

## **PART I : China' s Continuous Restraint Policy**

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The Chinese government continues to exercise some restraint on the South China Sea issue. It has made no radical moves other than tracking, expelling and protesting against increasing US military operations in the South China Sea. With regard to the construction on islands and reefs in the South China Sea, military deployment on these islands and reefs has not been proceeded as fast as expected after the completion of relevant infrastructure, and China has only deployed necessary and limited homeland defense facilities even in the context of the US intensifying military operations in the 12 nautical miles of the islands and reefs. In this regard, China is in fact well positioned to do more.

Another obvious sign is that the focus of China's construction on islands and reefs has shifted to the improvement of people's livelihood and supply of international public goods. In July 2018 Nanhai Rescue Bureau of the Ministry of Transport dispatched the rescue ship "Nanhai Jiu 115" to station on Zhubi Reef of the Nansha Islands for the execution of on-call duties. In this period, the Philippine Navy warship Gregorio del Pilar ran aground near Half Moon Shoal, after which the Chinese government voluntarily proposed to offer aid and rescue. At the end of October, China began operating a maritime observation center, a meteorological observatory, and an environmental and air quality monitoring station on the Nansha Islands, providing such services as maritime forecast, weather forecast, and real-time monitoring and warning of disastrous weather.

Instead of taking cues from others regarding such issues as Sino-US strategic competition and South China Sea conflicts preached by the US, China has exercised restraint in general with spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responding in a targeted manner. The problem

of China's restraint policy lies in that even if China has no strategic intention to challenge the US, its right-defending actions and power development in the South China Sea will be seen by the US as a threat to the latter's maritime dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. The Chinese government can control its own initiatives and actions in the South China Sea; however, as long as China maintains its current momentum for rise, its forces and capabilities will keep growing, which will be seen by the US and other countries as an intention to challenge the status of the US and even to secure control over the entire South China Sea.

With regard to South China Sea disputes, the Chinese government has adopted an increasingly prudent and positive policy.

China's move to accelerate the implementation of the COC has drawn worldwide attention and aroused some suspicion of some countries. However, China regards it a top policy priority to accelerate COC talks, and the purpose of these talks have been elevated to the height of building a regional order in the waters. In recent years, the Chinese government has shown great sincerity to the outside world and expressed its willingness and resolve to promote consultations. On October 29, 2018, Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, met with Teodoro Lopez Locsin Jr., Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, and stated that the Chinese side stands ready to work with all ASEAN countries to push the process of the negotiation on the COC, hoping that the negotiation would be completed during the tenure of the Philippines as the coordinating country and establish the regional rules that are committed to ensuring peace and stability in the South China Sea at an early date. At the Singapore Lecture held on November 13, 2018, Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (PRC), said that China will, based on consensus, strive to conclude the COC consultations in three years to boost regional peace and development.<sup>1</sup>

China conscientiously advances maritime pragmatic cooperation. China

and the Philippines have reached a new high in several aspects, including properly handling maritime differences, pragmatically promoting cooperation in low-sensitive areas, and discussing cooperation on the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the South China Sea. During President Xi Jinping's visit to the Philippines, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding on maritime oil gas cooperation. The China-Philippine Bilateral Consultative Mechanism on the South China Sea has been functioning steadily, and incidents like Philippine Navy warship's running aground near Half Moon Shoal have been properly handled. China and Vietnam have worked closely to tackle maritime issues: Sino-Viet Working Group on the Waters outside the Mouth of the Beibu Gulf, Working Group for Consultation on Maritime Joint Development, and Working Group of Experts on Maritime Cooperation in Low-Sensitive Areas have held formal consultations successively and secured positive progresses.

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<sup>1</sup> Li Keqiang Delivered A Speech at the Singapore Lecture, [http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2018-11/13/content\\_5340055.htm](http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2018-11/13/content_5340055.htm)