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By Bill Van Auken
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Trump's nominee for top US military commander calls for nuclear buildup to confront China

In testimony before the US Senate Armed Service Committee Thursday, Gen. Mark Milley, Trump's nominee for chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called for a major buildup of the US nuclear arsenal, while identifying China as the main target of US imperialism's war machine.

In his opening statement the general provided a clear voice to Washington's drive to arrest the long-term decline of American capitalism and its global hegemony by means of military force.



Gen. Mark Milley [Credit: US Army]

“From East Asia to the Middle East to Eastern Europe, authoritarian actors are testing the limits of the international system and seeking regional dominance while challenging international norms and undermining US interests,” Milley said. “Our goal should be to sustain great power peace that has existed since World War II, and deal firmly with all those who might challenge us.”

Asked by the chairman of the Senate panel, Oklahoma Republican Senator James Inhofe, what he was most concerned about in terms of the US confrontation with China and Russia, Milley responded: “I think the very No. 1 for me and No. 1 stated for the Department of Defense is the modernization, recapitalization of the nation’s nuclear triad. I think that’s critical. Secondly, I would say, is space. It’s a new domain of military operations.”

“I think China is the main challenge to the US national security over the next 50 to 100 years,” General Milley, said.

Questioned by Georgia Republican Senator David Perdue on Chinese “global expansion,” Milley provided a clear window into the advanced preparations by US imperialism for war with China.

He charged that China is “using trade as leverage to achieve their national security interests and the One Belt, One Road is part of that.” He said that China is “primarily in competition for resources to fund and improve their military and build and fuel their economy.”

The US response to these economic developments is largely military. Milley spelled out the US military buildup in what the Pentagon terms the “Indo-Pacific” region that is the main arena of confrontation with China. This consists, the general said, of 370,000 US troops, 2,000 warplanes and 200 ships.

Asked whether he thought it would be “helpful” to place conventionally armed, ground-launched intermediate-range missiles in the Indo-Pacific region to help deter Chinese interests in the region, Milley responded, “I do.”

These weapons had been banned under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which the Trump administration abrogated earlier this year. Washington claims that it is acting in response to alleged Russian violations of the treaty—an allegation that Moscow denies.

The US has advanced the theory that Moscow has adopted a wildly adventurist strategy of utilizing a low-yield tactical nuclear weapon against US-NATO conventional forces encircling its territory on the assumption that Washington would not respond with an all-out thermonuclear attack. No evidence has been presented to support this claim.

In any case, the principal target in the abandonment of the INF treaty is China. Beijing is not a signatory to the accord and has developed its own missiles as a counterweight to the US military buildup in the region.

Milley's low key testimony became most agitated in his description of China's military advances. "China is improving its military very, very rapidly," he said. "This is not hype, not a red under a bed. ... They're outspending us on research-and-development and on procurement."

The general said that he considered China "an adversary" and not an "enemy," going on to clarify that "an enemy in military language means they are in active armed conflict." The testimony provided a stark warning that the Pentagon is actively preparing for the transition from "adversary" to "enemy."

General Milley defended the buildup of Washington's nuclear "triad" of inter-continental ballistic missiles, strategic bombers and nuclear armed submarines against any suggestion that the vastly expensive arsenal is characterized by "unnecessary redundancy."

"Each leg of the triad gives you a different capability, so you got the bombers, the missiles and the subs," he testified. "The subs are going to give you the assured second strike, and the missiles give you immediate reaction, and the bombers give you a manned controlled delivery system. So all three present different problem sets to any adversary or enemy, and I think it's critically important to keep all three."

Milley also defended the development of low-yield nuclear missile warheads that are to be launched from submarines, describing the weapons as "an important capability to have in our arsenal in order to deal with any potential adversary."

The weapons are ostensibly aimed at countering potential Russian use of similar warheads in a war in Europe. They significantly lower the threshold for nuclear war, while raising the likelihood that the country on the receiving end of such a missile—unable to know the size of its warhead—would deliver a full-scale nuclear response.

Milley's testimony comes barely a month after the Pentagon briefly posted and then yanked off the internet a 60-page **document** titled "Joint Publication No. 3-72 Nuclear

Operations.” The document, prepared at the request of the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, has since been classified as “for official use only.”

The document spells out the Pentagon’s shift from the Cold War era doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD) to the concept of a limited use of nuclear weapons resulting in a winnable war.

The “joint doctrine” outlined in the document bluntly states that “nuclear weapons could create conditions for decisive results and the restoration of strategic stability. Specifically, the use of nuclear weapons will fundamentally change the scope of a battle and develop situations that call for commanders to win.”

It continues: “Employment of nuclear weapons can radically alter or accelerate the course of a campaign. A nuclear weapon could be brought into the campaign as a result of perceived failure in a conventional campaign ... Integration of nuclear weapons employment with conventional and special operations forces is essential to the success of any mission or operation.”

This gung-ho attitude toward winning by going nuclear is somewhat tempered by the acknowledgement that “The greatest and least understood challenge confronting troops in a nuclear conflict is how to operate in a post-nuclear detonation radiological environment.”

The document counsels: “Knowledge of the special physical and physiological hazards, and psychological effects of the nuclear battlefield, along with guidance and training to counter these hazards and effects, greatly improves the ground forces ability to operate successfully.”

How US military commanders are supposed to prepare for the “special effects” of a battlefield in which the dead may number in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, is not clarified.

Earlier this month, the Pentagon’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency **solicited** proposals from the tech industry for the development of Virtual Reality “training and testing platforms for DoD combat forces operating in a battlefield nuclear warfare (BNW) environment.”

In an oddly worded passage, the document makes clear that any use of a tactical nuclear weapon can quickly provoke all-out nuclear war. “Whatever the scenario for employment

of nuclear weapons, planning and operations must not assume use in isolation but must plan for strike integration into the overall scheme of fires,” it states.

The chilling testimony delivered by Milley on Thursday, spelling out US imperialism’s preparations for war with China and the increasing turn toward a doctrine of a “winnable” nuclear war, was accompanied by pledges from both Democratic and Republican senators that they would quickly confirm the general’s nomination.

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