

For the South China Sea “Militarization”: China should not be to Blame

By An Gang

Reporter for the World Affairs

Since the summer of 2015, with the situation in the South China Sea again getting complex, the word "militarization" continuously jumps into our ears. This is one of the terms most frequently used by the U.S. military commanders and government officials to blame China's maritime rights protection actions in the South China Sea.

Regarding the so-called "South China Sea militarization", the United States, as the representative of some countries inside and outside the region, refers to the acts of China to deploy weapons on the expanded islands and reefs, or turn the South China Sea Islands and reefs for military use, and intendeds to attribute the tensions in the South China Sea all to China.

Tracing to its source, the word "militarization" was first applied to the South China Sea matters by the U.S. allies, the Philippines, which claimed since 2012 "being bullied by the north big country". In June 2013, the 46th ASEAN foreign ministers meeting was held in Bandar Seri Begawan, Capital of Brunei, during the meeting the Philippines participants dealt out press release, showing "concern" to the growing "militarization" in the South China Sea, accusing China of increasing "military and paramilitary presence" over the Huangyan Island and Ren'ai reef, constituting "a threat to the maritime peace and stability in the region".

Later, the United States took over the word "militarization", rushed to the forefront to

launch accusations and put pressure on the Chinese side. A larger context is that the United States has adjusted its "neutral" position since the dispute in Nansha islands, coming to the fore from behind the scenes, and begun directly intervening in the South China Sea disputes, which is synchronically accompanied by the proposed and implemented U.S. Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy.

Associate professor Liu Lin of Academy of Military Sciences compiles an incomplete statistics, having found from May 2015 to March 2016, U.S. politicians and military leaders in the public speeches explicitly mentioned the South China Sea "militarization" for at least 15 times, of which 9 times in 2015, and 6 times in the first quarter of 2016. Some senior U.S. officials and media first maliciously cooked China's deployment of the HQ-9 missiles on the Yongxing islands of Xisha, and then China's building of radar facilities on Huayang, Dongmen, Nanxun, Chigua islands of Nansha, made the so-called "South China Sea militarization" a focus of public opinion.

In May 2015, Deputy Assistant Secretary David Zimmern, responsible for the Asia-Pacific Security Affairs, the U.S. Department of Defense, mentioned in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony the South China Sea "militarization" and said that from a military point of view, China's sea reclamation will make it possible to enhance the defensive and offensive capabilities and will lead to faster

militarization around the disputed South China Sea islands and reefs.

In August the same year, U.S. Secretary of State Kerry at the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, referred to China to construct facilities on the "artificial islands "for military purposes", and accused China of relevant acts increasing tensions.

On November 18 same year, touching on the South China Sea matter at the joint press conference with Philippine President Aquino before the opening of the Manila APEC informal leadership meeting, U. S. President Obama stated that we agree that it is necessary to take decisive measures, to reduce tensions, including a commitment to stopping further reclamation, construction of newly buildings, and militarization in the disputed South China sea waters.

On February 17, 2016, U.S. Secretary of State Kerry on the eve of his visit to China in relation to the South China Sea matter said that military activities continuously increase there, causing a deep concern, and hoped Beijing not by the military means, but through diplomatic means, through the joint efforts with other countries and other claiming countries to resolve the dispute.

On February 23, H. Harris, head of U.S. Pacific Command, said in testimony to Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, that China is clearly militarizing the South China Sea, unless someone believes that the earth is flat, otherwise it is difficult to deny the fact.

On March 2, U.S. Defense Secretary Carter said in a speech at the San Francisco Federal Club that China cannot implement its militarization in the South China Sea, and some specific actions will lead to specific consequences.

On April 8, U.S. Defense Secretary Carter in a speech on the Asia- Pacific defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York said that in the South China Sea, Chinese military behavior exacerbated the regional tensions; while the United States in the South China Sea islands and reefs sovereignty claims does not hold a position, but for any military action, especially China's behavior, it has a

position. He also said that because many Asia-Pacific countries ask the United States to defend the international law and principles, and to ensure the regional countries continuous prosperity so that it makes a massive military investment in the region.

In the same month, Harris again at the Senate Military Affairs Committee meeting said that the Chinese intends to obtain hegemony in East Asia. It obviously chooses to militarize the South China Sea, and there will be no other possibilities on this issue.

The Philippines, as one of the main claiming countries in the South China Sea dispute and an U.S. ally, actively promotes the U.S. idea on opposing the "South China Sea militarization". The U.S. strategic dialogues with Japan, Australia, India and other allies as well as 2+2 national defense and foreign affairs meetings also discuss this matter, and the joint communiqués published clearly mention their opposition to the South China Sea militarization. On April 11, 2016, the G7 foreign ministers issued the Statement on Marine Safety, strongly against changing the status quo in the East China Sea and South China Sea by unilateral action.

Not Vigorous concept in the end

What is in the end the South China Sea militarization? The U.S. officials and generals repeatedly expressed concerns over the matter. These issues have become major phenomenal ones that must be probed into for people to understand better the situation in the South China Sea.

Another expert from Marine Strategic Studies, Beijing University and Pangu Academic Committee — Hu Bo argues that the "South China Sea militarization" is not vigorous academic concept, but a topic of an operational policy.

Is the South China Sea being "militarized", and who is "militarizing" the South China Sea? China and the United States have significant differences -- the U.S. side accuses China of expanding reclamation of islands and reefs, deploying military equipments, "militarizing" the South China Sea; while China refutes the U.S. military ships in the South China Sea

arbitrary crossing, military exercises and strengthening military deployments and building military bases surrounding the South China Sea. The two sides are not on the same channel.

Hu Bo argues that the U.S. intention is, through the "militarization" concept, to try one way or another to cook the South China Sea situation. This cooking is an important part of the "costs imposed" strategy for the United States to deal with China's so-called "strong offense" in the South China Sea. From the experience of the U.S. foreign policy, this country, master of international discourse is very skilled in manufacturing and manipulating the topics while dealing with a hot issue in international relations, so as to push opponents down into the unjust trap.

The so-called "South China Sea militarization" is the U.S.-set discourse trap, pushing the victim onto the dock. This issue, in fact, is a political warfare and public opinion warfare coated and packaged by military issues.

Hu Bo said that China's will to carry out construction on the islands and reefs so resolutely with progress so rapidly in the South China Sea came as a surprise to the United States, it is too late when it is waken up to block. A way the United States can use now is cooking, mobilizing the outside attention, creating a full range of political and diplomatic pressure to stop China from deploying the necessary weapons on the islands and reefs, and delay China's pace in the South China Sea area for obtaining strategic and tactical advantages, and limit the growth of China's regional influence. So we see the United States on the issue of "militarization" get increasingly high toned, and the U.S. focus also expands to the Xisha Islands from the Nansha Islands. In 2015 the United States emphasized that China should not deploy offensive weapons on the islands and reefs, but now it is completely opposed to whether it is offensive or defensive weapons in nature.

The U.S. practice can also be understood as a 'strategic preset', Hu Bo said. The so-called "strategic preset" is that in the two sides game-play, a party expects the other party to take some actions, then take the preventive

measures and preparatory measures directed at the warning in advance, including verbal threats and deterrent actions, and then "push back" the party, a very heavy speculation. For the United States, cooking "the South China Sea militarization" costs very low, the potential gains may be from zero to infinity, there is a lot of space for imagination.

Tang Pei, at China's Naval Academy, pointed out that "the South China Sea militarization" is the focus of the current U.S. debate with China. U.S. military and political officials on the related issues frequently make high-profile statements, seize the construction project progress on islands and reefs in the South China Sea as empiricism, and make forecast that China will have "offensive military fast delivery" capacity and further slander China to seek regional "hegemony." What we should pay more attention is that as the United States is cooking the South China Sea militarization, it is stepping up the building of the South China Sea strategic alliance system to strengthen the military presence and intensity of action in the South China sea.

What is the United States Afraid of?

The concept of "militarization" is lack of the basis of justice in the international community. In our understanding, the "militarization" is a process, China has no intention to provoke an arms race through a large-scale deployment of military forces, deteriorating the situation. Yet the United States steals it into the concept of state of facts, even tries to deprive China of its rights to normal deployment of defense ability at its homeland territory, and stops China from releasing a gun and making shelling at its homeland, which is too overbearing, says Hu Bo.

The U.S. military has rejected China's counter-statement, requests the Chinese side not to confuse the military deployment with freedom of navigation. An excuse for the United States is mainly the following: Firstly, U.S. military forces in the South China Sea and its surrounding waters already exists for decades, and is most "welcome" by the Asia-Pacific countries. Secondly, the U.S. Navy's "declared freedom of navigation action"

is not only carried out in the South China Sea, but in the waters of the world over, and has never been interrupted. However, U.S. troops in the South China Sea cruising reconnaissance activity seems to abandon "just do not say" principle, having taken measures such as allowing a reporter to accompany, defense minister to takes a flight to arrive on the carrier deck for inspection and other high-profile approach, the formation of public opinion and the repeated stimulation are actually in a cyclic tension intensified.

At the military tactical level, what trends of China is mostly concerned by the United States is described in July 2015 by senior researcher Bonnie Glaser of U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in his article entitled "Continuous Development of the South China Sea Militarization", published in the Australian Lowy Institute website.

With more comprehensive reading, Glaser wrote that if China will use the artificial islands and reefs for military purposes, which will produce five functions in concrete terms: One is to strengthen the intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance and maritime situational awareness; Two is to announce the establishment of air defense identification zone within the dotted line wholly or partly; Three is to expand the "anti-access/area denial ability to quickly reach the eastern and southern regions of the South China Sea; Four is the deployment of anti-ship cruise missiles, surface to air missiles and submarines; Five is to provide stronger strength to drive out other claimants from the occupied islands and reefs.

Glaser recognizes in his article that once a military conflict occurs, then China's deployed ships and aircraft on Nansha Islands and reefs will be easily attacked, bearing little real defense significance; but also pointed out that even so the construction projects on islands and reefs and related military equipments deployment will enable China from afar away to put the American forces in a dangerous situation, even during war-time, the United States has to save some troops to launch attacks on these islands and reefs, which will affect implementation of other war missions.

Coincidentally, in February 2016, Director

James Clapper of the Bureau of National Intelligence in a letter sent to the Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain said that, during the years 2016 -2017, China will have an important ability to rapid deliver a large number of offensive military power to the area, and has set up required facilities for delivery of military forces in the South China Sea and beyond, and the related ability including deployment of advanced fighters, surface to air missiles, coastal defense cruise missile and the Chinese Navy ships and Coast Guard large patrol boats have constantly increased their presence.

At a Senate hearing in May 2015, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense David Zimmern also made a detailed description that militarily, China's land reclamation will enable it to enhance the defensive and offensive capabilities, including: deployment of long-range radar and intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance aircrafts on the reclaimed islands; to expand its law enforcement and naval presence to the south of the South China Sea; the runway on the islands will enable China's aircraft carriers to have transfer airport so that China can launch more lasting air operations. More high-end military upgrading such as permanent deployment of fighters group or surface to air missiles, anti-ship missile and ballistic missile systems will result in faster 'militarization' on these Islands and reefs in the disputed South China Sea.

Hu Bo argues that in the past, China's presence in the southeast of the South China Sea is very weak, also because the controlled islands area is small, too scattered and poorly conditioned, there is no way to equip normal facilities. Now with the islands expansion projects in advance, China is completely capable of effective control in this direction, but also a substantially increase the Chinese power projection radius, and shorten the operational preparation time in case of an emergency. The monitoring of Chinese naval and air forces in the South China Sea expands from the previous single point into a number of points that must be watched in the future, and shake the performance of the American military

presence in the Western Pacific region, which will mean that the U.S. military ability to intervene in the affairs of the South China Sea is relatively weakened, the military cost will be up to a certain extent, and the U.S. military used to maintain military superiority in the global oceans cannot be calm.

Zhang Jie from Asia-Pacific and Global Strategic Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave a briefing that in the near future, the U.S. greatest concern is how China will use its growing military capability to respond to the verdict of the Philippines' South China Sea arbitration case. The Hague International Criminal Court may announced the outcome of the arbitration by the middle of this year. The United States believes that China will not swallow the adverse ruling, but is likely to adopt some counter measures such as setting up the "South China Sea air defense identification zone" and stationing troops on the Huangyan Island with the strength built on these islands and reefs as the foundation. The United States is most worried about China's undermining of the U.S. military presence, alliance credibility and leadership position in the Asia-Pacific region.

Biased Accusations

The U.S. cooking South China Sea "militarization" is tightly matched with its strengthening military cruising presence in the South China Sea region, and "showing off power" by strengthening the strategic plan around the South China Sea.

Scholars briefed that the United States in recent years has increased exercises near the South China Sea with the countries surrounding the South China Sea, and sent ships and planes to the South China Sea Islands and reefs to take patrol and reconnaissance more frequently.

On June 28, 2015, Chen Xiaogong, member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, NPC, mentioned in his remarks at the Fourth World Peace Forum that the U.S. military aircraft close reconnaissance on the South China Sea Islands and reefs reached 1200 visits in 2014 from only 260 visits in 2009, this phenomenon is worse than that during the cold war between the United States and the former

Soviet Union in terms of reconnaissance flights.

From May 2015, the American warship-based aircrafts openly took "free navigation" actions with high-profile in the South China Sea, so far have made no less than 7 trips to China's islands and reefs within 12 nautical miles, once every four to six weeks, and in fact is "normalized".

In April 2014, the United States and the Philippines signed the Enhance Defense Cooperation Agreement, the U.S. military is able to enter the military bases inside the Philippines after more than 20 years. According to the New Agreement, the Philippines will open up their five bases for the U.S. aircrafts, ships and troops rotations. In the five points, Bautista air force base in Palawan is facing the South China Sea, the other four bases also have the geographical advantage for U.S. carrier based aircrafts to fast approach the South China Sea. Since February 2015, the U.S. P8 patrol aircrafts take off from the Philippines base for reconnaissance activities on the South China Sea. It is reported that the United States also requested the Philippine side to open another three bases previously belonging to the U.S. military and the Philippine military headquarters in Manila.

The United States is extremely biased to China in its critique. Liu Lin argues that as early as the 1960s-70s, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia began building airports, runways and ground facilities on their illegally occupied China's islands and reefs, and deploying military personnel. Vietnam built airstrip, radar, weather station, a lighthouse on the Nanzi Island, Dunqian sandbank, Hongma Island, Jinghong Island, Nanwei Island, Annwei sandbank. The Philippines established two small air force bases on the occupied islands and reefs, and the one built on the Zhongye island can take C-130 transport planes to land and take-off.

It is reported that Vietnam, the Philippines, etc. are engaged in "maintenance" on the occupied islands and reefs, also think of land reclamation, and attracting the U.S. "sponsorship" due to shortage of capital, technology, etc.. In May 2015, the CSIS

disclosed satellite images taken by a U.S. digital earth company, pointing out that from 2010 to April 2015, Dunqian sandbank and the Xijiao island of Nansha Islands under Vietnam control continue to expand to about 80000 square meters.

On March 4, 2016, Fu Ying, a spokesperson for the Chinese National People's Congress, was asked about the "South China Sea militarization" at a press conference. She asked, this wording "militarization" is cooked very bluffing, isn't this a kind of language hegemony? "If you take a closer look at entry and exit of advanced aircrafts, warships, in the South China Sea, does not the United States own most of them?" Since the United States returns to Asia-Pacific, how many military actions does take? In terms of militarization, what is this? Isn't it a militarization?

Fu Ying stated that it is very necessary to expand the projects on the Nansha Islands and reefs, since they so far from the mainland, should have their own defense capabilities, and deployment of the necessary precautions, that is a popular belief. Chinese people feel that the United States sends warships to show off force so close to the Nansha Islands, which stimulates the Chinese people's feelings of resentment. Previously on the Nansha disputes, the United States does not take a position on the dispute. Now the U.S. practice and discourse make people feel it is stimulating tensions, and the U.S. motivation brings about a big question mark. If the United States is really concerned about the regional peace and stability, it should support China and the neighboring countries to negotiate a settlement, instead of going in the opposite direction.

Five days later on March 8, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the press conference of the fourth meeting of the 12th National People's Congress noted that the South China Sea Islands are China's inalienable territory, all children of the Yellow Emperor has the obligation to safeguard the territory. China has never, nor will it put forward new territorial claims. China builds defense facilities on its own Islands and reefs, and its right to self-defense is given by the international law. China is neither the earliest to deploy weapons

in the Nansha islands, nor the country to have deployed most of weapons, nor the country carrying out military activities most frequently. The 'South China Sea militarization' hat buckle China's head, there are more appropriate ones to wear.

A spokesman for China's Ministry of National Defense said on July 30, 2015 that the United States in the South China Sea has further strengthened military alliances, increased military presence, frequently held joint military exercises... China is highly concerned about the militarization promoted by the United States in the South China Sea.

In Coordination with Asia-Pacific Rebalancing

We will see a greater strategic paradigm behind the fact that the United States in the South China Sea provokes 'militarization', and even openly intervenes in the South China Sea disputes, said associate professor Fang Xiaozhi from Institute of International Relations of the Chinese People's Liberation Army,.

Fang Xiaozhi believes that the United States in the South China Sea showing off force is integrated with strengthening measures in other directions in the Asia-Pacific. The Asia-Pacific region occupies an important position in the U.S. global strategy, and is replacing the traditional Atlantic region as the focus of the U.S. global strategy.

Over the past five years, the United States has accelerated the pace of withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, reduced military deployment in Europe, strengthened and optimized the forward military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the air-sea battle concept, constructed a three-dimensional combat system for the Asia-Pacific region; optimized Asia-Pacific bases layout, strengthened the forward base construction in Guam as the core, accelerated naval "major move from West to East"; speeded up the deployment of long-range strategic bombers in order to ensure its military projection capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region; continuously expanded the scope of allies cooperation through revising U.S.-Japan defense cooperation guidelines, stationing

troops in Australia and the Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore, and expanding the use of military bases in the Philippines plus a series of other measures in order to maintain and consolidate the U.S. dominant position in the Asia-Pacific region.

Fang Xiaozhi said that, enacted in March 2015, "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" announced the U.S. military will further enhance its mobile combat strength in the Asia-Pacific region, and the plans to have about 300-ship fleet by 2020 to ensure that at any time there are 120 ships deployed in the Asia-Pacific Region. At the same time, taking deterrence, sea control, power projection and maritime security as the essential ability of American naval power, in order to provide a solid military backing to implement the Pacific rebalancing strategy. The new layout of the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy is advancing step by step, and is changing from the original return to the Asia-Pacific to reshape the Asia-Pacific.

The U.S. leadership position is established on the basis of the marine hegemony, maritime security situation including the situation in the South China Sea sustainably remaining tense in the Asia-Pacific provides a rare opportunity and grab for the United States to accelerate the Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategic layout. For the United States, an U.S. important goal to accelerate military deployment in the Asia-Pacific regions is to respond to the rising China. The United States believes once it loses the West Pacific Ocean control in competition with China, which will exert a significant impact on the military activities of the U.S. Navy in the Western Pacific region, especially naval power projection, thereby threaten its military security interests in the Western Pacific region, thus changing the U.S.-made global ocean rules of the game and shake the America's global leadership. To this end, the United States believes that it must maintain existing "order and the rules of the game", and defend the U.S. maritime supremacy in the Asia-Pacific and the world at large through showing off force in the Asia-Pacific region, and through the maintenance of the so-called "free navigation".

Followers are not many

Opposition to "militarization" is almost equivalent to "demilitarization", one of the two sides. In terms of "demilitarization", it requests China not to deploy defensive weapons and equipments on the South China Sea Islands and reefs, which amounts to force a country engage in "demilitarization" on its own land, no government can accept such a request.

Liu Lin comes up with some analysis on the U.S. intention: Firstly, the United States is worried indeed about China's deployment in the South China Sea, hopes to use the military topic to put pressure on China before its full deployment of military equipments, Secondly, bring under further control the discourse on the South China Sea matters, make the public opinion atmosphere that China should take responsibility for the tensions in the South China Sea and defame China's international image. Thirdly, drive a wedge between ASEAN and China. In the South China Sea, there is a gap between ASEAN and China militarily, cooking China's increasing military presence in the South China Sea will surely increase concerns of the ASEAN countries and sense of urgency, the ASEAN countries will strengthen their arms, and on the other hand, strive for the support of the United States, Japan, Australia and other countries. This also makes the United States involved in the South China Sea affairs more conveniently.

Liu Lin mentioned that U.S. Secretary of State Kerry at the 48th session of the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting regional forum held in August 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, made the so-called "three stops" (stop reclamation, stop construction, stop militarization) proposal. At the meeting, Kerry used data accusing China saying that in the past 18 months the South China Sea Reclamation reached more than 1200 hectares (12 square kilometers), which is equivalent to 30 times the South China Sea total reclamation area (40 hectares) by Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan in the past 45 years. Since entering 2016, the United States has adjusted its expressions that "now it seems China has not stopped making an effort in the military aspect, then the United States would be responding, threatening

specific actions will bring specific consequences. Obviously, dealing with the goal of the so-called "South China Sea militarization", the United States has made some changes, since it is unable to block, then try possibly to delay, reduce the intensity, and balance China's growing strength through increased U.S. deployment.

However, the U.S. clamor on the so-called "South China Sea militarization" and concrete actions of "maintaining freedom of navigation" failed to generate its expected massive response from ASEAN countries. Liu Lin said that in addition to the Philippines, other ASEAN countries have not formed strong "militarization" echo. The Philippine efforts to manipulate the 46th ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in June 2013 to adopt a joint statement condemning China engaged in the South China Sea "militarization" was cold-shouldered. Other countries take the position very cautiously, rarely use the wording "militarization", and stand for restraints and stress peaceful settlement of the disputes. Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in early April 2016 at an exclusive interview with the Wall Street Journal expressed "confusion" on the U.S. FONOPs saying that if you were to assert your rights, that is one thing; If you harmlessly pass through another country's territorial waters, the meaning is completely different; so you have to determine what your real purpose is to make sure that no one else is misunderstood.

These above-mentioned scholars have noticed that now ASEAN has a growing "reverse" fears, i.e., some countries think that the United States carries out FONOPs with high profile in the South China Sea, forming too much unnecessary stimulation to China, things in the political aspects are noisy too, and U.S.- China military conflict risk increases, which ASEAN countries can hardly afford, and also increases pressure on them to choose sides. So, these countries have begun hoping the U.S. to become restraint.

Nanyang Technology University marine expert Sam Batema publishes an article pointing out that the U.S. FONOPs is a provocative action, of course the Chinese will regard it as a kind of containment. So, for

"demilitarization", we request China to clarify its positions on the South China Sea and hold self restraint, at the same time, the United States should also back out and stop the FONOPs.

Vietnam is actually in a very difficult position. Vietnam can't positively respond to the U.S. opposition to "militarization" in the South China Sea, because of its own deployment of a large number of weapons and equipments on the Nansha Islands, and if it explicitly rejects the U.S. propaganda, Vietnam cannot completely rely on its own strength to balance China.

Approaching the "critical point"?

The "South China Sea militarization" has become an objective trend of multi involvement, and behind the "militarization" is that the situation in the South China Sea is becoming more and more obvious a "strategic game".

Asia-Pacific regional hotspot issues are relatively concentrated with complex nature, and cannot be simply solved by military means. Americans in the South China Sea "show off muscles" and release the signal ready to intervene any time, which are not conducive to the dialogue, negotiations and peaceful settlement of the disputes, and will increase a risk of military conflict. The core of the South China Sea matter is previously the territorial disputes and maritime rights and interests disputes, but now a complex situation of a territorial sovereignty disputes, the disputes of maritime delimitation, and competition for marine control is formed, the situation of mistrust between the parties exist for a long time, the United States carries out partial policy and strengthens cooperation of sensitive content with individual countries, which is bound to cause increasing pressure on Asia-Pacific countries, aggravate the atmosphere of military confrontation, and may even trigger a regional arms race.

Mira Rapp-Hooper of Center for a New American Security, on March 31, 2016 in a testimony to American Economic and Security Council made some observations on the pros and cons of the contest between China and the

United States in the South China Sea. He believes that now the Americans get scores in politics and law while China in the military and strategy, the two sides are still at toss. Hooper argues, in many ways, Washington's efforts in the South China Sea coming to fruition. Let China move exposed in the spotlight. At the same time, however, Washington is facing a setback in the field of defense in these waters. The reason is very simple: Washington places South China Sea strategy focus on the political balance in order to secure maximum regional support for its own interests, while Beijing's focus is the tactically military balance, its building speed on the islands exceeds the speed of the United States building a coalition.

So, now what is the stage the South China Sea dispute at, is it fast approaching the "critical point"?

Now the two sides are at the stage of feeling and sounding each other out. Hu Bo argues that the United States is also testing China's bottom line, while China is still studying the US's true intentions, neither side is content with the current situation in the South China Sea, nor form a conclusion of the problems. Meantime, the comparative strength in the South China Sea continues to change, China's advantage is indeed growing, but is not completed yet. In such a case, both China the United States feel that there is room for their further interaction, so the situation in the South China Sea will continue to be in a relatively volatile state, and is difficult to relax in a short term."

Liu Lin believes that to say that there will be a "strategic showdown", or "military decisive battle" between China and the United States soon, which is too sensational. Because media always look for those news with the smell of gunpowder, but in reality, both sides have the consensus on the bottom line, neither is willing to fight a battle in the South China Sea, since that cost is too big to afford. However, it is a full range competition after all, all other means are likely to be used in addition to fighting.

Fang Xiaozhi thinks that from the perspective of the future development of the situation, the United States will not stop its

pace to take military operations in the Asia-Pacific region, but also intensify involvement in various regional hotspot issues, such as the Korean Peninsula affairs, the issue of the Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea disputes and others, acts as an Asia-Pacific security order "offshore balancer" through strengthening the military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, so as to check China's rise and maintain its maritime hegemony in the Western Pacific.

Zhang Jie holds that all walks of life in the United States not only show sustained concern to the South China Sea matters, and are shaping consensus, which advocates tougher deterrent measures to China to "push back" the Chinese forces or at least "freeze" the present situation of the South China Sea.

The challenge facing China is a difficult one. According to U.S. media reports, the U.S. military is not satisfied with the evolving situation in the South China Sea, goes all out to promote the White House to agree to upgrade the level of FONOPs and takes actions including the carrier-based helicopters taking off within 12 nautical miles off the Chinese islands, put the "real" FONOPs in operation. This message authenticity currently cannot be confirmed, but if the United States really does it, the disputed nature of the warship harmless passage will change, the confrontation between China and the United States will significantly increase.

What should China do ?

On the "South China Sea militarization", China's position is becoming clearer, that is, China does not seek militarization, which does not mean it holds back defense projects, China in the Nansha Islands not only constructs necessary defense facilities, will also establish civilian facilities, and provide public products to the international community. It is believed that with development of the situation, this position will get clearer accompanied with actions.

If strategic game-play does not lead to all-out confrontation and violent conflicts, and ultimately can shape a consensus and balance arrangement, the South China Sea matters are

without exception. The U.S. cooking of the "South China Sea militarization" is certainly digging a discourse trap for China, but is also providing the opportunity for China to further adjust and optimize the South China Sea Policy Structure and focus, and promote establishment of new rules of the sea. What is this opportunity? In the end, it requires both sides, based on the correct view of the situation, to make judgments on the overall situation, through careful study of the developing situation .

In the eyes of many international relations scholars, the South China Sea is an "uncharted waters", Both China and the United States should recognize that marine competition is inevitable, but the confrontation is not the best choice.

The understanding of freedom of navigation between China and the United

States has differences. In the waters near the islands and reefs of China, the focus of contradictions is whether the coastal states need to approve in advance warship harmless passage; in the South China Sea, the contradictory focal point is whether China can exercise jurisdiction over the military security behavior in the region and the skies.

China and the United States begin having a common interest in military maneuvers in the world, their positions in the global marine issues should be invariable, their interests cannot but be coordinated, and both sides should gradually establish a cognition of shared interests in marine freedom of navigation in the exclusive economic zone and territorial waters through interactions between the two countries.

(Excerpts)



A lighthouse guiding a fishing boat in the South China Sea.