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U.S. Philippine Military Cooperation in the South China Sea: *Challenges and Responses*

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U.S.-Philippine Military Cooperation in the South China Sea: Challenges and Responses[1]

Zhang Yilong[2]

From June 1-7, 2023, the Philippine Coast Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Japanese Coast Guard held a joint maritime exercise in the waters near Bataan Province, Philippines. This is the first time that the three countries' maritime law enforcement agencies have held a joint exercise. Moreover, the waters where the exercise took place are sensitive, and their intentions towards the South China Sea are very obvious. The intervention of the United States and Japan also fully demonstrates that in addition to the military forces of the two countries, the maritime law enforcement agencies as "paramilitary forces" are gradually increasing their cooperation with the Philippines, forming a momentum of comprehensive involvement in the South China Sea. Pictured above are the U.S. Coast Guard's *Stratton* (right) and Japan's Coast Guard's *Akitsushima* (left) arriving at the Philippine Navy's Manila port.

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[1] 张亦隆 [Zhang Yilong], 美菲军事合作在南海方向的挑战与应对 ["U.S.-Philippine Military Cooperation in the South China Sea: Challenges and Responses"], 舰船知识 [*Naval & Merchant Ships*], no. 8 (August 2023), pp. 93-99.

[2] **Translator's Note:** Zhang Yilong is the pen name for Zhang Yiqi (张一钡), a researcher at Modern National Defense and Security Research Center (现代国防与安全研究中心) and a special contributor at the Global Governance Institute (国观智库). He has published articles on military and international relations in *Naval & Merchant Ships* (舰船知识), *Global Military* (环球军事), and *World Military* (世界军事), and for *China Network* (中华网). *Naval & Merchant Ships* is a naval affairs magazine published by China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC).

With the new generation of Philippine government taking office, U.S.-Philippines relations have rapidly warmed, and the depth and breadth of their military cooperation have increased. This has brought new challenges and threats to China's national security. How to deal with these challenges will be a difficult problem before us.

Non-Military Challenges in the South China Sea

Compared with military challenges, non-military challenges are much larger in scope, more diverse in form, and more complex to deal with. As U.S.-Philippines military cooperation deepens, the non-military challenges they pose to China in the South China Sea have become unprecedentedly complex, and the threat level is even far higher than the military challenges.

Non-military challenges, also called non-military threats, are usually categorized under the umbrella of hybrid warfare (*hunhe zhanzheng*) or national security threats. However, the definition, composition, and degree of threat of hybrid warfare or national security threats are different for different countries. Even for the same country, the degree of threat to its national security posed by non-military challenges in different strategic directions is different. Simply put, non-military challenges and military challenges are two sides of the national security threat and are inseparable. It would be unwise to ignore either side.

In the maritime domain, non-military challenges pose a greater threat to China, especially in the South China Sea where international relations are unprecedentedly complex.

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As the military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines deepens, and the United States invests more national resources (including financial, diplomatic, and military resources) in the Indo-Pacific direction, the Philippines' ability to non-militarily challenge China has also increased. Especially after the Philippines' new president took office, Philippine diplomacy and military affairs became more inclined to the United States. After gaining support from the United States, the Philippines initiated a certain degree of challenge to China in non-military fields. While cooperating with the U.S, Indo-Pacific strategy, it also left itself enough room for flexible response. After all, the United States is a non-regional country. As a small country in the region, the Philippines will also be reserved when choosing sides. Compared with directly launching a military challenge against China, the non-military field is obviously more in line with its interests. Since the scope of non-military challenges is relatively broad, I only propose several possible directions in this article:

Continue to make things difficult for China on the Second Thomas Shoal issue. The core of the Second Thomas Shoal issue is the dispute over the control of the island/reef (*daojiao*). The so-called stranded "Sierra Madre" landing ship is just a tool. But in terms of the impact it creates, it truly does exert the effect of real control (*shikong*). No matter how bad its internal living environment is, as long as it is stranded on the Second Thomas Shoal, the Philippines can actually control the Second Thomas Shoal. Based on this situation, the Philippines will definitely let the "Sierra Madre" stay at the Second Thomas Shoal if possible. We can even boldly guess that if the "Sierra Madre" completely disintegrates, the Philippines is likely to immediately let a new ship run aground on the Second Thomas Shoal. From this point of view, even if China

resolves the problem of the stranded ship, it will only remove a tool for the Philippines to control the Second Thomas Shoal and [China] will not be able to take actual control of the Second Thomas Shoal. It will just return to a state of competition.

Whether it is actual control by the Philippines or a return to a state of competition between the two sides, it is a typical non-military challenge for China. The former can further turn the island/reef it has occupied into a fait accompli, while the latter can internationalize the disputes over the islands and reefs, providing excuses for foreign countries to intervene. Therefore, the Philippines will strive to maintain its presence on the Second Thomas Shoal and continue to provide more supplies to the stranded ship while maintaining necessary personnel rotations. As the military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines deepens, its supply to the “Sierra Madre” will increase significantly. In addition to conventional supply [methods], the United States is likely to provide more unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to deliver supplies to the Second Thomas Shoal. Although the payload of unmanned equipment is low and it is difficult to meet all the supply needs required by the "Sierra Madre", unmanned equipment has advantages in terms of concealment and long endurance. A mother ship can cruise at a long distance and control the actions of the unmanned equipment to complete the supply mission.

If the United States and the Philippines have fairly deep military cooperation in the future, the Philippine military is likely to obtain more advanced USVs from the United States. For example, the US military's "Common Unmanned Surface Vehicle" (CUSV) can perform supply missions very well. The boat is 12 meters long, 3.4 meters wide, and 3 meters high. It has a full load displacement of more than 10 tons, a self-sustaining capacity of more than 20 hours, a mission payload of up to 1,800 kilograms, and a maximum speed of 20 knots (37 kilometers per hour). Although its speed is not fast, the relatively large carrying capacity can meet the supply mission of the "Sierra Madre."

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The "Sierra Madre" was once a 100-meter-long US Army 542-class tank landing ship. It was commissioned in 1944 and transferred to the Philippines in 1976. Since the ship ran aground illegally on the Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 due to "mechanical failure," the Philippine military has been stationed on the ship. Although it has become scrap metal, it is still an active ship of the Philippine Navy. In order to prevent the ship from disintegrating, the Philippine Navy has been quietly reinforcing the hull and deck. This means that if the "Sierra Madre" is attacked, the Philippine military can request military assistance from the US military in accordance with a security agreement with the United States.

The local civilian ship “Unaizah Mae 2” hired by the Philippine military is carrying new supplies to the “Sierra Madre” which was illegally “run aground” on the Second Thomas Shoal.

If the level of military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines is fairly shallow, there are alternatives. For example, the "Protector" series developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems is a more ideal substitute. The boat is developed based on the 9-meter rigid-inflatable boat. There are two models of 9 meters and 11 meters in length. It is 3.5 meters wide and 4.5 meters high. The full load displacement is four tons, the payload is one ton, the endurance is 400 nautical miles (740 kilometers)/30 knots, the self-sustaining capacity is

eight hours, the maximum speed is 40 knots, and it can be carried and launched by amphibious landing ships. Relatively speaking, its self-sustaining capability, endurance, and payload are not as good as the US military's CUSV, but its technology is mature, cost is low, and modularity is high, and it can basically meet [the needs of] the supply mission.

As for UAVs, considering their fairly small payload and fairly high cost of use, they are more suitable for performing emergency and rapid supply missions, such as quickly delivering urgently needed medicines, weapons, and ammunition to the "Sierra Madre", etc. They can also be used for long-term air surveillance missions, and the captured video can be used for subsequent cognitive warfare.

Theoretically, by adopting the supply tactic of mother ship plus USVs, the Philippines can continue to supply the "Sierra Madre" until the ship is completely disintegrated. The challenge for us lies in its high flexibility. In summary, no matter what type of USV the United States provides to the Philippines, its characteristics are high speed, high flexibility, high concealment, difficult to intercept, and strong continuous supply capability, which are all non-military challenges that we need to seriously deal with.

If other countries in the region are won over to the Second Thomas Shoal model for exercising actual control over disputed islands and reefs, then from the perspective of current international relations the issue of disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea does not meet the conditions for a military solution. Of course, the possibility of a military solution also exists, but the probability is extremely low. Based on this judgment, how to actually control the disputed islands and reefs within a short period of time has become a difficult problem. Compared with [achieving] actual control by reclaiming islands, which requires greater investment, takes longer, and is more likely to cause further conflicts, [achieving] actual control by grounding ships is certainly a better option.

Considering that the decoupling of trade between Europe and the United States and China in recent years has led to some shrinkage in the international shipping industry, the cost of an intermediary company purchasing a nearly scrapped container ship and stranding it on the disputed islands and reefs is relatively low. Adopting this tactic will worsen relations with China. At a time when low-end manufacturing is shifting from China to Southeast Asian countries, not all countries that have island and reef disputes with China are willing to pay this price. For the Philippines, which is supported by the United States and is a "successful practitioner" of this tactic, to come forward at this time to guide other countries to adopt similar tactics to achieve control over the disputed islands and reefs is an acceptable plan. From an economic perspective, the Philippines is not a key country in this manufacturing transfer, and the benefits it can gain from it are relatively limited. Even if relations with China further deteriorate, the impact on its economy is relatively small. This is probably one of the motivations for the Philippines to take some actions in the South China Sea in the future.

The US military's general-purpose USV was jointly developed by AAI Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Textron Systems and was put into use in 2012. This type of vessel adopts a modular design and has a powerful payload. It can detect mines in patrol waters through the side-scan sonar installed on the boat and transmit relevant data back to the mother ship through the communication equipment on board. It also has unique advantages in data links and fuel, and is efficient, high-speed, and safe.

Israel's “Protector” adopts a modular platform design and open structure, which can ideally meet the needs of ship and force protection under various maritime conditions. It has the ability to protect high-value targets, including naval ships, ports, oil facilities, and coastal power plants by providing long-range independent surveillance, identification, and engagement capabilities.

Based on this judgment, the Philippines is likely to organize countries that have island and reef disputes with China to use the tactic of "accidentally stranding" civilian ships to control the disputed islands and reefs. Of course, the grounding is only the first step. The Philippine side

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will take responsibility for subsequent cognitive warfare and supply operations, which the relevant countries will jointly implement. Ship-grounding tactics organized by the Philippines

and implemented by multiple countries will bring non-military challenges to China that are more difficult to deal with and more complicated to handle than if just a single country did it. In addition, this tactic will have a demonstration effect, and it is very likely that more similar situations will occur.

Continue to interfere with China's official law enforcement activities in the South China Sea. With the improvement of China's Coast Guard capabilities and the standardization of law enforcement actions, a set of law enforcement mechanisms has been initially formed for positive interaction with relevant countries on relevant disputes in the South China Sea. All parties can deal with maritime rights and interests issues within the scope of official law enforcement. This mechanism not only reduces the possibility of armed conflict, but also standardizes the official law enforcement behavior of all parties in the South China Sea.

The United States will naturally not sit idly by and watch the initial formation of this mechanism. In recent years, the U.S. Coast Guard has frequently entered the South China Sea and interacted with the U.S. Navy many times, hoping to extend the U.S. maritime law enforcement force to the South China Sea and undermine this consensus. But objectively speaking, as a non-regional country, the United States' maritime law enforcement force is not justified even if it goes deep into the South China Sea. But if it is the Philippines, the situation is completely different.

As an important country in the South China Sea region, the Philippines is difficult to directly exclude from participating in South China Sea disputes. If the U.S. government strengthens the Philippine maritime law enforcement forces in a targeted manner and allows them to interfere with the Chinese Coast Guard's official law enforcement activities in the South China Sea, the threat level will be higher than the direct intervention of the U.S. maritime law enforcement forces.

The *Island*-class patrol boats were built between 1985 and 1992 with a total of 49 completed. The vessel is 34 meters long, has a displacement of 168 tons, a maximum speed of 53 km/hr, and a self-sustaining capacity of five days. It is also equipped with a 25mm gun, two 12.7mm machine guns, and AN/SPS-73 radars capable of tracking up to 200 targets. However, the Island-class is currently being replaced by the Sentinel-class fast response patrol boats.

The *Protector*-class (also known as the Ocean Protector-class) entered service in 2002, with a total of 73 built. The boat is 27 meters long, has a displacement of about 92 tons, a speed of 25 knots (46 km/hour), and a self-sustaining capacity of three days. In 2020, the Department of Homeland Security proposed the 2021 budget for the US Coast Guard, in which eight of the *Protector*-class will be retired one after another, and the mission will be taken over by the Sentinel-class.

This targeted reinforcement will not only be reflected in direct assistance, such as [described in] recent reports that the United States will transfer several patrol boats to the Philippines, including two *Island*-class and two *Protector*-class patrol boats; it will also be reflected in the field of multi-party joint law enforcement, such as the first joint maritime exercise between the Philippine Coast Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Japanese Coast Guard in the waters near Bataan Province from June 1-7, 2023. The three parties dispatched a total of six law enforcement ships, including four from the Philippines, the USS *Stratton*, and the Japanese patrol ship *Akitsushima*. The exercise involved many subjects, including maritime communications, photographing and collecting evidence, boarding inspections, search and rescue, and other tasks. After the exercise, Vice Commander of the Philippine Coast Guard, Lieutenant General Rolando Panzalan, thanked the United States and Japan for their help in building its maritime law enforcement force.

In this exercise, two of the four law enforcement vessels deployed by the Philippines were built with funding from Japan, including the *Mechula Aquino* (MRRV-9702). The Mechula Aquino is the largest and most modernized patrol vessel of the Philippine Coast Guard and was built by Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Co., Ltd. of Japan with funding from the Japan International

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Cooperation Agency and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport's "Maritime Security Capacity Enhancement Project." The ship was launched on November 18, 2021 and officially entered service with the Philippine Coast Guard on June 12, 2022.

It is not difficult to see that this exercise, in addition to verifying the joint maritime law enforcement capabilities of the United States, Japan, and the Philippines, is also an opportunity for the Philippines to show the United States and Japan its enhanced maritime law enforcement capabilities, and to make full preparations for active intervention in South China Sea issues in the future. So, we can boldly guess that in the future, there will be a complex situation in which the Philippine Coast Guard patrol boats are the main force, with cooperation from the maritime law enforcement forces of the United States and Japan. This will not only be more difficult to deal with, but also provide an ideal excuse for extra-regional forces such as the United States to intervene in the South China Sea. The strengthening of the Philippines' maritime law enforcement forces is closely related to the increase in the intensity of its activities in the South China Sea. Its roots also come from the increasingly close military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines. After all, the construction of maritime public law enforcement forces itself has a more obvious "paramilitarized" color.

Through the analysis of this trilateral maritime joint exercise, it was concluded that the U.S.-Philippines military cooperation can play a critical role, that is, through the United States, the Philippines can conduct more similar joint exercises and law enforcement activities with U.S. allies. In the future, it is possible that maritime law enforcement forces from extra-regional countries such as Australia, Britain, and France will enter the South China Sea through joint exercises or joint law enforcement with the Philippines. Compared with direct assistance to the Philippine Coast Guard, direct intervention by maritime law enforcement forces from extra-regional countries is undoubtedly a "good method" with low investment and quick results.

How to Deal with Non-Military Challenges

Faced with the non-military challenges brought about by the US-Philippines military cooperation, there is no way out by avoiding them. We must meet the challenges head-on. From historical experience, any evasion on the sovereignty issue is likely to lead to the disastrous consequences of a fait accompli. Once it becomes a fact, it will be extremely difficult to correct it through non-military means.

Actively respond to the stranding approach. Objectively speaking, responding to the approach of stranding [a ship on a reef] is indeed difficult, especially under the premise that military measures cannot be taken. However, in recent years, the rise of the international environmental protection movement has provided a good entry point for China's response.

Whether it is a warship or a civilian ship, running aground will inevitably cause damage and impact on the environment of the surrounding seas or islands and reefs. The difference lies in the degree of damage. As a responsible major country, China naturally must protect the marine environment from pollution and destruction. Therefore, it is reasonable to take certain compulsory measures to deal with relatively serious pollution problems, which is in line with international practice and international law.

Different compulsory measures must be taken depending on the level of environmental pollution. For ships that have been stranded for a relatively short time and are less polluting, they can be towed away by tugboats. At the same time, plans should be made in advance for possible pollution problems. If necessary, fuel can be pumped out to reduce damage to the marine environment. For ships that have been stranded for a relatively long time in shallow water and are not suitable for towing away, on-site dismantling can be considered, and the dismantled parts and garbage should be disposed of without causing harm. After the towing and dismantling is completed, it is also necessary to file an environmental damage compensation lawsuit against the shipowner involved in accordance with relevant international conventions and Chinese laws. This will also serve as a warning to other ship owners to be more cautious when sailing in the South China Sea to avoid accidents such as "grounding."

The *Mechula Aquino* is built based on Japan's *Kunigami*-class patrol ship, worth 14.55 billion yen (about 100 million US dollars). The purchase contract was signed in February 2020 and the ship was delivered to the Philippine Coast Guard in June 2022. The ship is about 97 meters long, with a maximum speed of 24 knots, a total of 67 crew members, a helicopter deck and hangar, and can carry H145 helicopters.

The "*Akitsu*" is a new helicopter-equipped patrol ship operated by the Japan Coast Guard, which was officially delivered in November 2013. The ship is about 150 meters long and 17 meters wide equipped with two 20mm guns and two 40mm guns. The

biggest feature of this ship is its heavy displacement. The displacement of 6,500 tons exceeds that of many destroyers. It can also carry two helicopters. In a patrol confrontation, it has an advantage in size and its aviation capability is also strong.

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Pick out the key points and respond to multinational joint operations in a targeted manner. There is an unavoidable contradiction (*nanti*) in multinational joint operations, that is, the core interests of the parties are not the same. The so-called joint action is only a temporary consensus on the interests of the parties. Based on this consideration, when responding to non-military challenges jointly launched by multiple countries, it is necessary to promptly select the party receiving the greatest benefits and engaging in the most active operations and focus on responding to it. Assuming that the Philippines and multiple countries jointly initiate a "ship stranding" incident, in addition to towing the stranded ship away in a timely manner, it is also necessary to file a lawsuit against the relevant Philippine companies and individuals involved, and even consider imposing sanctions on them, striving to divide and disintegrate their joint mechanism. Historical experience has proved that after suffering a major blow, the multinational joint mechanism is very fragile and easily disintegrates.

Actively cut off the leverage for maritime law enforcement forces of non-regional countries to intervene in the South China Sea. When responding to non-military challenges jointly initiated by multiple countries, we must focus our attention on the Philippine Coast Guard and avoid excessive entanglement with extra-regional countries. By curbing the Philippines' activities, the forces behind it will be forced to intervene directly. In this way, China will have the upper hand both in terms of difficulty of response and in cognitive warfare. The lie of so-called multinational joint law enforcement will be discredited *(bu gong zi po*).

For a long time, China has been relatively backward in responding to non-military challenges at sea, which is due to complex contemporary factors and subjective and objective factors. Therefore, we need to attach great importance to the challenges that deepening U.S.-Philippine military cooperation will pose to China, make plans earlier, and invest more resources in a timely manner to avoid a passive situation where we have to respond to fait accompli.

Military Challenges and Responses

From the perspective of weapons and equipment, it is difficult for U.S.-Philippine military cooperation to improve the combat effectiveness of the Philippine Navy in a short period of time. The reason is that the U.S. military does not have weapons and equipment suitable for military aid (including arms sales). Unless the U.S. Navy is willing to transfer the most advanced littoral combat ships to the Philippine Navy, it will be difficult to improve the combat effectiveness of the Philippine Navy in a short period of time. However, if the scope of weapons and equipment is expanded to the field of unmanned equipment, it will be completely different.

Although the transfer of more advanced USVs to the Philippine military has little significance for improving the combat effectiveness of the Philippine Navy, it is of great help in improving the combat effectiveness of the U.S. Navy. This is also a new challenge posed to China by US-Philippine military cooperation.

The "*Spartan Scout*" USV adopts a modular design concept and can be configured in various combinations as needed to perform different missions. This type of boat can be equipped with a variety of "plug and play" mission modules within 1 hour. It can not only undertake a variety of tasks, but also speed up the progress of research and development, reduce costs, and solve shipboard issues very well. This type of boat is divided into 7-meter and 11-meter types. Although it is small in size, its combat effectiveness can be compared with some larger-scale boats. Like warships, it can carry weapons such as naval guns, anti-ship missiles, and anti-submarine sensors, and perform tasks such as surveillance and reconnaissance, mine countermeasures, or anti-submarine warfare. It can operate at night and can operate remotely or independently.

At present, the USVs in service and under development by the U.S. military are mainly used to perform tasks such as reconnaissance, patrol, anti-submarine warfare, minesweeping, and electronic warfare and attack missions. For the Philippine Navy, after being equipped with the USVs provided by the US military, the only thing that can be improved is the reconnaissance and patrol capabilities. Although [the Philippine Navy's] anti-submarine warfare, minesweeping, and ship attack capabilities will improve, this will not change its already poor anti-submarine warfare, minesweeping, and ship attack levels. In other words, USVs are multipliers of the navy's combat power, but the prerequisite is that the navy itself must have strong combat power for the multiplier to work.

If the intensity of military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines can reach the level of the U.S.-Japan alliance, it is possible to transfer more advanced USVs, such as the "Spartan Scout," to the Philippine military. This type of boat has been in service for many years and its technology is relatively mature. It is equipped with basic systems such as cameras, navigation radar, surface search radar, GPS signal receivers, and line-of-sight/over-the-horizon communications. Mission modules such as ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), mine countermeasures, precision strike/anti-ship warfare, and anti-submarine warfare can also be run concurrently. Even if the four major mission modules are not run concurrently, the vessel can perform reconnaissance and patrol missions with only basic configurations. However, considering that the boat is equipped with more sensitive sensors and communication equipment, the US military is very likely to equip it with an anti-submarine warfare module and deploy it in the South China Sea to monitor Chinese submarines. Of course, when performing such highly

sensitive tasks, the USVs would usually be directly controlled by the U.S. military. That is, the Philippines purchases the vessels and the United States operates them.

If the U.S.-Philippines military cooperation remains at a relatively shallow level, then, as mentioned above, the U.S. military is more likely to transfer to the Philippines USVs such as the “Protector”, which are mainly used for reconnaissance and patrol. The "Protector" is equipped with sensors including navigation radar and the "Toplite" optical system.

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The latter is a typical multi-task optical sensor that can automatically or manually complete target reconnaissance and tracking and target indication around the clock. Combined with the shipborne "Typhoon"—a remote-controlled stabilized weapon system (which can be equipped with a 40-meter automatic grenade launcher or a 12.7-meter machine gun)—it can form a complete integrated unmanned combat system. It can not only be used to scout other countries' ships, but also attack small surface warships or official law enforcement ships when necessary.

Both the U.S. Navy and the Singapore Navy are equipped with the “Protector,” which is mainly used to carry out maritime counter-terrorism missions and protect their own ships. Israel has also equipped the improved "Protector" with the "Spike" anti-tank missile. If the Philippine Navy can successfully introduce [the “Protector”], its anti-(small) boat combat capability will be greatly enhanced.

Although it is difficult to fundamentally improve the combat effectiveness of the Philippine Navy due to the limitations of the combat and technical performance of USVs, from the perspective of the U.S.-Philippine military cooperation, USVs equipped with advanced sensors and communication equipment will become important assets for the U.S. military in performing "freedom of navigation" and other missions in the South China Sea. They are even more likely to serve as the vanguard of the U.S. military's anti-submarine warfare in the South China Sea, posing a direct challenge to the activities of Chinese submarines.

In addition to selling/transferring unmanned equipment to the Philippine military, deploying advanced sensors and weaponry on islands and reefs actually controlled by the Philippines may also pose a challenge to China in future U.S.-Philippine military cooperation. For example, the anti-ship unmanned vehicle system that the U.S. military is starting to deploy on the first island chain can also be deployed on disputed islands controlled by the Philippines. It is even possible to adopt a "replacement" approach, that is, the Philippine military purchases and deploys them on the surface, but the U.S. military is actually responsible for their operation. This model is not only conducive to the Philippines' more solid control over the disputed islands and reefs, but also reduces the possibility of direct conflict between China and the United States. Even if China takes military means to directly destroy these unmanned forces, it will not cause casualties of U.S. personnel.

Instead of directly deploying offensive weapons, the Philippines could deploy advanced radar/optical sensors or underwater sonar arrays on the disputed islands and reefs controlled by the Philippines, which will pose a direct challenge to China. These sensors will severely restrict

the activities of Chinese ships and provide important real-time intelligence to the U.S. military. In the event of a direct military conflict between China and the United States, they will also enhance the U.S. military's battlespace awareness.

Considering China's relations with countries surrounding the South China Sea, including the Philippines, there is a fairly low possibility of using destructive force as a response measure. However, paramilitary means can be applied, such as electronic interference and trapping of USVs equipped by the Philippines, or direct collision tactics. The Philippine military itself does not have the ability to manufacture advanced USVs. Collision tactics can reduce their threat to China in a short period of time. But in the cognitive warfare domain, a significant rise in negative public opinion [against China] may result. Whether it is necessary to adopt such extreme tactics needs to be carefully evaluated. For the advanced US military sensors deployed on the islands and reefs actually controlled by the Philippines, electronic jamming methods can be used if they cannot be directly destroyed. For example, USVs equipped with high-power electronic jamming equipment can be sent to the vicinity of the islands and reefs actually controlled by the Philippines to interfere with the operation of the U.S. military's advanced sensors. USVs can also be used to drop depth charges to destroy their underwater sonar arrays. The general principle is to reduce combat effectiveness as much as possible without causing direct military conflict, ultimately forcing the United States and the Philippines to abandon the deployment of advanced sensors on the disputed islands and reefs.

In general, as the world's only superpower, the United States has too many possibilities and options to cooperate militarily with the Philippines, and the intervention of extra-regional countries will inevitably aggravate the already complex situation in the South China Sea. Therefore, we must attach great importance to the challenges and threats that U.S.-Philippine military cooperation poses to China in all aspects, especially in the non-military field. We must actively respond to them with an attitude of "fighting without coming to blows" (*dou er bupo*).[3] While responding, we must continue to advance cooperation and exchanges between countries surrounding the South China Sea, including the Philippines. Whether in terms of tactics or technology, China does not lack the ability to respond to the challenges posed by the Philippines. However, this depends on the diplomatic direction of the Philippine government, which is not

[3] **Translator's Note:** "斗而不破" (dòu ér bùpò) is a Chinese idiom which roughly translates to "to fight without coming to blows". It is often used in a political context to describe the U.S.-China relationship which Chinese view as one of competition and pragmatic partnerships that emphasizes avoiding war with each other.

something China can interfere with at will. All that can be said is one hopes that everything will develop in a peaceful and friendly direction.

The US Marine Corps is developing a new anti-ship warfare method based on the Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS). NMESIS includes the Marine Corps and Navy's new anti-ship missile NSM and the unmanned Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). NMESIS can be remotely controlled, has no cab, and provides a powerful and fast-maneuvering anti-ship capability. In future operations, NMESIS will enable the U.S. military to obtain unprecedented autonomous suppression and defense capabilities in the waters of landing sites, effectively blocking the threat of enemy surface forces to the landing sites and enhancing the coastal defense capabilities of the beachheads.