



**SOUTH CHINA SEA STRATEGIC SITUATION
PROBING INITIATIVE**

May 31th, 2019

**An Incomplete Report on
U.S. Military Activities in the
South China Sea
2018**

SCSPI

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ABOUT SCSPI

The South China Sea is located in the world's most important shipping lane. Nearly 40% of the global trade of goods is shipped through the lane, which makes the waters crucial for global economic prosperity. The surrounding areas of the South China Sea boast the largest population density in the world. The stability and prosperity of the waters impact the fate and well-being of nearly two billion people. From 2009 to 2016, tensions over the waters escalated coupled with major incidents and crises breaking out all the time, which attracted extensive attention to the area.

Currently, all of the parties involved in the South China Sea disputes have now come to understand the significance of “shelving differences” and communication through dialogue. Under the “dual-track approach”, tensions over the waters are easing progressively. However, the root cause of the South China Sea disputes has not been entirely settled: claimants still hold different opinions about the sovereignty over islands and the delimitation of waters, and the contention over the exploitation of space and resources is becoming increasingly fierce; the competition between Chinese and US maritime strategies has come to the fore, and the South China Sea has become a major field of such contentions. Countries outside the region, such as Japan, Australia and the UK, are paying more attention to the waters with a stronger presence, which further complicates the situation. Now the future of the South China Sea holds more strategic relevance in today's world, because it not only concerns the safety and prosperity of Southeast Asia and the future of China-US relations, but could influence the strategic bearing of the entire Asia-Pacific region as well.

To continue the push for a more desirable situation in the South China Sea, we should first gather all the trends and news about the waters from an objective perspective and accurately observe the area within the parameters of its military, political, economic and environmental contexts.

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With a view to maintaining and promoting the peace, stability and prosperity of the South China Sea, Peking University Institute of Ocean Research has launched the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative (SCSPI). The Initiative aims to integrate intellectual resources and open source information worldwide and keep track of important actions and major policy changes of key stakeholders and other parties involved. It will provide professional data services and analysis reports to parties concerned, helping them keep competition under control, and with a view to seek partnerships.

The SCSPI is mainly funded by social donation and non-profit investment, the majority of which will be sourced from Peking University Education Foundation at the outset. We would appreciate only non-politically affiliated donations. The SCSPI sincerely invites experts and scholars, research institutes and other organizations from across the world to join us. We would also appreciate individuals, companies, institutions and international organizations willingness to share data and information with us, in accordance with the relevant laws of corresponding countries and international law.

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**U.S. Military Activities in the
South China Sea
2018**

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In 2018, the U.S. armed forces continued to carry out intensive military activities in the South China Sea, with the freedom of navigation operations(FONOPS) and reconnaissance flights conducted continuously, and its strategic weapon platforms and cutting-edge weapons coming in and out of the region frequently. The U.S. has also actively carried out the soft power diplomacy, encouraged its allies and partners to interfere in the South China Sea affairs, and continuously expanded its military influence in the region by means of joint military exercises, military diplomacy and arms sales. Some senior U.S. officials have vigorously propagated the war against China with clear intention of containment and deterrence.

I. Intensive FONOPS

The U.S. military carried out intensive FONOPS, with the emphasis of operations expanding from Spratly to Paracel sea areas. Throughout the year of 2018, the U.S. navy had carried out FONOPS of entering 12 nautical miles of islands and reefs at least 5 times. In addition to some undisclosed operations, and according to the *Annual Freedom of Navigation Report* of FY 2017 and 2018 from US Department of Defense, US military ships and aircraft have also carried out FONOPs in China's exclusive economic zone against so-called restrictions on survey and overflight.(these operations are usually not included by mosf of the scholars and media) Therefore, the actual number of FONOPS in the South China Sea should add up to above 10. Compared with the past years, in 2018, the U.S. navy conducted FONOPS in the South China Sea mainly in a 2-warship formation, with reconnaissance aircraft in the air for

coordination, embodying increasingly systematic use of forces. For example, on May 27, the USS Higgins (DDG-76) and USS Antietam (CG-54) navigated back and forth through the Lincoln Island, Tree Island, Woody Island and Triton Island of the Paracel Islands, and even entered within the 12-nautical miles of the islands. The military forces participating in the FONOPS were also diversified and appeared hybrid force disposition including more of the U.S. Third Fleet. The USS Higgins(DDG-76), which belongs to the Third Fleet, carried out FONOPS on May 27 as soon as it came back to the Naval Base San Diego after completing the deployment in the Middle East. While the USS Antietam(CG-54), which belongs to the Seventh Fleet, sailed westward across the Philippine Sea to the Bashi Channel and then entered the South China Sea. In particular, the U.S. military's focus appeared to be shifting toward the Paracel areas in that 2 out of 5 operations mentioned above were conducted in Paracel islands. In addition, the intensity and risk of U.S. military FONOPS have significantly increased. On September 30, USS Decatur (DDG-73) , which belongs to the Third Fleet, sailed into the sea area near Gaven Reefs of Spratly islands, and almost collided with the Chinese Destroyer Lanzhou with a closest distance of 45 yards from each other,

Table 1: America & British warships entering 12 nautical miles of Islands and Reefs of the South China Sea in 2018

Date	Ship	Feature
Jan 17	USS Hopper	Within 12nm of Scarborough Shoal
Mar 23	USS Mustin	Within 12nm of Mischief Reef in the Spratlys
May 27	USS Higgins and USS Antietam	Within 23nm of Lincoln, Tree, Triton, and Woody Islands in Paracel Islands
Aug 31	HMS Albion	In vicinity of Paracel Islands
Sep 30	USS Decatur	Within 12nm of Gaven and Johnson Reefs in the Spratlys
Nov 26	USS Chancellorsville	In vicinity of Paracel Islands

II. Increasing Deployment of Strategic Weapons

The strategic weapons of the U.S. military have been constantly deployed to the South China Sea and its surrounding areas, increasingly deterring China with military forces. The U.S. Navy had sent 4 Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs), 4 Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs), a number of nuclear-powered attack submarines, B-52H and F-22 to the South China Sea and its surrounding areas to conduct activities of strategic deterrence.

First, the U.S. Navy strategic surface vessels operated frequently in the South China Sea. In 2018, there were totally 4 Carrier Strike Groups (USS Carl Vinson, USS Theodore Roosevelt, USS Ronald Reagan, USS John C.Stennis) and 4 Amphibious Ready Groups (USS America, USS Bonhomme Richard, USS Essex, USS Wasp) appearing in the South China Sea, participating in the joint exercises with regional countries, or visiting or passing by the region. The John C.Stennis Carrier Strike Group and the Essex Amphibious Ready Group were sailing across the South China Sea toward the Middle East for deployment; The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group and the America Amphibious Ready Group were sailing across the South China sea back to the U.S. after completing the deployment in the Middle East; The Carl Vinson and the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, the Bonhomme Richard and the Wasp Amphibious Ready Group were specially dispatched to in the South China Sea for maritime patrol.

Second, the U.S.underwater strategic weapon appeared in the South China Sea for many times. Given that the nuclear submarines always operate in secret, , the exact number of the U.S. nuclear submarines sailing across the South China Sea in 2018 can not be concluded.However, some of their operations in the area are found out from the media report and AIS data. On March 1, the U.S. Navy Los Angeles-class submarine USS Bremerton (SSN-698) paid a port visit to the Subic bay in the Philippines, before when it just called at the Changi naval base in Singapore on February 14. Obviously, it was through the South China Sea that the submarine sailed

north to the Philippines. So it was the case with the U.S. Navy Los Angeles-class nuclear-powered attack submarine USS Oklahoma City (SSN-723), which arrived at the Changi naval base in Singapore for a port visit on March 16.

Third, frequently military exercises conducted by the strategic bombers became more frequent in the South China Sea, and simulated airstrikes against China for many times. In 2018, according to the online statistics, the U.S. Airforce B-52H bombers, which are deployed in the Anderson Air Force Base of Guam, were sent to the South China Sea to conduct operations for at least 16 times in the two-plane formation on most occasions, which is nearly four times of that in 2017, with increasing intention targeting on China. Usually the B-52H bombers take off from the Anderson Air Force Base in Guam (once from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean), and then fly northwest through the Bashi Channel to the south of Taiwan. After entering the South China Sea, and flying near the Spratly Islands, they turn north to Scarborough Shoal, and finally return to Guam. 2 KC-135R Stratotankers will take off after the bombers from the Anderson Air Force base or Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, and provide air refueling to the B-52H carrying out mission above the Philippine Sea, so as to prolong its time in the air. Among all the flight tasks of B-52H in the South China Sea, there were at least two (in late May) simulation strike exercises against the targets in China's southeast coastal areas. At that time, 2 B-52H bombers took off from Guam, flew over the Bashi Channel, instead of going south as usual, chose to fly northwest to Shantou, Guangdong near the Pratas Islands, and then turn to fly back to Guam. Obviously, such a line of flight was the simulated bombing drill targeted at China's mainland.

**Table 2: U.S. Air Force B-52H bomber operations
in the South China Sea in 2018**

	Date	Number of flight	Callsign	Operation area	Squadron
1	Feb. 3	2	Toxin01、02	Spratly islands, near Mischief Reef	20th Bomber Squadron
2	Feb. 10	2		One conducted military operation in SCS ,one flew to Singapore for International air Show	20th Bomber Squadron
3	Mar. 2	2	Burn01、02	Spratly islands	20th Bomber Squadron
4	Mar. 20	2	Nolan01、02	Spratly islands, near MeiJi Reef	20th Bomber Squadron
5	Apr. 24	2	Hero01、02	Spratly islands	20th Bomber Squadron
6	May. 17	2	Peril01、02	South China Sea	20th Bomber Squadron
7	May. 22	2	Legit01、02	South China Sea	20th Bomber Squadron
8	May. 31	1	Weld01	Outside ShanTou, GuangDong airspace	20th Bomber Squadron
9	Jun. 3	2	Maker01、02	Spratly islands	20th Bomber Squadron
10	Jun. 5	2	Diplo01、02	From Diego Garcia to Guam via South China Sea	20th Bomber Squadron
11	Aug. 28	2	Dente01、02	Spratly islands, near Mischief Reef	96th Bomber Squadron
12	Aug. 30	2	Dente01、02	Spratly islands, near Mischief Reef	96th Bomber Squadron
13	Sep. 24	2	Etos01、02	From Guam to Diego Garcia via South China Sea	96th Bomber Squadron
14	Sep. 25	2		South China Sea	96th Bomber Squadron
15	Oct. 17	2	Kimbo01、02	Spratly islands	96th Bomber Squadron
16	Nov. 20	2	Ziggy01、02	South China Sea	96th Bomber Squadron

Source : This table is made by SCSPI based on data of Twitter user: @Aircraft Spots



Source: Twitter @Aircraft Spots

Fourth, cutting-edge weapon platforms have started to be deployed to the surrounding areas of the South China Sea. The F-22 and F-35 fighters, representing the fifth-generation aircraft, began their deployment to the South China Sea in 2018, with the main purpose of familiarizing with the flight route and operational environment of the region, so that once the situation requires, they can conduct military operations supporting the strategic weapons such as craft carriers and bombers. At the beginning of February, two F-22 fighters of U.S. Air Force 525th Fighter Squadron took off from Elmendorf AFB, Alaska and landed in Singapore via Kadena AB, Okinawa Japan for the International Air Show. On the same day, two F-35B fighters of U.S. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)-121 also took off from Naval Air Station Iwakuni Japan and landed in Singapore for the same air show. Nominally, the advanced fighters were to attend the Air Show, however, actually, they were to familiarize with the flight route and operational environment of the South China Sea when flying over the region. More obviously, in August, the amphibious assault ship USS Essex(LHD-2), carried 6 F-35B of the Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)-211, conducted annual Joint military exercise CARAT with Southeast Asia countries

in South China Sea while en route to the Middle East for its oversea deployment; later, in September, the USS Wasp, an amphibious assault ship based at U.S Fleet Activities Sasebo, Japan, was heading to the South China Sea for military operation. At that time, the USS Wasp with 6 F-35B fighters on board from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)-121 conducted flight training operations for several times.

III. More Targeted Military Exercises and Cooperations

The U.S. conducted varieties of military exercises and cooperations with countries in and surrounding the South China Sea, constantly expanding its presence and influence in the region. In 2018, the U.S. military had conducted nearly a hundred exercises with regional countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as countries outside the region such as Japan and the U.K. It also actively expanded the soft power diplomacy through port visit and arms sales, etc.

First, the annual conventional military exercises have carried on as before, with the focus on forces coordination. In 2018, the major exercises jointly held by the U.S. and the ASEAN countries include: the U.S.-Philippine Balikatan, CARAT, U.S.-Thailand Cobra Gold, and U.S.- Indonesia Exercise Cope West, etc. Considering the Philippines had reduced the cooperation with the U.S. after President Duterte took office, so the joint exercises between the two had reduced a bit, but the exercises between the U.S. and other ASEAN countries had not decreased, and there was some increase in the exercises on the tactic level. In the past, it was mostly the U.S. Navy Seventh Fleet, Which headquartered in U.S. Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan, sent troops to participate in the exercises with the ASEAN member states. In 2018, the Third Fleet which sailed through the South China Sea also participated in some exercises. For example, the aforementioned USS Essex Amphibious Ready Group had participated in the U.S.-Malaysia Exercise CARAT when sailing through the South China Sea for the Middle East. The participating troops were mainly navy and marines, but the air force also participated, such as the joint air combat exercise Cope West held

by the U.S. Air Force and its Indonesia counter parts in Sam Ratulangi International Airport in Indonesia in early March. Many U.S. F-16C/D fighters from the 13th Fighter Squadron of the 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa Air Base in Japan and a total of 250 personnel from the 353rd Special Operations Group in Kadena Air Base in Okinawa participated in the Cope West. Moreover, the exercise was no longer limited to bilateral, but started to become trilateral or even multilateral participation. For example, in early July, the U.S., Japan and the Philippines conducted a joint search and rescue exercise in the waters west of Luzon island of the Philippines, participated by the U.S. Navy expeditionary fast transport USNS Millinocket, the salvage ship USNS Salvor, one patrol and reconnaissance aircraft P-8A, one UP-3D of the 91st aviation group of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and one C-90 aircraft, one helicopter, the frigate BRP Ramon Alcaraz and the dock landing ship BRP Tarlac of the Philippine Navy.

Second, the special operations exercises and anti-submarine exercises were conducted, which was operational concept verification against China. In the second half of 2018, the U.S. military continuously carried out sepecial operations exercises in the Mindanao region of the southern Philippines. The HH-60G Pave Hawk from the 33rd Rescue Squadron in Okinawa of Japan, MC-130J Commando II from the 17th Special Operations Squadron of the 353rd Special Operations Group, and the C-146A from the 524th Special Operations Squadron which came from the U.S. mainland carried out low-altitude penetration, paradrop, airborne and special rescue training in Luzon of the Philippines. The U.S. deployed a squadron of special operations personnel in Mindanao to assist the operations of the Philipine military in the southern region. Moreover, the Company B, 229th Aviation Regiment of the 449th Combat Aviation Brigade of the U.S. Army is also deployed on Mindanao to support the Philippine military. In addition, the United States has frequently held anti-submarine exercises in the south China sea with the Philippines, Malaysia, Japan and other countries, whose details are not disclosed in public, but purpose and target are self-evident.

Third, the U.S. actively carried out softpower diplomacy to build closer ties with countries around the South China Sea by means of developing diplomatic relations and arms sales, etc. The most conspicuous U.S. military diplomatic activity in the South China Sea in 2018 should be the visit by the USS Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group to Da Nang of Vietnam, which was the first visit by a U.S. aircraft carrier to Vietnam after the Vietnam war, marking a further improvement of military relations between the United States and Vietnam. The two visits paid by the then U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis to Vietnam within the year had set a new historic record. Besides Vietnam, the U.S. aircraft carriers, destroyers, cruisers and nuclear-powered attack submarines also visited Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and other ASEAN countries. At the end of March, the destroyer USS Sterett (DDG -104) visited Hong Kong; the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, which belongs to the Seventh fleet, visited Hong Kong in late November; the U.S. navy research vessel R/V Thomas G. Thompson (T-AGOR-23) visited the port of Kaohsiung, Taiwan in mid-october. In addition, the U.S. Pacific Fleet launched a "Pacific partnership" activity in 2018. The U.S. navy hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) visited Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Japan and etc., which are concrete manifestations of U.S. military diplomacy in the South China Sea. Besides the diplomatic visits, the U.S. military has also actively increased the arms sales and military assistance in the South China Sea region. For example, the U.S. delivered 8 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters to the Indonesian military in May, and in August announced that the U.S. would give the Philippines 4 OV-10 Bronco light attack aircrafts of the Vietnam War period.

IV. Intensive and All-dimensional Reconnaissance Operations

The U.S. kept highly intensive and all-dimensional reconnaissance over China's military forces all the time, constantly expanding the reconnaissance in the South China Sea, and giving priority to deploying all kinds of advanced reconnaissance platform in the region.

First, the U.S. sent advanced air reconnaissance platform to the South China Sea, where 2-4 sorties of P-3C and P-8A would be dispatched for reconnaissance almost every day, with more than one thousand sorties throughout the year. P-8A, U.S. Navy's most advanced maritime patrol and anti-submarine aircraft, whose frequency of operation were evidently soared in 2018 , can monitor large scale of sea area effectively with its state-of-the-art airborne reconnaissance system. Currently, the P-8A is mainly deployed at the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, and the Misawa Air Base in the north But there are also a few deployment around the South China Sea, for example, the U.S. military occasionally deploys one or two P-8A at the Clark Air Base in the Philippines and the U-Tapao Air Base in Thailand. In early October, two P-8A aircrafts dispatched from the U.S. mainland did not land in Japan but directly flew to U-Tapao Air Base in Thailand. Almost every day, there was P-8A flying to the South China Sea to conduct reconnaissance operation from Kadena or Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

Spratly Islands are the focus of U.S. reconnaissance operations. For example, on August, a U.S. Navy P-8A aircraft from the Patrol Squadron 4, tail number 168850, with a CNN reporter on board, took off from the Kadena Air Base to carry out a reconnaissance operation on Subi Reef, Fiery Cross reef, Johnson Reef and Mischief Reef in the airspace near the Spratly islands in the South China Sea. During the operation, the P-8A was warned by Chinese military through radio for 6 times. The New York Times reported that in early September, a P-8A aircraft, tail number 169009 from the Patrol Squadron 4 took off from the Kadena Air Base to carry out reconnaissance operation near the Mischief Reef, and even entered its territorial airspace once.¹

Besides the islands and reefs in the South China Sea, the U.S. military also conducted reconnaissance targeting PLA military operations. For example, some aviation enthusiasts online found through ADS-B that on the afternoon of January 6, a U.S. Navy P-8A aircraft tail number 168758 from the Patrol Squadron 8, took off from the Kadena Air Base, passed by the Bashi channel and flew to the South China Sea, where the Liaoning Aircraft Carrier Fleet was conducting military activities on that

day. In addition, The RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft deployed by the U.S. Air Force at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa and the RQ-4B Global Hawk deployed at Anderson Air Base in Guam often conducted reconnaissance operations in the South China Sea. For example, on May 7, during the U.S.-Philippine Balikatan joint exercise, notice No. 1754 from the Manila Flight Information Region showed that a U.S. RQ-4B would fly to the Philippines and the air above the South China Sea to conduct reconnaissance operation from May 8 to May 9.

Usually the U.S. reconnaissance aircraft that takes off from the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa would firstly fly southward to the Bashi Channel, enter the South China Sea, turn to the southwest, fly off the coast of Hong Kong, go westward along the South China coastline, fly from the northeast of Hainan Island to its southwest, along the coastline of Hainan Island to the southwest Sanya, and then turn back, conducting intensive air reconnaissance targeting the southern China region.

As China Strengthens force construction in Paracel and Spratly islands, U.S. has correspondingly adjusts its flight course of aircrafts to intensify reconnaissance of the south-central part of South China Sea.



Source: NSA document² revealed by Snowden

Second, The U.S. has strengthened the deployment of surface and underwater surveillance force, conducting all-dimensional surveillance on the hydro meteorology of the South China Sea. The aforementioned U.S. navy research vessel R/V Thomas G. Thompson (T-AGOR-23) which visited the port of Kaohsiung, Taiwan in October, carries advanced marine surveillance equipment on board and can collect all kinds of data of the seawater. The U.S. Navy Seventh fleet also deployed several Impeccable class and Victorious class ocean surveillance ships in the Fleet Activities Sasebo, Japan. Based on AIS information, it can be found that the surveillance ships often sail in the central part of the South China Sea and southeast of Sanya, conducting comprehensive surveillance on the important passage of Chinese submarines, including water temperature, salinity, conductivity and other kinds of data, so as to provide important support for U.S. military anti-submarine operations. Moreover, on April, 2018, the U.S. Navy's only two remaining missile range instrumentation ships USNS Lorenzen (T-AGM 25) and USNS Invincible (T-AGM-24) appeared in the Sembawang Base of Singapore at the same time. The home port of the USNS Lorenzen is the Sasebo Naval Base in Japan, so it has to sail through the South China Sea to arrive in Singapore; while the USNS Invincible is deployed in the Persian Gulf region of the Middle East for a long term, and its purpose of sailing such far distance to the South China Sea is unknown, but it is an effective instrument of ballistic missile surveillance, and China is the only country surrounding the South China Sea that can be targeted at.

V. Urging Allies and Partners to Join Hands to Pressure China

In 2018, due to its own insufficient forces, the U.S. clearly showed its appeal to its allies and partners to increase their involvement and input in the South China Sea by encouraging them to conduct military operation. The US has further seduced and put more pressure on its allies and the countries surrounding the South China Sea, with its purpose and tactic more blatant through publicly urging the cooperation of its allies

to strengthen its forces and operations in this region. James N. Mattis, the then US Secretary of Defense, more than once called on the US allies to combat Chinese efforts to change the regional rules and international order.³ On December 28, 2018, Randall Schriver, the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, said in an interview with *The Australian* that to counter China's actions, US allies, including Australia, the UK, and France, should step up their activities in the South China Sea, such as joint patrols and presence operations if not FONOPs as the US did.⁴ Countries such as the U.K., France, Japan and Australia responded actively by increasing the military presence and intensity of activities in the region: The Australian navy ships Anzac, Toowoomba and Success were dispatched for a three-month deployment in the South China Sea, during which they also visited Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and other countries in the region, and carried out the Bersama Shield exercise with Malaysia, Singapore, UK, New Zealand under the framework of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). To strengthen the joint operations and joint patrol, the U.S. military had consciously increased the communication and joint training with these extraregional countries. For instance, the USS Carl Vinson strike group, which ended its visit to Vietnam in mid-March, conducted joint exercises in the South China Sea with the Japanese Maritime Self-defense Force helicopter destroyer Ise (DDH-182). At the end of August, the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan strike group carried out joint exercises with the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force helicopter carrier Kaga (DDH 184), destroyer Inazuma (DD 105) and destroyer Suzutsuki (DD 117) in the South China Sea.

VI. Advocating war rhetoric and showing the motive to pulling chestnuts from the fire

In the recent year, many senior U.S. military officers propagated armed conflict or war against China in the South China Sea,⁵ which was rarely seen before. In February 2018, Harry Binkley Harris, Jr., the then Commander of Pacific Command, testified in the Congress that "Beijing's 'intent is crystal clear' to dominate the South China Sea

and America must prepare for the possibility of war with China.”⁶On April 26, Philip Davidson, Harris’s successor, stated at the review hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee that “China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States.”⁷ On February 6, 2019, John M. Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations, noted in a speech at Atlantic Council that the US may need to look for ways to impose consequences if the rules specified in the *Code of Unplanned Encounters at Sea* are not followed by China.⁸

Summary & Expectation

With the strategic competition going on between the major powers, the U.S. has significantly increased its attention and pertinence to the situation in the South China Sea in terms of strategy, tactics and operation. The U.S. military will continue to increase its military deployment, forward presence, FONOPS and battlefield construction in the South China Sea, as long as China's power keeps on developing, even if China remains restraint on using its power. In the future, the U.S. military forces will continue to concentrate on the South China Sea, and the intensity of operations will further increase. **As the United States is not satisfied with the current strategic situation in the South China Sea, the impulse or willingness to engage in friction or create conflicts is also rising sharply.** Therefore, it is necessary to keep a close eye on the presence and activities of the U.S. forces in and around the South China Sea.

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