**A costly war**

Melvin Goodman

Tuesday, Jan 31, 2023

No one knows how the war in Ukraine will end, but there is one post-war certainty: there will be a prolonged and costly Cold War between the United States and Russia. In an interview with David Ignatius of the Washington Post, who has been doing the bidding of the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency for several decades, Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the importance of a “long-term goal of deterrence.” Ignatius took this to mean that the Biden administration will make sure that Russia “should not be able to rest, regroup and reattack.”

Ignatius is joining the likes of such Cold Warriors as former secretary of state Condi Rice, former secretary of defense Bob Gates, journalists such as Max Boot and scholars such as Angela Stent and Leon Aron who believe that Russia’s war is not directed only against Ukraine, but against the larger idea that European states can peacefully cooperate. Yale historian Timothy Snyder goes further, arguing that the rule of law can have a chance in Russia only if “Russia loses this war,” and that Russia’s defeat will reverse the “trend…towards authoritarianism, with Putinism as a force and a model.” It is naive to think in terms of “rule of law” coming to Russia.

We have been accustomed to politicians who blithely talk about the “war to end all wars,” but it is unusual to have a distinguished historian argue that the “Ukrainians have given us a chance to turn this century around, a chance for freedom and security that we could not have achieved by our own efforts, no matter who we happen to be.” Snyder argues that “if Russia loses” it would mark an “end to an era of empire,” marking the “last war fought on the colonial logic that another state and people do not exist.” According to Snyder, a Ukrainian victory would “teach Beijing that such an offensive operation [against Taiwan] is costly and likely to fail.” Snyder believes that “this is a once-in-lifetime conjuncture, not to be wasted.”

In addition to this year’s record defense budget that found the Congress providing $45 billion more than the Pentagon requested, a so-called “emergency” provision will lay the foundation for adding scarce resources to defense spending in the coming year. This provision will allow multiyear, noncompetitive agreements to produce such ordinary weaponry as rockets and munitions. According to the Washington Post, the Pentagon will now have a way to replenish its stockpiles that will provide a “new golden age” for military contractors.

The Biden administration’s gift to the military-industrial complex rivals what the Reagan administration provided in the 1980s and ensures the country’s rich market for weapons sales. Nearly half of the record defense spending of $858 billion goes to military contractors. The House and Senate Armed Services Committees made sure that these spending spigots remain open by naming individuals with ties to the weapons industry to a commission that will review the Biden National Defense Strategy. The chairwoman of the commission, former Representative Jane Harman, protected Lockheed-Martin when she served on the Hill and currently is on the board of a military contractor that recently received a seven-year $800 million contract from the Pentagon.

The increased defense spending and the new emergency provision coincide with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy’s creation of a new committee – the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party! McCarthy appointed the requisite number of China hawks, including its chairman, Mike Gallagher. George Will, writing in the Post, predictably praised the creation of the committee, and lauded a new book by scholars from Johns Hopkins University and Tufts titled ‘Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China’, which may become a tragic self-fulfilling prophecy. In view of the recent rise in anti-Asian violence in the United States, It can only be hoped that Democrats appoint members to the committee who understand the domestic consequences of hyping the threat from China at this particular time.

Our China policy is not working, and the exaggeration of the China threat comes just in time for the hawks in the political aviary who fear that the severe deficiencies of the Russian military in Ukraine is making it more difficult to exaggerate the Russia threat. I’ve been calling attention to the exaggeration of the Russian threat for the past 50 years, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which included the implosion of the Red Army, should have provided political ammunition to downplay the Russian threat. I had a distinct advantage from 1966 to 1990 as a Soviet analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency, which had intelligence that documented Soviet deficiencies.

But the policy community, the bipartisan congressional community, and the pundit community can’t let go of the idea that the Soviet Union and Russia present a threat to the national security of the United States. The dysfunctional, but superficially successful, Russian military performances in Georgia (2008); Crimea (2014); and Syria (2015) were misread as a demonstration of a strong Russian military. It took the unsuccessful Russian efforts against Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson to fully demonstrate the deeply rooted dysfunction of the “new” Red Army and its inability to sustain offensive and combined arms operations. Instead, Russia must rely on a campaign of military terrorism to hold its own against Ukrainian forces.

The Biden policy ensures a robust military presence on the Russian border that will worsen Cold War 2.0. There will be prolonged and unnecessary increases in defense spending, and the absence of a diplomatic dialogue in those important areas where there is Russian-American agreement. These areas include a variety of arms control and disarmament issues, such as stopping the proliferation of nuclear weaponry and limiting the use of space in the military competition as well as dealing with insurgencies and terrorism; environmental degradation; and future pandemics. It is hard to imagine any Russian regime willing to pursue diplomatic solutions with a United States that has sponsored a Nato with more than 30 members.

Excerpted: ‘A Costly and Prolonged Cold War Now Seems a Certainty’.

Courtesy: Counterpunch.org