

Carriers in Strait still an option: official

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Adm. John Richardson, chief of Naval Operations of the U.S. Navy, speaks during a news conference with Philippine Armed Forces Chief Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., following their meeting at Camp Aguinaldo in suburban Quezon city, Philippines on Oct. 29, 2018.

Photo: AP

The US Navy has not ruled out sending an aircraft carrier through the Taiwan Strait, despite military technology advances by China that pose a greater threat to US warships than ever before, the chief of US naval operations said yesterday.

Washington sent ships through the strategic waterway three times last year as it makes more frequent transits of the strait that separates Taiwan from China, but it has not dispatched a carrier in more than 10 years.

During that time, China has modernized its forces with missiles designed to strike enemy ships.

“We don’t really see any kind of limitation on whatever type of ship could pass through those waters,” Admiral John Richardson told reporters in Tokyo when asked if more advanced Chinese weapons posed too big a risk.

“We see the Taiwan Strait as another [stretch of] international waters, so that’s why we do the transits,” he said.

Aircraft carriers, typically equipped with about 80 aircraft and crewed by about 5,000 sailors,

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are key to the US military's ability to project power globally.

On Tuesday, a US official told reporters that the US was closely watching Chinese intentions toward Taiwan as advances in military technology give Beijing's forces greater capability to occupy the nation.

In a report, the US Defense Intelligence Agency called Taiwan the "primary driver" for China's military modernization.

Richardson, who visited China before traveling to Japan, said that he told his Chinese counterparts that Washington was opposed to any unilateral action by Beijing or Taipei.

He also urged China to stick to international rules during unplanned naval encounters at sea.

That request came after a Chinese destroyer approached the USS *Decatur* in October last year and forced it to change course as it challenged Chinese territorial claims in the contested South China Sea with a freedom of navigation operation.

"We have made this very clear that this was an excursion, a departure from the normal adherence to those rules and we would hope that behavior in the future would be much more consistent," Richardson said. "We should not see each other as a threatening presence in these waters."

The US Navy continues to pass through waters in the South China Sea that Beijing considers its territory.

On Monday last week, a US guided-missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles (22.2km) of a Chinese-occupied island, prompting Beijing's rebuke that it had "gravely infringed upon China's sovereignty."

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China, which claims almost all of the strategic waterway, has said that its intentions are peaceful. Taiwan, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have competing claims.

The Ministry of National Defense yesterday thanked allied nations' military commanders for their support in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

The Taiwan Strait is an international sea zone, the ministry said, adding that it would respect the US' decision should it conduct naval or other military activities in the waterway.

Following the circumnavigation of Taiwan by Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force aircraft, the PLA Navy has also begun routine patrols west of the median line of the Taiwan Strait, the ministry said, adding that while such actions have increased pressure on Taiwan regarding combat readiness, the nation's armed forces are capable of reacting to various scenarios.

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