

US military calls for another \$20 billion to counter China

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Far from easing international geo-political tensions, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has plunged capitalism into a deep crisis and exacerbated pre-existing rivalries. Beneath nominal international co-operation, the preparations for war continue apace.

In an article on Sunday entitled “US Military Seeks More Funding for Pacific Region After Pandemic,” the *New York Times* featured a report by the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to Congress calling for an additional \$20 billion over the next five years to bolster its military capacities against China.

The report was mandated by Congress as part of the fiscal 2020 military budget reflecting the bipartisan character of its increasingly hawkish anti-China stance. Congress specifically required that INDOPACOM, in other words the frontline command, rather than the Defence Department, set out what it needed to maintain military superiority over China.

The funds would be spent on new radar warning systems and cruise missiles, and would also pay for more exercises with allies, deployments of additional forces and new intelligence-sharing centers. The efforts would help improve the U.S. military’s ability to deter the People’s Liberation Army.

INDOPACOM commander Admiral Phil Davidson couched his spending plan, which he termed “Regain the Advantage,” in defensive terms, saying that it was “designed to persuade potential adversaries that any preemptive military action will be extremely costly and likely fail by projecting credible combat power.”

His proposals, however, include weaponry of a decidedly aggressive character, including \$1 billion to be spent on long-range precision missiles such as the Navy’s Maritime Strike Tomahawk and the Air Force’s JASSM-ER weapon. These would be part of “highly survivable, precision-strike networks along the

First Island Chain, featuring increased quantities of allied ground-based weapons.”

The First Island Chain refers to the string of islands running from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines down to Indonesia that would hem in Chinese forces in any conflict. All of the countries near the islands are either US military allies, strategic partners, or in the case of Taiwan, heavily dependent on US protection.

The other measures include a major build-up of anti-missile systems on Guam, the key forward US military base in the western Pacific, as well as a boosting of radar systems on Palau and Hawaii, and a space-based radar tracking system. While they are construed as “defensive,” such systems are also designed to protect US military assets from Chinese retaliation in the event of a US first strike.

The report also calls for greater funding for joint US military exercises with allies and partners throughout the region as well as for stepped-up intelligence sharing. The US already has close intelligence ties with allies such as Australia, Japan and South Korea, but Davidson advocates the establishment of a counter-terrorism center, an Oceania fusion center and other intelligence facilities in the region.

In US ruling circles, there is a fear that the COVID-19 pandemic could further enhance the position of China at the expense of American imperialism. The apparent ability of the Chinese regime to contain the spread of the virus and to offer aid to other countries in the midst of the crisis, stands in marked contrast to the rapidly mounting death toll and numbers of infections in the United States.

Already, the US administration has sought to deflect attention from its own failings by lashing out at China, with Trump and other senior officials branding COVID-19 as the “Wuhan virus” or the “Chinese

virus.” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo effectively blocked a joint communiqué at the G7 meeting last month by insisting that it name the germ as the “Wuhan virus.”

In remarks at the State Department after hosting the G7 meeting, Pompeo provocatively declared: “The Chinese Communist Party poses a substantial threat to our health and way of life, as the Wuhan virus clearly has demonstrated.” He slammed Beijing for providing aid to other countries and then “claiming that they are now the white hat [good guy].”

This campaign has been accompanied by a barrage of US criticisms of China for initially attempting to cover up the outbreak and not alerting the world sooner. Several US politicians have even asserted, without any evidence, that the virus had been produced in a Chinese bio-weapons laboratory. A Chinese official retaliated by suggesting the virus had been developed in a US defence laboratory.

Trump last week dialed back his inflammatory rhetoric after a phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping as the anti-China barbs threatened to get in the way of shipments of vital Chinese medical supplies to the US. Pompeo, however, continued the attacks. A State Department release reported that Pompeo had raised with NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg the need to counter attempts by China and Russia to “spread disinformation and propaganda related to the virus.”

Congressional advocates of an aggressive military build-up against China have seized on the INDOPACOM report to push for greater defence spending in the Pacific.

Senator Josh Hawley, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told the *New York Times* that the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to upend the status quo around the world, particularly in Asia.

“China understands that the global pandemic is an inflection point,” he said. “They are trying to turn this to their advantage. Make no mistake, they are still pursuing their global strategic ambitions. The need for us to laser focus on China’s economic and military ambitions is going to be more urgent once we beat this pandemic, not less.”

US imperialism is determined to maintain the “status quo” in which it was the dominant global power, by all means including if need be through war. The US

military expansion that began under President Obama’s “pivot to Asia,” has been aggressively accelerated under Trump, coinciding with his trade war measures.

While the US health system has proven inadequately funded and equipped to handle the pandemic and the death toll has risen past 10,000, the political establishment in Washington is preparing a new disaster in the form of a war between nuclear-armed powers.



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