

Beijing Notes Signs of US Decline Behind Bloated New Pentagon Budget

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BEIJING – China has expressed serious concern about the new United States military budget, which explicitly notes the U.S.’ “long-term strategic competition with China” as a top priority and raises the government’s annual investment in the military to an unprecedented \$716 billion – an exponentially higher budget than that of any other defense department across the world.



The passage of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, authorizes a 2.3 percent boost in military funding — the U.S. government’s largest-yet war budget. The perpetually swollen U.S. military budget allows Washington to subsidize its massive and highly-profitable military-industrial complex while boosting its power to coerce rivals and wage wars abroad.

Earlier this month, Donald Trump hailed the act as “the most significant investment in our military and our war fighters in modern history.”

“We are going to strengthen our military like never ever before and that’s what we did,” the former reality television host added, noting that armed service branches will have “the finest planes, and ships, and tanks, and missiles” thanks to the NDAA, Trump said.

The act authorizes funding for a large number of top-of-the-line military products, including \$7.6 billion for 77 Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, full funding for the new Northrop Grumman B-21 “Raider” long-range stealth bomber, and 13 new warships – including \$1.56 billion for three littoral combat ships, despite the Navy’s only having requested a single one.

China’s Defense Ministry has decried the act as depicting an “exaggerated Sino-U.S. antagonism.” The NDAA includes a number of related provisions that shape foreign policy and stresses the need to boost the capabilities of Taiwan. China sees Taiwan as a breakaway province and has repeatedly stressed that its eventual reunification with the mainland remains a “core interest” for Beijing.

The boost in military expenditures comes amid what late world-systems theorist Giovanni Arrighi called the “terminal crisis of U.S. hegemony” — a turning-point that he and other analysts see as coinciding with the growth of Beijing’s geopolitical strength and a long-term shift favoring China as the potential center of a new world economy.

“Before Washington makes any radical decisions, it should evaluate its own power”

Several measures within the act are clearly intended to target China as the Pentagon continues to

focus its energy on the region surrounding the emerging East Asian powerhouse.

These include a requirement that public reports must be made on the state of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its activities in the South China Sea and so-called "Indo-Pacific Region," as well as the provision of military aid to Asia-Pacific states seen as vital allies in the goal of encircling China.

Cyber-warfare funding will also be boosted, as the act opens the door to the Pentagon's carrying out of covert operations free of congressional oversight. The NDAA notes that "clandestine military activity or operation in cyberspace shall be considered a traditional military activity."

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States will also be tasked with new powers to review Chinese investment proposals to ensure that they do not threaten U.S. national security. Any federal government entity will be prevented from using telecoms equipment provided by Huawei Technologies or ZTE.

The anti-Chinese thrust of the act hasn't been lost on Beijing; in an editorial published Wednesday, state-run newspaper Global Times excoriated the NDAA as "an aggressive act that mentions the Taiwan Straits, the South China Sea, Chinese investment in the U.S. and even Confucius Institutes."

The newspaper, which is often seen as offering a candid perspective reflecting the views of the ruling party's central committee, added that the bill recalls the militarism of the World War II-era Imperial Japanese Army. The editorial added:

If some American elites still feel unsafe, then they are greedy about their security. The security they seek doesn't exist in this world. It is beyond even the reach of God ... What Washington pursues is the destruction of China's national security, not the protection of its own national security.

If one of the act's purposes is to contain China, then the U.S. needs to defeat China in spirit and \$716 billion would be far from enough.

... No one should have the ambition to defeat China by using military approaches in the 21st century. Before Washington makes any radical decisions, it should evaluate its own power."

"The terminal crisis of U.S. hegemony"

The United States spent the latter half of the 20th century as the unchallenged global hegemonic power, largely using the threat of "communism's global spread" as an excuse to legitimize its leadership over the so-called "free world," project its power across the globe, and establish its proxies, bases, and logistical hubs around rivals such as the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China.

Following the Soviet Union's collapse in the early 1990's, the United States used the excuse of the "Global War on Terror" to justify its continued military presence across the globe. The style of U.S. leadership began to rapidly shift from the use of multilateral diplomatic institutions like the UN and International Criminal Court — as favored by the liberal wing of U.S. imperialism — toward the neoconservative "New American Century" method of economic warfare and the naked use of force by NATO and Western coalitions formed on an ad-hoc basis, a method the present administration seems to favor.

The foremost goal of the past several administrations has been the prevention of China's rise, as well as a push to dominate and lead a geopolitical arena filled with rising powers both north and south, including a united Germany, Turkey, India, South Africa, Brazil and Russia.

The United States may continue to exercise dominance in the military realm, but its legitimacy as a world leader in economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical terms is growing brittle and showing definite signs of wear. The emerging multipolar arrangement has convinced observers that the United States is undeniably confronting an inevitable decline in its status as the world's foremost hegemonic power.

Absent the role of a credible imperialist hegemon overseeing the global order, the world is finding itself mired in geopolitical instability, economic uncertainty, rising militarism, and fierce rivalries by nations over their positions in the emerging multipolar pecking-order.

As the U.S. gears up for another year of splurging on arms and equipping its allies, Beijing is far from alone in its understanding that Washington won't exit center-stage without putting up a fierce fight.

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