

Underlining the Ideals and Spirit of the South China Sea Peace Initiative

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Danger of conflict escalation

The waters surrounding Taiwan present both opportunities and challenges for countries around and beyond them. The abundant resources and the freedom of navigation of these waters have contributed largely to the region's growth and vibrancy. However, the sovereignty disputes over them have posed threats to regional stability and prosperity. The recent escalation of tensions caused by the muscle-flexing of some claimants in the South China Sea and by the subsequent heated exchange of criticism between the U.S. and mainland China may precipitately trigger a military confrontation, if gone unchecked. The rising hostilities in East Asia deserve closer attention and better efforts from all parties concerned.

Success of the previous case

While the existential disputes protract, the previous success case may well prove relevant. The Republic of China (Taiwan) government presented the East China Sea Peace Initiative in August 2012 in light of the sovereignty contests over the Diaoyutai Islands involving the mainland Chinese, the Japanese, and the Taiwanese. We proposed that, by establishing bilateral and multilateral negotiations, all parties could

benefit from shelving sovereignty disputes, sharing natural resources, and safeguarding the freedom and safety of aeronautical and maritime navigation. This peace initiative has born fruitful results. Embodying the ideals and spirit of this initiative, the Taiwan-Japan Fisheries Agreement signed in April 2013 has furthered the cause of peace, and therefore offered a constructive lesson for applying peaceful means to conflict resolution. The proposal of this peace initiative and Taiwan's subsequent handling of regional disputes have received warm endorsement from the world's major powers, such as the U.S., the European Union and its member states, and Australia.

South China Sea Peace Initiative

Aiming at defusing the mounting tensions in the South China Sea, President Ma Ying-jeou put forward another peace initiative in May this year, calling for all parties concerned to exercise extreme restraint and to take precautionary measures in preventing conflicts from arising. We propose that all stake-holders be involved in discussing the establishment of a maritime cooperation mechanism and a code of conduct concerning joint commitments on environmental protection, scientific research, maritime crime fighting, humanitarian aid, and disaster relief missions. With special emphasis being placed on natural resource sharing, we initiate the idea of “overall planning first and zonal development later.” The principles and spirit of all related international law, including the UN Charter and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, should be well observed and respected. Taiwan and the Philippines have pioneered such

talks and reached a consensus on law enforcement in the overlapping exclusive economic zones (EEZs) between the two countries. This may be a precursor to a solution to the sovereignty issues and blaze a trail for others to follow.

Prospects

As a responsible stakeholder and a peace maker in our region, Taiwan has proposed the two peace initiatives with the aim of reducing tensions and promoting stability concerning territorial disputes surrounding us. Now there is growing momentum for all the parties involved to take concrete actions and begin discussions before serious consequences develop.

Peaceful means are the most legitimate way to settle disputes in international affairs. Therefore, we call upon all parties concerned to begin negotiations at a multilateral platform, under the principles of equality and reciprocity, to resolve our common problems and enhance stability. Let's work together to make the South China Sea a sea of peace and cooperation.