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Washington plans for world war

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A remarkable document published July 31 on US military planning calls for the Pentagon to prepare to wage as many as half a dozen wars at the same time, including wars in which the antagonist possesses nuclear weapons.

The document, titled “Ensuring a Strong Defense for the Future,” was drafted by the National Defense Panel, a group of former top civilian and military officials, commissioned by Congress to provide a critical review of the official Pentagon planning document released early this year, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.

The National Defense Panel is co-chaired by William Perry, defense secretary in the Clinton administration, and General John Abizaid, former head of the US Central command. Its members include four other retired generals, as well as Michele Flournoy, former deputy defense secretary under Obama, and Eric Edelman, a leading neo-conservative and defense undersecretary in the George W. Bush administration.

The group is thus bipartisan, representing the entire spectrum of the security establishment in official Washington. Its report was issued under the auspices of a federally funded agency devoted to the study of war, whose name, with impeccable Orwellian logic, is the US Institute of Peace.

The document warns of the dangers facing the United States, listing in first place the growing power of China and Russia, followed by North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Syria, the Middle East as a whole, then Africa. China and Russia have thus been moved to the top of the list of potential targets for US military action, ahead of the three countries singled out by George W. Bush in his notorious “Axis of Evil” speech in 2002.

The document notes that for the past two decades, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, US defense doctrine has called for being able to wage two major wars at the same time. It then calls for a radical change in this doctrine:

“Given the worsening threat environment, we believe a more expansive force sizing construct—one that is different from the two-war construct, but no less strong—is appropriate.”

Later this is spelled out in more detail:

“We believe ... a global war-fighting capability to be the sine qua non of a superpower and thus essential to the credibility of America’s overall national security strategy. In the current threat environment, **the United States could plausibly be called upon to deter or fight in several regions in overlapping time frames: on the Korean peninsula, in the East or South China Sea, in the Middle East, South Asia, and quite possibly in Europe.** The United States also faces the prospect of having to face nuclear-armed adversaries. Additionally, the spread of al Qaeda and its spin offs to new areas in Africa and the Middle East means that the U.S. military must be able to sustain global counterterrorism operations and defend the American homeland even when engaged in regional conflict overseas.” [emphasis added]

This list suggests that the United States be prepared to fight five or six major wars simultaneously. This is nothing less than the demand that US imperialism begin preparing to wage a world war, which would threaten the extinction of humanity.

The elevation of China and Russia as likely targets of US military action has the most ominous implications, since these two countries have the second and third-largest nuclear arsenals on the planet, following that of the United States itself.

The report backs the Obama administration’s posture of “rebalancing” US military forces to confront China, describing this strategic initiative as an effort to reassert “the primacy of the Asia-Pacific region among US security interests.”

As for the likelihood of such a war breaking out, it should be pointed out that the National Defense Panel discusses the possible triggers for a major conflagration, especially in the Far East. The language may be jargon-filled, but the perspective is nonetheless chilling:

“The proliferation of unmanned and increasingly autonomous systems in the Asia-Pacific as well as the Middle East, for example, will have a detrimental impact on the ability to maintain stability during a crisis, or to manage escalation if conflict erupts. These systems, combined with the proliferation of offensive and defense cyberspace and counter-space capabilities, will greatly affect the relationship between offensive and defensive military capability in key regions,

increasing the risk that a crisis erupts rapidly into conflict before policymakers and military commanders have adequate time to react.”

To put it plainly, a major war can erupt through the interaction of drone weapons and automated response systems on both sides, even without any human intervention.

The report does not openly question the all-volunteer military force, but it focuses on its rising cost, and calls for “sensible and cost-effective pay and benefits reforms” to make it more affordable. The logic of the combined pressures of rising costs and expanded military deployments is inexorable, however: it means, sooner rather than later, that the US ruling class must move towards some form of conscription, even beyond the current economic draft in which poorer sections of the working class are disproportionately enrolled in the “volunteer” military.

The defense report expresses concern that the financial constraints on American imperialism, and in particular such self-imposed limitations as the “sequester” of selected military spending imposed under the Budget Control Act of 2011, cut across the Pentagon’s war preparations.

The authors repeatedly complain of the limitation on US military spending because of the burden of domestic social programs, pointing to “the large and growing gap between the amount collected to support entitlement programs, principally Social Security and major health programs, and the amount being spent on those programs.”

They declare, “America must get her fiscal house in order while simultaneously funding robust military spending. Aggressive health care cost containment should certainly be pursued both within the Department [i.e., for the soldiers and their families] and more broadly across all government programs.”

To reiterate again: this is a bipartisan report. Democrats as well as Republicans, liberals and conservatives, endorsed its demand that the social programs upon which working people depend should be slashed to ensure that trillions are available for the insatiable maw of the American military machine.

This bipartisan character of this document testifies to the unity of all sections of the American ruling class on the use of unprecedented violence to safeguard its wealth and its domination of vast sections of the globe. It confirms that the struggle against imperialist war can only be waged by the working class breaking free of the existing political system in the United States, and building an independent mass political movement based on a revolutionary socialist and internationalist program.