

Obama unveils war strategy focused on China

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The military strategy unveiled by President Barack Obama Thursday keeps massive spending on the US war machine largely intact, while shifting its focus decisively toward China.

Obama made an unprecedented appearance at the Pentagon Thursday, marking the first time that a US president has personally participated in the presentation of such a defense strategic guidance document, which presents in broad strokes the priorities and direction for the US armed forces.

In presenting the document, entitled “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” Obama insisted that the US military budget would remain higher than those of the next 10 military powers combined. Preemptively responding to right-wing claims he was “cutting” military spending, he pointed out, “The growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: It will still grow.”

The guidance calls for a fundamental re-orientation of American military power toward the Asia-Pacific region, while affirming its commitment to maintaining US military control over the oil-rich Persian Gulf. “All trends are shifting to the Pacific,” stressed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey. “Our strategic challenges will largely emanate out of the Pacific region.”

In its blunt and provocative portrayal of China as an enemy, the document reflects the steady buildup toward a confrontation over dominance of the Asia Pacific region, the scene of the world’s greatest economic growth.

The guidance document asserts that “US economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments” in this region and, while Washington will continue its interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere across the globe, “*we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.*” [emphasis in original].

The document stresses US efforts to forge a series of military alliances ranging from Japan and South Korea to the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam, while singling out India for the role of an “anchor” for US security interests in the Indian Ocean region.

“The growth of China’s military power,” the document warns, “must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region.”

In a section entitled “Project power despite Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenges,” the guidance document lumps together China and Iran as countries that “will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities,” citing “electronic and cyber warfare, ballistic and cruise missiles, advanced air defenses, mining and other methods.” The Pentagon has grown increasingly concerned over China’s development of torpedoes capable of attacking US aircraft carriers, which were previously seen as impregnable means of deploying massive US military power off China’s shores.

The document also includes multiple assertions of US determination to uphold the “free flow of goods” and “access to the global commons,” which are primarily thinly veiled references to Washington’s increasingly bellicose intervention in regional disputes over the South China Sea.

In surrounding himself with the uniformed members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as civilian Pentagon officials, Obama was undoubtedly attempting to cast himself as a hands-on commander-in-chief and to insulate himself from criticism from the Republican right. Republican presidential candidates, leading Republican members of Congress and sections of the right-wing media all seized upon the document’s budgetary implications, portraying them as a gutting of the American military.

The strategic guidance represents nothing of the sort. As Obama himself boasted, the administration’s proposal to trim around \$450 billion in projected expenditures over the next ten years will still leave the Pentagon’s base budget higher than the last one implemented by the George W. Bush administration.

The cuts being proposed by the Obama administration are not to the current budget, but rather to the projected spending over the next decade, which factored in an assumed steady increase in funding for Washington’s bloated armed forces. The past

decade, dominated by the “global war on terror” and the simultaneous wars and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq, saw military spending in the US soar by more than 80 percent. The plan being implemented by Obama will maintain military spending at this unprecedentedly high level, even as the White House and Congress prepare to take a meat ax to core social programs and benefits, including Medicare and Social Security.

Media reports on the presentation of the strategic review have included claims that the document unveiled Thursday represented Obama putting his “personal stamp” on US military policy. This is even more absurd than the claims about crippling budget cuts. The outline presented in the strategic guidance has been worked out within the US armed forces command and the military-industrial complex, with Obama serving as little more than a political spokesman for these powerful interests.

In its broad outlines, the guidance presents proposals that are remarkably similar to those pushed by Bush’s first defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, who entered the Pentagon pushing for a “revolution” in military policy. Like Rumsfeld’s proposals, the guidance presented Thursday advocates streamlining the ground forces, particularly the Army, while relying more heavily on Special Operations troops and hi-tech weaponry, including unmanned attack drones.

While the document provides no specific numbers relating to budgets and manpower, it has been reported that with the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and the drawdown from Afghanistan, the Army’s ranks will be thinned from the current 570,000 to 490,000. Similar reductions in force are reportedly in store for the Marine Corps, meaning that tens of thousands of troops returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will be thrown onto America’s long unemployment lines.

While undoubtedly the senior brass in the Army and Marines are chafing at these cuts, their concerns are outweighed by powerful corporate interests that are pleased with the guidance’s promise of continued spending on a new stealth bomber, submarines, star wars technology and other air and sea weapons systems that are seen as the most efficient means of aggressively projecting US military might. During Thursday’s press conference, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta directly addressed these interests, declaring the Pentagon’s commitment to “preserving the health and viability of the nation’s defense industrial base.”

In his appearance at the Pentagon, Obama repeated his assertion that, based on the withdrawal from Iraq and the minimal troop reductions in Afghanistan, “the tides of war are receding.”

On the contrary, the defense strategic guidance demonstrates that US imperialism remains committed to the use of armed force to assert its hegemony over the oil-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia, even as it gears up its war machine for an armed confrontation with China.

Giving a cynical tip of the hat to the “Arab Spring”, the guidance affirms US reliance on the despotic monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council in preparing for a military confrontation with Iran.

Defense Secretary Panetta provided a glimpse of what is on the horizon, assuring the assembled media that the US military is prepared to wage “a land war in Korea” while simultaneously defeating Iran in a confrontation over the Straits of Hormuz.

China issued a strong reaction to the defense guidance document. “China must make the US realize that its rise cannot be stopped,” *Global Times*, a state-run Chinese newspaper declared. Insisting that Beijing must not “give up its peripheral security,” the paper added that “China needs to enhance its long-distance military attack ability and develop more ways to threaten US territory in order to gradually push outward the front line of its ‘game’ with America.”

Confronting the relative decline of American capitalism and the rise of China, Washington is turning toward the reckless use of military might to defend its position of global dominance, threatening a conflagration that would eclipse the wars of the past decade.



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