

American think tank envisages blockading China with missiles

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The Rand Corporation, a US think-tank with close ties to the Pentagon, released a report this month titled “Employing Land-Based Anti-Ship Missiles in the Western Pacific”. The report outlines a plan for the United States and its allies to deploy Anti-Ship Missile (ASM) systems in an arc from Japan to Indonesia to block the vital waterways leading into China.

This report follows similar documents from think tanks and defence commentators which outline strategies and tactics for prosecuting a war between the world’s two largest militaries, which would inevitably engulf the entire Asian region. The document abandons the usual reserved language used to avoid outright mentioning war with China and instead simply declares that the authors “assumed a wartime strategic context”.

The tensions between the two nations have been inflamed by the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia”, which has seen aggressive US military, intelligence and diplomatic activity in the region to “contain” the rise of China. A key element of the pivot is the military strategy known as AirSea Battle, which involves countering the Chinese ability to control the waters off its mainland by a combination of attacks on its command, naval, missile and air capabilities and a long range blockade of China’s supply routes from the Middle East and Africa by blocking the narrow straits of Malacca, Lombok and Sunda through the Indonesian archipelago.

The Rand Corporation authors set out to concretise the battle plan by recommending that the US and its allies make use of strategically positioned land-based ASMs. The report describes how such systems could be highly effective in destroying Chinese ships, while being very difficult to locate and destroy themselves. With a series of maps, it illustrates how missiles deployed on the Korean peninsula, the Ryuku Islands

and Okinawa, the Philippines and in Indonesia and Malaysia would be able to stop the Chinese fleet leaving its home waters as well as preventing its ships from using the sea lanes. It notes that ASMs deployed in Taiwan and Japan could play a “key role” in sinking Chinese ships attempting an amphibious assault to break a blockade.

Far from being a purely hypothetical scenario, the report is another indication of the advanced state of preparations for a US war with China. Not only does the report envisage the possibility of such a conflict in the not too distant future, it notes that most major countries in the region are already stockpiling land-based ASM systems.

The most recent exercise carried out by the Japanese military was a rehearsal for exactly the kind of operation advocated in the Rand report. It involved 34,000 soldiers, six warships and 350 aircraft and centred on the rapid deployment of the Japanese Type-88 ASMs onto islands off Okinawa.

The country identified by Rand as most crucial for a successful land-based ASM strategy is Indonesia. The Malacca, Lombok and Sunda waterways all pass through or near the Indonesian archipelago.

The Rand report reviews the political stance of the Indonesian government. It notes that it has strengthened its military relations with China in recent years and describes its “reluctance” to allow US soldiers or missiles to be deployed on its islands. “In a strategic context short of a direct conflict involving these countries and China, [i.e. war] such assent [to place missiles] may be difficult to attain because it would pose significant risks for the countries that agreed to cooperate,” it states.

It is clear that the authors view the Indonesian government’s potential opposition to a US-China war

being fought within its territory as a major stumbling block to their plans. Similar concerns were also raised in the recently released report from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) titled “Gateway to the Indo-Pacific: Australian Defense Strategy and the Future of the Australia-US Alliance”.

CSBA stated that Australian troops could be deployed to Indonesia and Malaysia to blockade the Malacca, Lombok and Sunda straits with land-based anti-ship and anti-air missiles. It raised concerns, however, that the Australian military might not be granted permission from Jakarta to operate on its territory. In a similar vein to the Rand report, it stated that “due to Indonesia’s history of non-alignment and continued attachment to neutrality, this could probably only occur [the granting of permission] if Chinese actions were perceived as directly impinging upon Indonesia’s sovereignty”.

The strategic importance of Indonesia in the war planning of the US and its allies point to the motives behind the rampant spying in the country by that has been exposed by Edward Snowden, the ex-National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower. Snowden’s leaks revealed that in 2009, Australian intelligence agencies were monitoring the phone communications of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, his wife, and other senior political figures. Other leaks exposed that the Australian embassies in Indonesia, across South East Asia and in China effectively function as NSA listening posts.

The US-directed spying operations are an integral part of war preparations, intended to gather military and strategic information, but also, in the case of Indonesia, vital clues as to the political stance of the government. The US has demonstrated once before its complete ruthlessness in ensuring a compliant regime in Indonesia—the 1965-66 coup that installed the military junta headed by General Suharto who carried out the slaughter of half a million members of the Indonesian Communist Party, workers and peasants.

There is an air of insanity in the reasoning of the Rand Corporation report. It assumes that the US and its allies attacking Chinese shipping and imposing a blockade would compel the Chinese government to negotiate for peace or “create the space for political solutions”. The prospect of Chinese retaliation and escalation, which includes the danger of nuclear

conflict, is left unstated. It is another sharp warning to the working class across Asia and the world of the danger of a catastrophic global war.

The author also recommends :

US think tank report: Australia central to American war plans against China

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