

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

Asia Times Online

US in 'denial' over China's Pacific strategy

By Craig Guthrie

7/28/2011

HUA HIN, Thailand - Reports that China is close to achieving the same spy satellite capabilities as the United States and making advances in its drone and missile technologies are feeding into US theories that Beijing is pursuing a multi-faceted strategy to reshape the dynamics of military power in Asia.

However, the Pentagon seems too enamored with the doctrine of "access denial", the belief that China is intent on blocking US access to the region to gain the upper hand in an asymmetrical conflict, that it is failing to take the evolution in Chinese military thinking into account.

In July, reports surfaced that advances in China's spy orbiter program in the past 18 months enable it to spy on the same moving target - such as a US aircraft carrier - for up to six hours a day. In the same month, China launched an advanced new communications drone and there were revelations over its anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) program.

"China is clearly pursuing a policy of 'access denial' toward pushing the US away from the western Pacific," Joan Johnson-Freese, chair of the National Security Decision Making Department at the US Naval War College, told Asia Times Online. "As part of that, they need to be able to 'see' what's going on, and the improvements in their eye-in-the-sky capabilities will allow them to better do that."

The focus on China's satellite-based reconnaissance and real-time operations resulted from partial publication of an analysis by the Journal of Strategic Studies, due out in full in October.

The article concluded that the ability of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to monitor moving targets from space has been revolutionized in the past decade.

"Starting from almost no live surveillance capability 10 years ago, today the PLA has likely equaled the US's ability to observe targets from space for some real-time operations," two of the institute's China researchers, Eric Hagt and Matthew Durnin, wrote in the analysis, as seen and reported by Reuters.

"The most immediate and strategically disquieting application is a targeting and tracking capability in support of the anti-ship ballistic missile, which could hit US carrier groups ... With space as the backbone, China will be able to expand the range of its ability to apply force while preserving its policy of not establishing foreign military bases," Reuters reported.

The impetus for the advances in monitoring systems likely derived from major embarrassments for the PLA, such as the US deployments of two carriers, the *USS Nimitz* and *USS Kitty Hawk*, to Taiwan in 1996. That affront to Chinese sovereignty is seen as a turning point in post-Cold War US-China relations and in the formation of the East Asian regional order.

The access denial theory envisions the PLA acting quickly in similar scenario to neutralize US infrastructure in the region in the event of a conflict, to prevent deployment of vastly superior US follow-on forces. By striking hard, Beijing could convince the US and its allies that the cost of entry in blood and treasure would be prohibitive, despite the gaping disparities in firepower and strength between the US and Chinese militaries.

Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, also referred to access denial in July, ahead of a meeting with General Chen Bingde, chief of the PLA's General Staff.

"There are some significant advancements that China has made technologically over the course of the last decade ... And those do focus on anti-access or area-denial - they are focused and have that capability," Mullen said in Beijing.

Surveillance of moving targets such as carriers is an aspect of the access denial strategy as identified in a 2007 report "Entering the Dragon's Lair", which was prepared by the Rand Corporation for the US Air Force. It said the PLA would increasingly focus on restricting or disrupting the US military's ability to operate within a theater far from US territory.

"Attacks on aircraft carriers ... could prevent naval aviation from operating within the theater or force the carriers to withdraw to more-distant locations from which their aircraft would be less effective," according to the report. It also pointed to a "political anti-access" strategy, whereby Beijing would apply diplomatic pressure to foster disputes between host-nations of Pacific bases and the US.

While media reports have focused on China's eyes in the sky, its new stealth fighter, aircraft carrier and reconnaissance drones are key links in the anti-access strategy for relaying on-the-ground communications, while anti-ship ballistic missile systems are critical for strike options.

In July, the PLA deployed the Silver Eagle, a twin-tailed drone. According to an account of its test flight found on a PLA-sponsored website, as reported by Flight International, the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) made a three-hour flight, with a ground operator controlling the drone with a mouse and keyboard. When the UAV reached the combat zone, it maintained a cruising speed of 72kt (134 km/h) and an altitude of 9,840 ft (3,000 meters). [1]

"During its mission it disrupted communications, while also acting as a node for a Chinese military communications network, relaying 'large numbers of information packets' among Chinese forces. When an 'enemy' aircraft approached, the ground control station initiated a 'counter-surveillance deployment plan', and by reducing its altitude and initiating radio silence the Silver Eagle evaded detection," Flight International reported.

In a rare example of Chinese military transparency, General Chen confirmed this month that the Dong Feng 21D anti-ship missile, known as a "carrier killer" was in development. His comments came as the English-language China Daily reported that the DF-21D had a range of 2,700 km, far beyond US assessments by the Office of Naval Intelligence last year, which put the range at around 1,500 km.

"The missile is still undergoing experimental testing and it will be used as a defensive weapon when it is successfully developed, not an offensive one," Chen told reporters.

Taken together, the recent satellite, drone and missile advances are critical in China's Pacific access denial strategy, says Gabe Collins, co-founder of China SignPost.com.

China's work on overhead ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] assets is very important, as they will help the PLA with over-the-horizon targeting and weapons guidance. Our work to date has focused most specifically on the DF-21D that recently reached initial operational capability. In our December 2010 report on ASBM development, we note China's rapid buildup of a reconnaissance satellite constellation, with at least 12 Yaogan advanced electro-optical and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) remote sensing satellites launched in the last 4 years.

Though the network China is constructing fits well with the strategies identified in "Entering the Dragon's Lair", Hagt of the World Security Institute told Asia Times Online that there were several problems with the US focus on access denial, particularly in how a theory devised by Western policymakers is "parsed" onto Chinese military thinking.

"Remember that A2/AD [anti-access/area denial] is not a Chinese term, nor was it first borrowed by the Chinese to describe their own strategy in the western Pacific. If one looks at the specifics of what the strategy really means in the Western context, there are a number of problems," said Hagt.

"The Chinese formulation for their naval modernization is 'active defense', admittedly an even more amorphous term. I think where the Chinese foremost resistance to the [A2/AD] term would be in the concept's inherent purpose to possess the means and intent to keep the US (or other power) out of a pre-defined area using some form of forward deployed surface, submarine vessels, missiles or even bases. Rather, they would describe an A2/AD like strategy as one in reaction to specific threats and triggers, for instance interference over Taiwan.

"What exactly would trigger the A2/AD strategy is unclear. Only interference in Taiwan? Or would some dispute in the South China Sea be sufficient? If it is just over Taiwan, what exactly would the response be? Who would the deterrent be aimed at exactly? If the US sailed in with carriers aided by Japanese Aegis destroyers, or let's say just satellite comlink support, would the deterrent be exercised over Japan and any others that may operate alongside US forces? This is the difficulty over A2/AD and to which nuclear weapons (a simple deterrent) are not subject to," he said.

Moreover, Hagt said reporting on his article for the World Security Institute missed several significant caveats that he and his colleagues mentioned in terms of a comparison between US and Chinese capabilities in reconnaissance satellites:

We point out that while China's potential to view a stationary target in the Western Pacific are nearing US capabilities, they still lack in cueing assets (for example ELINT, Electronic signals intelligence or intelligence-gathering by use of electronic sensors) ... this is say nothing of the gap when talking about greater battlefield awareness on a global scale.

Our point was not that China is catching up in overall battlefield awareness, much less on a global scale, but given that China is mainly interested in a well-defined and somewhat limited space (western Pacific), its potential ability to view objects has greatly increased over the past few years.

While the Western media may be exaggerating China's technological advances, a second look at how Chinese military strategy is evolving offers further counterpoints to the access denial theory. Rather than preparing for a counterstrike, it is more likely that the PLA is sticking to its "active defense" strategy and building on "space deterrence".

The PLA can achieve this by building up a formidable reconnaissance and strike capability while adopting a new tack of using political victories and psychological warfare to chip away at the US's standing in Asia. Active Defense is said to feature "defensive operations, self-defense and striking and getting the better of the enemy only after the enemy has started an attack".

In a February report delivered to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Dean Cheng, a research fellow at the Asian Studies Center, said PLA strategy had evolved based on careful observation of Western war approaches to identify "three warfares": psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare, with the first proving the most important for space operations.

"Psychological warfare at that level is aimed not only at an opponent's political and military leaders, but also at their broader population ... PLA descriptions of how space deterrence can be effected are consistent with this definition of psychological warfare. For example, Chinese analysts note that space systems are very expensive. It is possible, then, to hold an opponent's space infrastructure hostage by posing a question of cost-benefit analysis: is the focus of deterrence (eg, Taiwan) worth the likely cost of repairing or replacing a badly damaged or even destroyed space infrastructure?"

While Cheng says "three warfares" fits with the Pentagon's "access denial" doctrine, "space

deterrence" and the political techniques available to undermine US prestige in space are likely to play an increasingly important role as Beijing projects itself as the ascendant power in the Pacific.

As Chinese military expert Bao Shixiu wrote in "Deterrence Revisited, Outer Space", a report published in 2007, "The basic necessity to preserve stability through the development of deterrent forces as propounded by Mao [Zedong] and Deng [Xiaoping] remains valid in the context of space."