

Full-spectrum Impotence

Jon Spitz – December 27, 2007

In May of 2000, near the end of the Clinton presidency, the US Defense Department released a document called “Joint Vision 2020” in which it espoused a US military doctrine called “full-spectrum dominance.” The idea behind full spectrum dominance is that in wars of the future the US must achieve and maintain complete and unchallengeable control over all areas of warfare including land, sea, air, outer space and cyberspace. After Bush seized power in the fraudulent election of November 2000, he and his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, criticized Clinton for letting the US military fall into a state of unpreparedness, yet they adopted with a vengeance this Clinton era military doctrine of full-spectrum dominance.

To achieve full-spectrum dominance over any other military force in the world the US armed forces are equipped with the most advanced armored vehicles, aircraft, ships, missiles and satellite communication systems in the world. To build, maintain, transport and operate all this advanced equipment requires massive amounts of energy in the form of oil. As the US military has been transformed into a full-spectrum dominance force its oil consumption has skyrocketed – in the Iraq war of 1991 the average American soldier consumed 4 gallons of oil per day while in the current Iraq and Afghan wars the average soldier consumes 16 gallons per day, four times more. The US Defense Department is now the world’s leading single consumer of oil at 14 million gallons per day, more than the entire country of Sweden.

To maintain full-spectrum dominance into the foreseeable future the Bush regime realized that they not only had to assure themselves of a secure supply of oil to run their own military machine, they also had to be able to deny any potential adversaries (read China) access to the oil supplies that would enable them to develop a military that could possibly challenge US dominance. This meant military control over the world’s largest oil reserves located in the Middle East and is the reason for the US invasion and occupation of Iraq and the impending bombing of Iran.

Even as the Bush regime was developing the US military into an oil hogging full-spectrum dominance force they also expected that world oil production was going to peak during the first decade of the 21st century and that this natural limit on the availability of oil would create an even more intense international competition for the world’s remaining reserves. On this expectation they were right – world oil production did peak in 2006 and will only go down from there. It was the imminence of “Peak Oil” that explains the timing of the Bush regime’s rush to power and to war in the Middle East. To be able to dominate their anticipated oil wars gave all the more reason for the Bush regime to build the US military into a full-spectrum dominance force.

Full-spectrum dominance as envisioned by “Joint Vision 2020” has not quite panned out the way its planners had hoped. As it turns out maintaining complete and unchallengeable control over all areas of warfare is not so easy.

In January 2007 China successfully tested an anti-satellite missile by shooting down one of its own weather satellites orbiting the earth at over 500 miles up in space. For China to have this capability to shoot down satellites profoundly undermines the US doctrine of full-spectrum dominance which is highly dependent on the enhanced intelligence gathering and communications capabilities provided by satellites. China now possesses the technology to severely disrupt US military operations anywhere on the planet and the US is helpless to do anything about it. China developed and tested this anti-satellite missile as a warning to the Bush regime that they do not accept the US military doctrine of full-spectrum dominance. Will China use this weapon against US satellites to defend its vital interest in the Middle East if the US bombs Iran and cuts off their supply of Middle Eastern oil? You can bet this Achilles' heel has caused many a sleepless night among Bush's war planners.

The Iraq war has also exposed major vulnerabilities in the US military's attempt to establish full-spectrum dominance on the battlefield. The high-tech mobile forces that allow the US to assert its power rapidly and devastatingly across the globe are great for deposing foreign governments and smashing their armies, but such a force is completely incapable of establishing control over the inevitable popular resistance that develops against long-term occupation. By employing guerrilla tactics and low-tech weaponry poorly trained and equipped resistance fighters are able to keep the US military bogged down in an endless war of attrition that it cannot win.

A second vulnerability of full-spectrum dominance exposed by the Iraq war is that such a protracted and expensive military engagement overextends the US military's human and material resources and precludes it from forcing regime change on other targeted oil rich states like Iran or Venezuela.

This problem of limited capacity has reduced the Bush regime's military options in Iran to aerial bombardment which will only succeed in provoking Iran to join forces with the resistance fighters against US ground forces in Iraq. US ground forces are already stretched to the breaking point in Iraq and with Iran's help the US occupation could crack.

Far from living up to its bravado of unchallengeable US hegemony throughout the world, this desperate military doctrine of full-spectrum dominance has demonstrated the practical limits of US military power and presages the final days of the American empire.