

December 28, 2015

Great Implication of the US Navy's Action in the South China Sea

By SUZUKI Keisuke

It seems that the United States has finally resorted to a concrete action in the South China Sea. The US Navy sent an Aegis combat system destroyer to the waters within 12 nautical miles from Subi reef for maritime patrol at night on October 26 in local time, where China claims their territorial rights and builds an airstrip. I would like to express my support for such a resolute response for regional stability. From my experience of exchanging opinions with political leaders of Vietnam, Taiwan, and South Korea, I have come to realize that the vulnerability of these countries vis-à-vis China's military and economic pressure is far more serious than we, the Japanese, imagine. I believe this is also the case with leaders of the Philippines and the rest of regional stakeholders.

As Japan is surrounded by the sea, and is strong in the economy, we can hardly imagine how vulnerable they are to China. They always feel themselves endangered. Furthermore, it is their vital interest that Japan and the United States deter Chinese expansionism, maintain regional balance of power, and make firm and continual commitment to each of them. On every occasion, I argue that if East and South East Asian nations feel doubtful of continual engagement by Japan and the United States, they have no choice but appease China for their national survival, whether they like it or not. This is because Asian nations face direct military threat of China, while their economy is highly dependent on this country. We must remember this sober reality.

For this purpose, just a verbal comment is not enough, and actions are anticipated more than anything else. When China unilaterally set the ADIZ around the reef before, the United States sent B-52 bombers to the disputed airspace immediately. As was the case before, a resolute action like deploying a destroyer to the disputed waters as it was done this time, will be a card stating clearly to wipe out widespread distrust among Asian nations whether America is continually and seriously engaged with Asia, despite tight budget and increasingly isolationist public opinion. That will prevent Asian nations' relations with China from developing too close and keep status quo, and consequently, contribute to regional stability in Asia.

While we are anxious to know the prospect of the forthcoming presidential

election in the United States, it is understood that security policy in Asia should not change whoever wins the election. In view of this, while we understand the reality that actions beyond verbal engagement make the message more trustworthy, it is important for the Japanese side to deepen bilateral communications within the framework of the US-Japanese partnership, and contribute to regional stability by making the US understand the actual perception of Asian countries and by convincing the US of the necessity of substantial action.

(This is an English translation of the article written by Mr. SUZUKI Keisuke, Member of the House of Representatives (Liberal Democratic Party), which originally appeared on the e-forum “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on October 30, 2015.)