



Employing Land-Based Anti-Ship Missiles in the Western Pacific

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Land-based anti-ship missiles (ASMs) feature prominently in the capabilities of many island nations in the Western Pacific, but the United States currently lacks such systems. This report illustrates the potential strategic advantages of the U.S. working with partners to build a coalition ASM capability, particularly in the event of a conflict with China, and includes an assessment of logistical challenges and positioning approaches.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the potential capabilities of ground-based anti-ship missiles (ASMs) in the strategically and commercially important waterways of the Western Pacific?
- How could ground-based ASMs support a U.S. anti-access/area-denial strategy in the region?
- If the U.S. military had such capabilities, how could it use them to engage in security cooperation initiatives with regional friends and allies to interdict warships or (if supplemented by other assets) form a full blockade in times of war?
- How would the array of positioning options for these systems affect the targeting requirements of China's People's Liberation Army?
- What are the requirements for developing these capabilities, and what are the approximate costs?



KEY FINDINGS

Land-Based Anti-Ship Missiles Would Be a Valuable Contributor to U.S. and Coalition Defense Operations in the Western Pacific

- China depends heavily on freedom of the seas for trade and, increasingly, to pursue its territorial and other interests.

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- If China takes steps to limit a U.S.-led coalition's freedom of movement in the Western Pacific, the United States and its allies must be able to counter this strategy by limiting Chinese naval freedom of movement. The strategic placement of anti-ship missile systems (ASMs) has the potential to ensure the success of such an operation.
- Ground-based ASMs are mobile and relatively easy to conceal. They could also have a range of uses, from serving as a deterrent to Chinese power projection to enabling blockades of critical waterways.

The United States Would Face Logistical and Security Cooperation Challenges in Fielding These Systems, but They Are Not Insurmountable

- The United States does not currently have an ASM capability. It would be relatively easy to create in the U.S. armed forces (Army or Marine Corps), though it would be viable only as part of the joint force.
- The United States must decide how many ASM systems to field and where to position them. The cooperation of regional partners will be necessary to ensure the optimal placement of these assets in the event of a conflict with China.
- The air- and sealift requirements for ASM systems are not insignificant. The United States will need to consider these costs and logistical needs when developing a placement strategy. Existing systems and transportation requirements offer some guidance in this area.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- China depends heavily on freedom of the seas for trade and, increasingly, to pursue its territorial and other interests. A U.S.-led coalition defense strategy in the Western Pacific should focus on these critical waterways.
- The United States could develop a ground-based anti-ship missile (ASM) capability to exploit the advantage of these systems in an operational context and to facilitate security cooperation with partner nations in the region. The United States cannot train partners to use these assets if it has no experience with them.
- Additional studies should be undertaken to determine how fielding ASMs would affect the regional, political, economic, and military dimensions of relations in the region. If the United States pursues an ASM strategy, additional research would be needed to establish the appropriate force structure, doctrine, and other requirements.

