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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

16 November 2018

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17.11.2018

Bipartisan panel: US must prepare for “horrendous,” “devastating” war with Russia and China

A bipartisan commission appointed by Congress issued a lengthy report Tuesday backing the Pentagon’s plans to prepare for a “great-power” war against Russia, China, or both, making clear that the Trump administration’s belligerent policies are shared by the Democratic Party.

Safe in the knowledge that its findings will never be seriously reported by the mass media, the authors of this report do not mince words about what such a war will mean. A war between the United States and China, which according to the report might break out within four years, will be “horrendous” and “devastating.” The military will “face greater losses than at any time in decades.” Such a war could lead to “rapid nuclear escalation,” and American civilians will be attacked and likely killed.



U.S. B-52

Stratofortress aircraft [Credit: US Air National Guard]

It is impossible to understand anything in American politics without recognizing one fundamental reality: the events and scandals that dominate political discourse, which make it onto the evening news and into headlines on news sites and social media feeds, have precious little to do with the considerations of those who actually make decisions. The media talking heads play their assigned roles, knowing that the most important topics can be discussed only within very circumscribed limits.

Those who actually make policy—a select group of high-ranking members of Congress, Pentagon officials, and think-tank staffers, as well as White House aides—speak an entirely different language among themselves, and in publications they know the general public will not read, and the media will not seriously report.

These people all accept as plain, self-evident fact, statements that, if they ever made the evening news, would be dismissed as “conspiracy theories.”

The latest example of such plain speaking comes in the form of a new report published by the National Defense Strategy Commission, a body set up by Congress to assess the Pentagon’s new National Security Strategy, issued early this year, which declared that “great-power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus” of the US military.

The findings of the panel, published as a report titled “Providing for the Common Defense,” can be summarized as follows: The US military is entirely correct to prepare for war with Russia and China. But the Pentagon, which spends more each year than the next eight largest national military forces combined, requires a massive expansion in military spending, to be paid for with cuts to bedrock social programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

The report is, in other words, a congressional rubber-stamp on the Trump administration’s military build-up, putting into words what the Congress did in deeds this year when it passed, with overwhelming bipartisan support, the largest military budget increase since the Cold War.

But beyond the recognition that the United States should prepare for an imminent, “whole-of-society” war with “devastating” impacts on the American population, the document is a stark warning of another basic reality: The United States could very well lose such a war, which requires, in effect, the military conquest of the entire planet by a country with less than five percent of the world’s population.

The United States “might struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China or Russia,” it declares. These wars would not just be fought overseas, but would likely target the American population: “it would be unwise and irresponsible not to expect adversaries to attempt debilitating kinetic, cyber, or other types of attacks against Americans at home while they seek to defeat our military abroad.”

It adds, “Should war occur, American forces will face harder fights and greater losses than at any time in decades. It is worth recalling that during the Falklands War, a decidedly inferior opponent—Argentina—crippled and sank a major British warship by striking it with a single guided missile. The amount of destruction a major state adversary could inflict on U.S. forces today might be orders of magnitude higher.”

To drive the point home, the report outlines a number of scenarios. The first involves Taiwan declaring independence from China in 2022, prompting Chinese retaliation. “The Pentagon informs the President that America could probably defeat China in a long war, if the full might of the nation was mobilized. Yet it would lose huge numbers of ships and aircraft, as well as thousands of lives, in the effort, in addition to suffering severe economic disruptions—all with no guarantee of having decisive impact before Taiwan was overrun ... But avoiding that outcome would now require absorbing horrendous losses.”

The solution, the report concludes, is a much bigger army, funded by consistent, multi-year increases in spending. “There is a need for extraordinary urgency in addressing the crisis of national defense,” it writes.

The army needs “More armor, long-range fires, engineering, and air-defense units.” The Air Force needs “more stealthy long-range fighters and bombers, tankers, lift capacity, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms.” The nuclear forces need more missiles. And so on and so forth.

To pay for all this, social services are to be gutted. “Mandatory entitlement programs drive spending growth,” the report complains, demanding that Congress address these programs, which include Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. It warns that “such adjustments will undoubtedly be quite painful.”

And finally, all of society must be mobilized behind the war effort. A “whole-of-nation” approach must be adopted, including “trade policy; science, technology, engineering, and math education.” Everything from private corporations to academic institutions must be brought to bear.

In listing the various challenges to the United States fighting and winning a war against Russia or China, none of the distinguished members of the committee arrived at the seemingly obvious conclusion: that maybe the United States should not fight such a war.

But in this they represent the overwhelming consensus within American policy circles. In his last days, Adolf Hitler was reported to have declared over and over again that if the German nation could not win the Second World War, it did not deserve to exist. The American ruling class is entirely committed to a course of action that threatens the obliteration of not only much of the world’s people, but of the American population itself. This is not the madness of individuals, but the insanity of a social class that represents an outlived and bankrupt social order, capitalism, and an equally outlived political framework, the nation-state system. And it can only be opposed by another social force: the world working class, whose social interests are international and progressive, and whose very existence depends on opposing the megalomaniacal war aims of American capitalism.