

US mulling warship passage: report

Written by Taipei Times

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This US Navy handout photo released May 16 shows an MH-60S Sea Hawk attached to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9 as it flies next to the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in the Atlantic Ocean on May 15.

Photo: Reuters

The US is mulling the possibility of sending an aircraft carrier through the Taiwan Strait as a show of support to Taiwan, a report by Reuters said yesterday, citing US officials speaking on condition of anonymity.

According to the report, the US had explored plans for an aircraft carrier passage earlier this year, but did not pursue them, perhaps due to concerns about upsetting China.

The last time a US aircraft carrier transited the Taiwan Strait was in 2007, when George W. Bush was president.

According to Reuters, the Pentagon has declined to comment on any potential future operations, so it was not clear how soon such a passage might take place.

However, yesterday's story follows a Reuters' report on Sunday from the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue security forum in Singapore that said the US Department of Defense was weighing a more assertive program of freedom-of-navigation operations close to Chinese installations on reefs in the Paracel Islands (Xisha Islands, 西沙群岛) and Spratly Islands (Nansha Islands, 南沙群岛), citing two unnamed US officials, and Western and Asian diplomats close to the discussions.

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Two US Navy warships, the USS Higgins, a destroyer, and the USS Antietam, a cruiser — last month passed within 12 nautical miles (22.2km) of the Paracels.

While yesterday's Reuters report said that some US military officials think a carrier transit is overdue, it said another option would be resuming the periodic passages by other US Navy ships.

The last time US Navy ships sailed through the Strait was in July last year, according to Reuters.

"They're turning up the heat," Reuters yesterday cited one US official as saying about the US view of Chinese military activities around Taiwan this year.

In Taipei, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Andrew Lee (李安達) declined to comment on the possibility of a US warship passage through the Strait, saying the news had yet to be verified.

According to the Reuters report yesterday, one US official said that Washington is also aiming to change the way it approaches arms sales requests from Taiwan to address them on a case-by-case basis instead of bundling them together.

It also quoted US-Taiwan Business Council president Rupert Hammond-Chambers as saying that moving away from bundling would be better for Taipei's defense needs, as it would treat Taiwan more like a regular security partner.

"We get into difficulty when we treat Taiwan differently, which opens the door for the politicization of the [arms sales] process," it cited Hammond-Chambers as saying.

Asked by Reuters about US obligations to Taiwan, Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Logan said Washington has sold Taiwan more than US\$15 billion of weaponry since 2010.

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“We have a vital interest in upholding the current rules-based international order, which features a strong, prosperous and democratic Taiwan,” it quoted Logan as saying.

Meanwhile, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Hua Chunying (华春莹) yesterday urged the US to prudently handle the Taiwan issue to avoid harming bilateral ties and peace and stability in the region.

“We have repeatedly emphasized that the Taiwan issue is the most important and sensitive core issue in the China-US relationship,” she told a daily news briefing.

In related news, it now appears unlikely that Washington is to send top officials to next week’s dedication ceremony for the new American Institute in Taiwan’s office building in Taipei, according to a Reuters report.

US officials cited by Reuters said that the ceremony would clash with the summit in Singapore on Tuesday next week between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, but that there would be another opportunity to commemorate the unveiling when the complex opens in September.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2018/06/06](#)