

China responds to Rubio's remarks on South China Sea after his phone call with Philippine FM

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Mao Ning Photo: Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In response to a U.S. State Department statement claiming new U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussing Beijing's "dangerous and destabilizing actions in the South China Sea" with his Philippines counterpart Enrique Manalo over phone and underscoring the "ironclad" U.S. defense commitment to Manila, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on Thursday that the U.S. is not a party to the South China Sea issue and has no right to interfere in the maritime issues between China and the Philippines.

Mao said "the military cooperation between the U.S. and the Philippines should not undermine China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, still less should such cooperation support or advance the Philippines' illegal claims." China will continue to take necessary steps to firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and uphold peace and stability in the South China Sea, said Mao.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke Wednesday local time with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo about issues of mutual concern, including so-called China's "dangerous and destabilizing actions in the South China Sea."

Rubio underscored the U.S.' "ironclad commitments" to the Philippines under the Mutual Defense Treaty. The two sides also exchanged views on ways to advance security cooperation, expand economic ties for shared prosperity, and deepen avenues for further regional cooperation, according to a readout released by the U.S. Department of State on Wednesday.

Li Haidong, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, said that the U.S. will continue the diplomatic rhetoric, but to what extent Rubio's remarks will turn into concrete actions in the region is still a question.

"The Marcos Jr. administration of the Philippines also needs to learn that the U.S.,

especially under the leadership of the Trump administration, will not be hijacked by any other countries, including its allies, for any unnecessary dangers,” Li noted.

Lü Xiang, an expert on U.S. studies and research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Thursday that the Trump administration is likely to continue to launch groundless accusations against China’s legitimate acts in the region.

“However, the Trump administration will be less interested in getting involved too much on issues not directly related to U.S. core interests, as this is what ‘America First’ means. In addition, China now has much more strength [to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests] in the region, and the consequences of being ‘unnecessarily provocative’ would be unaffordable to both Washington and Manila,” Lü noted.

The Chinese military conducted [joint sea-air combat readiness patrols](#) in the South China Sea from January 17 to 19 to maintain peace and stability in the area, according to a statement by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command. The statement was issued after the Philippine Navy held live fire drills and carried out joint maritime exercises with the U.S. in the South China Sea.

“Any military activity that stirs up trouble in the South China Sea is within our control,” the PLA statement read. The statement directly targets the provocative exercises conducted by the Philippine navy near Huangyan Dao, and its joint exercises with the U.S., Zhang Junshe, a Chinese military expert, told the Global Times.

Humphrey Arnaldo Russel, director of the China Research Center in the Institute for Strategy and Global Studies at the University of Indonesia, told the Global Times in an [exclusive interview published on Tuesday](#) that “ASEAN is a family. When a family faces a problem, it is unwise for one member to turn to external parties for ‘help.’

ASEAN, as a unity, is bound by shared values such as harmony, non-interference and the commitment to finding peaceful solutions to problems."

"These core values will not change because of any single member's actions. Therefore, it would be far more beneficial for the Philippines to engage directly with China, as this is where the solution lies," said the Indonesian expert.

Source: [Global Times](#)

