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New Military Doctrine: America is "Looking for Enemies": Threatening China

By John Cherian

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The new United States military doctrine “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence”, officially unveiled in January, is a clear indication that Washington's focus has once again shifted to China and the Asia Pacific region. The U.S. had not really shifted its gaze away from the region as it fought wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly half of U.S. Air Force F-22 jet fighters have been based in the Asia Pacific region. Two U.S. aircraft carriers have always been around in the region. As many as 22,000 U.S. troops are permanently based in South Korea. In the 2006 Quadrennial Review, the Pentagon had allocated six aircraft carriers and 60 per cent of the U.S.' submarines to the Pacific. Washington had approved a \$-6 billion arms deal with Taiwan despite strenuous objections from China. Before the new Pentagon strategy was announced, President Barack Obama announced the permanent stationing of U.S. troops in Australia.

But with the occupation of Iraq over and the winding-down process in Afghanistan beginning, the U.S. wants to identify new enemies to fight. American economic and security interests, the 2012 Pentagon document emphasises, are “inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific to East Asia into the Indian Ocean and South”. The U.S.,

according to the new doctrine, “will have to necessarily rebalance towards the Asia Pacific region”.

Obama, who was present when the document was released on January 5, made it a point to remind the world that though the defence budget had been trimmed, U.S. defence spending would still continue to remain higher than the combined defence budgets of the next 14 biggest militaries in the world. “Over the next 10 years, the growth of the defence budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: it will still grow,” he told the media in Washington.

The latest Pentagon doctrine identifies China as the enemy the U.S. will have to confront. “Over the long term, China's emergence as a regional power will have the potential to affect the U.S. economy and our security in a variety of ways...The U.S. will continue to make a variety of investments to ensure that we maintain regional access and the ability to operate freely,” the document states. “The growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region.” Though U.S. officials keep on harping about the China threat, they do concede that the country is far away from achieving any kind of parity in military capabilities with the U.S.

The document goes on to highlight the U.S. government's continuing efforts to forge even stronger military alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia. Efforts are currently under way to rope in India and Vietnam into the anti-China alliance. The document singles out India, describing it as “a regional anchor and a provider of security for the broader Indian Ocean region”. The U.S. military has been carrying out joint exercises with their Indian and Vietnamese counterparts for some years now.

The U.S. has lifted a ban on military cooperation with Indonesia's “Kompas” Special Forces. Many of the other countries in the region, such as Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia, have been military allies of the U.S. for a long time. Another of China's neighbours, Myanmar, seems to be rushing into a strategic embrace with the West.

The U.S. wants the Pacific to remain an “American lake” and at the same time ensure free access to its warships through the key choke points in Asia, whether it is the Strait of Hormuz or the Strait of Malacca. The new Pentagon document on several occasions mentions the U.S.' determination to ensure the “free flow of goods” and “access to the global commons”. Shortly after its release, an influential American think tank close to the Obama administration, the Centre for a New American Society (CNAS), called on Washington to pursue a policy of “cooperative primacy” in the South China Sea to preserve the freedom of navigation and the independence of smaller countries in the region.

In 2010, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signalled that Washington was once again starting to refocus its attention seriously on containing China. She declared that the U.S. had a “national interest” in the South China Sea and was prepared to mediate in the territorial disputes that China was embroiled in with its smaller neighbours.

The South China Sea, which stretches across more than one million square miles, connects the Indian Ocean with the South Pacific. It has vital shipping lanes and huge amounts of untapped

oil and gas. If the U.S. and its allies are able to exert control over the South China Sea, it will then be easy to mount an effective naval blockade of China.

The Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman, Geng Yansheng, said that the accusations levelled against China in the Pentagon document were “totally baseless”. He stressed that China’s “peaceful development” presented opportunities rather than challenges to the international community. He expressed the hope that the U.S. would deal with China and the Chinese military “in an objective and rational way”.

People's Liberation Army Daily published an article by a senior army officer, Major General Luo Yuan, accusing the U.S. of targeting China. “Casting our eyes around, we can see that the U.S. has been bolstering its five major military alliances in the Asia Pacific region and is adjusting the positioning of its five major military base clusters, while also seeking more entry rights for military bases around China,” he wrote. The state-owned Xinhua news agency advised the Obama administration “to abstain from flexing its muscles”.

U.S. troops may have left Iraq, but the policymakers in Washington aim to maintain their vice-like grip on the oil resources of the region. “U.S. policy will emphasise Gulf security,” the new military strategy states. There are no proposals to wind up the American military bases in the region or reduce the number of troops based in the Gulf countries aligned to the U.S.

The Pentagon on January 3 answered an Iranian warning to keep U.S. aircraft carriers out of the Persian Gulf by declaring that American warships would continue regularly scheduled deployments to the strategic waterway. Obama has been paying lip service to the “Arab Spring” but bolstering authoritarian regimes like Saudi Arabia. The U.S. weapons deal with Saudi Arabia last year has been described as the biggest in history. The defence document details the importance of the Gulf states in the looming confrontation with Iran. U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta, speaking during the release of the Pentagon document, asserted that the U.S. army was well prepared to fight simultaneous land wars in Iran and the Korean peninsula.

American troops remain in Germany, Japan and Korea though the Second World War ended more than 65 years ago. The U.S. is scouting for military bases in Africa and Asia. Then there is the threat of using nuclear weapons. “Even when the U.S. forces are committed to large-scale operations in one region, they will be capable of denying the objectives of – or imposing unacceptable costs on – an opportunistic aggressor in a second region,” the Pentagon doctrine states. The document has clarified that “imposing unacceptable costs” means that the U.S. “can field nuclear forces that can under any circumstances confront an adversary with the prospect of unacceptable damage”.

Obama has further strengthened the “pre-emption” policy that the Bush administration had put in place after the events of 9/11. This policy has no sanction under international law. Since 2001, the U.S. has bombed and invaded countries if the White House concludes that its national interests are at stake. The Bush administration's Strategic Plan for 2007-12 aimed to “directly confront threats to national or international security from ... failed or failing states”. The latest Pentagon document states that the U.S. will for the foreseeable future retain the right “to establish control over ungoverned territories, and directly striking the most dangerous groups and

individuals when necessary”. The U.S., appropriating the role of the world's policeman, will of course retain the right to determine which are the individuals, dangerous groups and countries that have to be targeted. This policy of pre-emption is already being witnessed in Somalia and Yemen.

In Iran, the government has blamed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for targeting its nuclear scientists. According to many reports, the U.S. army had a role in the killing of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

The Pentagon's goal of fighting “two wars” concurrently will entail the increased use of military drones and “precision strategic bombing”. The U.S. has announced that it plans to deploy sea-based drones in the Pacific by 2018. A new generation of sea-based drones being developed by the U.S. will be able to operate 2,500 km away from the carrier, putting the ships out of harm's way. The U.S. has already started training more pilots to operate drones than to fly conventional fighters and bombers.

Pentagon budget figures show that the U.S. spent \$5 billion on drones. In 2002, the U.S. military spent only \$550 million on the technology. The use of drones, known as “the messengers of death” in places where they have wreaked havoc, has gone up significantly after Obama entered the White House. According to statistics published in Der Spiegel, Obama despatches a missile-equipped drone into action once every four days. During the Bush presidency, the average was one drone in 47 days.