

Washington prepares for World War III

Patrick Martin
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The US military-intelligence complex is engaged in systematic preparations for World War III. As far as the Pentagon is concerned, a military conflict with China and/or Russia is inevitable, and this prospect has become the driving force of its tactical and strategic planning.

Three congressional hearings Tuesday demonstrated this reality. In the morning, the Senate Armed Services Committee held a lengthy hearing on cyberwarfare. In the afternoon, a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee discussed the present size and deployment of the US fleet of aircraft carriers, while another subcommittee of the same panel discussed the modernization of US nuclear weapons.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will provide a more detailed account of these hearings, which were attended by a WSWS reporter. But certain preliminary observations can be made.

None of the hearings discussed the broader implications of the US preparations for war, or what a major war between nuclear-armed powers would mean for the survival of the human race, and even of life on our planet. On the contrary, the hearings were examples of what might be called the routinization of World War III. A US war with China and/or Russia was taken as given, and the testimony of witnesses and questions from senators and representatives, Democrats and Republicans alike, concerned the best methods for prevailing in such a conflict.

The hearings were component parts of an ongoing process. The witnesses referred to their past writings and statements. The senators and representatives referred to previous testimony by other witnesses. In other words, the preparations for world war, using cyber weapons, aircraft carriers, bombers, missiles and the rest of a vast array of weaponry, have been under way for a protracted period of time. They are not a response to recent events, whether in the South China

Sea, Ukraine, Syria or anywhere else.

Each of the hearings presumed a major US conflict with another great power (sometimes unnamed, sometimes explicitly designated as China or Russia) within a relatively short time frame, years rather than decades. The danger of terrorism, hyped incessantly for the purposes of stampeding public opinion, was downplayed and to some extent discounted. At one point in the Senate hearing on cyberwarfare, in response to a direct question from Democrat Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the panel witnesses all declared that their greatest concern was nation-states, not terrorists.

One of the witnesses at that hearing was Dr. Peter W. Singer, listed as a “Strategist and Senior Fellow” for New America, a Washington think tank. He titled his presentation, “The Lessons of World War 3.” He began his prepared statement with the following description of that imagined conflict:

“US and Chinese warships battle at sea, firing everything from cannons to cruise missiles to lasers. Stealthy Russian and American fighter jets dogfight in the air, with robotic drones flying as their wingmen. Hackers in Shanghai and Silicon Valley duel in digital playgrounds. And fights in outer space decide who wins below on Earth. Are these scenes from a novel or what could actually take place in the real world the day after tomorrow? The answer is both.”

None of the hearings saw any debate about either the likelihood of a major war or the necessity of winning that war. No one challenged the assumption that “victory” in a world war between nuclear-armed powers is a meaningful concept. The discussion was entirely devoted to what technologies, assets and human resources were required for the US military to prevail.

This was just as true for the Democratic senators and representatives as for their Republican counterparts. By

custom, the two parties are seated on opposite sides of the committee or subcommittee chairmen. Without that arrangement, there would be no way of detecting, from their questions and expressions of opinion, which party they belonged to.

Contrary to the media portrayal of Washington as deeply divided between parties with intransigently opposed political outlooks, there was bipartisan agreement on this most fundamental of issues, the preparation of a new imperialist world war.

The unanimity of the political representatives of big business by no means suggests that there are no obstacles in the path of this drive to war. Each of the hearings grappled, in different ways, with the profound crisis confronting American imperialism. This crisis has two major components: the declining economic power of the United States compared to its major rivals, and the internal contradictions of American society, with the deepening alienation of the working class and particularly the youth.

At the House subcommittee hearing on aircraft carriers, the chairman noted that one of the witnesses, a top Navy admiral, had expressed concern over having “an 11-carrier navy in a 15-carrier world.” There were so many challenges confronting Washington, he continued, that what was really needed was a navy of 21 aircraft carriers—double the present size, and one that would bankrupt even a country with far more resources than the United States.

The Senate hearing on cybersecurity touched briefly on the internal challenge to American militarism. The lead witness, retired Gen. Keith Alexander, former director of the National Security Agency and former head of the Pentagon’s CyberCommand, bemoaned the effect of leaks by NSA contractor Edward Snowden and Army private Chelsea Manning, declaring that “insider attacks” were one of the most serious threats facing the US military.

Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia asked him directly, referring to Snowden, “Should we treat him as a traitor?” Alexander responded, “He should be treated as a traitor and tried as such.” Manchin nodded heartily, in evident agreement.

While the witnesses and senators chose to use the names of Snowden and Manning to personify the “enemy within,” they were clearly conscious that the domestic opposition to war is far broader than a few

individual whistleblowers.

This is not a matter simply of the deep-seated revulsion among working people in response to 14 years of bloody imperialist interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Yemen and across North Africa, important as that is.

A war between the United States and a major power like China or Russia, even if it were possible to prevent its escalation into an all-out nuclear exchange, would involve a colossal mobilization of the resources of American society, both economic and human. It would mean further dramatic reductions in the living standards of the American people, combined with a huge blood toll that would inevitably fall mainly on the children of the working class.

Ever since the Vietnam War, the US military has operated as an all-volunteer force, avoiding conscription, which provoked widespread opposition and direct defiance in the 1960s and early 1970s. A non-nuclear war with China or Russia would mean the restoration of the draft and bring the human cost of war home to every family in America.

Under those conditions, no matter how great the buildup of police powers and the resort to repressive measures against antiwar sentiments, the stability of American society would be put to the test. The US ruling elite is deeply afraid of the political consequences. And it should be.



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