

“Future War with China”?: New US Bomber Aimed at China?

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-[General Gary North, commander of the US Pacific Air Force] has hinted at one of the roles the new bombers might play in any future war with China. He said the key to defeating the new J-20 fighter would be to prevent it ever taking off from its mainland bases. Bombers might be used to attack Chinese airfields in the early hours of a conflict.

\$3.7 billion. That’s how much the US Air Force proposes to spend over the next five years developing a new, stealthy, long-range, manned bomber likely specifically intended to penetrate Chinese air defences. The plan, included in the Obama administration’s 2012 budget, could lead to the production of around 100 new bombers by the mid-2020s — and could significantly tip the Pacific balance of power.

Last week’s bomber announcement marked the continued escalation of the arms race between the United States and China. Since early 2010, China has debuted a new stealth fighter prototype (the Chengdu J-20), brought ballistic anti-ship missiles into service and at least temporarily matched the US in sheer number of satellite launches (15). Meanwhile, the United States has deployed long-range spy drones to Guam, test-flown a new carrier-launched drone fighter and begun development of new supersonic anti-ship missiles—all in addition to the new bomber programme.

According to Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Phillip Breedlove, the bomber will comprise the biggest part of a ‘family of systems’ that will also include a non-nuclear ballistic missile plus new munitions for the bomber and two types of stealthy drones that might be controlled from the bomber. The new missiles and planes will be ‘decades ahead’ of what other countries might possess, Breedlove claimed.

The Air Force might also add lethal lasers to the bomber at some point in the future, said Gen. William Fraser, head of Air Combat Command.

The Pentagon’s bomber development coincides with the scripting of a new battle plan aimed at preserving US military capabilities in the Pacific. This so-called AirSea Battle plan is meant to help coordinate US Navy and Air Force ships and planes to better defend Taiwan from possible Chinese attack, while also countering Beijing’s efforts to expand its influence beyond its territorial waters.

The United States’ current force of some 160 B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers, armed with guided bombs and missiles, already factors heavily into US Pacific war plans. But of these bombers, only the 20 B-2s have any ability to evade Chinese radars; the B-1s and B-52s could be vulnerable to Chinese fighters and surface-to-air missiles. The new bomber would likely

displace some of the B-1s and B-52s and result in a more survivable long-range force.

The US Air Force base on Guam already hosts a rotating detachment of B-52s and B-2s. As the new bomber nears service, the Air Force might install new 'hardened' hangars—either buried or armoured—to protect the valuable planes from Chinese ballistic missiles, according to Gen. Gary North, commander of the US Pacific Air Force.

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