

Look Out, Obama Seems to Be Planning for a Lot More War

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There's more war in America's future — a great deal more, judging by the Barack Obama administration's reports, pronouncements and actions in recent months.

These documents and deeds include the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the Ballistic Missile Defense Report, the nuclear security summit in New York and the May 3-28 United Nations nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference, as well as the continuing wars in the Middle East and Central Asia, and the 2011 Pentagon war budget request.

The United States government presides as a military colossus of unrivaled dimension, but the QDR, which was published in February, suggests Washington views America as being constantly under the threat of attack from a multitude of fearsome forces bent on its destruction. As such, trillions more dollars must be invested in present and future wars — ostensibly to protect the besieged homeland.

The NPR says the long-range U.S. goal is a “nuclear-free” world, but despite token reductions in its arsenal of such weapons, the Pentagon is strengthening its nuclear force and bolstering it with a devastating “conventional deterrent” intended to strike any target in the world within one hour. In addition this document, published in April, retains “hair-trigger” nuclear launch readiness, refuses to declare its nuclear force is for deterrence only (suggesting offensive use) and for the first time authorizes a nuclear attack, if necessary, on a non-nuclear state (Iran).

Meanwhile, Obama is vigorously expanding the George W Bush administration's wars, and enhancing and deploying America's unparalleled military power.

The Obama administration's one positive achievement in terms of militarism and war was the April 9 signing in Prague of the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia that reduces deployed strategic nuclear weapons to 1,550 warheads each. It was a step forward, but all agree it was extremely modest, and it does not even faintly diminish the danger of nuclear war.

The QDR is a 128-page Defense Department report mandated by Congress to be compiled every four years to put forward a 20-year projection of U.S. military planning. A 20-member civilian panel, selected by the Pentagon and congress, analyzes the document and suggests changes in order to provide an “independent” perspective. Eleven of the members, including the panel's co-chairmen — former defense secretary William Perry and former national security adviser Stephen Hadley — are employed by the defense industry.

Although the Pentagon is working on preparations for a possible World War III and beyond, the new report is largely focused on the relatively near future and only generalizes about the longer term. Of the QDR's many priorities three stand out.

- The first priority is to “prevail in today’s wars” in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen and wherever else Washington’s post-9/11 military intrusions penetrate in coming years. Introducing the report February 1, Bush-Obama Defense Secretary Robert Gates issued this significant statement: “Success in wars to come will depend on success in these wars in progress.” The “wars to come” were not identified. Further, the QDR states that military victory in Iraq and Afghanistan is “only the first step toward achieving our strategic objectives.”

- Second, while in the past the US concentrated on the ability to fight two big wars simultaneously, the QDR suggests that’s not enough. Now, the Obama administration posits the “need for a robust force capable of protecting US interests against a multiplicity of threats, including two capable nation-state aggressors.”

Now it’s two-plus wars — the plus being the obligation to “conduct large-scale counter-insurgency, stability and counter-terrorism operations in a wide range of environments,” mainly in small, poor countries like Afghanistan. Other “plus” targets include “non-state actors” such as al-Qaeda, “failed states” such as Somali, and medium-size but well-defended states that do not bend the knee to Uncle Sam, such as Iran or the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and some day perhaps Venezuela.

- Third, it’s fairly obvious from the QDR, though not acknowledged, that the Obama government believes China and Russia are the two possible “nation-state aggressors” against which Washington must prepare to “defend” itself. Neither Beijing nor Moscow has taken any action to justify the Pentagon’s assumption that they will ever be suicidal enough to attack the far more powerful United States.

After all, the U.S., with 4.54 percent of the world’s population, invests more on war and war preparations than the rest of the world combined. Obama’s 2010 Pentagon budget is US\$680 billion, but the real total is double that when all Washington’s national security expenditures in other departmental budgets are also included, such as the cost of nuclear weapons, the 16 intelligence agencies, Homeland Security and interest on war debts, among other programs.

Annual war-related expenditures are well over \$1 trillion. In calling for a discretionary freeze on government programs in January’s state of the union address, Obama specifically exempted Pentagon/national security expenditures from the freeze. Obama is a big war spender. His \$708 billion Pentagon allotment for fiscal 2011 (not counting a pending \$33 billion Congress will approve for the Afghan “surge”) exceeds Bush’s highest budget of \$651 billion for fiscal 2009.

At present, U.S. military power permeates the entire world. As the QDR notes: “The United States is a global power with global responsibilities. Including operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, approximately 400,000 US military personnel are forward-stationed or rotationally deployed around the world.”

The Pentagon presides over 1,000 overseas military bases (including those in the war zones), great fleets in every ocean, a globe-spanning air force, military satellites in space

and nuclear missiles on hair trigger alert pre-targeted on “enemy” or potential “enemy” cities and military facilities. A reading of the QDR shows none of this will change except for upgrading, enlarging (the Pentagon just added six new bases in Colombia) and adding new systems such as Prompt Global Strike, an important new offensive weapon system, which we shall discuss below.

The phrase “full spectrum military dominance” — an expression concocted by the neo-conservatives in the 1990s that was adopted by the Bush administration to define its aggressive military strategy — was cleverly not included in the 2010 QDR, but retaining and augmenting dominance remains the Pentagon’s prime preoccupation.

The QDR is peppered with expressions such as “America’s interests and role in the world require armed forces with unmatched capabilities” and calls for “the continued dominance of America’s Armed Forces in large-scale force-on-force warfare.” Gates went further in his February 1 press conference: “The United States needs a broad portfolio of military capabilities, with maximum versatility across the widest possible spectrum of conflicts.” Obama bragged recently that he commanded “the finest military in the history of the world.”

Evidently, the Pentagon is planning to engage in numerous future wars interrupted by brief periods of peace while preparing for the next war. Given that the only entity expressing an interest in attacking the United States is al-Qaeda — a non-government paramilitary organization of extreme religious fanatics with about a thousand reliable active members around the world — it is obvious that America’s unprecedented military might is actually intended for another purpose.

In our view that “other purpose” is geopolitical - to strengthen even further the Pentagon’s military machine to assure that the United States retains its position as the dominant global hegemon at a time of acute indebtedness, the severe erosion of its manufacturing base, near gridlock in domestic politics, and the swift rise to global prominence of several other nations and blocs.

The QDR touches on this with admirable delicacy: “The distribution of global political, economic and military power is shifting and becoming more diffuse. The rise of China, the world’s most populous country, and India, the world’s largest democracy, will continue to reshape the international system. While the United States will remain the most powerful actor, it must increasingly cooperate with key allies and partners to build and sustain peace and security. Whether and how rising powers fully integrate into the global system will be among this century’s defining questions, and are thus central to America’s interests.”

At the moment, the QDR indicates Washington is worried about foreign “anti-access” strategies that limit its “power projection capabilities” in various parts of the world. What this means is that certain countries such as China and Russia are developing sophisticated new weapons that match those of the U.S., thus “impeding” the deployment of American forces to wherever the Pentagon desires. For instance:

China is developing and fielding large numbers of advanced medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, new attack submarines equipped with advanced weapons, increasingly capable long-range air defense systems, electronic warfare and computer network attack capabilities, advanced fighter aircraft and counter-space systems. China has shared only limited information about the pace, scope and ultimate aims of its military modernization

programs, raising a number of legitimate questions regarding its long-term intentions.

To counter this trend in China and elsewhere, the Pentagon is planning, at a huge and unannounced cost, the following enhancements: “Expand future long-range strike capabilities; Exploit advantages in subsurface operations; Increase the resiliency of US forward posture and base infrastructure; Assure access to space and the use of space assets; Enhance the robustness of key ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capabilities; Defeat enemy sensors and engagement systems; and Enhance the presence and responsiveness of U.S. forces abroad.”

In addition, the U.S. not only targets China with nuclear missiles and bombs, it is surrounding the country (and Russia as well, of course) with anti-ballistic missiles. The purpose is plain: In case the U.S. finds it “necessary” to launch ballistic missiles toward China, the ABMs will be able to destroy its limited retaliatory capacity.

According to an article in the February 22 issue of China Daily, the country’s English-language newspaper: “Washington appears determined to surround China with US-built anti-missile systems, military scholars have observed ... Air force colonel Dai Xu, a renowned military strategist, wrote in an article released this month that ‘China is in a crescent-shaped ring of encirclement. The ring begins in Japan, stretches through nations in the South China Sea to India, and ends in Afghanistan’.”

Compared to the Bush administration’s 2006 QDR, there has been a conscious effort to tone down the anti-China rhetoric in the current document. But it is entirely clear that China is number one in the QDR’s references to “potentially hostile nation states.”

According to the February 18 Defense News, a publication that serves the military-industrial complex, “Analysts say the QDR attempts to address the threat posed by China without further enraging Beijing. ‘If you look at the list of further enhancements to US forces and capabilities ... those are primarily capabilities needed for defeating China, not Iran, North Korea or Hezbollah,’ said Roger Cliff, a China military specialist at Rand. ‘So even though not a lot of time is spent naming China ... analysis of the China threat is nonetheless driving a lot of the modernization programs described in the QDR.’”

Incidentally, according to the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, this year’s Chinese defense budget, for a country four times larger than the United States, is \$78 billion, compared to the \$664 billion for the Pentagon (without all the national security extras harbored in other department budgets). China possesses 100-200 nuclear warheads compared to America’s 9,326 (when both deployed and stored weapons are included). China is contemplating the construction of an aircraft carrier; the US Navy floats 11 of them. China has no military bases abroad.

In our view, China appears to be constructing weapons for defense, not offense against the US — and its foreign policy is based on refusing to be pushed around by Washington while doing everything possible to avoid a serious confrontation.

Russia as well is treated better in the new QDR than in 2006, but it is included with China in most cases. Despite Moscow’s huge nuclear deterrent and abundant oil and gas supplies, it’s only “potential enemy” number two in terms of the big powers. Washington feels more threatened by Beijing. This is largely because of China’s size, rapid development, fairly successful state-guided capitalist economy directed by the Communist Party, and the fact

that it is on the road to becoming the world's economic leader, surpassing the US in 20 to 40 years.

It seems fairly obvious, but hardly mentioned publicly, that this is an extremely dangerous situation. China does not seek to dominate the world, nor will it allow itself to be dominated. Beijing supports the concept of a multipolar world order, with a number of countries and blocs playing roles. At issue, perhaps, is who will be first among equals.

Washington prefers the situation that has existed these 20 years after the implosion of the Soviet Union and much of the socialist world left the United States as the remaining military superpower and boss of the expanded capitalist bloc. During this time Washington has functioned as the unipolar world hegemon and doesn't want to relinquish the title.

This is all changing now as other countries rise, led by China, and the U.S. appears to be in gradual decline. How the transition to multi-polarity is handled over the next couple of decades may determine whether or not a disastrous war will be avoided.

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