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**The Military Strategy of US Imperialism
At the Turn of the Century**

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The last decade of the 20th century has seen the rise of a new aggressive military strategy by the United States. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the countervailing power to the imperialist bloc, the United States has embarked on a new thrust for world dominance and hegemony for the imperialist bloc under its leadership. The economic aspects of this imperialist drive are well documented and known; the accompanying changes in the military strategy of imperialism and its implications for peace and the third world in particular must be paid more attention. Contrary to the expectations that the end of the cold war will yield a peace dividend, the US strategy poses a new menace to the world.

Within the imperialist bloc, the United States is the most powerful economic and military power. Under President Reagan in the 1980s, the United States stepped up the use of military power for the political and economic aims of imperialism. In the confrontation with the Soviet Union, the Reagan presidency utilised the arms race as a systematic weapon to heighten the confrontation and force the Soviet Union to step up its arms expenditure, making it an unbearable drain on its system.[\[1\]](#) With the end of Soviet power, the United States was free to fashion a new military strategy more in tune with its status as the sole superpower which has to also discharge the leadership responsibility for maintaining of imperialist world order.

Alongwith the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the decade of the nineties also witnessed, the strengthening of the US economy relative to the performance of the German and Japanese economies. The impact of the current phase of crisis in the world capitalist system has been uneven. It has resulted in the USA recovery from the recession and registering growth, while the other major centres,

Germany and Japan, have not been able to come out of the recession. This has provided added strength to the US aggressive posture and willingness to undertake interventions all round the world ignoring international norms and the United Nations.

The fashioning of the new military doctrine of the United States has been conditioned by two factors, the dominance of the US economic and military power after the end of the cold war and the growing monopoly over the use of high technology for military purposes.

The United States maintains and develops its formidable military strength for a global role which has three aspects. It needs the military machine to protect and maintain the imperialist order. Secondly, its overwhelming strength is required to exercise leadership of the imperialist bloc, though as the hegemon it has a partnership with other imperialist countries particularly Germany and Japan. Finally, it targets and attacks much weaker third world countries, like Iraq, to establish its credibility and reputation as a global superpower. It is the classic use of force as example, to elicit obedience and compliance.

The first indication of the new orientation of US military strategy came with the Gulf war in 1991. In the attack on Iraq, the coalition led by the United States consisted of Britain, Germany, Japan and other allied powers with America providing the main equipment and fighting force. The use of high-tech weaponry for aerial bombing, missile attacks and crippling the enemies air and ground defences indicated how the United States would use its economic-technological-military superiority to cow down or destroy potential enemies or threats.

Threat From Regional Powers

The military doctrine enunciated after the collapse of the Soviet Union stated that the threat would now come from "regional powers" which had the capacity for substantial strength in conventional weapons and armed forces. Such powers who did not accept the global hegemony plan of the United States were to be targetted as potential threats.

The US Defence Secretary, Dick Cheney, stated in March 1991: "The Gulf War presaged very much the type of conflict we are most likely to confront again in this new era - major regional contingencies against the foes well-armed with advanced conventional and non-conventional weaponry. In addition to Southwest Asia, we have important interests in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and Central and Latin America. In each of these regions there are opportunities and potential future threats to our interests. We must configure our policies and our forces to effectively deter, or quickly defeat, such regional threats".[\[2\]](#)

While the outlines of the new strategic posture were formulated during the Bush Presidency, the final shape to it was given by the Clinton Administration. The "Bottom-Up Review" adopted and made public in September 1993 called for a mobile hi-tech force which could "project power into regions important to our interests and to defeat potentially hostile regional powers, such as North Korea and Iraq."[\[3\]](#) The new strategic doctrine provided for intervention in two major regional conflicts simultaneously. The US armed forces should have the requisite capacity and global reach to wage war in two theatres.

Rogue States

In the military doctrine, primacy is given to targetting "rogue" states who are unwilling or who refuse to fall in line with this new world order. Cuba, Iraq, Libya, Iran, Sudan and North Korea are some of the states so labeled. Yugoslavia is the latest addition. Against most of these countries, both economic weapons and military might have been used. In a second category are other emerging regional powers who can pose a potential threat because of their capacity to become military powers and produce new weapons such as missiles or nuclear weapons. China, India, Egypt, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil are in this list.

In order to counter and tackle such powers the United States decided to have a leaner, more mobile and high-tech armed forces. This led to a reduction in the actual manpower strength of the United States armed forces. While the existing strength of the armed forces were reduced by a quarter, at the same time the expenditure on defence did not go down proportionately. More money was needed to develop high-tech weapons to maintain total aerial and missile

superiority and to develop new weapons based on advanced technology available only in the advanced capitalist countries.

Rising Expenditure

The end of the Soviet Union did not lead to any substantial reduction of US defence expenditure or the strength of the armed forces or its armaments stocks. On the contrary, in order to have such well equipped highly mobile high-tech armed force, the United States has now actually begun increasing its defence expenditure after some reduction in the years 1993 to 1997. The US defence budget for the year 2000 is proposed to be \$281 billion as compared to \$252 billion in 1998 and 1999. This is more than the combined military expenditure of six other countries with the biggest military budgets: Russia, Britain, France, Germany and China. The US administration also decided to increase its defence budget by \$ 112 billion in the coming six years. The United States has also announced that it will spend \$7 billion on the "Star Wars" system. The US share of the world-wide spending is 34 per cent.[\[4\]](#)

Enforcing Free Markets & Democracy

Who is this increased defence expenditure and new weapons systems directed against? The answer to this lies in the nature of the imperialist system which the United States is heading. Imperialism at the end of the 20th century manifests increasingly the necessity to control, exploit and dominate all parts of the world and sectors of the world economy. After the "golden boom" of capitalist growth for the quarter of a century after the second world war, the world capitalist system has not been able to create and sustain the same levels of growth. With the increasing internationalisation of finance capital and its volatility, new problems and contradictions have arisen. Without going into the details of these developments, it is pertinent to note that the United States and the advanced capitalist countries require to capture the markets of the third world and the former socialist countries and to ruthlessly exploit their advantageous position in international trade and monopoly of technology.

In the world view of the US ruling circles, "free market" and "democracy" are intertwined and to implant these around the world, military force is an essential component. The NATO in 1991 stated:

"We will continue to support, with all means available to us, reforms undertaken in the East and efforts aimed at creating market economies."^[5] In a frank admission, Anthony Lake, Clinton's National Security Advisor, stated in a speech that the new world presents immense opportunities "designed to consolidate the future of democracy and open markets". He said, "The US is not starry-eyed about the prospects of spreading democracy. But it knows that to do so serves its interest. Democracy creates free markets that offer economic opportunity and they make for reliable trading partners". From President Eisenhower in the fifties to Clinton in the 1990s, this is a running thread in US foreign policy. The difference is that, the US is now able to pursue their aim more brazenly after the setbacks suffered by socialism.

The IMF, the World Bank and the WTO constitute the trinity of imperialist dominated multilateral institutions which serve to ensure that the capitalism of the late 20th century, of free market and the neo-liberal economic order, becomes the rule all over the world. The United States has openly declared that in order to maintain such a neo-liberal order it is prepared to deploy and utilise its enormous military strength. Any country which refuses to accept or deviates from this norm is a target for potential attack both in terms of economic and military warfare. The US therefore uses the twin weapons of economic sanctions, blockades, threats and blackmail alongwith military measures to pacify recalcitrant states.

The other prong of US strategy is to curb proliferation of nuclear weapons and new hitech armaments such as missiles. Earlier, during the Cold War, the US had the COCOM to maintain the monopoly of advanced arms technology. Now, the US has the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the NPT, the CTBT and the FMCT talks to institute such an international regime. Further the US is prepared to use the UN Security Council or direct armed intervention to prevent other countries getting "Weapons of Mass Destruction". This of course is selectively applied. Iraq and Iran have sanctions against them for acquiring such weapons, while Israel, the firm ally of the US, is free to stock nuclear weapons.

The New Doctrine of NATO

The NATO was set up 50 years ago as a military alliance of the West European countries, with the US as its leader, to contain communism

and to aggressively confront the Soviet Union and the East European countries. The NATO was not dismantled when the Warsaw pack was dissolved. Instead, the United States has pushed for including the former East European socialist countries into the NATO alliance. This year three such countries, the Czech republic, Poland and Hungary were admitted to the alliance. Some of the other East European countries are prospective members. This eastward expansion of NATO upto the borders of Russia has alarmed the Russian government. It has so far been able to only lodge strong protests against a move seen as inimical to Russia's security interests.

On the 50th anniversary of NATO on April 23, 1999, the summit meeting held at Washington of the 19 NATO member countries adopted a new strategic concept. This doctrine empowers NATO to intervene in any regional conflict or crisis around the world. Contrary to the NATO charter which confines military actions in defence of NATO member countries, the new doctrine extends NATO's military power for use in East Asia, Africa or any other part of the world where the US and its NATO allies feel their interests are threatened.

Yugoslavia: NATO Aggression

This new doctrine has already been put in practice in Europe in Yugoslavia. The attack on Yugoslavia does not have the sanction of the NATO charter as Yugoslavia has not attacked any of the member countries of the NATO or committed aggression against any other European country. NATO intervened to settle an internal problem of Yugoslavia in Kosovo.

The United States has signalled that it will not confine military action to the framework of the United Nations and the mandate given to the Security Council in this regard. The military action against Yugoslavia bypassed the United Nations altogether. The new strategic concept outlined on its 50th anniversary has further degraded the United Nations as a mere auxiliary body which can play a relevant role only if United States and its allies decide to let it do so. The end of the bombing of Yugoslavia saw the NATO organising a peace-keeping force to occupy Kosovo and getting the UN Security Council to sanction this step. Russia has been grudgingly allowed a marginal role with the core remaining the

forces under NATO command.

The US strategic ideologues have now postulated that the United States has a moral duty to militarily act in any part of the world for humanitarian reasons. Kosovo is the first such "humanitarian intervention". But the definition of what constitutes a humanitarian intervention will be decided by the global interests of the USA and the imperialist powers. The repression of the Kurdish people in Turkey, the genocide which took place in Rwanda, the continuing deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian people and many such other instances world wide do not merit humanitarian intervention, if the regimes responsible for such a situation happen to be allied or friendly to US interests.

Both the aggression on Iraq and Yugoslavia have highlighted the negligible human cost paid by the United States for such military ventures. Using aerial bombardment, new sophisticated missiles and laser guided smart bombs, the United States has cut down its human cost in such hostilities. In the entire destructive bombardment of Yugoslavia for 78 days, more than 800 aircraft were used. All through this attack, the United States lost only two pilots who were killed in a helicopter crash in Albania. It is this face of the new high-tech war which is globally broadcast through television. It provides the impetus for the United States to go ahead with plans for naked hegemony trampling upon all international laws and norms.

The opposition to the aggression in Yugoslavia by Russia and China has not deterred the United States. One of the reasons for its arrogance and confidence is the present unity of the imperialist powers behind it. Given its preeminent position and the united desire of all the Western powers to jointly exploit the former socialist countries and the third world, the United States is not facing any serious inter-imperialist contradictions on its military adventures.

China and Russia: Strategic Targets

The maintenance of a huge military machine and the relatively high level of defence expenditure cannot be meant only to deal with some "rogue states" or regional powers. The global military strategy of US envisages the potential threat from China and Russia. There are two countries which have the economic resources and military strength

to challenge US hegemony in the future.

The NATO expansion to the East has to be seen in the light of the need to contain and tame Russia, which despite its currently weakened state and the servility of Yeltsin, is not willing to give up ambitions for great power status.

As for China, US imperialism sees it as a major potential threat in the 21st century. While engaging with China as a major power economically and politically, with an eye on its large market, the United States is also putting into place its strategic plans to contain and confront China. Two recent events highlight this plan.

Firstly, Japan has now passed legislation in its parliament enabling it to become a junior partner of the United States for military activities in the areas surrounding Japan. This is significant as the Japanese constitution prohibits Japan developing its military for any activities except for self-defence. The "War Bills" passed by Japan aim to enhance Japan's military activities in the region including in Taiwan if necessary. China has protested against this new act of the Japanese government which is aimed at it. Similarly, the new Theatre Missile Defense Programme by the US in East Asia is targetted against China and North Korea.

Secondly, in the Philippines, which has been a traditional ally of the United States, there was a break in the strategic military ties after the downfall of the Marcos regime. In 1992 the last of the US military naval bases were closed down in the Philippines. This was followed by the cessation of joint military exercises since no agreement was arrived at for this. Now with President Estrada in office, the Filipino Senate has passed a Visiting Forces Agreement for resumption of visits by US naval ships and joint military exercises. If the NATO and the West will act as the instrument for imperialist hegemony pushing East, in the Asia-Pacific region from the East the USA hopes to continue to push forward to contain China to establish its hegemony alongwith Japan and satellite powers like the Philippines and South Korea.

Apart from these two major thrusts from the West and the East, the United States continues to maintain its string of military bases around the world. Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean is one such vital

base close to India. It has been utilised as a centre for the continuous bombing of Iraq. With the military bases in the Gulf region, the US dominates the oil-rich region. In all these bases, highly mobile troops backed by the massive fire power of the airforce which can reach any part of the world or country for quick strategic strikes or deep penetration attacks will be available. The missile attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan last year showed the willingness of the United States to undertake such sudden, quick attacks brazenly violating the sovereignty and integrity of the countries concerned.

India And South Asia

The United States strategy towards India underwent a change in the post cold war period. Even before the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the United States in the late eighties had begun evolving its new approach to India which took final shape after 1991. In keeping with its post cold war outlook, the US wanted to ensure that no major third world country emerges as an independent economic and military power. The United States has adopted a dual approach to India which is one such major country. Firstly, it took firm steps to curb India's independent technological and military potential, at the same time, the US signalled its preparedness to accept India as a major regional power if it acquiesced to the US hegemonic plans. The tactics of pressure and inducement, threats and conciliation were adopted to persuade India to accept the status of a junior partner in the US global strategy as applied to South Asia.

Such an approach was possible in the absence of the Soviet Union with which India had longstanding friendly relations. The shift in the approach to India began with the end of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The accomplishment of the US aim to overthrow the pro-Soviet regime in concert with Pakistan led to a change in priorities in the region. Henceforth the United States could woo India and seek to harness it for its strategic goal while maintaining close relations with Pakistan.

The other major development which facilitated US interest in India was the opening up of the economy with the liberalisation policies initiated in 1991 by the Narasimha Rao government. While promoting the opening up of the Indian economy, the United States stepped up relentless pressure to stop India developing its missile and nuclear technologies. The five-year period of the Narasimha Rao

government saw mounting pressure and calibrated steps to make India accept the non-proliferation regime in missile and nuclear technology.

The period saw a qualitative change in Indo-US relations with military cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries. A beginning was made during the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1988 with an agreement for joint exercises by the naval forces of both countries. This was followed up after 1991 by a series of joint exercises and training programmes between the two armed forces.

In January 1992, the first Indo-US Army Executive Steering Committee was set up. This was the result of the acceptance of the proposals made by the Americans through the US Pacific Commander of the armed forces. The proposals accepted were: (i) setting up Indo-US Army executive steering council; (ii) reciprocal visits by senior commanders; (iii) regular staff talks between the two armies; (iv) reciprocal training and individual training programmes; (v) unit training exchanges and observations of training services; (vi) combined training activities; (vii) US and Indian army participation in the Pacific Command Joint Committee level meeting programmes; (viii) personnel exchange programme; (ix) collective training information exchange and cooperation.

Following this joint steering committees of the two navies and airforces were constituted. After that for five successive years, upto 1997 joint exercises were conducted between the two armies on the ground and by the two navies in the seas.

These measures were taken to a higher level of cooperation by the signing of the Indo-US Military Cooperation Treaty during the visit of the US Defence Secretary, William Perry, in January 1995.

The BJP-led government which came to power in 1998 was not opposed to military cooperation with the USA. In fact the then BJP President, L.K. Advani, had welcomed the first Indo-US joint naval exercises in 1992. The BJP offered "strategic cooperation" with the USA and wanted the Americans to accept India as its junior partner in South Asia displacing Pakistan.

However, the United States had no intention while developing military ties with India to abandon their long-standing military cooperation with Pakistan. Walter Slocombe the US Undersecretary of Defence declared in June 1995 that the US would maintain "a balance between India and Pakistan". While the US armed forces through its Pacific Command held joint exercises with Indian armed forces, simultaneously the US Central Command conducted similar exercises with the Pakistan armed forces.

The growing military links between the United States and India were disrupted temporarily after the BJP-led government conducted the nuclear tests at Pokhran in May 1998. The US suspended joint activities between the two armed forces as part of the sanctions imposed on India. The United States also targetted over 200 Indian institutions and organisations prohibiting them from having relations with US organisations by putting them in an "entities list".

The response of the Vajpayee government showed its basic pro-imperialist orientation. It entered into clandestine negotiations through the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott talks. These eight-month long talks resulted in a commitment by the BJP-led government to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and acceptance of US supervision for a small Indian nuclear weapons arsenal. The United States positioned itself as the arbiter in the nuclear equation between India and Pakistan. The Vajpayee government sought recognition for India's nuclear weapon status by citing the common threat faced by both India and the USA in the long run from China.

Significantly the first measure announced by the US in relaxing the sanctions in November 1999 was the resumption of training of Indian armed forces personnel under the International Military Education Training programme. It is under this programme that the Pentagon conducts joint training programmes and consultations with the armed forces of other countries.

The adventurist nuclear policy embarked upon by the Vajpayee government led to total reliance on the United States by the BJP-led government in its quest for an illusory great power status. The events which took place from the time of the nuclear blasts in Pokhran to the limited war in Kargil, sparked off by the Pakistani intrusion across the line of control, have further confirmed that the BJP-led government was deeply drawn into the US strategic plan for

South Asia.

The path adopted in the nineties by successive governments in India has taken for granted that there is no alternative but to accept US suzerainty over the South Asian region in view of the major changes in the world situation. Influential ruling circles argue that India can become a major international player only by accepting the status of a junior partner in the US global strategic plan. This would mean abrogation of India's sovereignty and subjecting the entire subcontinent to the ravages of imperialist exploitation. As against this ruinous path, India can strike out on an independent path. As multi-polarity will develop in the coming decades India should work for closer relations with Russia and China.

One of the major developments in the recent period has been the decision of Russia and China to enter into a strategic partnership for the 21st century. India should find a place in this forthcoming project. To ensure that a genuine anti-imperialist strategy develops in India, there has to be a powerful movement which will articulate the aspirations for India developing as a strong and united country capable of defending its sovereignty and independent decision making. This will require a self-reliant path of developing our economic strength, maintaining an upgraded conventional military force and joining with the forces who will in the future refuse to accept the new world order based on US hegemony.

The US dominance unquestioned today will not go unchallenged. It will be subject to inter-imperialist contradictions in the next century. The present economic strength of the US vis-à-vis other centres is not a permanent phenomenon. The costs of the war on Yugoslavia will add to the burdens of West European countries which will be borne by the working people. The rising strength of China cannot be curbed by the covert moves of the USA. Despite the ravaged and debilitated state of Russia, the push to the East by NATO is meeting with serious resistance from patriotic circles.

The new strategic military doctrine of the USA and its imperialist allies which must be understood and countered. Any effort to justify any of the imperialist actions on grounds of "humanitarian intervention" or "fighting terrorism" cannot be accepted. On the bombing of Yugoslavia, some sections of the Left in Europe have supported the attacks on the above considerations. This is only

lending sustenance to imperialist aggression. The United States cannot arrogate to itself the right to intervene, or resolve any domestic or internal conflict in any country. Any such military action by the United States must be met with world-wide opposition of all those interested in an end to imperialist exploitation and defence of national sovereignty.

[1] In 1985, under Reagan, the US Defence budget went upto \$ 294.7 billion, from \$ 143.9 billion in 1980

[2] Quoted in "US Military Policy In the Post-Cold War Era", Michael Klare, Socialist Register, 1992

[3] Michael Klare: Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws, Hill and Wang, New York, 1995. P.112

[4] Gilbert Achcan: The US Military Engine, New Left Review, No. 228, March-April 1998.

[5] NATO Review, June 1991