



**吴士存：美军来得越频繁，越容易造成“擦枪走火”**

**Wu Shicun: More frequent US military comes near us, more likely it is to cause “guns and misfires”**

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## Summary

*Professor Wu Shicun 吴士存 is President of China SCS Research Institute. The USS Ronald Reagan and USS Nimitz returned to SCS and conducted military exercises on July 17. This was the US Navy aircraft carrier's second exercise in July. A few days earlier, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a statement on July 13 in which he not only reiterated the PCA decree on SCS four years ago but also publicly opposed China's position on the SCS issue. In response to the frequently malicious acts of the United States in SCS, 观察网 Guancha.cn or Observer.com recently interviewed Professor Wu Shicun and invited him to express his views on various issues including the motives and impact of the US military operations in SCS, in the larger context of Sino-US relations.*

**Source:** [https://m.guancha.cn/WuShiCun/2020\\_07\\_21\\_558362.shtml](https://m.guancha.cn/WuShiCun/2020_07_21_558362.shtml)

**Author of the Original Article:** Prof. Wu Shicun



**Image: Professor Wu Shicun**

***Observer.com:*** Since early July, the US has been proactively present in the South China Sea. Is the US intervening in SCS to divert attention from internal problems such as continuously spreading rising pandemic, racial violence etc.?

**Professor Wu Shicun:** The reason why the US continues to increase its military and diplomatic operations in SCS has nothing to do with the internal politics but everything to do with its deep-rooted ill-designs to contain China. The US is not happy to see the possibility that China will become the sole independent power in SCS. The US is also

unhappy to see China-ASEAN relations growing steadily.

I must point out this has been a consistent US policy to use SCS issue to contain China. Since 2010, especially following the implementation of the US strategy of “Pivot to Asia” and the Asia Pacific “Re-equilibrium”, the United States has never stopped its provocative military activities in the South China Sea. Though the US maintains it has remained neutral on the issue of territorial sovereignty disputes in SCS, the fact is it not only has been proactively involved in the SCS affairs but has also been “taking side.”

By “taking side” I mean if any country challenges or opposes China, the US immediately starts backing up that country. The Scarborough Shoal (“黄岩岛对峙事件” *Huangyandaoduizhishijian*) incident between the Philippines and China in April 2012, the Philippines filing SCS arbitration case in 2013, and Sino-Vietnam “981” oil rig crisis – in all these the US State Department had repeatedly issued official position papers accusing China and supporting other countries.

Also, the general public in the US is least bothered about the Trump administration indulging in belligerent acts against China in SCS. The SCS dispute issue has become closely integrated with the US dominance in the West Pacific Ocean region, this is why the US, even in the face of the pandemic menace, has neither relaxed its military activities in the region nor scaled-down provocative acts against China. So to say the US has been proactive in the SCS just in order to divert attention from the internal issues, may be true only if you look at it from the upcoming US presidential elections in November. Aiming to continue his presidency, Trump is making full use of the opportunity by timing well its increased attacks on China, because to a certain degree attacking China in the US today is being viewed as “politically correct” thing to do.

***Observer.com:* Mike Pompeo recently brought up again the Philippines arbitration issue, the PCA decree issued in 2016. How do you evaluate the 2016 decree, do you think the decree was the result of some kind of political pressure? Why is Pompeo suddenly going back to and raising the issue?**

**Professor Wu Shicun:**The Philippines arbitration issue from the beginning was a US act. The whole thing was scripted, acted and directed by the US. Even the relevant content of the PCA ruling was packaged with the help

of the United States. Therefore, the ruling completely denied China’s legitimate rights and claims in the South China Sea.

Even after four years, the US has not been able to accept the fact that China has refused to acknowledge the ruling; the US continues to feel indignant that China had dismissed the decree as “a piece of waste paper” and the US has continued its efforts to find ways to somehow enforce The Hague ruling on China.

For three successive years in 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively, the foreign ministers of US, Japan and Australia continued to issue joint statements during the ASEAN foreign ministers’ meeting. The core content of the joint statements was to ask China to respect the so-called “ruling” and force China to accept the relevant parts of the decree.

The main reason behind the US reviving the issue now has also much to do with the political situation in the Philippines. The important consensus established between China and the Duterte government to keep aside the “ruling” and move ahead through bilateral negotiations to resolve the SCS dispute, has been unacceptable to the US. As Duterte has entered the last leg of his presidency, the “pro US” and “anti-China” forces in the Philippines have become proactive to sabotage the “Duterte-China consensus”. So, the US is raising the issue again with the twin purposes:

first, to once again alert the international community; second, to cheer up the spirits of pro-US and anti-China forces inside the Philippines.

**Observer.com:** In an earlier interview, you had said the real thinking in the US is not to be on the side of the South East Asian countries, there are several other cards the US has in mind. What are these other cards?

**Professor Wu Shicun:** The US has several tricks up on its sleeves, let me elaborate:

1. To rope in other countries from outside of the region, especially from among the US allies and form a new grouping called “paramilitary group” to start joint patrolling in SCS. For the US alone doing the patrolling etc. is proving out to be costly and unsustainable. So the US has been pushing (and luring) its allies and friendly-partner countries to join the group. The idea is to divide responsibility and at the same time ensure the military pressure on China remains intact. Though the US allies and friendly-partners such as Japan, Australia, UK and even India are yet to formally respond to the US request, it is not unlikely given the US “carrot and stick” mechanisms and driven by their respective national interests, the allies and friendly partners will sooner than

later join the patrolling operations in SCS.

2. The regular deployment of the US coast guard navy in SCS. The US has always maintained that the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force Coast Guard Corps, also called the China Coast Guard is China’s “paramilitary force.” These “grey areas” have been the source of “asymmetry” in the balance of power between the US and China in the South China Sea. Hence, the US desires to deploy the coast guard navy in SCS. For the US will quickly act on the side of Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia as soon it gets an opportunity, once there is an escalation of tension with China and enter the conflict in the SCS.
3. The US “freedom of navigation” (aka freedom of provocation) actions against China will become more frequent and the US will also employ more diverse means to realize its goal.
4. The deployment of the US Coast Guard and increased activities is likely to be “new normal” in SCS. The US has already deployed two coast guard ships as part of its military bases in Japan under the unified command of the

Seventh Fleet. In the coming years, we will see more such US Coast Guard deployment and activities in SCS, with the purpose of further heating up the situation by “enforcement” in the already troubled SCS waters. However, according to international practice and conventions, the coast guard troop of a coastal state only enforces the law in their own respective EEZ. But the United States is not a coastal state in the South China Sea region and therefore its so-called “enforcement” is nothing but “overriding.”

5. Just as the US “freedom of navigation” activities against China have become normal, so the US has no new card to play except increase frequency and expand the scope of these activities into the SCS waters near the Paracel Islands, Nansha Islands etc. The US has run out of ideas, so it is continuing to play the old game.

In its desperate attempts to openly support the positions of Vietnam, the Philippines,

Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia respectively, in the SCS dispute on one hand, and to provoke China’s relations with other countries in the region on the other, it is starkly evident that the US has been unable to make fresh moves.

**In summary**, the possibility of “guns and misfire” between the US and China in the South China Sea is reaching a situation of maximum probability. If the US military activities in the region continue unabated,

China too will be expected to take corresponding matching counter measures such as tracking and identifying, issuing warnings and even expulsion. The more the US military comes closer, the greater the probability of “gun misfire.”

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*The views expressed here are those of the translator and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies*



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