiness, and directs the Pentagon to work with the Office of Management and Budget to craft a defense supplemental for the current fiscal year, as well as a budget plan for fiscal 2018.

In addition, it directs the Pentagon to conduct a strategy review and a review of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. The final text sent from the White House on Friday was different from the

one Trump signed at the Pentagon, according to a photo of the memorandum Trump held up after he signed it.

During an hourlong meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Trump and senior generals also talked about efforts to accelerate the military campaign against the Islamic State, according to a defense official who briefed reporters afterward.

The official said the chiefs "did most of the talking" and declined to discuss more specifics.

Trump's call for a military buildup was one of the few concrete proposals he laid out during the presidential campaign, in which he called for boosting the Army to 540,000 soldiers and increasing the Navy to 350 ships.



McConnell to Trump: Do not lift sanctions on Russia

By [Seung Min Kim](#), [Burgess Everett](#) and [Austin Wright](#)

But there could be major roadblocks. For example, Trump's new directive reportedly instructs Mattis to work with the Office of Management and Budget on an emergency budget amendment to begin directing new dollars to the Pentagon this year.

Yet trump's pick for OMB director, Rep. [Mick Mulvaney](#) (R-S.C.), could be wary of such a high price tag without cuts elsewhere. Mulvaney clashed with Sen. [John McCain](#) (R-Ariz.) at a confirmation hearing earlier this week, during which McCain slammed Mulvaney over his past efforts to cut the defense budget.

A major boost to the Pentagon budget would require either changes to the 2011 Budget Control Act, which mandated strict spending limits, or an increase to the separate war budget, which is not subject to the caps. And Mulvaney has been a staunch opponent of using the war budget as a "slush fund" to skirt the 2011 law.

Plus, any extra spending still has to get Democratic support in the Senate, where 60 votes are needed to approve an appropriations measure.

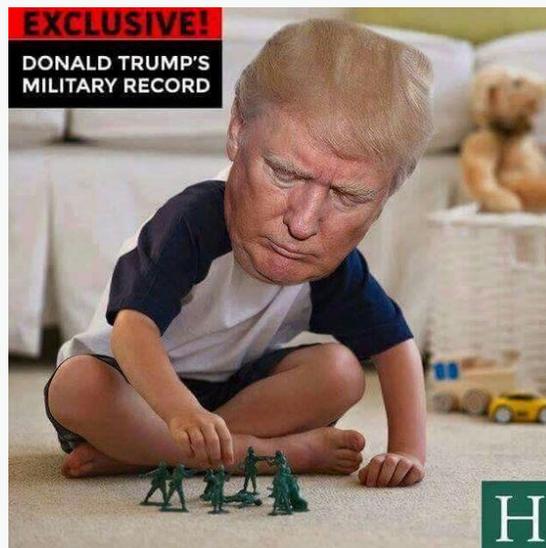
Defense analyst Roman Schweizer said Democrats in the Senate and Mulvaney's allies in the House are the two biggest question marks for Trump to secure more defense dollars.

“One question is how big of a fight the House Freedom Caucus will put up spending more on defense and tacking on more debt. They have been notably silent recently,” Schweizer said in a note to investors Friday. “Another question is whether eight or more Democrats would vote with the GOP in the Senate. Vulnerable Senate Democrats in Trump states may not want to appear weak on defense.”

TRUMP MILITARY BUILDUP PLAN:

- + Increase the Army to 540,000 soldiers**
- + Return the Marines to 36 battalions**
- + 350 ship Navy (now at 285)**
- + Air Force of 1,200 fighter aircraft**

Trump on Friday did not ask for any new plan for defeating the Islamic State, according to the defense official, as he had telegraphed repeatedly in the past.



But his widely anticipated orders to beef up the military campaign against the Islamic State could also face a heavy dose of reality.

“It’s unlikely that there’s going to be any huge change, because, of course, Trump also doesn’t want to put a lot of boots on the ground, and we have already been pummeling them from the air,” said Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, who argued Trump can simply capitalize on the Obama administration’s grudging escalation of the campaign in its final months. “He can declare a huge shift, but the huge shift happened in 2014, not 2017.”

As defense secretary, Mattis would provide as practical advice as anyone for the Islamic State campaign, given his experience as head of Central Command, argued Anthony Cordesman, a military analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. And the military had already recommended options for the Obama administration to make the Islamic State campaign more effective.

But he, too, argued that the demographic, sectarian and economic problems in the region, and particularly Syria, won’t be solved by “bombing Islamic extremists back to the stone age.”

“This whole idea you can accelerate your way into regional stability, I think, very clearly is simply something that can’t happen,” Cordesman said.

Accelerating the anti-Islamic State campaign in Syria is particularly difficult because of Russia, which has operated militarily to prop up the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Trump’s White House has not articulated how it plans to address Russia’s military efforts in Syria, particularly if the U.S. military sets up so-called safe zones, which Trump said he backed this week in an ABC News interview.

“It’s not feasible at all without Russian acquiescence,” said Nick Heras, a fellow at CNAS. “If it’s going to be done, and U.S. military and U.S. diplomatic efforts are going to be put toward building out safe zones in Syria, it will happen as part of a grander bargain with the Russians.”



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