

Who Really Controls US Foreign Policy?¹

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One wonders as to why President Trump has pledged to expand United States' nuclear capacity, undermining decades of efforts – both by the Republicans and Democrats – to reduce the strategic role of nuclear weapons and strengthening the non-proliferation regime. Why is his administration shoring up a war of rhetoric with China, especially when Chinese are ready to fully embrace the capitalist-order and rubbing their hands in glee to be the next 'guardian' of free-market economy? Why is Trump bringing 'war on terror' mantra back into the security-discourse even though the Obama administration not only stopped using the 'war on terror' rhetoric but also effectively disengaged US from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria? The American strategists and analysts, especially those who are driven by the power-politics and advocate the so-called reality and inevitability of the prevailing power structures, tend to explain US behaviour towards Russia in terms of 'Great-Game' geopolitics (i.e. the historic Russian ambitions to expand and dominate their neighbouring regions and countries). Regarding China, US policy is being described with reference to classic geopolitics, articulated in the famous 'Thucydides-Trap,' (i.e. the inevitable clash between a rising power (China) and the established leading power (US)). As for the Muslim World, President Trump is consistently re-invoking the 'war on terror' mantra, built upon the so-called 'Clash of Civilisation' thesis to, apparently eliminate the radical Islamist threat to the US and the West, at large. These rhetoric are not, randomly and whimsically, added or re-added into the US security discourse. They are rather tendentious and purposefully constructed into US geopolitics or foreign policy to serve the interests of what President Eisenhower revealed in 1961, 'the conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry'. The formation of this 'conjunction' or 'nexus' took place after President Franklin Roosevelt declared war on Japan and told the Americans that the fate of the United States and its allies would depend largely on US industrial capacity and strength. This turned the spotlight on leading defense contractors in the US and as they geared towards massive production of war related equipment, their business peaked, catapulting them into billion dollar companies. Simultaneously, the expansion of the US army, and the way it stretched around the

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world to fight the Germans and Japanese forces, overshadowed the length and the breadth of Roman and British Empires. As the War progressed, the military contractors and military establishment found themselves knitted into supply-demand relationship, which quickly metamorphosed into single gigantic entity, known as Military Industrial complex (MIC), whose economic, political and even spiritual influence, according to President Eisenhower, was felt in every city, every state and every office of the Federal government. It became too powerful and prevailing to be folded back to its pre-War level which led President Eisenhower to urge Americans to guard against the sought and unsought, warranted and unwarranted influence of the MIC.

Ironically, it was Eisenhower administration which had done everything to promote and strengthen the role of MIC. His ideologues and military strategists were the most ardent advocate of military-power to solve geopolitical issues. They put maximum effort in furthering the construction and dissemination of what came to be known, the binary: liberalism (West) versus communism (East). This binary construction, followed by vicious campaign under McCarthyism to impose a demonic and monological interpretation of Communism, gripped the American imagination, predisposing and inducing them into accepting the MIC role as given, inevitable and therefore natural condition or reality of the post-Second World War geopolitics. This also entangled the 'free-world' into the discourse of 'Containment', which enabled the MIC to sell advanced military equipment manufactured by the leading military contractors such as the North American Aviation, Northrop, Sikorsky, Kaman, McDonnell, Bell, Rockwell and Boeing to the 'Third World' countries.

Although, the important developments of early 1960s, especially the collapse of political and ideological harmony between the Soviet Union and China, and the beginning of the 'peaceful coexistence' between Moscow and Washington mitigated the intensity of the Cold War geopolitics, bringing down the US defense spending from its peak above \$600 billion during the Korean War, down to \$400 billion. The reduction in defense spending, however turned out to be ephemeral since the MIC had already permeated the electoral politics/system of the US, sponsoring and getting elected the 'pro-MIC' with ingenious minds like Robert S. McNamara. McNamara, before his appointment as US Secretary of Defense, was the first non-Ford family member to have held the position of president at Ford Company. According to Henry Ford, the Ford Motor Co., along with other major US banks and corporations belonged to those classes of financiers who not only profited from wars but also used their influence to bring about wars for profit.

Thus, playing as a front-man for MIC, McNamara personally oversaw thousands of nuclear weapons, billions of dollars in military spending, foreign arms sales and masterminded a number of military missions. He became the foremost advocate and planner of the Bay of Pigs invasion, and after its failure, he proposed an audacious plan to attack Cuba with 60,000 American troops, which too failed,

prompting him to devise ways to stir things up on Cuba with espionage, sabotage, general disorder. Having failed on Cuba, McNamara, at President Lyndon Johnson's behest, carefully and deliberately concealed from American public the plan to escalate war in Vietnam. He and his likeminded defense officials approved the use of lavish firepower in Vietnam, turning it into bomb dropping field, where stocks were depleted to warrant new orders. Against this backdrop, the US defense spending once again surged to well above \$600 billion with Defense Department spending between \$60 to 80 billion a day on the War. With massive war spending, the MIC began to swim in immense profits prompting Senator William Fulbright to speak of MIC in 1969 as 'a direct threat to American democracy'.

However, the rising death-toll in Vietnam and growing anti-War movement in US, forced President Richard M. Nixon to disengage and gradually withdraw the US forces from Vietnam. This considerably cut the costs of War, paving the way for the Congress to justify 26% reduction in the defense spending which remained flat till hawkish (both within the Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations) succeeded in killing Détente. In particular, James Rodney Schlesinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski did everything to consolidate and project what apparently were disjointed historical events of the mid and late 1970s such as Spring Offensive by the North Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge assault on the American-backed government in Cambodia, failure of a coup against the left-leaning government in Portugal, Angola war, the Ethiopia-Somalia war over Ogaden and above all Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan to justify the renewal of the Cold War geopolitics. Their warmongering was picked up by the MIC sponsored elements in the Reagan administration particularly Reagan's secretary of defense, Caspar W. Weinberger and Henry S. Rowen.

Before joining the Reagan administration, Caspar had served as a special counsel to Bechtel, one of the major defense contractors in the US. Sponsored by Bechtel, Caspar particularly joined Reagan administration with single agenda to 'rearm America'. He personally oversaw the biggest and costliest military build-up in peacetime history. Likewise, Rowen who had served at California based Rand Corp (a research organization funded by leading defense contractors, especially General Electric) remained actively engaged in killing Détente. As these hawkish and their likeminded defense officials succeeded in re-igniting the Cold War, Reagan authorised a massive expansion of US nuclear and conventional forces while defense spending hit a peak of \$456.5 billion. The MIC once again began to profit immensely and continued to flourish/expand till the end of the Cold War geopolitics which deprived the MIC sponsored war mongering ideologues and military strategists of anti-Communism discourse upon which the entire US defense budget was rationalised and justified.

The end of the Cold War left the State Department and other defence related agencies wondering how to cope with the new environment that was devoid of 'mega enemy', without which

the reduction in defense spending was but inevitable. This led the Defense Department to seek new enemies and threats. In this respect, two immediate threats, the 'Drug Cartels' and 'Third-World-instability', were identified and projected as serious challenges/threats to the US security interests hence the need to sustain defense spending and extending the role of armed forces. The so-called 'war on drug' and 'third world instability' however, remained short of inducing a favourable response from American public, let alone the US Congress, necessary to justify defense spending. Against this backdrop, the US Congress, Office of Technology Assessment published its report in 1992 suggesting steep cut in the defense-budget and need to divert resources and attention to other pressing national needs. In particular, the report turned out to be damning for the defense contractors/companies, for they were told to 'adapt to commercial demands, or shrink, or possibly go under'. This was to undermine the business and perhaps the very existence of leading defense contractors, such as General Dynamics, Grumman, and McDonnell Douglas, Martin Marietta, Raytheon, and Lockheed, United Technologies Boeing, and Rockwell International.

It is intriguing to note that the same year (1992) when the US Congress, Office of Technology Assessment (1992) contemplated very substantial reductions in defense spending and anticipated the closure of important military industries, Samuel P. Huntington (an ardent advocate of strong defense) came forward to 'construct' what English theorist Barry Buzan believed to be a 'Mega Enemy' to replace the Evil Empire (the then Soviet Union). Huntington in his lecture at the American Enterprise Institute in 1992, predicted that the 'Clash of Civilizations' would dominate global politics and 'conflicts between the civilisations would be the latest phase in the evolution of conflicts in the modern world'. Under the so-called 'Clash of Civilisations' rhetoric, the MIC, behind its sponsored platform (The Project for the New American Century, PNAC), began to pull together a team of hawkish military strategists, diplomats and 'intellectual wizards' to put into practice the Clash of Civilisations theory. In this respect, a group of hawkish neo-cons including Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, R. James Woolsey, Elliot Abrams, Donald Rumsfeld, Robert Zoellick, John Bolton, Richard L. Armitage and Zalmay Khalilzad signed an open letter initiated by the PNAC urging President Bill Clinton to take military actions against Saddam regime. As President Clinton refused to be swayed by the polemics of these war-mongers they put their weight behind George W. Bush's election campaign.

It is revealing how George W. Bush and most of the PNAC members were directly tied to the MIC or military contractors. For instance, Bush family was connected with 'Carlyle-Fund', the largest investors in the military industries in the world. Likewise, Dick Cheney had close links with Halliburton Corporation, and Donald Rumsfeld and other major figures in the Republican Party were linked to 'Bechtel Corporation.' These companies including Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin,

and General Dynamics poured millions of dollars into Bush's election campaign for 2000 elections. In return, when Bush took office he appointed James Roche, an executive with Northrop Grumman and Peter B Teets, former President and Chief Operating Officer of Lockheed Martin, as Secretary and Undersecretary of the US Air Force. Gordon England, Vice President of General Dynamics was made Secretary of US Navy. Dick Cheney who came from oil and service and military contractor firm Halliburton became the Vice President of the United States. In addition, Bush appointed 32 executives, paid consultants or major shareholders of weapons contractors to top policymaking positions in the Pentagon, the National Security Council, the Department of Energy (involved in nuclear weapons development) and the State Department.

Although in key positions to drive US foreign policy, these neo-cons and warmongers had to come up with a strong pretext to demand an increase in the defense budget. To this effect, September 11, 2001 offered them the best opportunity to further their sponsored-agenda and made 2000s a 'good decade' for the MIC. For instance, Pentagon's base budget plus expenditures on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan pushed total military spending to over \$700 billion per year, 'the highest level since World War II.' Most of the leading military contractors flourished beyond expectations with Pentagon's top ten contractors jumping from \$46 billion in 2001 to \$80 billion in 2003, an increase of nearly 75%.

However, as decade of so-called 'War on Terror' ran its course, President Barak Obama promised to drawdown and eventually withdraw US forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. More so, Obama administration shunned the 'War on Terror' rhetoric, replacing it with more bureaucratic phrase 'overseas contingency operations'. The 'contingency operations' nonetheless had never been sold well in the US and remained short of winning lucrative deals for military contractors. As defense budget once again came under scrutiny, President Obama perhaps yielding to the MIC pressure introduced 'Pivot' or 'rebalance' to Asia policy. Eschewing the Clash of Civilization rhetoric, the apologists of the US foreign policy are now resorting to conventional geopolitics, articulated in the famous 'Thucydides Trap', the inevitable clash between a rising power (China) and the established leading power (US) to explain and justify change in America's so called 'Pivot to Asia' policy. In short, the 'Pivot to Asia' is aimed at containing China by building a series of encircling regional alliances, including Japan, Australia, Indonesia and, India.

Although Asia Pacific nations joined the Washington sponsored 'Trans-Pacific Partnership' (TPP), their economic interests however outweigh scale and intensity of their geopolitical let alone ideological differences. This perhaps explains as to why TPP partners, including Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand have also joined Chinese sponsored and led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Moreover, most of the TPP partners enjoy

an increasingly stable economic cooperation with China. This probably led Obama administration to accelerate the deployment of US troops to Eastern European countries especially Poland, the Baltic States and Romania to raise 'security' against Russia. Extending the role of US army in Europe, 'President Obama's budget requested more than quadrupled the amount of overseas contingency operations (OCO) money funnelled into what is being called the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI)'. To implement so-called ERI, the US army will get about \$2.8 billion of the \$3.4 billion in fiscal 2017.

In the meanwhile, the current administration of President Donald Trump seems very much pro-MIC and are actively engaged in safeguarding and promoting MIC interests. In particular, John F. Kelly and James Mattis have a long history of working for the leading defense contractors in the US. Prior to his appointment to lead the Department of Homeland Security, Gen. Kelly served as a vice chairman at the Spectrum Group, a defense contractor lobbying firm. He is known to have received \$37,500 from DC Capital Partners, the controlling shareholder of the Spectrum Group. Likewise, retired General James Mattis who has been picked up by Trump to serve as US Secretary of Defense, has served as one of the independent directors of General Dynamics, receiving about \$594,369 and amassing more than \$900,000 worth of company stock.

Trump's selection of these hawkish generals to lead Pentagon and Defense Department has been followed by his pledges to add more ships, aircraft and troops to the military. More so, he has once again brought the 'War on Terror' mantra back into the security-discourse and promised to give CIA officials more powers than they have ever had to combat America's enemies. This is indeed good news for the military establishment and military contractors who do not want to go through, yet another post-Cold War and pre-September 11, 2001 phase of business uncertainty. They do not want to see another Congress report, contemplating substantial reductions in defense spending and telling the major military contractors to adapt to commercial demands, or shrink, or possibly go under. Trump selection of new defense team is indicative of the fact or historical trend that US defense spending will not go down, especially when MIC sponsored or backed retired Generals, strategists, diplomats and academics continue to occupy leading positions in the legislature and administrative branches of the US and when mass media continue to support and project the state narrative of state centric view of conventional security as real, given therefore natural condition or order or the day.