



## Sincerity key in resolving disputes

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China said on Tuesday that sincerity, rather than a nation's size, should be used to gauge how it justifies its actions.

The comment came after remarks by US President Barack Obama that "big nations should not bully smaller ones".

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that of the 12 neighbors China has completed demarcation agreements with, five countries are smaller than the Philippines in size and 10 are smaller in population.

"This shows that a country's size does not matter regarding the issue. The key point is whether countries involved have the determination and sincerity to resolve disputes via talks and consultations," Hua said at a media briefing.

The Philippines has unilaterally initiated an arbitration case against China in the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague over their disputes in the South China Sea.

Obama told an audience in Hanoi on Tuesday, "Big nations should not bully smaller ones and disputes should be resolved peacefully".

Hua called for countries outside the region to respect the efforts of those in the region to maintain peace and stability.

Tao Wenzhao, an American studies researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the US sees China as its biggest threat, both at present and in the long term.

"The US aims to multilateralize, globalize and militarize the disputes in the South China Sea, making the situation an important measure to contain China," Tao said.

Obama said during his speech that the US "will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows".

Hua urged the US to clarify whether the freedom of navigation it claims is the freedom of navigation that abides by international law or simply navigation enjoyed solely by the US military.

"If it is the latter, I'm afraid that the whole international community will not agree."

Zhu Feng, head of a South China Sea research center at Nanjing University, said Washington is practicing gunboat diplomacy.

"China never challenges the freedom of navigation of civil or commercial vessels in the South China Sea," Zhu said.

Obama, who started a three-day visit to Vietnam on Monday, has announced the lifting of a decades-old ban on weapons sales.

Tom Pepinsky, a Southeast Asia expert and associate professor of government at Cornell University, said, "This decision signals the US plans to contain China's regional ambitions, with Vietnam as a partner."

#### **Experts' comments:**

The visits themselves are not necessarily directed against China. But it is rather difficult to interpret the lifting of the arms embargo against Vietnam in any other way. We need to see if a similar move that is blatantly hostile to Beijing emerges from the Japan leg of President Obama's trip.

Ted Carpenter, a senior fellow of defense and foreign policy, Cato Institute

It's the tendency for all countries to think that this has to do with us. I would simply say, World War II and the Vietnam War are two extraordinarily difficult issues that stir a lot of emotions in the US, independent of China.

I think there is a large issue at stake. The rebalancing act the US president has to walk in most places is extremely difficult. This can't be an apology tour. This can't be a sort of resisting historical fact. It can't be sweeping under the table what transpired in Vietnam. That's recognition of where we are.

We want a better relationship with Vietnam. We also want a recognition of the tragedy of nuclear weapons and our desire to diminish their role in global politics. I think there are a lot of issues.

I think these are the real challenging dimensions of this trip, not this is part of a pincer movement aimed at China.

Remember that Obama only had one bilateral meeting at the just concluded Nuclear Security Summit, and that was with the Chinese president. Later this year, we'll have a very important summit between the US and China (at the G20 in China).

Kurt Campbell, chairman of The Asia Group, and former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

The president's decision takes the normalization process between two former battlefield foes one step further and provides Vietnam a hedge against China's increased assertiveness in the South China Sea. For Americans concerned about human rights, Hanoi still has to jump through more approval hoops before it can buy any military hardware.

Obama's visit lays the foundation for deeper ties going forward. VietJet's order for \$11 billion of Boeing passenger planes will deepen ties between these two members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. From almost no trade when the US lifted its trade embargo in 1994, Vietnam has emerged as the largest exporter to the US from Southeast Asia, outstripping dynamos like Singapore.

Murray Hilbert, senior adviser and deputy director, Southeast Asia Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Obama's decision to end (the US) embargo on arms sales to Vietnam is the final step in normalizing relations between the two countries, but it is also driven by regional concerns.

The end of the US embargo on lethal weapons exports to Vietnam represents one of the final steps in the normalization of US-Vietnamese relations, a process begun under Bill Clinton in 1995 and supported by both the Bush and Obama administrations.

However, this decision is ultimately driven by regional concerns, with Vietnam emerging as a key strategic partner for the United States.

Tom Pepinsky, Southeast Asia expert and associate professor of government at Cornell University