

Navy Chief Pushes for ‘Compromise’ to Stop ‘Problematic’ Actions in South China Sea

Written by Nguyen tien think
Monday, 03 October 2016 00:00

The chief of U.S. naval operations underscored the need to pursue “compromise” in the South China Sea when asked to expand on the U.S. military strategy to deter “problematic” behavior like China’s island-building.



Adm. John Richardson was asked by a reporter during an event in Washington, D.C., on Monday to offer a “better understanding of what sort of pressure the Navy can bring to bear on activities which are problematic but not necessarily unlawful” in the South China Sea, such as construction on disputed features.

The U.S. Navy has repeatedly sailed warships under the rules of innocent passage close to disputed features over which Beijing claims sovereignty, in exercise of freedom of navigation. Richardson made no mention of these operations during remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday morning, instead focusing on the “common interests” shared by the United States, China, and other regional powers and the need to pursue compromise through peaceful means.

“With respect to options that the United States Navy can bring, with all of the partners in the region, including China, there are many areas in which we have common interests, even today. A lot of those are glossed over, but there’s an awful lot of areas where we do have common interests and we have to make sure that we pile in and reinforce those areas,” Richardson said.

“There are areas where ... we don’t agree, and as we work through those disagreements towards a compromise ... we want to do so in a way that mitigates the risk of some kind of a miscalculation,” the admiral added.

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“We hope that we will reach that agreement that is acceptable to all players in the region including the United States, including China, and everybody else, in a way that does not involve conflict,” Richardson continued. “Certainly, we wouldn’t want to do any deliberate conflict, but we also want to make sure that we don’t do any kind of conflict that results from a miscalculation or mistake.”

Richardson’s remarks came days after Defense Secretary Ash Carter indicated that the United States will conduct more joint patrols with other nations in the Asia-Pacific to enforce freedom of navigation and overflight.

Tensions in the South China Sea have risen as Beijing has pursued reclamation efforts on disputed features in the region, which many have described as militarization. Satellite imagery indicates that China has been building air strips and reinforced hangars on some man-made islands, though Beijing has insisted it is not conducting reclamation for military purposes.

China has also rejected the July ruling by an international court that deemed Beijing’s territorial claims in the South China Sea unsubstantiated by law or history.

Richardson did not mention China’s island-building campaign or territorial claims during his remarks, nor did he reference the ruling by the arbitration tribunal at The Hague, which the United States has urged China to accept.

Richardson said that the “vast majority” of encounters he witnessed aboard the USS John C. Stennis between the U.S. and other navies, particularly the Chinese, in the Indo-Asia-Pacific satisfied the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, or CUES, a set of rules established by the United States and China and signed by 21 Pacific nations in 2014 to prevent miscalculations and escalations at sea.

He said that the Navy will maintain its presence in the South China Sea and continue to “enhance these sort of rules of behavior, advocating for rules and norms of behavior to allow us to peacefully resolve differences.”

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Richardson also stressed his own need to maintain a dialogue with Admiral Wu Shengli, his counterpart in the People’s Liberation Army Navy, in the “unlikely event” that conflict arises and needs to be deescalated quickly.

Richardson has previously underscored the need to cooperate with China amid increasing tensions in the South China Sea. At the same time, he said in July that the United States will continue freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea in compliance of international law.

The Obama administration’s policy toward China has been criticized for failing to deter Beijing’s moves in the South China Sea. A panel of experts in Asia studies and maritime law told House lawmakers last month that more needs to be done both militarily and diplomatically to thwart Chinese aggression.

Dr. James Kraska, an international law professor at the U.S. Naval War College, faulted the U.S. government for not calling out China for making “unlawful claims” over territory in the South China Sea.

“We have to talk plainly about the issues,” Kraska said. “It begins even with the nomenclature that we use for China’s claims, which in the U.S. government we call them ‘excessive’ claims. I would suggest that they’re not excessive claims, they’re unlawful claims.”

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