

THREATENING CHINA: South China Sea: U.S.-Japan Military Deployments Put Region At Risk

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Global Research, May 05, 2012

[Global Times](#) 5 May 2012

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

External forces' intervention in the South China Sea disputes has gradually become a reality despite China's opposition against the externalization of the disputes. Last week, the US and Japan reached a new agreement on the joint use of the US military bases in the Pacific region.

According to media reports, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces are expected to station forces alongside US troops in the Philippines. Once Manila approves, Japan, the US and the Philippines will conduct specific military training together in Philippine bases.

In recent years, countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have gained huge economic interests through developing gas and oil resources in the South China Sea region.

Driven by economic ambitions, they chase further expansion in the South China Sea, which intensifies the territorial disputes around the region. They see moving closer to Japan and the US as their strategy to prevent China seeking its legal rights over the South China Sea.

This provides favorable conditions and timing for Japan and the US to get involved in the South China Sea disputes.

In the process of refocusing its strategic attention to the Asia-Pacific region, Southeast Asia is an important US focus. For the last two years, the US has been increasing its strategic input in Southeast Asia.

Militarily, the US is seeking permanent stations in some military bases in this region. It has requested to return to the Subic Bay military base in the Philippines and to send its most advanced littoral combat ships there.

The US has also intensified military drills with different countries in the regions and waters around China. Though those drills are not all targeted at China, some are indeed aimed at deterring China and increasing US popularity in Asia.

Unlike the US, Japan acts quite subtly in intervening in the South China Sea disputes. But Japan lifted its restrictive policies on arms exports after Prime

Minister Yoshihiko Noda took office. In essence this is a preparation to support countries involved in the South China Sea disputes by exporting weapons to them.

Besides, Japan also plans to supply patrol vessels to the Philippines and assist the country in training its coast guards.

These moves show that Japan is extending its military reach in the South China Sea, and the trend will further continue. A messy South China Sea situation is in Japan's interests. As the disputes between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands have intensified recently, Japan hopes confrontations with China in the South China Sea could distract China's attention.

The external intervention in the South China Sea dispute complicates the regional dynamics. As the US and Japan are backing them, countries like the Philippines and Vietnam become more and more arrogant and constantly provoke China in the South China Sea, including illegally detaining Chinese fishermen.

This time, the Philippines have even had a dozen days of confrontation with China, potentially risking a regional war. The countries involved are speeding up their military modernization by importing more advanced weapons, posing threats to regional stability and risking an arms race.

Directly and implicitly supporting relevant countries to check China is essentially a short-sighted strategy. This not only shakes the regional security, but also threatens the mutual trust between China and the US and Japan.

The US and Japan should recognize that countries like Vietnam and the Philippines may play an effective role in balancing China, but these countries' ambition for regional hegemony may also be boosted in the process.

This short-sighted strategy comes at the cost of benefits that could bring overall and sincere cooperation among relevant parties.

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