

## **Chinese, US experts call for more rationality on the South China Sea issue**

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At a forum on the South China Sea issue held on Tuesday in Washington DC, dozens of veteran Chinese and US experts urged China and the US to prevent the issue from damaging overall Sino-US ties by managing their differences in a rational way.

Relevant countries should join these efforts to cool down the South China Sea issue, noted by the experts from major Chinese and US think tanks and academic institutions.

The forum came a week before the arbitration tribunal in The Hague is expected to issue its ruling on the South China Sea arbitration, which was unilaterally filed by the Philippines despite China's objection.

Former Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo stressed the urgent need to calm matters, but at the same time reiterated China's determination to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He urged the US to honor its stated position of not taking sides on issues concerning territorial disputes. The South China Sea issue should not be framed as a strategic issue, said Dai, recommending that China and the US find ways to manage their differences constructively.

Stressing the importance of Sino-US ties to world peace and stability, former US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte pointed out that as a country not directly concerned with the South China Sea, the US anticipates a peaceful solution to the dispute.

The US has no reason to confront China concerning the islands and reefs in the South China Sea, said Douglas Paal, vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

He explained that the numerous comments concerning freedom of navigation have sent a signal that is likely to be misunderstood by countries around the globe. He added that the forum should prove helpful in calming tensions in the region.

Eric Gomez, a research associate for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, told the People's Daily that the US has flexed its military might as part of its South China Sea policy, but this part has been overplayed by officials. In his opinion, the US should try to manage tensions in the region through diplomacy.

David Sedney, senior associate at Center for Strategic and International Studies and former deputy assistant secretary of the US Defense Department, stressed that since actions made during times of high emotion can easily lead to escalation, communication would be of the utmost importance after the decision by the Tribunal is made.

Michael D. Swaine, a researcher with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, echoed that more discussion on the South China Sea issue should be carried out by the China and the US, saying that in a bid to prevent the issue from escalating, China and the US need to reinforce communication and manage differences.

The tensions in the South China Sea can be attributed to the suspicion and misunderstanding of related countries towards China's peaceful development and South China Sea policy, explained by Lou Chunhao, an assistant director at the Institute of Maritime Studies affiliated to the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations.

Relevant countries led by the US should stop using the arbitration or the concept of freedom of navigation to aggravate tensions in the region, he added.

As the biggest power in the world and a major player in the Asia-Pacific, the US should work to relax the tensions in the region, said Huang Renwei, vice president of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, adding that the country also needed adhere to principle when dealing with ties with its allies.

J. Stapleton Roy, former US ambassador to China, advised that the US should not to comment too much on or interfere with sovereignty disputes over the South China Sea. He also urged the US to join the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Over the past two decades, the US has never treated the convention seriously, but as a non-signatory of the convention, it has requested other countries to abide by it, Roy pointed out, questioning the unreasonable standards upheld by the US.