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U.S.-China Relations and Trump's Military Agenda

By Abayomi Azikiwe
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The President-elect says defense industry costs are too great while positioning Beijing as an adversary

Over the last several weeks there has been considerable attention paid in the corporate media to the discussions held, nominations made and utterances issued by President-elect Donald Trump during the course of transition process.

Trump is running the pre-White House operations from his hotel in New York City. A constant stream of political and corporate personalities has been summoned to Trump Towers fueling speculation of their possible role in the upcoming administration.

One striking aspect of Trump's nominees is the number of high-ranking military officials who led various missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars have been unmitigated disasters for the peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia as well as the United States. In fact these military adventures have spawned the largest displacement of people since the conclusion of the Second World War ending in 1945.

Since the advent of the administration of President George W. Bush a precipitous increase in defense spending and interventions have taken place. In addition to the massive bombing and invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, there was the intervention in Haiti during February 2004 which removed the elected government of President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Haiti has never recovered from this invasion by the Pentagon, France and Canada along with the earthquake that struck the country in January 2010.

Even in 2010, the U.S. military was sent into Haiti ostensibly to provide relief to the impacted population suffering from the earthquake. An outbreak of cholera has been attributed to the United Nations Mission to Haiti (MINUSTAH) which continued the occupation of the country after the withdrawal of most Pentagon troops.

In Libya, the blanket-bombing of the North African state for seven months during 2011, which was initiated by Washington, Paris and London with the support of Turkey and other NATO states, paved the way for U.S. regional allies to also drop ordnance on the country prompting the deaths of tens of thousands and the dislocation of millions. The Libya war plunged the oil-rich nation into political chaos and poverty making the country the source of much of the instability throughout North and West Africa extending across the Mediterranean into Europe.

Oil, Intelligence and Russian Influence

Gaining tremendous attention from the business media is the possible nomination of ExxonMobil Chief Executive Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. Much has been made of Tillerson's meetings with Russian Federation officials including President Vladimir Putin who is routinely vilified in the American press.

In a December 12 article published by politico.com, it notes:

“Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) delved into the issue during his press conference Monday (Dec. 12) morning, rebuking the Kremlin as he announced support for a congressional probe into its involvement in the U.S. election. His remarks came hours after Trump suggested that the intelligence community’s assessment that Russia is responsible for a series of hacks to tip the election in his favor ‘would be called a conspiracy theory’ if he lost the election and his team “tried to play the Russia/CIA card.”

This same report continues noting that:

“McConnell said flatly that ‘the Russians are not our friends’ and maintained that the U.S. should approach foreign policy and national security issues ‘on the assumption that the Russians do not wish us well. Asked specifically about the possibility that Trump would tap Tillerson as secretary of state, the Kentucky Republican did not mince words. ‘I’m going to save us a lot of time by saying I just addressed how I feel about the Russians, and I hope that those who are gonna be in a position of responsibility in the new administration share my view,” McConnell said.

Raising eyebrows as well was Trump’s comments over Fox News on December 11 suggesting that he did not need to receive the Presidential Daily Briefings because he “is a smart person” and they (intelligence agencies) repeat information throughout the week. Trump went on to say: “I don’t have to be told the same thing in the same words every single day for the next eight years. Could be eight years — but eight years. I don’t need that. But I do say, ‘If something should change, let us know.’”

The U.S. Defense Industry and Capitalist Political Economy

Production of armaments, their marketing and the rising Pentagon budget are integral to the nature of the American capitalist system. Hundreds of billions of dollars are allocated from taxpayer resources to feed the war machine which extends from the foreign policy level to domestic law-enforcement and surveillance.

Trump’s comments related to the cost of the Air Force One jets manufactured by Boeing and F-35 fighter jets developed through Lockheed Martin, have contradicted his heavy reliance on the Retired Generals such as Michael T. Flynn and James “Mad Dog” Mattis, nominated for White House National Security Advisor and Secretary of Defense. Both Flynn and Mattis have never indicated publically any desire for a lessening of Washington’s hostilities towards the Russian Federation, the People’s Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

A commercial deal for the selling of 80 Boeing jets to Iran worth \$16 billion has been met with a groundswell of opposition within the U.S. Congress. The purchase of these aircraft which include the newer version of the 737 along with 777s and 777Xs, resulted from the Iran Nuclear Agreement of July 2015 which Trump has criticized raising the possibility of either re-negotiating the deal or pulling out of it altogether. The passage of a bill by the Senate in early December which would extend Washington’s sanctions against Iran has been assailed by Tehran

as violation of the Nuclear Deal.

Concurrently Trump in a tweet on December 11, criticized costs related to the manufacture of a new series of F-35 fighter jets by Lockheed Martin Corporation, another leading defense contractor with the U.S. military and other states. As a result of the statement over social media, Lockheed Martin's stock declined by 3.4 percent on December 12.

Reuters press agency noted that:

“A week before Trump won the Nov. 8 presidential election, the U.S. Defense Department and Lockheed concluded negotiations on their ninth contract for 90 F-35 fighter jets. Lockheed won the contract, valued at up to \$7.18 billion, in late November and has received an interim payment..... The Pentagon's chief weapons tester has continued to criticize the program, but the jets are now in use by the U.S. Marine Corps and Air Force, and by six countries: Australia, Britain, Norway, Italy, the Netherlands and Israel. Japan took delivery of its first jet last week, according to a program spokesman. Still, cost overruns have attracted criticism. With an estimated price tag of \$400 billion, the F-35 program has been described as the most expensive weapon system in history. Lockheed and its key partners, Northrop Grumman Corp (NOC.N), United Technologies Corp (UTX.N) unit Pratt & Whitney and BAE Systems (BAES.L), are developing and building three variants of the F-35s for the U.S. military and its allies.” (December 12)

These problems associated with Iran-U.S. relations and the production of additional war planes will serve to further the degree of uncertainty in assessing the character of the foreign policy of the Trump White House.

Implications for U.S.-China Relations

Trump has given clear signals that he will seek a shift in the current character of relations with the People's Republic of China. A telephone conversation with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen caused concern in Beijing.

The president-elect says that his administration will not be bound by the “One China” policy which recognizes Beijing as the sole legitimate government for the country. The Chinese government has expressed its opposition to such statements and is threatening retaliation for the abandonment of the policy which has been in effect since January 1979.

In an editorial published by Global Times in China, the newspaper stresses:

“The One China policy is not for selling. Trump thinks that everything can be valued and, as long as his leverage is strong enough, he can sell or buy. If a price can be put on the U.S. Constitution, will the American people sell their country's constitution and implement the political systems of Saudi Arabia or Singapore? Trump needs to learn to handle foreign affairs modestly, especially the China-U.S. relationship. More importantly, a hard struggle against Trump is needed to let him know that China and other world powers cannot be easily taken

advantage of. If Trump gave up the One China policy, publicly supported Taiwan independence and wantonly sold weapons to Taiwan, China would have no grounds to partner with Washington on international affairs and contain forces hostile to the U.S. In response to Trump's provocations, Beijing could offer support, even military assistance to U.S. foes."

These are strong words coming from a nation which has the largest conventional military force in the world along with nuclear capability encompassed by a state which has the second largest economy that conducts enormous trade with the U.S. The heightening of tensions with China could provoke conflict between Washington and Beijing leading the possibility of another international conflagration.

The Trump pronouncements are a reflection of the confused state of U.S. domestic and foreign policy imperatives. Facing the overall declining level of economic growth and political influence, the ruling class is seeking ways to reassert the dominance of the Pentagon and Wall Street.

It is highly unlikely that such a strategy of global dominance can be achieved even with another world war. Such an international military conflict that would risk nuclear confrontation could bring about the effective destruction of U.S. imperialism as a whole.

These issues surrounding military policy, armaments productions, relations with Iran and China will be debated in the next several months among the elite political and economic circles in the U.S. It is essential that forces within the antiwar and anti-imperialist movements point out the destructive nature of these debates and the need to eliminate the threat of war by transforming the present structures of political power and international relations.