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US encircling China with military bases: Report

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As part of a new strategy to “pivot” increased US military presence in the Asia-Pacific, the United States is encircling China with a chain of small air bases and military ports, a report says.

The US Air Force is planning to lease 33 acres of land on the small Pacific island of Saipan for

the next 50 years to build a "divert airfield" on an old World War II airbase there, according to the Foreign Policy magazine.

American jets would use the small airstrip in case access to the US super-base at Guam "or other Western Pacific airfields is limited or denied," according to an Air Force document on the project which was reviewed by the FP.

The Air Force specifically wants to expand the existing Saipan International Airport - built on a military base and used by Japan, and later the US during the World War II - to carry out "periodic divert landings, joint military exercises, and joint and combined humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts," according to the documents.

This is in accordance with a new strategy called Air-Sea Battle, under which the Pentagon is combining air and naval forces to counter "the increasingly formidable defenses of nations like China or Iran," the report said.

Although large parts of the Air-Sea Battle are still in the "conceptual phase," the strategy is currently being implemented in the Pacific region.

An important component of the strategy is for the US military to operate "from small, bare bones bases" in the Pacific, providing its forces the opportunity to disperse if the main bases come under attack by Chinese ballistic missiles.

China is involved in territorial disputes with US allies in the Asia-Pacific, namely the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea, and Japan in the East China Sea.

While the United States insists that its military's "pivot" to Asia does not concern China, experts say the increased presence is a check against any future Chinese expansion into the Pacific Ocean.

"China will be much more discreet throughout the entire region because U.S. power is already there, it's visible; you're not talking theory, you're already there in practice," said Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

China sees the Pentagon's focus on the Pacific as a strategy to counter China's increasing global influence.