

Pentagon budget directed toward war with Russia and China

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Presenting a preview of the Pentagon's \$583 billion budget, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter stressed that the US military is shifting its focus toward war against both Russia and China even as it escalates ongoing interventions in the Middle East.

Speaking before the Economic Club of Washington Tuesday morning, Carter said the gargantuan budget for fiscal year 2017, which is to be presented next week, had been prepared to confront what he called "a new strategic era." The thrust of Carter's speech, delivered in the dry cadence of a longtime technocrat in the field of mass destruction, was that US imperialism is preparing for a new world war.

The biggest single change in the budget is the quadrupling of funding for the so-called European Reassurance Initiative, which is being increased from \$789 million to \$3.4 billion. This initiative was introduced by the Obama administration in the wake of the crisis provoked in Ukraine two years ago, when the US and Germany orchestrated a coup spearheaded by neo-fascist forces that overthrew the Moscow-aligned government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

In September 2014, Obama, speaking in the Estonian capital, Tallinn, committed the US to the military defense of the three former Soviet Baltic republics, vowing that this pledge was "unwavering" and "eternal" and would include "American boots on the ground."

According to a report published Tuesday in the *New York Times*, the increased funding will be used to ensure that the US and NATO maintain a full armored combat brigade at all times on Russia's western border, along with the forward deployment of weapons and military hardware in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as in other eastern European countries such as Hungary and Romania.

Times quoted a Pentagon official as saying that what was being prepared was a "heel to toe" rotational troop presence in the region, meaning that combat units would be continuously deployed. This provocative and reckless tactic is designed to evade a 1997 agreement with Moscow known as the NATO-Russia Founding Act, in which both sides pledged not to station large numbers of troops on each other's borders.

The US, Carter insisted, must have the capacity to counter Russia "theater-wide," meaning it must maintain forces capable of attacking Russia wherever it sees fit.

The money for this anti-Russian escalation is to be taken from the Overseas Contingency Operations account, the war-fighting fund that has paid for US wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While from an accounting standpoint this is meant to circumvent spending caps on the Pentagon's regular budget, it also signals that what is involved is the active preparation for a military confrontation between the world's two largest nuclear powers.

Included in the budget proposal are plans for a substantial buildup of US imperialism's nuclear war arsenal. It calls for the allocation of \$13 billion over the next five years to develop and produce a fleet of new submarines armed with nuclear ballistic missiles. Pentagon sources said it also provides for a new Air Force bomber as well as new generation of land-based nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The Pentagon's proposed budget emphasizes the development of naval firepower, with the aim of escalating the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," which has seen increasingly provocative US military operations in the South China Sea. "We're making all these investments that you see in our defense budget that are specifically oriented towards checking the

development of the Chinese military,” Carter said.

The pretense that funding for the vast US military apparatus is driven by the need to keep up with the growth of the Chinese or Russian military is absurd on its face. American military spending last year was greater than that of the next seven largest powers combined. It spent nearly three times as much as China and roughly seven times as much as Russia.

Carter listed five “challenges” that he said the Pentagon budget must seek to counter. At the top of the list were Russia and China, followed by North Korea and Iran. Dead last were the ongoing US interventions against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which was lumped together with the so-called war on terror generally, which for nearly 15 years has been presented to the American people as the justification for the uninterrupted growth of American militarism.

Nonetheless, the Pentagon budget provides a substantial increase in funding in this area as well. Totalling \$7.5 billion, it includes \$1.8 billion to pay for 45,000 bombs and rockets needed to replenish the stockpile that has been depleted by continuous air strikes in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

The US defense secretary emphasized that the shift in strategy was based on a “return to great power competition.” This required the US military to prepare to confront “a high-end enemy” with the “full spectrum” of armed power. This situation, he added, was “drastically different than the last 25 years,” referring to the period since the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Carter insisted that “America is still today the world’s leader” and the “underwriter of stability and security in every region across the globe, as we have been since World War II.”

The US military, he said, had to prepare for confrontation with those “who see America’s dominance and want to take that away from us... in the future so we can’t operate effectively around the globe.”

The mission spelled out by the US defense secretary is essentially a military struggle to impose US control over every corner of the planet. America’s residual military superiority is to be employed to counter the effects of the protracted decline of American capitalism and its domination of the global economy. To this end, US imperialism must confront every real or potential

rival for both global and regional hegemony. The path outlined in Carter’s speech leads inexorably toward World War III.



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