

# ► Move sends a wrong signal to the Philippines: experts US aircraft carrier activity adds fuel to S.China Sea tensions

By Liu Xuanzun

A US aircraft carrier has reportedly entered the South China Sea in a move experts said on Wednesday sends a wrong signal to the Philippines amid the Southeast Asian country's repeated provocations on Chinese islands and reefs in the region.

The US Navy *Carl Vinson* carrier strike group departed Singapore following a port visit there, and is now in the South China Sea, USNI News, the news service of the US Naval Institute, reported earlier this week.

The carrier strike group is one of the few extra-regional naval forces currently operating in Southeast Asia over the Christmas period with other navies having all wrapped up their deployments, USNI News said.

By keeping an aircraft carrier sailing in the South China Sea during the Christmas period, the US wants to maintain the South China Sea issue as

a hot topic and retain its military presence in the region, said Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military expert.

Such show of military force in sensitive waters amid tensions goes in the opposite direction of peace and stability in the South China Sea, Wei said.

Chen Xiangmiao, director of the World Navy Research Center at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said that US aircraft carrier activity in the South China Sea is nothing new, as the moves usually attempt to deter China and show support to US allies, so the US can consolidate its hegemony.

The US carrier's entry into the South China Sea this time is adding fuel to the persistent tensions between China and the Philippines, and sends a wrong signal to the Philippines that could incite Manila to take more extreme moves that escalate contradictions, Chen said.

Medel Aguilar, a Philippine military spokesperson, on Tuesday accused China of "carrying out dangerous ma-

neuvers" and "committing all the violations," and claimed that the Philippines "is not provoking conflict in the South China Sea," Reuters reported.

Mao Ning, a spokesperson at China's foreign Ministry, said on Tuesday that the recent developments involving China and the Philippines in the South China Sea are caused by the Philippines' change of policy and position, refusing to honor its commitments, violating international law and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and infringement of China's sovereignty and provocations, and the responsibility lies with the Philippines.

China will resolutely protect its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, Mao said. "We hope that the Philippines will make the wise choice, return to the right track of properly handling disputes through dialogue and consultation, and work with China to properly handle and manage the situation at sea."

## Prolonged Gaza war leads to growing risks of wider regional conflict

By GT staff reporters

Experts raised concerns on Wednesday about the growing risks of a wider conflict in the Middle East, as Israel's military chief warned that its war on Hamas will likely last for months. Experts said that it is hard to predict when the war will end, but that a prolonged war will be increasingly detrimental to Israel.

Israel's Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi told reporters in a televised statement on Tuesday from the Gaza border that the war would go on "for many months," Reuters reported on Wednesday.

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant also told Knesset lawmakers on Tuesday that Israel would punish Hamas over its brutal October 7 attack, "whether it takes months or years."

However, Israeli President Isaac Herzog said Israel is willing to agree to a new temporary truce with Hamas in Gaza to secure the release of more captives held by the Palestinian group, Al Jazeera reported on December 19.

The information coming from Israel is still somewhat chaotic, but it can be broadly divided into two aspects. "On one hand, there are some efforts in response to international pressure and humanitarian concerns, including humanitarian aid and negotiations for a cease-fire and the exchange of hostages. On the other hand, there is a strong military stance, indicating a determination to continue the conflict," said Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University.

Still, it may be challenging to predict the end of the Israel-Palestine conflict, Liu noted. "While the prolonged conflict is increasingly detrimental to Israel, Israel maintained a strong stance to convey its determination, especially to Hamas."

Gallant also warned on Tuesday of a growing risk of a regional conflict in the Middle East as tensions with Iran increase, the Financial Times reported.

He told a parliamentary committee that Israel was being attacked in a "multi-arena war" from seven areas, which he identified as Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Iran.

### ► Election banner



Posters of election candidates are hanging over a street in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on December 27, 2023. The upcoming general election in Bangladesh will take place on January 7, 2024. Photo: VCG

## US urged to turn non-support for 'Taiwan independence' commitment into action

By Wang Qi

The Taiwan Affairs Office under the State Council on Wednesday urged the US to stop arming the island of Taiwan, stop interfering in Taiwan's regional elections, and turn its commitment of non-support for "Taiwan independence" into concrete action.

The final press conference of the Taiwan Affairs Office in 2023 came against the backdrop of the US' constant military support to the secessionist Democratic Pro-

gressive Party (DPP) authorities despite US President Joe Biden's claim that the US does not support "Taiwan independence."

The US National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024, which was signed into effect on December 22, vowed more resources to arm the island.

Chen Binhua, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office, said at a press briefing Wednesday that the US' insistence on including Taiwan-related content in the NDAA 2024 is a gross

interference in China's internal affairs, representing a serious violation of the one-China principle and the three China-US Joint Communiqués, sending a seriously wrong signal to Taiwan secessionists, and undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits.

"Some people in the US said that they hope for peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits, but in reality, they are speeding up arming Taiwan and inciting confrontation across the Straits," he said.

We urge the US to abide by its solemn political commitment to China on the Taiwan question, to turn its commitment of non-support for Taiwan independence into concrete action, and to immediately stop arming Taiwan, and stop interfering in Taiwan's regional elections, Chen said.

According to Xin Qiang, deputy director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, arming Taiwan is actually a gesture of emboldening and encouraging the DPP authorities

and its candidate Lai Ching-te, which is a kind of interference and intervention in the island's upcoming election as competition becomes increasingly intense.

The US will not change its strategic path to contain China by playing the Taiwan card, nor does it want to see a rapid warming of cross-Straits relations, Xin said.