



Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume II

Trends in Force Projection Against Potential Adversaries

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This volume describes nine warfighting scenarios to test whether the anti-access and area-denial threat to U.S. force projection is growing more severe in critical regions. The potential adversaries in the scenarios are China, Russia, and Iran. The scenarios describe plausible U.S. and adversary military actions based on common understanding of current operational capabilities and approaches.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is the A2AD threat to U.S. force projection growing more severe in critical regions?



KEY FINDINGS

The Adversaries Matter, and Their Improving A2AD Capabilities Make Them Significantly Harder to Defeat

- The regions and stakes in these scenarios are strategically significant, and the opponents are plausible. The posited challenges would have far-reaching consequences for the United States. Even absent a war, a shift in the perceived military balance and the likely outcome of any conflict could be damaging.
- Such a shift is exactly what the 2015 and 2025 scenarios illustrate. The degree and consequence differ from case to case, but, in each instance, the adversaries' A2AD capabilities increase relative to U.S. force projection.
- Some of the major drivers of a degraded U.S. position are the same in each scenario. Paramount among these common elements are more and more-capable ballistic and cruise missiles. Telling improvements are also made by adversaries in each scenario in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and in air defenses.

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Anti-Access and Area-Denial Effectiveness Declines over Distance and Increases over Time in Significant Ways

- The adversary ability to threaten U.S. forces diminishes as distance increases from the adversary's homeland.
- The greater the reach of an adversary's A2AD umbrella, the abler it is to project force locally in the face of U.S. opposition.

The U.S. Response to Anti-Access and Area Denial Leads to Escalation and Increased Strategic Risk

- To overcome A2AD, the United States launches extensive conventional strikes against the adversary's homeland. In general terms, this is escalatory: Regional aggression against a U.S. ally or deployed U.S. forces is met with a broad U.S. attack.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The scenarios show that a change is needed in the United States' approach to A2AD. Volume I explores the underlying reasons for the current unfavorable trend and recommends a viable alternative strategy, one that exploits U.S. advantages to prevent international aggression.