

Pentagon Unveils Strategy for Military Confrontation with Russia and China

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The Trump administration's defense secretary, former Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, rolled out a new National Defense Strategy Friday that signals open preparations by US imperialism for direct military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Speaking at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, Mattis made clear that the strategy, the first such document to be issued by the Pentagon in roughly a decade, represented an historic shift from the ostensible justification for US global militarism for nearly two decades: the so-called war on terrorism.

“Great power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus of US national security,” Mattis said in his speech, which accompanied the release of an 11-page declassified document outlining the National Defense Strategy in broad terms.

A lengthier classified version was submitted to the US Congress, which includes the Pentagon's detailed proposals for a massive increase in military spending.

Much of the document's language echoed terms used in the National Security Strategy document unveiled last month in a fascistic speech delivered by President Donald Trump. Mattis insisted that the US was facing “growing threat from revisionist powers as different as China and Russia, nations that seek to create a world consistent with their authoritarian models.”

The defense strategy goes on to accuse China of seeking “Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.”

Russia, it charges, is attempting to achieve “veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor.”

“China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea,” it states. “Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors.”

In what appeared to be a threat directed against both Russia and China, Mattis warned,

“If you challenge us, it will be your longest and worst day.”

Both Moscow and Beijing issued statements condemning the US defense strategy. A Chinese spokesman denounced the document as a return to a “Cold War mentality.” Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, meanwhile, told a United Nations press conference:

“It is regrettable that instead of having a normal dialog, instead of using the basis of international law, the US is indeed striving to prove their leadership through such confrontational strategies and concepts.”

A government spokesman in Moscow characterized the document as “imperialistic.”

Like the National Security Strategy released last month, the defense strategy also singles out North Korea and Iran as “rogue regimes,” charging them with destabilizing regions through their “pursuit of nuclear weapons or sponsorship of terrorism.” It accuses Tehran of “competing with its neighbors, asserting an arc of influence and instability while vying for regional hegemony.”

The document calls for the preparation for war across what it describes as “three key regions”: the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. The document also makes brief references to Latin America and Africa, asserting the necessity of US imperialism striving for hegemony on both continents. It makes clear that these continents are arenas for the global “great power” struggle that forms the core of the strategy, asserting that a key aim in Africa is to “limit the malign influence of non-African powers.”

What emerges clearly from the Pentagon document is a vision of US imperialism besieged on all sides and in mortal danger of losing global dominance. It reflects the thinking among the cabal of retired and active-duty generals that dominate the Trump administration’s foreign policy that the past 16 years of unending wars in the Middle East and Central Asia have failed to further US strategic interests, creating a series of debacles, while grinding down the US military.

“Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding,” the document states. “We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”

The Pentagon’s aim, according to the defense strategy, is to ensure that the US remains “the preeminent military power in the world” able to “ensure the balance of power remains in our favor,” “advance an international order that is most conducive to our security and prosperity” and “preserve access to markets.”

The thrust of the document is a demand for a vast buildup of the American war machine, which already spends more than the next eight countries combined, including nearly triple

the military spending of China and roughly eight times the amount spent by Russia.

A failure to implement the huge military spending increases that the Pentagon is demanding—the Trump White House has called for a \$54 billion increase in the military budget, while Congressional leaders have suggested an even bigger hike—will result “in decreasing U.S. global influence, eroding cohesion among allies and partners, and reduced access to markets that will contribute to a decline in our prosperity and standard of living,” the declassified summary of the defense strategy warns.

Despite having siphoned trillions of dollars out of the US economy to pay for the past 16 years of war, Mattis and the defense strategy present the American military as an institution that has been virtually starved of resources, unable to meet “readiness, procurement, and modernization requirements.”

The overriding objective in terms of modernization is the buildup of the US “nuclear triad”—Washington’s array of intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and strategic bombers, capable of destroying life on the planet many times over.

The document said the Pentagon will seek to upgrade all aspects of its nuclear war-fighting apparatus, “including nuclear command, control, and communications, and supporting infrastructure.” It added that “Modernization of the nuclear force includes developing options to counter competitors’ coercive strategies, predicated on the threatened use of nuclear or strategic non-nuclear attacks.” In other words, the US military is prepared to launch a nuclear war in response to a conventional or cyberattack.

Tellingly, the Pentagon document uses the words “lethal” and “lethality” 15 times to describe the aims of Mattis and his fellow generals in regard to their proposed military buildup. Clearly, what is being prepared is a level of mass killing far beyond the bloodbaths carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere.

In Mattis’s speech there was a strong element of resentment toward the civilian government and its constitutional control over the military. He described US troops being compelled to “stoically carry a ‘success at any cost’ attitude, as they worked tirelessly to accomplish the mission with inadequate and misaligned resources simply because the Congress could not maintain regular order.”

Mattis warned that the war plans outlined in the document will require “sustained investment by the American people,” noting that “past generations” had been compelled to make “harsher sacrifices.”

These new “sacrifices” will take the form of savage cuts to essential social services, including the gutting of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, with the transfer of resources to the military, the arms industry and the financial oligarchy.

The National Defense Strategy released Friday constitutes a grave warning to working people in the US and throughout the world. Driven by the crisis of their system, America’s capitalist ruling class and its military are preparing for a world war fought with nuclear weapons.

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