Title: U.S. South China Sea Policy and Current Sino-U.S. Relations

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The South China Sea issue has become the focus of international public opinion and regional geopolitical competition. In the recently held Group of Seven (G7) Summit, Shangri-La Security Dialogue and the China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue, the South China Sea issue was the most eye-catching topic. one. Judging from the current situation, this issue continues to be on the track of escalation, and how it evolves will have a major impact on the regional situation. Because I study Sino-US relations, I would like to talk about my understanding from two aspects: the U.S. South China Sea policy and its impact on Sino-US relations.

1. Some outstanding features of the current U.S. policy in the South China Sea

The most basic nature of the South China Sea issue should be the dispute between China and other claimants in the South China Sea over the ownership of islands and maritime rights and interests. However, as the United States has become increasingly involved and involved in the South China Sea issue since 2010, the nature of the South China Sea issue is undergoing major changes. The initial dispute between China and neighboring countries over the ownership of islands and related interests is evolving into strategic competition between China and the United States, and is increasingly becoming a focus of strategic competition and strategic game between China and the United States.

In July 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited ASEAN "Freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, maintaining open maritime affairs in Asia, and respecting international law in the South China Sea are related to the national interests of the United States," the forum said. The United States began to formally intervene in the South China Sea issue. Initially, the United States intervened mainly behind the scenes, encouraging countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines to continuously challenge China's rights and interests. Since 2014, U.S. involvement has escalated. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russell asked China to provide a clear explanation of the nine-dash line in the South China Sea at a congressional hearing on February 5 of that year. This marked the United States' move from behind the scenes to the front. Beginning in 2015, the United States' involvement further escalated, from "going to the front in words" to "going to the front in action." At the end of February of the same year, the United States dispatched reconnaissance aircraft to the South China Sea to carry out reconnaissance operations. In late May, the US reconnaissance aircraft P8 -A carried CNN reporters to Fiery Cross Island, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef for reconnaissance. By October, this kind of "operational intervention" further developed in the direction of "militarization". On October 27, the US guided missile destroyer USS Lassen sailed within 12 nautical miles of Subi Reef. Since this year, the U.S. South China Sea policy has become more and more aggressive, showing an increasingly strong all-element and strategic nature. This all-element and strategic nature is mainly reflected in the following five aspects:

First, the United States’ military investment in the South China Sea issue has rapidly escalated from “harassment” to “strategic deterrence.” In 2015, when the United States sent a warship to patrol near our islands and reefs for the first time, it only sent a destroyer. Soon after, another B-52 strategic bomber "accidentally" occurred. Just a few months later, on March 1 this year, the United States dispatched an aircraft carrier battle group to patrol the South China Sea. We know that the aircraft carrier battle group is a strategic deterrent weapon. It was used by the United States during the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1995-1996. It showed an escalation of the situation, and it was only a relatively obvious one. On February 26, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, Harry B. Harris Jr., claimed that more nuclear submarines would be deployed in the Western Pacific. We know that nuclear submarines are a quiet but more deterrent weapon. Moreover, in just a few months, the United States has rapidly upgraded its military power display in the South China Sea from single destroyers and bombers to the level of strategic weapons, demonstrating the United States' determination to confront China on the South China Sea issue. Judging from the current situation, the "Stennis" aircraft carrier has arrived in the South China Sea twice. Since entering the area for the second time, it has stayed in the area for more than 50 days and conducted a series of military exercises and political declarations. . On June 10 this year, the United States, India and Japan were in An eight-day joint maritime military exercise was held in the Western Pacific Ocean. In this military exercise, China, the United States and Japan dispatched both aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines. All these show that the United States seems to be trying to force China to stop in the offshore through this display of military power.

Second, the United States’ intervention in regional disputes in the South China Sea has achieved full coverage. We know that disputes over the South China Sea issue are mainly concentrated in the Nansha Islands area. This has also been the focus of the game between China and other claimants and the United States in the past period of time. In the Paracel Islands region, only Vietnam has made illegal claims to Chinese territory, and it is alone. However, on January 30 this year, the United States sent the destroyer USS Wilbur into the 12-nautical-mile waters of Zhongjian Island. This is an area that US warships have rarely "patronized" in the past. This is obviously not a simple "patronage." It contains an obvious implication, which is to fully mobilize all countries that have disputes with China on the South China Sea issue. On May 22, U.S. President Obama visited Vietnam. The two sides reached 20 cooperation agreements on economy and trade, navigation safety, addressing climate change, education, science and technology, and solving the legacy of war. Among them, the United States completely lifted the ban on the sale of anti-personnel weapons to Vietnam. It was called by the United States "a historic step toward the comprehensive normalization of relations between the two countries. "In his speech during his visit to Vietnam, Obama even quoted a famous poem about Vietnam's war with the Song Dynasty. His intention to drive a deeper wedge between China and Vietnam was clearly revealed. For those of us who study Sino-U.S. relations, the behavior of the United States feels like something from another world. Obama's visit to Vietnam is like a miniature version of "Nixon's visit to China," except that the "friend-enemy relationship" is completely different. Turn around, originally the United States was pulling China to deal with the Soviet Union, but now it is pulling Vietnam to deal with China.

Third, the United States is using the South China Sea issue to continuously intensify its efforts to compete with China for influence in Southeast Asia. On February 15-16 this year, the U.S.-ASEAN Summit was held in California, USA. Against the backdrop of the ever-heating South China Sea issue, it was unusual to bring so many leaders of ASEAN countries to the United States for a meeting. The announcement Although some issues were not mentioned by name in the joint statement, the direction is obvious at a glance. Moreover, the venue of the meeting was the Annenberg Manor, which can’t help but evoke various associations.

Fourth, the United States is using the South China Sea issue to mobilize and integrate China's neighboring powers and extraterritorial forces will create greater strategic pressure and strategic advantages on China. Since its intervention in the South China Sea issue, the United States has continuously mobilized other major powers outside the region to join. Especially since last year, the United States has been actively building a so-called "Diamond Alliance" between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. With the promotion of the United States, this "alliance" has Taking shape. At the end of last year, Abe visited India. In the subsequent joint statement between Japan and India, both countries mentioned the South China Sea issue. On February 26 this year, Australia published its 2016 defense white paper, proposing to increase military spending. Tensions in the South China Sea were one of the reasons. In March, the United States, Japan and India announced that they would hold joint military exercises in the South China Sea. In addition, the United States is also trying to attract more external forces to intervene in the South China Sea issue. On May 27, driven by the United States and Japan, the Group of Seven (G7) summit once again expressed its stance on the South China Sea issue in the Hiroshima Summit Declaration. In the maritime security section, the declaration emphasized respect for "freedom of navigation and aviation" and supported the adoption of the resolve disputes through “peaceful means” including judicial proceedings or arbitration, and claimed to be concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas. On June 5, at the instigation of the United States, the French Defense Minister who participated in the Shangri-La Security Forum claimed that France would urge EU countries to coordinate naval patrol operations to ensure that European navies maintain a "regular and visible" presence in the region to " Uphold the law of the sea and freedom of navigation.” Mobilizing so many major powers from outside the region on the South China Sea issue feels like the United States is playing a big game. This is obviously a strategic move.

Fifth, from the perspective of U.S. policy toward China, the South China Sea issue has become increasingly irreplaceable. We know that when dealing with state-to-state relations, in order to achieve stability, development or breakthroughs in the relationship, there will often be some exchange of interests. This is a common practice in international relations. For example, during the Nixon and Carter administrations, in order to achieve a breakthrough in relations and establish diplomatic relations between the two countries, the U.S. government reduced its support for the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan. In fact, exchanges of interests, large and small, often occur in the evolution of Sino-U.S. relations. However, judging from the situation since January this year, major events such as nuclear tests and satellite launches have occurred on the Korean Peninsula. After communication and coordination, China and the United States have reached a certain consensus on the issue of United Nations sanctions. At a time when the situation on the peninsula is highly sensitive and tense, according to common sense, the United States should lower its tone on the South China Sea issue. The fact is that just before and after the United Nations sanctions agreement was passed, the United States could not wait to send the "Stennis" aircraft carrier battle group to patrol the South China Sea. This seemed to send this message to the world. This is a signal that the strategic importance of the United States' confrontation with China on the South China Sea issue is equal to or higher than the North Korean nuclear issue and cannot be replaced!

Combining the above five aspects, the competition between China and the United States in the South China Sea issue is obviously on a cyclical escalation track. The United States’ investment in this competition is all-round and all-factor in nature, with obvious strategic characteristics, and has formed a trend in the near future. The possibility of such a strategic compromise is relatively small.

2. South China Sea Issues and Current Sino-US Relations

Sino-US relations are extensive and comprehensive, and the South China Sea issue is obviously far from the whole of Sino-US relations. However, as the South China Sea issue continues to heat up, especially the recent rapid development of the United States' South China Sea policy, the South China Sea issue has become the hottest topic in the international public opinion field regarding Sino-US relations, and has become the most prominent focus of the strategic game between China and the United States. To a certain extent, it has become the most important driving force for the escalation of Sino-US relations towards conflict and confrontation at present and in the future. This becomes clearer if we look at the basic logic of the evolution of U.S. foreign strategy.

In fact, in the evolution of U.S. foreign strategy, there has always been a question of how to balance issues of importance and urgency. During the Cold War, issues of importance and urgency basically overlapped. How to deal with the Soviet Union was both an important and urgent issue. Therefore, the focus of the US global strategy throughout the Cold War was clear, specific and fixed, which was to deal with the Soviet Union, its main rival. Almost all policies revolve around this focus. After the end of the Cold War, a major change in U.S. foreign strategy is the separation of issues of importance and urgency. This has led to a very interesting phenomenon—the focus of U.S. foreign strategy is no longer relatively fixed, but The ones that are constantly switching mainly change according to changes in urgent issues. For example, during the Clinton administration, the main strategic focus of the United States was how to digest and absorb the results of the Cold War, and the strategic focus was still on Europe. During the George W. Bush administration, the most pressing issue facing the United States was the threat of terrorism, and the United States' strategic focus shifted to the Middle East, where terrorism was rampant. Since the Obama administration took office, its foreign strategic focus seems to have vacillated. Shortly after Obama took office, Proposing to "return to Asia", at the same time, it is also involved in various urgent issues that are constantly emerging, such as the "Arab Spring", "Ukraine issue", "Syria issue", "Islamic State issue", "Iran" nuclear issue" and so on. However, when observing the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in recent times, one phenomenon deserves special attention, which is the trend of convergence and convergence of important and critical issues in dealing with China.

Obama launched the "Asia-Pacific rebalancing" strategy soon after taking office, which shows that the United States has regarded dealing with the rise of China as an increasingly important issue. Judging from the series of actions, the United States has dealt with this issue as an increasingly urgent issue. In April this year, a U.S. policy advisory agency stated that the Obama administration has ranked the South China Sea issue alongside the "Islamic State" issue as the most urgent issue facing U.S. foreign policy, and considers them both to be the most urgent issues. The challenge posed by the "Islamic State" to the United States is easing, while the challenge posed to the United States by the South China Sea issue is still rising. ①From the perspective of the United States, the South China Sea issue is far from an issue of island disputes and maritime rights and interests, but involves the maritime order led by the United States, which includes its so-called maintenance of international public waterways, jurisdiction over international disputes, and the balance of international affairs. capabilities, if China's behavior is "allowed" to "endanger the past independent status of many Southeast Asian countries, the credibility of the United States will be difficult to maintain. "In May, U.S. Secretary of Defense Jimmy CarterＡｓｈｔｏｎＣａｒｔｅｒ) declared in a speech at the Naval War College that China was “building a Great Wall of self-isolation” and taking “unprecedented expansionist actions.” He compared the U.S. strategic posture toward China to "like the Cold War confrontation with the former Soviet Union that lasted for nearly 50 years." He said that the Pentagon will send "all" the most sophisticated weapons to the Pacific region, including F-35 stealth fighters, P-8 reconnaissance aircraft, stealth destroyers, etc. A U.S. Department of Defense official even said that the United States is currently engaged in ongoing disputes over the South China Sea issue risk. At the same time, we should also see that although the South China Sea issue has become increasingly prominent, it is far from the entire Sino-US relationship. China and the United States should handle this group of issues prudently from the perspective of building a new type of major-country relationship between China and the United States. the most important bilateral relationship. As President Xi Jinping pointed out at the opening ceremony of the China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue not long ago: "Now, we are in a world of rapid development and change. The world is becoming multi-polar, economic globalization, and social informatization are advancing in depth. Various challenges arise one after another, and the interests of all countries are closely linked. Zero-sum game, conflict and confrontation are no longer appropriate. Sharing the same boat and seeking win-win cooperation have become the requirements of the times. As the world's largest developing country, the largest developed country, and the top two economies, China and the United States The two countries should proceed from the fundamental interests of the two peoples and the people of all countries, have the courage to take responsibility, and strive to move forward in the direction of building a new type of major-country relationship between China and the United States."

The South China Sea is one of the main directions for my country's maritime strategic expansion and protection of maritime rights and interests. Due to historical, practical and legal factors, the South China Sea dispute is very complicated. Coupled with the intervention of the United States, this issue severely tests our diplomatic and strategic wisdom. While resolutely pursuing national interests in the South China Sea, we must more clearly and convincingly define our rights and claims in the South China Sea, proactively handle conflicts and differences, and accurately grasp the "time," "potential," and "degree." ” and “rhythm” to creatively explore solutions to problems.