

Pentagon spells out strategy for global military aggression

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Only days before the Bush administration submitted its fiscal 2007 budget, which calls for a major increase in military spending, the Pentagon sent Congress a long-term strategy document that makes clear Washington's intentions to use the additional billions to wage an aggressive campaign of global militarism.

Envisioned in the document, the Defense Department's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), is a vaguely defined "long war" that will involve the use of military power all over the globe to suppress challenges to US interests both from popular insurgencies and geo-strategic rivals. In particular, the document singles out China as a potential military competitor that must be deterred.

President Bush's budget calls for a 7 percent hike in military spending, to reach a total of \$440 billion. The proposed increase has been coupled with calls for sweeping cuts in such core entitlement programs as Medicare and Medicaid.

With the increase, combined with tens of billions of dollars more for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as funds separately allotted to the Energy Department to maintain America's nuclear arsenal, US military spending will climb well above the half-trillion-dollar mark in the coming year. This is more than the amount spent by all other countries combined, accounting for more than half of the estimated \$1 trillion in worldwide arms expenditures.

The bloated Pentagon budget includes \$5.1 billion—a 20 percent increase—for special operations, i.e., to expand elite killing squads, such as the Army's Special Forces and the Navy Seals, which are trained for use in far-flung counterinsurgency interventions, including the deployment of assassination squads to kill insurgent leaders. The plan envisions adding 14,000 more troops to these units by 2011, bringing the ranks of such forces up to 64,000.

Another \$6.1 billion is to be allotted to the Army to transform its forces into a more mobile brigade-based force, better suited for rapid deployment in counterinsurgency warfare.

Notwithstanding Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's advocacy of "military transformation"—a supposed shift from the Cold War military colossus to a more agile and leaner force—the Pentagon budget is laden with \$84.2 billion in weapons procurement. The bulk of this is in multi-billion-dollar arms programs initiated during the Cold War which critics both within and outside the US military now view as largely superfluous.

By far the largest of these projects is the "Star Wars" missile defense program, which is allotted \$10.4 billion—a 20 percent increase over last year. The program has failed in repeated tests and there is widespread skepticism that it can ever be effectively deployed.

Another \$5.3 billion is slated for building the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and \$2.8 billion for the F-22A aircraft, another "stealth"

fighter designed in anticipation of air-to-air combat with an advanced Soviet fighter that was never built. The Air Force already has 100 of these planes, which are ill-suited for any current military uses.

The Navy is to get \$2.6 billion to build another nuclear-powered attack submarine, on top of the existing fleet of 60 such vessels. Another \$3.4 billion is to be spent on new DD(X) class destroyers, and \$1.1 billion for a CVN-21 aircraft carrier (this is merely a down payment, as the total cost of such a carrier is expected to top \$12 billion).

These proposals are a demonstration of the enduring power—and massive expansion—of what then-President Dwight Eisenhower warned against nearly 50 years ago, when he spoke of a growing "military-industrial complex." Defense contractors such as General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, Boeing and Lockheed Martin saw their stock prices increase sharply in the wake of the budget announcement.

The administration is continuing its stealth funding of the war in Iraq, which is excluded from the Pentagon's annual budget and procured under "emergency supplemental requests"—seven thus far. It has already gotten \$50 billion more from Congress this year and is expected to return within the next two weeks for another \$70 billion to finance its Iraq intervention for the rest of the current fiscal year. This will bring the total cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan thus far to \$440 billion, rapidly approaching the cost (when adjusted for inflation) of the 13-year-long war in Vietnam.

The anticipated spending rate of \$10 billion a month is 50 percent higher than last year. The Pentagon said the dramatic hike was due, in part, to the inclusion of funding to repair and replace the large amount of military equipment that has been damaged or destroyed in Iraq.

This massive spending proposal is driven ultimately by a policy, supported by the decisive sections of the American ruling elite and both major parties, of utilizing US military superiority as a means of countering the relative decline of American capitalism on the world market. The buildup of the US armed forces is aimed not at countering some ubiquitous terrorist menace, but at defending American economic and political hegemony against challenges from both popular movements and powerful economic rivals.

This strategy is spelled out in the QDR document released in conjunction with the budget request. That the document uses the term "long war," a phrase that is increasingly replacing the "global war on terrorism" in Washington official-speak, has ominous implications. The term is aimed at accustoming US military personnel and the American public at large to a state of permanent warfare that will continue regardless of the outcome of the current interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As the document states: “Currently, the struggle is centered in Iraq and Afghanistan, but we will need to be prepared and arranged to successfully defend our Nation and its interests around the globe for years to come.”

In another significant terminological shift, the Pentagon document defines the main enemy not as terrorists, but rather as “violent extremists” or merely “extremists.” This choice of words is not accidental. The thrust of the strategic conceptions outlined by the Pentagon review is the organization of the US military to violently quell any and all opposition to US domination.

Those who resist Washington’s economic and political hegemony are to be branded “extremists,” no matter what their ideological conceptions, and ruthlessly suppressed. The counterinsurgency methods elaborated in the document are aimed not merely at Islamist terrorist groups, but at any popular movement that emerges against US imperialism and its client regimes.

Significantly, the QDR includes repeated references to both Latin America and Africa. In its sections on Special Operations Forces (SOF), the document states: “SOF will increase their capacity to perform more demanding and specialized tasks, especially long-duration, indirect and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas. For direct action, they will possess an expanded organic ability to locate, tag and track dangerous individuals and other high-value targets globally... For unconventional warfare and training foreign forces, future SOF will have the capacity to operate in dozens of countries simultaneously... while increasing regional proficiency specific to key geographic operational areas: the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America.”

In regards to Latin America, the document presents as a growing concern in US military planning the “resurgence of populist authoritarian political movements in some countries, such as Venezuela,” which it says “threaten gains achieved and are a source of economic and political instability.”

The document spells out the now well-established US doctrine of “preemptive war,” i.e., military aggression. It declares that the Pentagon has “set about making US forces more agile and more expeditionary.”

Listing a series of ongoing changes being made by the US military to meet “the new strategic environment,” the document includes the following: “From conducting war against nations—to conducting war in countries we are not at war with;” “From responding after a crisis starts (reactive)—to preventive actions so problems do not become crises (proactive);” “From static defense, garrison forces—to mobile, expeditionary operations;” and “From a battle-ready force (peace)—to battle-hardened forces (war).”

The document likewise spells out Washington’s intentions to increasingly deploy the US military for domestic purposes. The Pentagon, it states, will, on the order of the White House, use military forces to support “civil authorities for designated law enforcement and/or other activities.” It adds that it intends to “provide US NORTHCOM [the military command created in 2002 to oversee the US itself] with authority to stage forces and equipment domestically prior to potential incidents when possible.”

In a section entitled “Shaping the choices of countries at strategic crossroads,” the document makes clear that the buildup of the US military is aimed at deterring any country from challenging US domination in any region of the world.

It warns that Washington “will attempt to dissuade any military competitor from developing disruptive or other capabilities that could

enable regional hegemony,” adding the explicit threat that “should deterrence fail, the United States would deny a hostile power its strategic and operational objectives.”

In particular, the document singles out China, describing it as “having the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages.”

This marks a significant change over the last such QDR, issued in 2001, in which China was not even mentioned by name, though indirectly referred to as “a military competitor with a formidable resource base.”

The current review clearly suggests that the spending on new long-range weapons programs is aimed at preparing for a future military confrontation with China. Increased Chinese military capabilities, the documents states, as well as “the vast distances of the Asian theater, China’s continental depth, and the challenge of en route and in-theater US basing place a premium on forces capable of sustained operations at great distances into denied areas.”

This overt military threat provoked angry protests from the Chinese government. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said that his government had “lodged serious representation” with Washington over the Pentagon document, charging that it “interferes in China’s internal affairs.” He demanded that the US “stop its random and irresponsible remarks on China’s normal defense construction.”

A Chinese foreign policy spokesperson writing in the *China Daily* called the references to China in the document “anxiety on the part of the US that borders on the illusionary.”

“The speedup of China’s military modernization has its own logic, which is completely reasonable,” wrote Yuan Peng, vice director of the Institute of American Studies of China’s Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. “It is a necessary step for a major power in a new phase of development, just like the US did at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when it invested heavily in its naval power.”

No opposition to the escalation in military spending—or the growing threat of new wars and interventions—can be anticipated from the Democratic leadership in Congress. Many of the congressional Democrats have welcomed the multi-billion arms programs as a favor to defense contractors in their districts—such as Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, who praised the Pentagon for budgeting for yet another nuclear submarine, to be built at the General Dynamics shipyard in Groton.

The Democratic Party intends to contest the 2006 midterm election not as an opponent of the Iraq war and global US militarism, but as a critic of the administration’s performance in these pursuits. Some Democrats in Congress have criticized the Pentagon budget for its failure to fund a proposal approved by Congress last year to recruit an additional 30,000 troops to bolster the badly overstretched US ground forces in Iraq.



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