RAND Corporation lays out scenarios for US war with China

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A new study by the RAND Corporation titled "War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable" is just the latest think tank paper devoted to assessing a US war against China. The study, commissioned by the US Army, provides further evidence that a war with China is being planned and prepared in the upper echelons of the American military-intelligence apparatus.

That the paper emerges from the RAND Corporation has a particular and sinister significance. Throughout the Cold War, RAND was the premier think tank for "thinking the unthinkable"—a phrase made notorious by RAND's chief strategist in the 1950s, Herman Kahn. Kahn devoted his macabre book *On Thermonuclear War* to elaborating a strategy for a "winnable" nuclear war against the Soviet Union.

According to the preface of the new study, released last week, "This research was sponsored by the Office of the Undersecretary of the Army and conducted within the RAND Arroyo Center's Strategy, Doctrine, and Resources Program. RAND Arroyo Center, part of the RAND Corporation, is a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the United States Army."

The paper is a war-gaming exercise in the Kahn tradition: weighing the possible outcomes of a war between two nuclear powers with utter indifference to the catastrophic consequences for people in the United States, China and the rest of the world.

The study is based on a series of highly questionable assumptions: that a war between the United States and China would not involve other powers; that it would remain confined to the East Asian region; and that nuclear weapons would not be used. In reality, a war on China would from the outset involve US allies and would thus, in all likelihood, rapidly escalate out of control, spread beyond East Asia, and heighten the danger that nuclear weapons would be used.

As part of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," the US has been strengthening alliances throughout the region, establishing new basing arrangements and consolidating military "interoperability." The US military could not wage war against China without the intelligence and military and basing resources of, at the very least, Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

The RAND Corporation study considers four simplistic scenarios for a conflict defined by two variables: intensity (either mild or severe) and duration (from a few days to a year or more). It also notes that given the pace of advances in military technology—in what is already an undeclared arms race—the outcomes change over time. Thus, it studies the losses and costs for both sides of a war fought in 2015 and one in 2025.

The summary of findings pays far more attention to the outcomes of severe conflicts than for mild ones. In both cases—a brief, severe war and a long, severe war—the study estimates that the economic and military impact on China would be far greater than on the United States. At the same time, it concludes that the US would suffer greater losses and costs in 2025 than in 2015.

The paper states: "As its military advantage declines, the United States will be less confident that a war with China will conform to its plans. China's improved military capabilities, particularly for anti-access and area denial (A2AD), mean that the United States cannot count on gaining operational control, destroying China's defences, and achieving decisive victory if a war occurred."

The unstated conclusion, which underpins all of the Pentagon's planning and preparations, is that a war with China must be fought sooner rather than later. The

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US military build-up envisages 60 percent of all air and naval assets in the Indo-Pacific region by 2020—now just over three years away. Moreover, Washington's deliberate inflaming of dangerous flash points in Asia, especially in the South China Sea, is aimed at portraying Beijing as "aggressive" and "expansionist" and concocting the necessary casus belli.

The very premises of the study, however, underscore the aggressive, neo-colonial character of a war confined to a region thousands of kilometres from the United States. Washington's aim is nothing less than the complete subjugation of China to the strategic and economic interests of US imperialism.

In advising the Pentagon and the White House, the RAND Corporation paper calls for "prudent preparations to be able to wage a long and intense war with China." It continues: "Of no less importance is the ability of the United States to limit the scope, intensity, and duration of a war with China through its planning, its system of civilian control and its ability to communicate with China."

The reference to the necessity of a "system of civilian control" in the United States is particularly sinister. Behind the backs of the American population, plans are being drawn up by think tanks like the RAND Corporation, by the military/police forces and by the broader state apparatus for police state measures to suppress anti-war opposition that go well beyond those employed in World War II.

The RAND Corporation paper is a chilling confirmation of the warnings made by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in its statement of February 18, 2016 titled "Socialism and the Fight Against War." The statement notes that at a certain point, military fatalism becomes a significant contributing factor to the outbreak of war. It cites an international relations specialist who wrote: "Once war is assumed to be unavoidable, the calculations of leaders and militaries change. The question is no longer whether there will or should be a war, but when the war can be fought most advantageously."

The new study indicates that such a shift in thinking is underway in Washington. And while the RAND Corporation study dismisses the possibility of nuclear war, other imperialist strategists are planning for such an eventuality.

Just two weeks ago, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which has played a central role in the planning of the "pivot to Asia," issued a report assessing the Chinese nuclear arsenal. The paper was titled "China's nuclear forces and weapons of mass destruction."

The CSIS also downplayed the likelihood of nuclear war, but did not reject it out of hand. "History is a grim warning," it stated, "that deterrence sometimes fails, and escalation occurs in ways that are never properly planned or controlled.

Driven by the worsening economic and political breakdown of capitalism, another catastrophic war on a global scale is not only possible, but inevitable without the intervention of the international working class. However, the same capitalist crisis that is driving towards the insanity of world war is also creating the impulse for social revolution. This underscores the urgent necessity of the political fight being waged by the ICFI to build an international anti-war movement of the working class to put an end to capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system and reconstruct society on socialist foundations.

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