

The new global arms race

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Since the 1980s, in an effort to maintain the position of unchallenged global primacy it achieved during and immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US ruling elite has spearheaded a global arms race and militarization drive that now threatens to produce a third imperialist world war.

After a superficial and short-lived drawdown during the “peace dividend” years of the 1990s, the US military’s expenditures have grown fantastically since the beginning of the 21st century, under the fraudulent banner of the “global war on terrorism.”

Between 2000 and 2006 alone, the US Department of Defense budget rose from \$300 billion to over \$530 billion. As of 2014, official US military expenditures totaled \$610 billion, or nearly 35 percent of total military spending globally.

Taking into account the US military’s secret “black budget” and the various “contingency” funding packages for wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, the real amount consumed every year by US militarism is closer to \$1 trillion.

These expenditures are necessary to fulfill the US government’s openly stated commitment to endless and total war. As reaffirmed in the Obama administration’s 2014 National Security Strategy document, the Pentagon is committed to safeguarding America’s status as “the world’s leading global power.” The NSS 2014 calls for the US to intervene “in every part of an increasingly interconnected planet,” including the Arctic Circle.

Washington’s military ambitions are not confined to the territories of Earth, but encompass outer space and cyberspace as well.

The Pentagon’s new cyberwar strategy includes a “far more muscular role for the US military’s cyber warriors,” calling for new cyber-weapons capable of delivering “blunt force trauma” against enemy information networks and preparing for preemptive cyber-offensives against Russia, China and Iran.

On *60 Minutes* this week, US Air Force Space Command General John Hyten announced that the Pentagon is launching a new space program—with an initial budget of \$25 billion—in an effort to establish unconditional US military dominance over outer space.

Washington is also at the forefront of a renewed nuclear buildup. The Obama administration has announced US government plans to spend \$355 billion on modernization of nuclear arsenals over the next decade.

At a conference of 800 nuclear specialists in Washington this March, a senior US Air Force commander boasted to a conference of nuclear experts in Washington that its nuclear capabilities give the US “an ability to allow no adversary to have sanctuary anywhere in the world.”

US imperialism is the exemplar and leading enabler of international war preparations of a mind-blowing scale. In 2014, global military expenditure consumed nearly 2.5 percent of global production, reaching almost \$1.8 trillion, according to estimates cited by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institution (SIPRI). World expenditures on weapons remained “significantly above the [previous] peak levels of the late 1980s,” according to the SIPRI.

Governments in the Middle East, the Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe and Africa are outfitting themselves with vast quantities of light and heavy weapons. Total military spending worldwide has grown by 1.7 percent so

far in 2015, a rise driven largely by increased purchasing from states in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, according to statistics published Wednesday by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

Though far surpassed by the US behemoth, foreign military budgets continue to grow at an accelerating rate.

Spending by other non-US powers in 2014 included: China (\$215 billion); Russia (\$85 billion); Saudi Arabia (\$80 billion), the United Kingdom and France (\$60 billion each); Japan and India (\$50 billion each); Germany (\$45 billion); South Korea (\$35 billion); Brazil, Italy and Israel (\$30 billion each); and Australia, Turkey and the UAE (\$25 billion each).

While the other major imperialist powers, including Germany and Japan, are moving rapidly to remilitarize, the international cockpit of war planning and rearmament is the United States.

Overwhelmingly purchased from American corporations, which control some 75 percent of the world arms trade, the most advanced weapons systems are being deployed to flashpoints around the world. In the South China Sea, Ukraine and the Persian Gulf, the steady escalation of war simulations and regional conflicts make clear that the vast arsenals being accumulated by the major powers are not intended merely for show.

Asia

During a speech from Singapore in 2012, then US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta made clear Washington’s intention to target the Chinese mainland with the most destructive firepower at its disposal.

Panetta proclaimed that the US would “rapidly project military power” across the Pacific through the deployment of America’s most advanced military hardware, including “an advanced fifth-generation fighter, an enhanced Virginia-class submarine, new electronic warfare and communications capabilities and improved precision weapons.”

The Pentagon’s most lethal resources will be “forward stationed and forward deployed” to strategic areas of the Eastern Pacific, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel assured regional allies during the 2014 Shangri La Dialogue.

In line with the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” the US Navy and Marine Corps have extensively pre-positioned forces along the outskirts of the South China Sea, where, in collaboration with the navies of South Korea, Japan, Philippines and Vietnam, the US war plan aims to rapidly strangle the flow of oil and other essential commodities from the Indian Ocean to Chinese ports.

The US buildup has driven a corresponding expansion of regional military assets. In 2014, fully 48 percent of US weapons sales went to the Asia-Pacific. Militaries in the region increased spending by 62 per cent between 2005 and 2014, reaching \$450 billion in 2014. Vietnam’s military budget has surged by some 130 percent since 2005.

The Pentagon launched a new round of joint “Operation Balikatan” war-games with Philippine forces involving some 12,000 soldiers this month. During the exercises, Philippine commanders issued provocative anti-China rhetoric and threats cited in media reports on the exercises. Maneuvers focused on tactics for assaulting fortifications perched on reefs and small islands, intended to simulate Chinese facilities in the Spratly Island chain.

A top Philippine military officer warned last week of “the adverse effects of China’s aggressiveness,” and announced that the US will assist the Philippine army with new equipment and training specifically tailored to counter China’s island-based defenses. Philippine President Benigno Aquino, who utilized this week’s ASEAN conference as an opportunity to stoke conflict with Beijing, warned during the US-led exercises that the Chinese advances should “engender fear for the rest of the world.”

Europe

Beginning in early 2014, US imperialism fomented a coup and civil war in Ukraine as the means to create conditions for the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe into a vast staging ground for war preparations against Russia.

In the wake of the US-orchestrated February 2014 operation in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, the US and German-led NATO alliance has rapidly developed its network of bases and intelligence and logistical facilities in Poland, Romania and the Baltic states. Last year, the US-led alliance established new battle groups in Europe for the specific purpose of initiating combat operations against Russia on extremely short notice, including the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, also known as the “Spearhead Force.”

Since the beginning of 2015, the US has deployed thousands of tanks and other combat vehicles to Europe, including 800 new battle tanks in March alone. This month, as part of the “Noble Jump” war games, the US and 11 other NATO militaries simulated a dry run for the opening stages of mobilization for a full-scale ground war against Russia. NATO officers told press that the exercises showed that NATO’s spearhead forces can be mobilized and forward deployed for combat along NATO’s “eastern flank” within 48 hours. Also this month, more than 2,000 US and NATO troops simulated large-scale tank and infantry battles in the rolling hills of eastern Romania, as part of ongoing war games codenamed Wind Spring. (See video footage here).

With enthusiastic support from the US, NATO-aligned governments along the Russian border are implementing large increases in military spending this year. According to statistics compiled by SIPRI, military expenditures in Central and Eastern Europe have increased more rapidly than any other region in the world during the period since the February 2014 coup in Kiev.

The largest increases are planned by the US puppet regime in Kiev, which will double its military spending in 2015, after increasing its budget by more than 20 percent in 2014. Lithuania plans to increase military spending by 50 percent in 2015, Poland by 20 percent and Latvia by 15 percent.

The US Army transferred large numbers of Patriot missiles to the outskirts of Warsaw in mid-April, as part of \$2 billion deal with the Polish government.

East European militaries are preparing to use their new hardware in coordination with a growing presence of US military personnel, trainers and “advisors.” As part of Operation “Fearless Guardian,” hundreds of US Army paratroopers deployed to Ukraine this month to train Ukrainian militants, including members of the neo-fascist Azov Battalion.

In addition to an overall \$1 billion military aid package to the Kiev regime, now led by President Petro Poroshenko, Washington has offered to cover the \$20 million expense of the six-month long training program.

Already in 2014, Ukrainian fascistic groups gained official approval as purchasers of weapons from US armament firms, having privileged status as the only non-state groups on a list of “green-lighted” weapons purchasers that includes 56 national governments, according to SIPRI.

Middle East

The decades-long US military buildup in the Middle East has been accompanied by a surge of weapons purchases by America’s regional gendarmes in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

Major US weapons firms informed Congress this month that they are

preparing huge new weapons packages, including thousands of high-tech missiles and other munitions, to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan. The sales are necessary to replenish the depleted arsenals of the Gulf States, which have run low in the past year as regional conflicts have escalated.

Saudi Arabia has been the most aggressive purchaser in recent years, spending more than \$80 billion on weapons in 2014, nearly as much as Russia and more than France and Britain. The kingdom’s ongoing bombing campaign against Yemen has been carried out with fresh supplies of brand new US hardware.

The UAE spent \$23 billion, has tripled its total military spending over the past decade and appears poised to win the honor of being the first non-NATO government authorized to purchase US Predator drones. Saudi and the UAE have now become the second and fourth largest buyers of US arms, respectively, according to SIPRI research.

Qatar ordered weapons systems worth nearly \$24 billion in 2014, including \$11 billion worth of Apache helicopters and advanced missile systems. The purchases evidently whetted the appetites of Boeing and Lockheed Martin, which have opened new offices in Doha in recent years.

The US tripled weapons sales to Iraq in 2014, selling the Baghdad government some \$15 billion worth of “big-ticket equipment, including fighter jets, attack helicopters and laser-guided missiles,” according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

The vast weapons transfers to Middle Eastern regimes serve a definite strategic function, aside from their enormous profitability for US manufacturers. The occupation and militarization of the Middle East and large portions of Africa is now seen in US ruling circles as a necessary component of preparations for strategic confrontation with Beijing.

Faced with a massive buildup of US forces concentrated in the Pacific, East Asian powers, primarily China and but also Japan, have turned to their “geographic back door”—Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa—in an effort to circumvent US predominance in the Pacific and secure access to natural resources and commercial partners. As the US Defense Department argued in its 2014 US Quadrennial Review, “a continued American presence in the Gulf is a key stratagem to check expanding Chinese power.”

Latin America

In addition to the main cauldrons of brewing geopolitical conflict in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and East Asia, US government is also continuing to promote militarization throughout Latin America.

US regional policy is anchored by “security cooperation” programs with the national bourgeois elites in the Western Hemisphere, such as Merida Initiative and Plan Colombia, which funnel US weapons and military expertise to US imperialism’s client regimes in Mexico and Colombia respectively.

In the past few years, Mexico has made “a 100-fold increase from prior years” in weapons purchases from the US, according to an official NORCOM statement. US arms sales to Mexico rose from nearly \$400 million in 2011 to more than \$1.2 billion in 2013.

Mexico’s arms purchases have included some 3,000 Humvees for more than \$550 million, and some \$800 million on a fleet of Black Hawk helicopters. This includes five choppers equipped with M134 machine guns, capable of firing some 5,000 rounds per minute, for an elite urban police unit stationed in Mexico City known as the Condores.

There is no mystery behind the build-up to yet another global bloodbath, so clearly foreshadowed in the terrifying war preparations of the US and its rivals. As Leon Trotsky, founder of the Fourth International, wrote in his 1934 analysis, “War and the Fourth International,” the capitalist mode of production and the dynamics that it fosters, primarily that of implacable struggle between rival states, lead inevitably to world war.

“The same causes, inseparable from modern capitalism, that brought

about the last imperialist war have now reached infinitely greater tension than in the middle of 1914. The fear of the consequences of a new war is the only factor that fetters the will of imperialism. But the efficacy of this brake is limited. The stress of inner contradictions pushes one country after another on the road to fascism, which, in its turn, cannot maintain power except by preparing international explosions. All governments fear war. But none of the governments has any freedom of choice. Without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable," Trotsky wrote.

Now as in Trotsky's time, the only alternative to the slaughterhouse being prepared by imperialism lies in building the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.



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