

US again declines to condemn Manila over shooting

Written by Taipei Times

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Despite strong pressure and repeated efforts, the US has again declined to issue an outright condemnation of the Philippines for shooting a Taiwanese fisherman.

However, US Department of State spokesperson Jennifer Psaki has confirmed that Washington is now trying to play a role in calming the growing crisis.

“We regret the tragic death of a Taiwan fishing boat master during the May 9 confrontation at sea with a Philippine patrol vessel,” Psaki said on Monday.

“The United States has been in touch with both the Philippine government and the Taiwan authorities regarding the incident,” she said.

Psaki said that the US welcomed the Philippine government’s pledge to conduct a “full and transparent” investigation.

While the State Department has refused to give details, sources with knowledge of the situation told the Taipei Times that US diplomats are currently talking to both sides and strongly urging caution.

Asked if the US was worried about a possible escalation, Psaki said: “We continue to urge all parties, in any scenario, to ensure maritime safety and to refrain from provocative actions.”

“The Philippine government is going to be conducting an investigation and they will be working with the Taiwan authorities to establish what happened in this case,” she said.

Pressed to condemn the Philippine authorities for firing on the Taiwanese boat, Psaki appeared to equivocate.

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She was asked to explain what actions Taiwan had taken that the US was concerned about when only one side — the Philippines — had actually done any shooting.

“When you’re warning both sides, you’re giving an equivalency. What is the Taiwanese action that you’re concerned about?” Psaki was asked.

“The Philippine government is looking into this case — I don’t want to get ahead of their process of investigating what happened,” she said.

At a regular daily press briefing, Psaki was again pressured to be more specific.

“The Taiwanese fisherman was unarmed. It’s a fishing boat — small compared to the government vessel that the Filipinos had. When you say confrontation, only one side was shooting the other, using a machine gun. Fifty-nine bullet holes were found in that small boat. I want you to comment on the fact that someone opened fire in the South China Sea,” a reporter said.

Psaki said that she was just making a broad point that both sides should refrain from provocative actions.

“I’m not going to speculate on this specific case,” she said.

Asked where, in the US’ view, the shooting took place, Psaki said: “The precise location of the incident is not yet clear, although it appears the incident took place in or near disputed waters, where both claim fishing rights.”

Psaki said that the US regretted the “tragic death” and encouraged “peaceful negotiation and peaceful resolution.”

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“When you see people doing things that run directly counter to behavior that would lead to stability, are you going to stand up and point that out, and hold these governments to account? You’re holding the victimizer and the victim to equal account, so it doesn’t seem to match,” the reporter said.

Psaki replied: “There will be an investigation run by the Philippine government into what happened here. I don’t think that is holding both sides to the same account.”

In a final effort the reporter asked: “Would you condemn the killing of an innocent fisherman, unarmed, in this incident? Or would you condone that?”

“I certainly didn’t condone it. I said we regret the tragic death of this fisherman,” Psaki said.

It was the second time the US Department of State has refused to condemn the incident.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2013/05/15](#)