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Obama's War Machine

By Jack A. Smith

On May 6, 2010

There's more war in America's future — a great deal more, judging by the Obama Administration's reports, pronouncements and actions in recent months.

These documents and deeds include the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the Ballistic Missile Defense Report, the Nuclear Security Summit in New York, and the May 3-28 UN Non-Proliferation review conference, as well as the continuing Bush-Obama wars in the Middle East and Central Asia, and the 2011 Pentagon war budget request.

The United States government presides as a military colossus of unrivalled dimension, but the QDR, which was published in February, suggests Washington views America as being constantly under the threat of attack from a multitude of fearsome forces bent on its destruction. As such, trillions more dollars must be invested in present and future wars — ostensibly to make safe the besieged homeland.

The NPR says the long range U.S. goal is a "nuclear free" world but despite token reductions in its arsenal of such weapons, the Pentagon is strengthening its nuclear force and bolstering it with a devastating "conventional deterrent" intended to strike any target in the world within one hour. In addition this document, published in April, retains "hair-trigger" nuclear launch readiness, refuses to declare its nuclear force is for deterrence only (suggesting offensive use) and for the first time authorizes a nuclear attack, if necessary, on a non-nuclear state (Iran).

Meanwhile, President Barack Obama is vigorously expanding the Bush Administration wars, and enhancing and deploying America's unparalleled military power.

The Obama Administration's one positive achievement in terms of militarism and war was the April 9 signing in Prague of the new START treaty with Russia that reduces deployed strategic nuclear weapons to 1,550 warheads each. It was a step forward, but all agree it was extremely modest, and it does not even faintly diminish the danger of nuclear war.

The Quadrennial Defense Review is a 128-page Defense Dept. report mandated by Congress to be compiled every four years to put forward a 20-year projection of U.S. military planning. A 20-member civilian panel, selected by the Pentagon and Congress, analyzes the document and suggests changes in order to provide an "independent" perspective. Eleven of the members, including the panel's co-chairmen — former Defense Secretary William Perry and former National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley — are employed by the defense industry.

Although the Pentagon is working on preparations for a possible World War III and beyond, the new report is largely focused on the relatively near future and only generalizes about the longer term. Of the QDR's many priorities three stand out.

- The first priority is to "prevail in today's wars" in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen and wherever else Washington's post-9/11 military intrusions penetrate in coming years. Introducing the report Feb. 1, Bush-Obama Defense Secretary Robert Gates issued this significant statement: "Success in wars to come will depend on success in these wars in progress." The "wars to come" were not identified. Further, the QDR states that military victory in Iraq and Afghanistan is "only the first step toward achieving our strategic objectives."

- Second, while in the past the U.S. concentrated on the ability to fight two big wars simultaneously, the QDR suggests that's not enough. Now, the Obama Administration posits the "need for a robust force capable of protecting U.S. interests against a multiplicity of threats, including two capable nation-state aggressors." Now it's two-plus wars — the plus being the obligation to "conduct large-scale counterinsurgency, stability, and counterterrorism operations in a wide range of environments," mainly in small, poor countries like Afghanistan. Other "plus" targets include "non-state actors" such as al-Qaeda, "failed states" such as Somalia, and medium size but well defended states that do not bend the knee to Uncle Sam, such as Iran or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and some day perhaps Venezuela.

- Third, it's fairly obvious from the QDR, though not acknowledged, that the Obama government believes China and Russia are the two possible "nation-state aggressors" against which Washington must prepare to "defend" itself. Neither Beijing nor Moscow has taken any action to justify the Pentagon's assumption that they will ever be suicidal enough to attack the far more powerful United States.

After all, the U.S., with 4.54% of the world's population, invests more on war and war preparations than the rest of the world combined. President Obama's 2010 Pentagon budget is \$680 billion, but the real total is double that when all Washington's national security expenditures in other departmental budgets are also included, such as the cost of nuclear

weapons, the 16 intelligence agencies, Homeland Security, and interest on war debts, among other programs.

Annual war-related expenditures are well over \$1 trillion. In calling for a discretionary freeze on government programs in January's State of the Union address, Obama specifically exempted Pentagon/national security expenditures from the freeze. Obama is a big war spender. His \$708 billion Pentagon allotment for fiscal 2011 (not counting a pending \$33 billion Congress will approve for the Afghan "surge") exceeds President Bush's highest budget of \$651 billion for fiscal 2009.

At present U.S. military power permeates the entire world. As the QDR notes: "The United States is a global power with global responsibilities. Including operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, approximately 400,000 U.S. military personnel are forward-stationed or rotationally deployed around the world."

The Pentagon presides over 1,000 overseas military bases (including those in the war zones), great fleets in every ocean, a globe-spanning air force, military satellites in space, and nuclear missiles on hair trigger alert pre-targeted on "enemy" or potential "enemy" cities and military facilities. A reading of the QDR shows none of this will change except for upgrading, enlarging (the Pentagon just added six new bases in Colombia) and adding new systems such as Prompt Global Strike, an important new offensive weapon system, which we shall discuss below.

The phrase "full spectrum military dominance" — an expression concocted by the neoconservatives in the 1990s that was adopted by Bush Administration to define its aggressive military strategy — was cleverly not included in the 2010 QDR, but retaining and augmenting dominance remains the Pentagon's prime preoccupation.

The QDR is peppered with expressions such as "America's interests and role in the world require armed forces with unmatched capabilities" and calls for "the continued dominance of America's Armed Forces in large-scale force-on-force warfare." Gates went further in his Feb. 1 press conference: "The United States needs a broad portfolio of military capabilities, with maximum versatility across the widest possible spectrum of conflicts." Obama bragged recently that he commanded "the finest military in the history of the world."

Evidently, the Pentagon is planning to engage in numerous future wars interrupted by brief periods of peace while preparing for the next war. Given that the only entity expressing an interest in attacking the United States is al-Qaeda — a non-government paramilitary organization of extreme religious fanatics with about a thousand reliable active members around the world — it is obvious that America's unprecedented military might is actually intended for another purpose.

In our view that "other purpose" is geopolitical — to strengthen even further the Pentagon's military machine to assure that the United States retains its position as the dominant global hegemon at a time of acute indebtedness, the severe erosion of its manufacturing base, near gridlock in domestic politics, and the swift rise to global prominence of several other nations and blocs.

The QDR touches upon this with admirable delicacy: "The distribution of global political, economic, and military power is shifting and becoming more diffuse. The rise of China, the world's most populous country, and India, the world's largest democracy, will continue to reshape the international system. While the United States will remain the most powerful actor, it must increasingly cooperate with key allies and partners to build and sustain peace and security. Whether and how rising powers fully integrate into the global system will be among this century's defining questions, and are thus central to America's interests." (Italics ours.)

At the moment, the QDR indicates Washington is worried about foreign "anti-access" strategies that limit its "power projection capabilities" in various parts of the world. What this means is that certain countries such as China and Russia are developing sophisticated new weapons that match those of the U.S., thus "impeding" the deployment of American forces to wherever the Pentagon desires. For instance:

"China is developing and fielding large numbers of advanced medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, new attack submarines equipped with advanced weapons, increasingly capable long-range air defense systems, electronic warfare and computer network attack capabilities, advanced fighter aircraft, and counter-space systems. China has shared only limited information about the pace, scope, and ultimate aims of its military modernization programs, raising a number of legitimate questions regarding its long-term intentions."

To counter this trend in China and elsewhere, the Pentagon is planning, at a huge and unannounced cost, the following enhancements: "Expand future long-range strike capabilities; Exploit advantages in subsurface operations; Increase the resiliency of U.S. forward posture and base infrastructure; Assure access to space and the use of space assets; Enhance the robustness of key ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capabilities; Defeat enemy sensors and engagement systems; and Enhance the presence and responsiveness of U.S. forces abroad."

In addition, the U.S. not only targets China with nuclear missiles and bombs, it is surrounding the country (and Russia as well, of course) with anti-ballistic missiles. The purpose is plain: In case the U.S. finds it "necessary" to launch ballistic missiles toward China, the ABMs will be able to destroy its limited retaliatory capacity.

According to an article in the Feb. 22 issue of *China Daily*, the country's English language newspaper: "Washington appears determined to surround China with U.S.-built anti-missile systems, military scholars have observed.... Air force colonel Dai Xu, a renowned military strategist, wrote in an article released this month that 'China is in a crescent-shaped ring of encirclement. The ring begins in Japan, stretches through nations in the South China Sea to India, and ends in Afghanistan.'"

Compared to the Bush Administration's 2006 QDR, there has been a conscious effort to tone down the anti-China rhetoric in the current document. But it is entirely clear that China is number one in the QDR's references to "potentially hostile nation states."

According to the Feb. 18 *Defense News*, a publication that serves the military-industrial complex, "Analysts say the QDR attempts to address the threat posed by China without further enraging

Beijing. 'If you look at the list of further enhancements to U.S. forces and capabilities... those are primarily capabilities needed for defeating China, not Iran, North Korea or Hezbollah,' said Roger Cliff, a China military specialist at Rand. 'So even though not a lot of time is spent naming China... analysis of the China threat is nonetheless driving a lot of the modernization programs described in the QDR.'

Incidentally, according to the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, this year's Chinese defense budget, for a country four times larger than the United States, is \$78 billion, compared to the \$664 billion for the Pentagon (without all the national security extras harbored in other department budgets). China possesses 100-200 nuclear warheads compared to America's 9,326 (when both deployed and stored weapons are included). China is contemplating the construction of an aircraft carrier; the U.S. Navy floats 11 of them. China has no military bases abroad.

In our view, China appears to be constructing weapons for defense, not offense against the U.S. — and its foreign policy is based on refusing to be pushed around by Washington while doing everything possible to avoid a serious confrontation.

Russia as well is treated better in the new Quadrennial than in 2006, but it is included with China in most cases. Despite Moscow's huge nuclear deterrent and abundant oil and gas supplies, it's only "potential enemy" number two in terms of the big powers. Washington feels more threatened by Beijing. This is largely because of China's size, rapid development, fairly successful state-guided capitalist economy directed by the Communist Party, and the fact that it is on the road to becoming the world's economic leader, surpassing the U.S. in 20 to 40 years.

It seems fairly obvious, but hardly mentioned publicly, that this is an extremely dangerous situation. China does not seek to dominate the world, nor will it allow itself to be dominated. Beijing supports the concept of a multi-polar world order, with a number of countries and blocs playing roles. At issue, perhaps, is who will be first among equals.

Washington prefers the situation that has existed these 20 years after the implosion of the Soviet Union and much of the socialist world left the United States as the remaining military superpower and boss of the expanded capitalist bloc. During this time Washington has functioned as the unipolar world hegemon and doesn't want to relinquish the title.

This is all changing now as other countries rise, led by China, and the U.S. appears to be in gradual decline. How the transition to multi-polarity is handled over the next couple of decades may determine whether or not a disastrous war will be avoided.

America's Nuclear Intentions

The Nuclear Posture Review is of great importance because it concerns the most deadly weapons in the world. The report is overflowing with ambiguity. First it notes that President Obama seeks "a world without nuclear weapons," but that he recognizes it may not be possible "in his lifetime."

Then it notes that after the Cold War "The threat of global nuclear war has become remote, but the risk of nuclear attack has increased" because a terrorist may seek to bring a nuclear weapon into the United States. We assume this does not mean it is more dangerous today than during the Cold War, but it's not entirely clear.

It probably means that an al-Qaeda operative may enter the U.S. with a nuclear weapon and detonate it. If so, it's odd that the NPR does not explain that in the unlikely event a weapon falls into the wrong hands, the chances of a successful nuclear terror attack are exceptionally slight due to complex technical reasons, and the fact that such a weapon has many intricate safeguards. Instead the American people are given one more exaggerated fear to dwell upon.

The New York Times and many websites carried the following comment regarding nuclear terrorism: "Micah Zenko, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations who has written on nuclear history, said: 'The fear of a clandestine nuclear attack on American soil goes back to the very beginning of the nuclear era. There's certainly nothing new here, even if they didn't call it terrorism back in the '50s.... If you consider that the threat has been around for more than 60 years, you don't get overwhelmed by fear.'"

One of the memorable descriptions of the Posture Review was supplied by Robert Haddick, editor of the Small Wars Journal April 9:

"The authors of the... NPR are attempting to deliver two messages. The first message attempts to show that the U.S. government is making some significant changes to its nuclear weapons doctrine and force structure, changes that bring the world closer to being free of nuclear weapons. The second message asserts that the United States is doing no such thing at all and in fact will remain a fully modernized and supreme nuclear power."

The NPR lists "five key objectives of our nuclear weapons and posture." They are 1. Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism; 2. Reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy; 3. Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels; 4. Strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring U.S. allies and partners; and 5. Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal. We shall discuss number one and two, the most important.

- "Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism" is a worthy goal, but the Obama Administration's approach to the problem is inadequate and politically motivated. No effort is made in the document to explain why complete nuclear disarmament — the only way to eliminate nuclear proliferation, nuclear terrorism, and nuclear war — won't even be possible for the next 35 years (Obama's statistically remaining life span), if ever.

The U.S. has been the main obstacle to complete nuclear disarmament during and after the Cold War. The Soviet Union repeatedly called for nuclear disarmament, and even proposed general and complete disarmament of each country's military apparatus, including nuclear weapons. In January 1986, several years before the USSR collapsed from internal political and economic contradictions, Premier Gorbachev introduced another plan — this time calling for complete

nuclear disarmament by 2000. Although at times sectors of the U.S. ruling establishment viewed various such proposals favorably, a majority always demurred, as it does today.

If Washington boldly proposed the total nuclear disarmament of all nine nuclear nations under strict UN supervision, it probably would result in a treaty to eliminate the weapons within several years.

In this connection, when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed in 1970, the several nations in possession of nuclear weapons at the time were supposed to gradually reduce their arsenals to the extent of complete nuclear disarmament. That was 40 years ago, and while there have been reductions in Russian and U.S. stockpiles, the final goal is absurdly distant. It should have transpired years ago.

President Obama's effort to halt proliferation cannot possibly be sincere when he refuses to condemn and sanction three of the four countries that have produced a substantial number of nuclear weapons illegally in total violation of the NPT because they are U.S. allies — India, Pakistan and Israel. Instead Obama vents fury, sanctions, and the threat of attack upon the DPRK, which possesses only a couple of relatively small nuclear weapons.

Most telling of all, however, is the NPR's implied threat to punish Iran with a nuclear attack, even though it does not have any nuclear weapons and repeatedly promises not to produce them. Here is the sentence pertaining to Iran: "The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations." Iran is technical violation because of a couple of a minor incidents.

Here is how Defense Secretary Gates elaborated upon this sentence: "The NPR has a very strong message for both Iran and North Korea, because whether it's in declaratory policy or in other elements of the NPR, we essentially carve out states like Iran and North Korea that are not in compliance with NPT. And basically, all options are on the table when it comes to countries in that category, along with non-state actors who might acquire nuclear weapons."

The phrase "all options are on the table," which Gates repeated in his next paragraph for emphasis, is standard Bush-Obamaspeak for threatening certain small and weaker countries that displease the White House. Such bullying would never be directed against well-protected Russia.

According to Robert Parry, editor of the website Consortium News, on April 18: "What is perhaps even more extraordinary about Obama's comments — and the nonchalant response from the U.S. news media — is that the President appears to be exploiting technical disputes to overturn a broader principle that nuclear states should not threaten non-nuclear states with nuclear destruction."

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad responded with these words: "Even Bush did not say what Obama is saying."

Tehran is filing a formal complaint with the UN, reports an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman who noted that "such remarks prove that the countries which possess nuclear arms are the greatest threat to the global security." Iran strongly supports complete nuclear disarmament. At the Arab League summit in Libya March 28 delegates called for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons. They also requested the International Atomic Energy Agency to end technical assistance programs in Israel if Tel Aviv continues to avoid UN inspections.

- The NPR's second objective is "reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons." This does not mean reducing the number, deployed or in storage, just the role. And there is a very good reason to reduce the role: The U.S. is developing a major non-nuclear alternative. It's called Prompt Global Strike (PGS) and sometimes Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS).

The U.S. government realizes that there are serious problems about using nuclear weapons. Such weapons may be justified as a deterrent to avoid a nuclear exchange because strike and counter-strike would result in mutually assured destruction (MAD). But the entire world would object to a preemptive unilateral strike against a non-nuclear state. For instance, had the Bush Administration's "shock and awe" terror bombing of Baghdad included nuclear weapons, the global outcry — substantial to begin with — would have been magnified a hundred fold, and the act would never be forgiven by much of the world. Indeed, it would spark proliferation as countries scrambled to build nuclear deterrents of their own, as did the DPRK, to forestall a possible nuclear attack.

The document barely mentions Prompt Global Strike, revealing only that the Pentagon "is studying the appropriate mix of long-range strike capabilities, including heavy bombers as well as non-nuclear prompt global strike." Global Strike usually means nuclear bombs and missile warheads. PGS or CPGS means conventional, i.e., non-nuclear.

Prompt Global Strike relies on high speed missiles, satellite mapping and other cutting edge military technology to launch a devastating non-nuclear payload from a military base in the U.S to destroy a target anywhere in the world in less than one hour. The purpose is to resolve the conundrum posed by the global inhibition toward the use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states, thus greatly strengthening the Obama Administration's full spectrum military dominance.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a once leading Cold War hawk, had PGS in mind in an article he placed in the January-February 2009 Foreign Affairs titled A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age. Writing of the need to balance nuclear capabilities with non-nuclear weapons, he declared: "The United States cannot take its current dominance for granted and needs to invest in the programs, platforms and personnel that will ensure that dominance's persistence," he said.

PGS is a non-nuclear weapon on steroids. Along with existing nuclear missiles and anti-missile systems, this new addition, still in its experimental stage, will provide the United States with a decisive advantage over China and Russia, unnecessarily provoking an arms race, defensive or offensive, in a totally new weapon category.

According to a March 15 article by Global Security Newswire's Elaine M. Grossman, the Air Force's Conventional Strike Missile, as it is named, "would initially boost into space like a ballistic missile, dispatch a 'hypersonic test vehicle' to glide and maneuver into a programmed destination, which could be updated or altered remotely during flight. Finally, it would dispense precision-guided munitions to hit its target. Traveling at speeds exceeding hypersonic Mach 5 the weapon could go from initial launch to destroying a target halfway around the globe in less than an hour.

"A U.S. president might be more likely to approve the launch of a Conventional Strike Missile because it would involve fewer negative consequences and less stigma than nuclear weapons, government officials assert. As it stands, the capability is very expensive, with per-weapon estimates approaching \$100 million or more. The Obama administration has requested \$239.9 million for prompt global strike research and development across the military services in fiscal 2011." It is expected to be war-ready in five to seven years.

To insure the right wing doesn't characterize claims of reducing weapons as signs of weakness, the White House dispatched both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Gates to TV news programs last month to sing the praises of Pentagon power.

Appearing April 11 on "This Week," hawkish Clinton intoned: "I think if you actually read the nuclear posture review, you would [understand] we intend to maintain a robust nuclear deterrent. Let no one be mistaken. The United States will defend ourselves, and defend our partners and allies. We intend to sustain that nuclear deterrent by modernizing the existing stockpile. In fact, we have \$5 billion in this year's budget going into that very purpose.

"We believe... that we can have the kind of deterrent that we need by modernizing our stockpile, but not necessarily having to replace and build new nuclear weapons. But if there is a conclusion down the road that there does have to be consideration for some kind of replacement, that decision will go to the president.... We do not see this as in any way a diminishment of what we are able to do."

Gates then chimed in: "We have more robust deterrents today, because we've added to the nuclear deterrent missile defense. And with the phased adaptive approach that the president has approved, we will have significantly greater capability to deter the Iranians, because we will have a significantly greater missile defense. We're also developing this conventional prompt global strike, which really hadn't gone anywhere in the Bush administration, but has been embraced by the new administration. That allows us to use long range missiles with conventional warheads. So we have more tools, if you will, in the deterrents kit bag than — than we used to."

Everything is expressed as defensive deterrents; that's almost always the aggressor's way. Prompt Global Strike is an offensive tool par excellence. Nuclear weapons are both defensive, as a deterrent, and offensive, particularly when coupled with an ABM network.

Hans M. Kristensen, Project Director for the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, wrote the following April 7 for the FAS website: "The new NPR comes across as a surprisingly cautious document that... for now preserves many of the key nuclear

weapons force structure and policy elements of the previous administration.... For those of us who looked forward to the NPR to clearly and significantly reduce the role and numbers of nuclear weapons, however, the report is a disappointment. President Obama has cautioned that his vision of a nuclear free world might not happen in our lifetime and the NPR shows why he might be right."

The United States and Russia possess over 90% of global nuclear weapons and delivery systems, mostly accumulated during the Cold War (1945-1990). Significant reductions have taken place in the past. The recent U.S-Russian START II treaty reduced a portion of deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems by about 30% to a shared total of over 3,000 strategic warheads, and 1,600 deployed strategic launchers.

The withdrawn weapons are to be taken off line and stored for possible future deployment, not destroyed. No new warheads are to be built since existing warheads will be upgraded for future deployment if required. The treaty did not interfere with the 200 U.S. intermediate range warheads and delivery systems based in Western Europe, much to the chagrin of several European governments.

START II will become operative if approved in the Senate by a two-thirds majority. It may have been watered down sufficiently to gain the 67 votes needed for approval. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said April 12 he believed it would pass but it might take several months. Congress still has not approved the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly nearly 14 years ago.

In an analysis of the START treaty for Truthout April 19, Joseph Gerson, director of programs for the New England American Friends Service Committee, declared it "is widely recognized as a very modest step that at best helps to stabilize relations between the world's two nuclear superpowers," noting that the reductions still leave the two states with "the destructive capacity on the order of 60,000 Hiroshimas." He further quotes The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists to the effect that "due to the arcane arms control counting methods, a fully armed B-52 bomber will be counted as a single warhead, resulting in smaller reductions than most anticipate. No cuts in U.S. and Russian nuclear stockpiles of about 20,000 warheads are included."

The State Department April 8 made a special point of the fact that "the new START treaty does not contain any constraints on current or planned U.S. conventional Prompt Global Strike capability." We have no evidence but assume the Russians must have raised the point and lost since Moscow is on record as strongly opposing PGS.

The QDR and NPR, followed by the Obama Administration's April 12-13 47-nation nuclear summit meeting in New York are intended to set the stage for promoting the U.S. agenda at the May 3-28 meeting of the UN's important 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Washington wants its principal priorities — strengthening the NPT and intensifying efforts against nuclear terrorism — to be acted upon. It seeks to have Iran and the DPRK punished. And it wants to be looked upon as being compliant with the NPT in terms working toward complete nuclear disarmament.

Above all, the Obama Administration seeks to convey the impression to the people of the U.S. and the world that it is diligently trying to reduce weapons, ease world tensions, and diminish the danger of more war. In reality, the U.S. government is widening the wars, hiking military spending, introducing an entirely new and disruptive weapon, while erecting obstacles to the swift attainment of nuclear disarmament.