

NONSTATE ACTORS AND ANTI-ACCESS/AREA DENIAL STRATEGIES: THE COMING CHALLENGE

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This monograph explores the emerging challenge of nonstate actors' anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategies and their implications for the United States and its allies. This monograph starts from one major development: the historical monopoly of states over precision-guided munitions has eroded, and this evolution eventually challenges the ability of the most advanced militaries to operate in certain environments. Questioning the type of strategy that nonstate actors may implement as they gain greater access to advanced military technology, the research argues some of these groups increasingly lean toward A2/AD strategies. The analysis focuses on two regions, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, where case studies include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Houthis in Yemen, and separatist groups in Ukraine. Three key parameters are underlined to assess emerging nonstate A2/AD strategies: a political shift toward the preservation of the status quo vis-à-vis opponents, a significant focus of military resources dedicated to A2/AD capabilities—primarily missiles and rockets, and finally, a consequential adaptation of the military units responsible for the implementation of this new strategy.

These postures are still in their infancy and should not be equated to those of major regional or world powers, such as Iran, Russia, or China. The development of nonstate A2/AD postures currently remains dependent on the ability of the nonstate actors to attract state sponsorship: Hezbollah was able to acquire its arsenal because of its support from Iran and Syria; the Houthis could not sustain their

ongoing missile campaign against Saudi Arabia without significant help from Tehran; and, likewise, the Ukrainian separatists only became a credible threat to Kiev thanks to the provision of military resources by Russia. Thus, without state sponsorship, these emerging nonstate A2/AD strategies would hardly constitute a major threat.

Bearing in mind this precondition, if a scenario of multiple nonstate A2/AD “bubbles” were to unfold, the United States and its allies could face unprecedented challenges, especially in the field of counterterrorism campaigns. For military planners considering scenarios in Europe and the Middle East, the new constraints would need to be factored in when assessing the option of using military force in regional interventions. In addition, this type of conflict would potentially raise the level of casualties and constitute a kind of life insurance for the terrorist organizations.

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