

The New Arms Race: America to Wage War in Space, Cyberspace, Air And Sea Simultaneously

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New US strategy brings risk of new arms race

-After the 9/11 attacks, the US waged a 10-year war against terrorism, but now it considers China's anti-access and area denial capabilities the main threat to its interests in the West Pacific. Its attention has shifted from non-traditional threats such as terrorism back to traditional threats from countries like Iran and China.

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"AirSea Battle (ASB)" is a US strategic plan that envisions China as the main opponent. In a recent press conference, Spokesman of China's Ministry of National Defense Geng Yansheng stated that the plan is nothing new and is the result of a cold war mentality. Why has the US developed such a plan? How should China respond? Global Times (GT) reporter Yu Jincui talked to Fan Gaoyue (Fan), a senior colonel in the People's Liberation Army and research fellow at the PLA Academy of Military Science, on these issues.

GT: How do you interpret the ASB concept?

Fan: According to the 2010 US Quadrennial Defense Review, the ASB concept is intended to defeat adversaries across the range of military operations, including adversaries equipped with sophisticated anti-access and area denial capabilities. The concept will address how air and naval forces will integrate capabilities across all operational domains to counter growing challenges to the US.

Although there is no official statement that the plan mainly targets China, the intention is obvious. Confronted by a rising China, the US is panicky. It worries China may replace it as the biggest economy and challenge its global leadership.

GT: What are the prospects of the ASB plan, given US defense cuts?

Fan: Land forces and the US Marine Corps played a major role in US anti-terrorism wars, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Land forces also have the upper hand in resource allocation.

From 2007 to 2010 the number of soldiers in land forces were increased by 38,000 soldiers, compared to 3,000 in the air force and 11,000 in the navy. Due to budget cuts, the air force

and navy need to emphasize their importance in future possible wars. That's why they are promoting the ASB concept.

Generally speaking, the ASB concept could reduce expenditure, since it concentrates on equipment rather than soldiers. Equipment is less costly than human resources in the long run. Therefore, the concept is favored by the Pentagon.

GT: The US is enhancing its deployment in the Asia-Pacific region, including setting up a military base in Darwin, Australia and strengthening its alliances. Is this linked to the ASB plan?

Fan: Yes. The US is constantly expanding air and navy bases in Guam and increasing military presence there. It deployed the USS George Washington, an extremely advanced aircraft carrier, to the Yokosuka base in Japan to check Chinese air and navy forces.

The US also shifted the headquarters of its land forces' first army from Washington State to Japan to enhance the command and management abilities of the US Pacific Command.

The US is increasing its combat capacities in the coastal regions of East Asia as well as building or renting new military bases in Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and Australia to improve its rapid response ability.

Due to the economic crisis, the US has become unable to deal with opponents with strong anti-access and area denial capability by itself, nor is it willing to. So the US has managed to get its alliances involved. It highlights the "China threat" and China's increased military strength by taking advantage of the Diaoyu Islands disputes and the South China Sea disputes to seduce its allies to join its ASB plan.

GT: What changes will the ASB bring?

Fan: The ASB concept symbolizes that the US now sees anti-access and area denial capabilities as its main threat rather than terrorism and extremism.

After the 9/11 attacks, the US waged a 10-year war against terrorism, but now it considers China's anti-access and area denial capabilities the main threat to its interests in the West Pacific. Its attention has shifted from non-traditional threats such as terrorism back to traditional threats from countries like Iran and China.

The possible battlefields may be shifted from Middle East and Southeast Asia to the West Pacific. In a future war, the US may fight against opponents simultaneously in the space, cyberspace, air and maritime theaters. Ensuring free US movement in the West Pacific and containing China's rise will become the top US goal.

GT: What challenges it will bring to China?

Fan: As a matter of fact, nowadays, the political implications of the concept are bigger than its military ones. The ASB concept hypes the "China threat," satisfying the US domestic demand to contain China. The concept helps build US credibility in protecting its alliances by targeting China and it also satisfies the interests of US military groups.

However, it damages China's interests. Promoting such a concept will have a negative

influence on building strategic mutual trust between China and the US, and it will result in an escalation of tensions in the Asia-Pacific region.

More severely, it may risk a new round of an arms race. Besides the US, countries like Japan and Australia are all involved. They have to upgrade their military power to narrow the gap between them and the US.

In a future war, the US may fight against opponents simultaneously in the space, cyberspace, air and maritime theaters.

These countries are active participants while China and other countries in the region are passive ones. Under the threats of the US ASB plan, they have to make some preparations, such as increasing military funding, developing new joint operation theories and new type of weapons, and enhancing military strength to avoid being on the back foot if a war occurs.

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