The Pentagon's strategy review: A blueprint for world war

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"The tide of war is receding," President Barack Obama declared, not once, but twice on Thursday in his brief remarks at the Pentagon introducing a new defense guidance strategy that formally announces an aggressive US buildup toward military confrontation with China.

Perhaps the US president felt compelled to repeat the phrase because it is so belied by the contents of the document he unveiled. The strategy guidance, together with the remarks that have accompanied and followed its release, points to a further eruption of American militarism and the palpable threat of a third world war.

Obama based his rhetoric about a receding tide of war on the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, the modest drawdown of forces in Afghanistan—where over 90,000 US soldiers and Marines remain—and the proposal, mandated by a deficit reduction measure passed by Congress, to cut $487 billion from projected Pentagon spending over the next decade.

Yet the US president was at pains to deflect the inevitable criticism from his Republican opponents and from within America's military-industrial complex by stressing that the Pentagon's budget would remain at the record levels reached at the end of the Bush administration and would continue to grow, just not at the breakneck 80 percent rate recorded over the last decade.

Referring to the disastrous US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama declared the "end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints." Yet the strategy guidance insists that the US will continue pursuing its full range of interests in the oil-rich Persian Gulf and broader Middle East, adding that *"to support these objectives, the United States will continue to place a premium on US and allied military presence in—and support of—partner nations in and around the region."* (Emphasis in the original).

While the document suggests that Washington can pursue its interests by combining air and sea superiority with drone missile assassinations and Special Forces and CIA killing squads, it also insists that the US military will retain the capacity to *"secure territory and populations and facilitate a transition to stable governance on a small scale for a limited period using standing forces and, if necessary, for an extended period with mobilized forces."* (Emphasis in the original).

In other words, wars for regime-change and the "large military footprints" of protracted American occupations are over only until the next time. The document stresses that the "concept of reversibility" is "key" to the Pentagon's calculations, meaning that plans have been drafted to quickly swell the ranks of the Army, including through the mobilization of National Guard and Reserve units as well as through a potential military draft.

A critical editorial on the strategy guidance published January 6 by the *Washington Post* provides a glimpse into the bloody-minded calculations of the US ruling elite. The newspaper suggests that wars with Iran and North Korea are on the horizon in which "a major US land force will be needed for a prolonged period." It goes on to indicate that similar interventions may be required in Yemen and Pakistan, even as "tens of thousands of troops…remain for many years" in Afghanistan.

The most momentous facet of the strategy guidance is its reorientation of US military might toward the Asia-Pacific region and toward confrontation with the rising power of China.

After the catastrophic interventions by US imperialism in Korea and Vietnam, Washington is

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proclaiming that it is “back” in Asia. It is seeking to use its armed might to assert its dominance over the region and contain or even roll back Chinese influence. The past year has seen the US attempt to cement alliances with regional powers ranging from the Philippines and Indonesia to Vietnam and Burma. It has intervened provocatively into regional disputes over the South China Sea and, most recently, unveiled plans to deploy some 2,500 Marines in northern Australia.

Behind Obama’s false posturing as an opponent of war in the 2008 election, this reorientation of US military policy was a key objective of those elements within the American political establishment that sought to place him in the White House. Frustrated with the Bush administration’s prolonged and costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their failure to deliver the promised American control over Persian Gulf and Central Asian energy reserves, these layers favored directing the deployment of US military power first and foremost against the country seen as the most significant challenge to US hegemony, not only in Asia, but increasingly in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.

The US ruling elite has not given up the original objectives underlying the two major wars of the last decade, as the strategy guidance makes clear, but merely intends to pursue them by other means. Key among these aims is imposing US control over strategic energy resources upon which China depends.

The implications of a military confrontation with China are spelled out in the strategy guidance’s section assuring the world that Washington will maintain an “effective arsenal” of nuclear weapons “that can under any circumstances confront an adversary with the prospect of unacceptable damage.”

The threat of terrible new wars abroad is joined with the march towards military-police state dictatorship at home. The Pentagon guidance specifically tasks the military with defending the “homeland” and providing “support to civil authorities.” It stresses that “homeland defense and support to civil authorities require strong, steady-state force readiness,” language that can only mean that US troops are being readied for deployment in the streets of American cities to confront an inevitable upsurge in class struggles and social unrest.

Coming in the wake of Obama’s New Year’s Eve signing of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), authorizing the military detention of anyone, citizen and noncitizen alike, without charges or trials, this provision for domestic military deployments is a stark warning.

Coinciding with the opening of the 2012 election campaign, the strategic guidance issued by the Pentagon and the White House underscores the irrelevance of the coming contest between the Democrats and Republicans as regards the pursuit of fundamental US policy, both foreign and domestic. Swept into office in 2008 on a wave of popular hostility to the Bush administration’s policies of war abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home, the Obama administration has only escalated both, bringing humanity face-to-face with the threat of a global conflagration. His Republican rival will, if elected, pursue the same course. Both parties take their orders from the same ruling financial oligarchy and military-intelligence complex.

The struggle against war and in defense of democratic rights can be waged only through an irreconcilable break with the Democratic Party and the struggle for the independent political mobilization of the working class against the Obama administration and the capitalist profit system, which is the source of militarism and the threat of dictatorship.

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