

‘Air-Sea Battle’ Is a Plan for War on China

by Michael Billington

June 20—Over recent weeks, several leading analysts and institutions in Washington have released studies which directly challenge the operative U.S. war-fighting doctrine under the Obama Administration, known as Air-Sea Battle (ASB), demonstrating that the very existence of the doctrine threatens to bring the United States into a confrontation with China which would lead, perhaps quickly, into a thermonuclear war. While Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both in his practice and in his public presentations, has made abundantly clear that confrontation with China is neither necessary nor wise, and that he would continue building ties between the two nations, and between their military forces, the fact remains that the Air-Sea Battle doctrine has been put in place and is influencing policy decisions which, in the words of one leading analyst, have “no good outcome.”

EIR has consistently warned of the danger and insanity of the ASB doctrine,¹ tracing its origin to the work of Andrew Marshall—the 91-year-old director of the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment, who has, for the past 20 years, been painting China as the military threat of the future—and of his kindergarten of think-tankers, notably Andrew Krepinevich, now the head of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, who is largely responsible for formulating the ASB doctrine.

This role of Marshall and Krepinevich in creating and implementing this doctrine was noted by Amitai Etzioni, a professor of international affairs at George Washington University, in a paper, titled “Who Authorized Preparations for War with China?,” published in the current issue of the Yale *Journal of International Affairs*. On July 10, a forum under the same name as

1. For example, see Carl Osgood, “Obama’s Asia Pivot Is Aimed at China,” *EIR*, May 3, 2013.



Carnegie Endowment

Michael Swaine: Anyone who thinks China will just throw up its arms and say “game’s up—we give up,” is crazy. “There is no good outcome for this,” Swaine concluded.

Etzioni’s paper is scheduled to take place at the Segur Center for Asian Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., co-sponsored by the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies, and the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, featuring Etzioni, together with former U.S. Ambassador to China Stapleton Roy—perhaps the most senior of American diplomats—and National Defense University senior fellow T.X. Hammes. The issue of ASB leading to war is clearly being taken quite seriously.

“The Pentagon has concluded that the time has come to prepare for war with China,” Etzioni writes, noting that the Pentagon has adopted the policy as part of its 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review. He calls this a “momentous conclusion” that “will shape the United States’ defense systems, force posture and overall strategy for dealing with the economically and militarily resurgent China.” He warns that this “may well lead to an arms race with China, which could culminate in a nuclear war.”

Etzioni points out, as have other critics, that ASB’s purpose is to defeat China, and that this is a “long cry from containment or any other strategies that were seriously considered in the context of confronting the USSR after it acquired nuclear arms.” The Cold War, Etzioni notes, was characterized by mutual deter-

rence, and was structured around a series of red lines that each side knew they were not to cross. “In contrast, ASB requires that the United States be able to take the war to the mainland with the goal of defeating China, which quite likely would require striking first,” he writes. “Such a strategy is nothing short of a hegemonic intervention.” He quotes Joshua Rovner of the U.S. Naval War College, who said that deep inland strikes could be mistakenly perceived by the Chinese as preemptive attempts to take out its nuclear weapons, thus cornering them into “a terrible use-it-or-lose-it dilemma.” That is, ASB is prone to lead to nuclear war.

A 13-page unclassified report by the Air-Sea Battle Office within the Pentagon, titled “Air-Sea Battle—Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access and Area Denial Challenges,” acknowledges that the doctrine is not a strategy, but a battle plan to counter an adversary which has the potential to prevent access (using the now ubiquitous acronym A2/AD, for Anti-Access/Area Denial) to some or all of the U.S. military capacities—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. The report describes in simple, but hair-raising terms, how to use the full array of U.S. military power to take out all aspects of this adversary’s A2/AD capacities, at sea and on land. While not naming China, the constant refrain of the “China threat” being trumpeted by the governments and the media in the U.S. and Europe, repeating ad nauseum that China is developing dangerous A2/AD capacities, removes any doubt of the intended target of this U.S. military doctrine.

Carnegie’s Warning

The second major intervention against this madness was made by a team of nine analysts at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in May, in a study titled “China’s Military and the U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Strategic Net Assessment.” The project was headed by Michael Swaine, a former RAND analyst, who spoke on aspects of the report at a Sigur Center forum on June 18, on “Japan as a Global Power.” Swaine said that, if you ask Pentagon or other government officials what the ASB policy actually is, you get a different answer from each one. The Japanese and the Chinese, he said, are asking, “What is this,” questioning if it really is a plan for a preemptive strike on China, as it appears to be. Some in Japan support this, he said, and want to prepare Japan to block China’s access to the Pacific by fortifying the Ryukyu

Islands. Anyone who thinks China will just throw up its arms and say “game’s up—we give up,” he said, is crazy, concluding: “There is no good outcome for this.”

Swaine also emphasized that the U.S. presumption that it has the right and the necessity to have absolute domination and military superiority over the entire Pacific, right up to the 12-mile territorial limit of China, and that China’s efforts to establish its own security in the East China Sea and the South China Sea translates into a threat to the United States and its allies, is simply false. China is emerging as a major power, as everyone recognizes, and therefore, has serious security concerns in its immediate neighborhood.

Here it is important to recall that General Dempsey, in a speech to the Carnegie Endowment in May of 2012, engaged in a masterly war-avoidance intervention regarding precisely this issue of dealing with China’s rise. Dempsey warned the West not to get caught in the “Thucydides trap.” This trap, he said, “goes something like this: It was Athenian fear of a rising Sparta that made war inevitable. Well, I think that one of my jobs as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and as an advisor to our senior leaders, is to help avoid a Thucydides trap. We don’t want the fear of an emerging China to make war inevitable. So, we’re going to avoid the Thucydides trap.”

Also, as Etzioni points out in his paper, former JCS vice chairman Gen. James Cartwright stated in 2012 that “Air-Sea Battle is demonizing China. That’s not in anybody’s interest.”

The Carnegie report makes the following points regarding the Air-Sea Battle doctrine:

“Many Chinese defense analysts are increasingly concerned that the United States will adopt (or has already adopted) the goal of acquiring all the elements of a so-called Air-Sea Battle (ASB) operational military concept, designed to neutralize China’s A2/AD type capabilities, using bomber strikes at tactical inland C4ISR [Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance—ed.] targets, along with precision-guided munitions, stealth, cyber, and other capabilities.... Although still largely undefined, the ASB concept would ostensibly involve a networked, domain-integrated, deep-strike-oriented force structure designed to disrupt, destroy, and defeat all relevant Chinese A2/AD-type capabilities, encompassing both offshore

weapons systems and supporting onshore assets....

“Such doctrines could fuel a level of Chinese hostility and distrust that would make efforts at establishing credible, inclusive multilateral security assurances virtually meaningless. Indeed, a likely mid- to high-capacity China would almost certainly respond to the military aspects of this strategy by developing more potent, and escalatory, countermeasures.... This robust approach could also empower hardline leaders in Beijing, who could more easily rationalize their arguments for adopting a more assertive approach toward Japan and the region by pointing to evidence that the alliance is being utilized in an effort to contain and encircle the PRC.”

U.S.-China Relations

The June 7-8 Summit in California between President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping was generally successful, with the two sides finding common ground on a desire to de-nuclearize the Korean Peninsula, setting up regular 2+2 talks between the military and foreign ministers/secretaries, and other important issues. Of course, any intentions by Obama’s team to bash China at the summit, for alleged Chinese cyber warfare against the U.S., as trumpeted in the press for weeks leading into the conference, were neutered in the days leading up to the summit, by the exposure of massive U.S. surveillance and cyber-spying.

Nonetheless, the Air-Sea Battle doctrine is in place, and, as Etzioni argues, as military acquisition decisions are increasingly shaped by the ASB doctrine, and the force structure is shifted in that direction, it becomes increasingly locked in. Etzioni makes the mistake of covering for President Obama, arguing that he appears to be oblivious to the existence of the ASB doctrine, despite his role as Commander in Chief. To support this argument, Etzioni foolishly claims that the so-called Pivot (Rebalancing) of U.S. military and economic power to the Asia-Pacific is not related to the Air-Sea Battle plan against China.

In fact, as Lyndon LaRouche noted in response to these recent institutional attacks on the ASB policy, as the world becomes increasingly aware of, and alarmed by, the madness of Obama’s war policies, both in Southwest and East Asia, the more rapidly he is being discredited, and thus, subject to removal from office.

mobeir@aol.com