甚至不排除采取战术冒进行动，引发新的管控危机。

从本质上看，美国高调介入南海问题，是其强化亚太战略、塑造东南亚地缘新格局的一种手段。鉴于中美关系大局的重要性，以及中美之间既有竞争又有合作的基本关系特征，美国目前在南海问题上与中国“针锋相对、锱铢必较”的可能性不大。而且，目前美国经济尚处于复苏初期，中东局势仍不稳定，在此状况下中美发生严重的对峙并不符合美国的根本利益。尽管美国在南海权利主张、国际话语权等方面对东南亚有关当事国明显有所偏袒，但这种偏袒也会留有相对超脱和居间得利的回旋余地。因此，美国政府的南海政策将会限定在一个可控的运作范围，既不危及中美关系的根本，又能有效地施压于中国，在接触与防范策略中保持平衡。中美之间围绕南海问题出现“争而不休、斗而不破、破而不战”的局面，将很可能是未来很长一段时间的基本态势。

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U.S. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS OF ITS INTERVENTION IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

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The South China Sea issue revolves around the dispute regarding the sovereignty of Nansha Islands and the jurisdiction of some waters. This matter is of concern to China's sovereignty security and development interests as well as the peace and stability of China's periphery. In recent years, as a result of the influence of the extra-regional powers, the increased intervention of the major powers led by the U.S. in particular, the intensified geopolitical competition of the South China Sea has posed a bigger strategic pressure on China.

Shift of U.S. policy on the South China Sea

The U.S. policy on the South China Sea issue, serving its policy toward Southeast Asia and conforming to its policy toward China, is dominated by its Asia-Pacific Strategy. The South China Sea issue, as the most sensitive hot spot issue between China and Southeast Asian countries for long, provides the best opportunity for the U.S. and Southeast Asian countries to express their common interests. In response to the adjustment of its Asia-Pacific Strategy, the U.S. policy on the South China Sea has gone through three phases, namely being neutral, limited intervention, and high-profile intervention.

In the 1980s, Brzezinski, the U.S. former national security advisor, developed the classic theory the[2] Geographic Pivot of History, which was originally proposed by Mackinder, breaking down the inner crescent area into three battlefronts, namely Far West, Far East and Middle East. During the Cold War, the

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2 Mackinder. H. J, “The Geographical Pivot of History”, The Geographical Journal, Vol. 23, No.4 (Apr., 1904)

Western camp led by the U.S. built blockades along three fronts to contain the Eastern Camp. In the west there was containment of the NATO, in the middle was the support of the "U.S.-Israel alliance mechanism" and the U.S. base in Indian Ocean, and in the east was the blockade imposed by the "U.S.-Japan mutual security treaty" and the first island chain.

As the maritime pivot connecting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the South China Sea is both the geological confluence of Asia Pacific region and strategic choke point in the eyes of scholars of Rimland Theory. After the end of Cold War, the U.S. adjusted its policy on the South China Sea, adopting the "restrained intervention policy", i.e. intervening without being trapped. The U.S. State Department for the first time articulated, in U.S. Policy on Spratly Islands and South China Sea[3] released on May 10, 1995, its interests in the South China Sea as well as its related policy, which has become the first divide of the U.S. policy shift on the South China Sea. On September 23, 1997, the U.S. and Japan concluded The Guideline for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation[4] in which the South China Sea was for the first time put under the terms of security alliance, signifying that the U.S. may make strategic response to the South China Sea region and further confirming the effectiveness and trend of the U.S. policy.

At the beginning of the new Millennium, George W. Bush took office bringing with him an era of neo-conservatism. A series of important changes in the U.S. policy have transpired with great concern about the Asia-Pacific region and the global strategic pivot shifting towards this region. As a result, the U.S. policy towards China became more hardline[5]. However, the September 11 event changed this trend to a large extent. The Bush Administration toned down its Asia-Pacific strategy to meet the demands of combating terrorism and its Middle-East policy and consequently adjusted its policy toward China. Correspondingly the South China Sea issue appeared stable.

After that, the U.S. gradually decreased its presence along the Atlantic Ocean line and withdrew from Afghanistan and Iraq, indicating that the U.S. was adopting the strategic retrenchment policy on the both east and west lines. In the meantime, the U.S. increased its engagement and front deployment on the east line, highlighting U.S. expansion towards Asia Pacific Region. Such a balanced move shows U.S. determination on and preparation for addressing challenges brought by the emerging countries in the East Asia. On that basis, the geographical competition in the South China Sea became the focus of attention. An American scholar named Kaplan believed that the geopolitical battlefield in the 21th century is the South China Sea in which China and the U.S. are the two protagonists[6].

At the 17th ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on July 23, 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered a statement of the U.S. position on the South China Sea issue, for the first time completely expressing the Obama Administration's policy toward the issue, which became the second divide of the U.S. policy shift on the South China Sea. But this time the emphasis was put on U.S. national interests and international interests in the South China Sea region as well as on the particulars of resolving the dispute in accordance with the International Law. The U.S. policy shift is largely reflected by its intention to multilateralize and internationalize the South China Sea issue, which is in obvious opposition to China's long-standing position of dealing with each claimant bilaterally. The U.S. smart power is materialized in exaggerating freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. While trumpeting

3 Christine Shelly, U.S. Policy on Spratly Islands and South China Sea, May 10, 1995.

4 The Guideline for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation, Sep. 23, 1997.

5 倪峰：《布什上台以来的对华政策》，《当代亚太》，2001（7）。

6 Robert Kaplan, "the South China Sea Is the Future of Conflict", Foreign Policy, Aug. 2011.

the universal interests and principles, the U.S. says nothing about its vessels' military activities including close-in surveillance conducted in China's EEZ in the South China Sea. Or it vaguely describes them as navigation activities in the "international waters" and avoids mentioning its geopolitical interests and strategic intentions in the Southeast Asian Region.

Strategic intention of current U.S. intervention in the South China Sea issue

The U.S. intervention in the South China Sea issue is controlled by its Asia-Pacific strategy, serving and subordinating to American national interests. A review of the profound changes in the international situation in recent years shows that the U.S. intervention in the South China Sea is not a short-term move, but rather, made by considering deep level motives with respect to politics, economy and security.

1. Seeking a leadership role in Southeast Asia

Positioning itself in Asia-Pacific region as the pivot of global strategy, the U.S. continues to seek a political status in East Asia, guarding against and excluding China's gradual expansion of regional influence. The Obama Administration abandoned the restrained approach in the geopolitical competition of Southeast Asia taken by its predecessor, constantly increasing its political input with more intervention in the region. Through the dialogue platforms including U.S.-ASEAN Summit, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting, and ASEAN Summit, the U.S. ensures and strengthens its discursive power in the regional affairs. While clamoring the so-called "China Threat Theory" by utilizing the South China Sea issue, the U.S. is squeezing out the political influence that has been pooled together in the region. It is not only American way of showing "balance of power" strategy, but also a crucial means of creating its leadership role in Southeast Asian Region. In fact, the U.S. has always looked upon the claimant countries in Southeast Asia as the two opposing camps, adopting "divide and rule" tactics for different purposes. Since the Obama Administration, the U.S. has shown a tendency of changing its role from being "the dominator" to "a participant" of balance of power.

2. Economically relying upon the emerging countries and dividing their power

Since the end of the Cold War, East Asia where the emerging countries are concentrated has always enjoyed most rapid growth rate in the world. China and Japan own a large amount of U.S. treasuries and foreign currency assets. Therefore, by leveraging the emerging countries, the U.S.economy is able to get out of the mess and suppress the rise of regional powers. Southeast Asia is not only an important market of U.S. foreign trade, but also an important place for economic competition between the U.S. and China. In 2011, the bilateral trade volume between China and ASEAN reached USD 360 billion, way ahead of over USD 220 billion between the U.S. and ASEAN. While China is integrating economically more and more with ASEAN, Southeast Asia is an important destination for the Chinese enterprises to go abroad. Besides, it stands a chance of becoming the test place for RMB internationalization, which means that China will undergo a structural integration of dominant industry system and currency system in this region. The great opportunity brought about by investment in RMB will to a large extent enhance China's economic influence and peripheral reaching-out capability. Eventually China may shake the dominant role of U.S. dollars in Southeast Asia and hence weaken U.S. economic competitiveness in the region. The U.S. high-profile intervention in the South China Sea issue is to some degree out of its consideration of competing for economic dominance in Southeast Asia with China. First, the U.S. is dividing the regional integration of China's economy. Then, it purposely continued to force RMB appreciation with a view to weakening China's exports. The final goal is to strengthen the U.S. economic status in Southeast Asia.

3. Building U.S.-dominated multilateral security cooperation framework

By taking the South China Sea issue, which Southeast Asian countries are largely concerned about, as the breakthrough point, the U.S. recovered and developed the security cooperation mechanism with ASEAN and other Southeast Asian countries, resulting in a security cooperation consensus with these countries. In early 2012, the Pentagon brought forth a new military strategy, reflecting three fronts with clear emphasis orientated by "strengthening Asia Pacific, safeguarding NATO, guarding against the Middle East". The increase of frontier military deployment by the United States in Philippines, Australia and Singapore aims to enhance its military influence in the Southeast Asia, Sunda Strait, and Malacca Strait, thus posing a strategic threat to the emerging countries in East Asia including China, the primary target that the U.S. guards against. Besides, the U.S. also strengthened cooperation in non-traditional security with the surrounding countries in the South China Sea such as conducting cooperation in maritime anti-terrorism, disaster relief, and anti-piracy and by doing so strengthened the U.S. influence in the security field in the South China Sea. It can be foreseen that against the backdrop of the increasing ease of tension across the Taiwan Strait at present, the U.S. will build and dominate the Southeast Asian multilateral cooperation framework. Containing China by use of the South China Sea issue has become the theme of U.S. policy on the South China Sea. The ultimate purpose of the U.S. is to reach its strategic goal of seeking and intensifying the U.S. dominance in the Asia-Pacific region.

Practical influence of the U.S. intervention in the South China Sea and prospect of the South China Sea issue

With the U.S. global strategic focus shifting eastward, the related strategic plan entered its implementation stage. Against such background, different powers in and outside the region rely on each other's support in response to the so-called "China Factor", imposing strategic precaution, containment and balance upon China by use of the South China Sea issue. As a result, the South China Sea will witness more intensified geopolitical competition, which will further escalate the situation and bring more serious challenge to China in face of the South China Sea issue.

1. The U.S. strategic containment against China is implemented in all-round way extending from north to south and from point to line

The U.S. has for a long time imposed a tight blockade against China's east access to the sea through its "three island chains". In recent years, the U.S. has been stepping up its efforts in its frontier military deployment in Philippines, Australia, Singapore, and other countries, striving for more access rights of military bases in the surrounding areas of the South China Sea and developing more usable strategic partners and resources. China's south access to the sea is in danger of being further blockaded. If the U.S. succeeds in Vietnam, Myanmar and so on in the future, China's south access to the sea may be under strict supervision and blockade. The U.S. strategic hedge on the sea against China will be expanded from point to line, which will put unprecedentedly immense strategic pressure and strategic risks upon China's surrounding waters.

2. The South China Sea issue has gradually become the international hot-spot issue thanks to multifold factors.

With the increasing presence and penetration of the U.S., Japan and other foreign countries in the South China Sea, Vietnam, Philippines and other claimant parties redoubled their efforts in their maritime control and resource exploration, making it more possible for frictions and conflicts in the disputed area of the South China Sea. Due to the lack of strategic confidence between China and the U.S., and between China and Vietnam in the issue, the local incidents with seemingly

limited influence may be further expanded and turned from a regional hotspot issue to an international one under the interwoven influence of both regional and outside powers, which will consequently trigger high attention and strong reaction from both in and outside the region.

3. The intensified arms race in the South China Sea increases the possibility of future conflict

In recent years, some countries on the periphery of the South China Sea has pushed forward the transformation of military build-up with a clear target, showing the obvious strategic intent of seeking maritime rights by use of force. Vietnam, Philippines and other countries all procured advanced weapons from the U.S., Europe, Russia and etc. in response to the increasingly tense situation in the South China Sea. Vietnam has accumulatively purchased military equipment worth of USD 10 billion from Russia, most of which are offensive ones. Philippines also purchased two patrol ships graded as "Hamilton", and aircraft and aviation radar systems from the United States, in an attempt to strengthening its marine armed forces[7]. The constantly intensified arms race in the South China Sea will lead to a confrontational situation in the South China Sea and obviously increase the possibility of local armed conflicts and uncertainty.

4. China's ability falls short of its wish to safeguard the stability of the South China Sea by exercising self-restraint

As a responsible major power, China has been committed to properly handling the disputes in the South China Sea. For the sake of stability of the region, China has always maintained strategic self-restriction, which has played positive role in a period of time. However, under the high-profile intervention in the South China Sea by the U.S., China's ability falls short of its wish to safeguard the stability of the South China Sea by exercising self-restraint. Vietnam and Philippines may avail themselves of China's self-restriction by playing little tricks such as hitting "edge ball" and "encroachment". With the implicit encouragement and security commitment offered by countries outside the region, Vietnam and Philippines may further show their strength in the future, and even take aggressive actions, triggering a new situation management crisis.

In essence, the U.S. high-profile intervention in the South China Sea is a means of strengthening its Asia-Pacific strategy and creating new geographical patternin Southeast Asia. In view of the importance of China-U. S. relations as a whole, which is basically characterized by competition as much as cooperation, the U.S. is unlikely to be diametrically opposed to China in every detail. Moreover, as the U.S. economy is just beginning to recover and the Middle East situation is still unstable, to create a major confrontation with China is not in conformity with its fundamental interests. The U.S. is unequivocally biased towards the related Southeast Asian countries with respect to the South China Sea claims, international discursive power and so on, but such biasness is relatively unconventional for obtaining the benefit between the parties, leaving rooms of manoeuver. As a result, the U.S. government policy on the South China Sea issue will be kept under control. On the one hand, it will not endanger the fundamental interests of China-U.S. relations. On the other, it can effectively pressurize China and maintain balance by adopting engagement and prevention policy in the same time. Because of the South China Sea issue, China-U. S. relations will witness a situation that may be the basic trend for quite a long time in the future, featuring incessant competition, struggles without damaging the relations, and damaged relations without leading to war.

Translated by Tan Shenglan
Edited by Graham Walker

7 《南海冲突加剧，军备竞赛升级》，载《联合早报》，2012–2–14。