

Pentagon budget: A blueprint for World War III

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Defense Secretary Ashton Carter's speech Tuesday previewing the Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2017 spelled out Washington's advanced preparations for military confrontations with the world's second- and third-largest nuclear powers, Russia and China.

Delivered to the Economic Club of Washington, DC, an appreciative audience whose sponsors include the major arms manufacturers Boeing and Northrop Grumman as well as financial giants like Bank of America and Goldman Sachs, the defense secretary's speech presented an unabashed declaration of Washington's intentions to assert its hegemony over the world's markets and resources by whatever means necessary, up to and including a nuclear holocaust.

The presentation made by Carter, a longtime technocrat of America's military industrial complex, provides a powerful vindication of the warnings made by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* that the deepening crisis of US and global capitalism is posing a real and growing danger of a Third World War.

The biggest increase proposed in the Pentagon budget is the quadrupling of funding for the US military buildup against Russia in Europe—projected to rise from \$800 million to \$3.4 billion. In addition to the 65,000 troops Washington already garrisons on the European continent, the funding increase will pay for the “heel to toe” rotation of full armored combat brigades into the former Baltic republics, on Russia's doorstep, as well as other eastern European countries.

This proposal represents a flagrant and provocative violation of the agreements reached with Moscow in the wake of the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union not to station large numbers of NATO troops on Russia's borders.

In addition, large quantities of military hardware, including tanks, artillery, infantry fighting vehicles and other weaponry, are to be stockpiled in close striking

distance to Russia to allow for the speedy intervention of additional US combat brigades from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Poland Bulgaria and Romania.

President Barack Obama issued a statement Tuesday declaring that the 400 percent increase in funding to encircle Russia “will enable the United States to strengthen our robust military posture in Europe and improve our ability to uphold our Article 5 commitments to NATO members.” By invoking Article 5, which requires NATO to militarily defend any member against attack, Obama was reiterating the vow he made in 2014 that the US would put “boots on the ground” to defend the Baltic republics, thereby making their right-wing and virulently anti-Russian regimes the trip wire for a war that would have incalculable consequences.

The other major focus of Carter's speech and of the proposed budget itself is the buildup of US military pressure against China under the banner of the “pivot to Asia,” with particular emphasis on the modernization of the US war fleet for confrontations in the South China Sea.

Carter did not mince words about Washington objectives, which are to use military force to maintain US hegemony in Asia and quell any threat to its dominant position from the rising economic power of China, subordinating China to US economic and strategic interests and reducing it to a semi-colony of US imperialism.

The US, the defense secretary said, would act to “maintain the stability in the region that we have underwritten for 70 years,” warning China that “to disrupt the security environment where half of humanity lives and half of humanity's economic behavior is not a good idea.”

Washington, he continued, was carrying out its military buildup to be able “to impose unacceptable costs on an advanced aggressor that will either dissuade them from taking provocative action or make them deeply regret it if

they do.”

Employing the language of total war, Carter added, “In this context, Russia and China are our most stressing competitors.”

All of these proposals to escalate military confrontations that lead in the direction of global catastrophe are being made without even the semblance of a public debate, never mind the support of the American people, who have repeatedly demonstrated their hostility to militarism and war. The drive toward World War III is unfolding largely behind the backs of the public, with the corporate media and the two major parties showing no interest whatsoever in making the chilling implications of the Pentagon’s preparations known to the population.

As for Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning president, his role as a rubber stamp for the US military and intelligence apparatus was briefly noted in Carter’s remarks Tuesday. Asked whether there would be a further increase in the number of US troops deployed in Iraq and Syria—where funding for military operations is also being increased by 50 percent to \$7.5 billion—he responded in the affirmative, adding, “Every time the chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] and I have asked the president for more capability to do that, he said yes, and I expect that will continue.”

The massive spending on war preparations is to be paid for through ever more draconian attacks on the living standards, jobs and social conditions of the broad masses of working people. The extent of the diversion of social resources to militarism can be seen in the Pentagon’s proposal to increase its spending on research and development for the production of newer and more deadly weapons to nearly \$72 billion. This amount alone exceeds the entire US federal budget for education in 2015, never mind the trillions more that are to be spent in the coming years for new generations of nuclear submarines, bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In July 2014, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) issued a statement entitled “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War.” The statement drew out the fundamental dynamics of the drive toward world war that find expression in Carter’s speech and the Pentagon’s proposed budget. It declared:

“The danger of a new world war arises out of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system—between the development of a global economy and its division into antagonistic nation states, in which the private ownership of the means of production is

rooted. This finds its most acute expression in the drive of US imperialism to dominate the Eurasian landmass, above all those areas from which it was excluded for decades by the Russian and Chinese revolutions. In the west, the US, in league with Germany, has orchestrated a fascist-led coup to bring Ukraine under its control. But its ambitions do not stop there. The ultimate objective is to dismember the Russian Federation, reducing it to a series of semi-colonies to open the way for the plunder of its vast natural resources. In the east, the Obama administration’s pivot to Asia is aimed at encircling China and transforming it into a semi-colony. Here, the objective is to ensure domination of the cheap labour that is one of the key global sources of the surplus value extracted from the working class and the life-blood of the capitalist economy.”

The ICFI went on to explain that the objective roots of the US drive for world domination ensure that an imperialist world war is inevitable outside of the revolutionary intervention of the international working class to put an end to the capitalist system and establish socialism. It stressed that the same contradictions that are the driving forces for war provide the objective impulse for socialist revolution.

In the year and a half since the ICFI issued its statement, these contradictions have only sharpened, intensifying existing wars and heightening the danger of new ones from the Middle East, to Eastern Europe, to the South China Sea, while at the same time driving the working class into increasingly bitter struggles against austerity and exploitation.

The historic question confronting humanity is the necessity for the working class to carry out the world socialist revolution before the capitalist ruling class can complete its descent into a war that threatens nuclear extinction. This places the greatest urgency on the political task of building the Fourth International as the revolutionary leadership of the world working class.

Bill Van Auken

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