

Rubio Calls for Sanctions on Beijing for South China Sea Antics

Written by Nguyen tien thinh
Wednesday, 07 December 2016 00:00

One-time presidential candidate Sen. [Marco Rubio](#) (R.-Fla.) introduced a bill Tuesday that would slap sanctions on China for its destabilizing actions in the East and South China Seas, where Beijing has built artificial islands and airfields and warned neighboring countries to stay out.



“The People’s Republic of China,” the bill reads, “should not be allowed to continue to pursue illegitimate claims and to militarize an area that is essential to global security.”

Rubio proposes sanctions — including asset freezes, travel bans, and visa restrictions — on “any Chinese person” who contributes to construction or development projects in any contested area of the South China Sea, or who is complicit in actions or policies that threaten stability of those areas. Interpreted broadly, that would target everybody from Chinese coast guard and naval personnel to construction firms to fleets of Chinese fishermen who informally patrol far-flung waters.

The bill also urges a more muscular U.S. response to China’s territorial ambitions. It calls for the United States to “continue and expand” freedom-of-navigation operations meant to challenge China’s claims, and calls for the United States to meet Chinese “provocations” with “commensurate actions that impose costs on any attempts to undermine security in the region.”

It isn’t clear yet how much support Rubio can count on; it was introduced in committee without a single co-sponsor. Neither Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R.-TN) nor Ranking Member Ben Cardin (D-MD)’s office has yet responded to request for comment.

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In the House, [Rep. Mike Pompeo](#) (R-KS) — Trump’s pick to head the CIA — introduced a bill in July calling on China to cease militarization and reclamation in the South China Sea and to end provocation in the East China Sea.

What is clear is that the hard-line legislation comes on the heels of a [carefully arranged call](#) between U.S. President-elect Donald Trump and the president of Taiwan, an issue that the Chinese

[do not take lightly](#)

. Trump also, in a series of tweets,

[accused](#)

China of intentionally devaluing its own currency to make it more difficult for U.S. companies to compete — and of building a “

[massive military complex](#)

” in the South China Sea.

Some foreign-policy analysts welcomed the bill as a way to show China some teeth. It’s a “welcome reminder that the United States has many tools at its disposal to influence Chinese policy in the South China Sea and East China Sea,” Bonnie Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told Foreign Policy. Though the bill has warts — Glaser noted that it focuses exclusively on China’s behavior in the disputed waters, not other claimants’, and targets activities like lighthouses that aren’t necessarily nefarious — she welcomed the effort to push back in area crucial to global trade and to the stability of Asia.

Even if this bill fails, she said, it is a reminder to the incoming administration that a targeted approach to the individuals and companies involved in military activity, construction, and dredging in the South and East China Seas would be useful in taking the lead on this issue, restoring U.S. credibility in the process.

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