

China Could Use “Antiaccess” Strategies to Counter U.S. Military Superiority

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U.S. defense analysts are concerned about the possibility that China—a potential U.S. adversary in a conflict over Taiwan or South Korea—could employ an “antiaccess” strategy to prevent U.S. forces from deploying to a combat theater or to limit the locations from which they could operate. Such a strategy would be more attractive to China—and potentially more effective—than a force-on-force battle against the U.S. military, which remains superior to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in technology, doctrine, training, and experience.

A RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) study of Chinese military doctrinal writings finds that China could employ several types of antiaccess strategies in a future conflict with the United States, including

- pressuring such countries as Japan to limit or deny the United States the use of forward bases
- striking or jamming information systems to delay the deployment of U.S. military forces or to deny the United States access to information on enemy whereabouts
- disrupting U.S. logistics systems, thereby preventing the timely delivery of supplies and delaying the arrival of additional forces
- attacking air bases and ports to prevent or disrupt the deployment of forces and materiel
- attacking naval assets, such as aircraft carriers, to limit the United States’ ability to launch aircraft from the sea.

These actions could result in defeat for the United States—not in the sense that U.S. military forces would be destroyed but in the sense that China would accomplish its military and political objectives while preventing the United States from accomplishing some or all of its objectives.

Abstract

China could employ “antiaccess” strategies to prevent U.S. military forces from deploying or operating overseas. These actions could result in defeat for the United States, in the sense that China would accomplish its military and political objectives while preventing the United States from accomplishing some or all of its objectives. The United States can take short- and long-term steps to mitigate the Chinese antiaccess threat.

The United States can do much to mitigate the Chinese antiaccess threat. The following near-term measures could be taken using existing capabilities:

- Strengthen passive defenses at air bases.
- Deploy air and missile defense systems near critical facilities.
- Diversify basing options for aircraft.
- Strengthen defenses against covert PLA operations.
- Reduce the vulnerability of naval forces to attack while in port.
- Reduce the vulnerability of command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems.
- Take steps to deter and to mitigate the potential effects of high-altitude nuclear detonations, which could be used to disrupt U.S. information systems.
- Bolster allied capabilities to defend against attacks by missiles, aircraft, or special operatives.

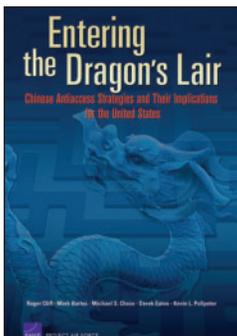
Taking measures such as these would strengthen deterrence of potential aggression by China.

In the longer term, the United States should consider investing in new or improved capabilities, such as the following:

- improved ballistic missile defenses
- better capabilities for detecting, identifying, and attacking mobile, time-sensitive targets
- improved land-based and advanced shipborne cruise missile defenses
- improved antisubmarine warfare capabilities
- improved minesweeping capabilities

- an antisatellite capability and counters to antisatellite attack
- improved extended-range air defense capabilities
- more-effective counters to long-range surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles
- early strategic and tactical warning capabilities.

These measures and capabilities would help ensure that U.S. forces remain capable of responding rapidly and effectively to potential crises in the region. ■



This research brief describes work done for RAND Project AIR FORCE and documented in *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Anti-access Strategies and Their Implications for the United States*, by Roger Cliff, Mark Burles, Michael S. Chase, Derek Eaton, and Kevin L. Pollpeter, MG-524-AF (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG524/>), 2007, 154 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8330-3995-8. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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