

Ma's visit is 'unhelpful,' AIT says

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The Republic of China's national flag yesterday flies from the top of a small tower on Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island) in the South China Sea.

Photo: Luo Tien-pin, Taipei Times

The US is disappointed at President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) announcement yesterday that he is to today visit Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island, 太平島), the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) said, calling it an "unhelpful" move.

"We are disappointed that President Ma Ying-jeou plans to travel to Taiping Island. Such an action is extremely unhelpful and does not contribute to the peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea. The US urges Taiwan and all claimants to lower tensions, rather than taking actions that could raise them," AIT spokeswoman Sonia Urbom said in an e-mail to reporters.

A reciprocal halt among all claimants to further land reclamation, construction of new facilities and militarization of outposts would help to lower tensions and create space for peaceful resolution of disputes, Urbom added.

Vietnam's representative to Taiwan, Tran Duy Hai, also protested against Ma's decision in the afternoon, as Hanoi also claims sovereignty over Itu Aba Island.

Tran told reporters that he strongly opposed Ma's planned visit and that "his actions have violated the claim of the Vietnamese government, and I will therefore express our strong protest to relevant government institutions in Taiwan."

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As tensions are already high in the South China Sea, Tran urged Ma to immediately halt the plan.

Another claimant to territory in the South China Sea, China — which considers Taiwan its sovereign territory — had a different reaction.

Asked to comment on Ma's planned visit, China's Taiwan Affairs Office reiterated that China and Taiwan had a common duty to protect Chinese sovereignty in the waterway.

"Safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as safeguarding the overall interests of the Chinese nation is the common responsibility and obligation of compatriots across the [Taiwan] Strait," office spokesperson Ma Xiaoguang (马晓光) told reporters in Beijing.

While the Philippines also claims sovereignty over Itu Aba Island, it had yet to make any response to Ma's planned visit as of press time yesterday.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2016/01/28](#)