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Asian Military Balance Destabilized by China's Military Expansion

By NABESHIMA Keizo

The annual report on China's military forces published by the U.S. Department of Defense on August 24, featuring a 7-page analysis entitled "China's Evolving Maritime Strategy," articulated vigilance against China, who is under a rapid transformation from a continental state to a maritime state engaging in construction of aircraft carriers. Michael SCHIFFER, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia expressed his concerns: "The pace and scope of China's sustained military investments have allowed China to pursue capabilities that we believe are potentially destabilizing to regional military balances, increase the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation, and may contribute to regional tensions and anxieties." China's moves to steadily promote the strategy of "Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD)" against the U.S. in view of "Taiwan Contingency" contradict the strategies which the U.S. and the allies employ in the Asia Pacific region. The Chinese great-power policy and nationalism will generate friction and confrontation with Japan and other Asian countries. The administration of NODA Yoshihiko of the Democratic Party of Japan needs to sensitively address rapid changes of the security environment, reconsolidate Japan's alliance with the U.S., and restructure her diplomacy with Asian countries including China.

Countering the report, China argued, "Being defensive, China's national security policy contributes to the regional and global peace and stability." However, coinciding with the publication of the report on August 24, a fisheries patrol boat, that is, a Chinese official boat, trespassed into Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands. To the protest of Japanese government, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeated its previous claim, "The Senkaku Islands are traditional Chinese territory," in order to justify China's violation of Japanese territorial waters. Around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, 2008 saw an incident that two Chinese marine research vessels intruded into Japanese territorial waters, and September 2010 saw another incident that a Chinese fishing boat hit against a Japanese coast guard vessel inside Japanese territorial waters. A series of China's violations of Japanese territorial waters were not coincidental events; it is reasonable for us to interpret that China is accumulating accomplished facts for the purpose of disseminating her assertion, "The Senkaku area is Chinese territory and sea," across the international world.

The report introduces the Chinese concepts of "Three Warfares": (1) Psychological Warfare, (2) Media Warfare, and (3) Legal Warfare. It is widely known that (1) is to demoralize enemy military personnel and (2) is to build public support for China's military actions, while (3) uses international and domestic law to build international support for China's claim. In view of China's hard-line claims and threat behaviors observed in the Senkaku Incident in the East China Sea as well as in the territorial disputes with Philippines, Vietnam and others in the South China Sea, it is evident that China tactfully combines the concepts of "three warfares." Philippines deployed the Navy's largest frigate ship equipped with a helicopter; President Aquino boarded the ship on August 23 in order to internationally appeal her intention to China to defend the territory and waters. Vietnam purchased six submarines from Russia as well as deployed her second frigate ship equipped with guided missiles on August 22. Also, India hastens to enhance her fleet including an aircraft carrier. The naval force expansions in Asia, catalyzed by China's advance into the sea, are being intensified.

China regards an aircraft carrier as a symbol of a "great power." President HU Jintao asserted that China was a "great maritime power" in 2006, encouraging enhancement and modernization of the Chinese Navy. An American critic Robert KAGAN, while commenting on China's transition to a great power, pointed out: "Power changes nations. It expands their wants and desires, increases their sense of entitlement, ... It also makes them more ambitious. It lessens their tolerance to obstacles, ..." He also provided such a perspective as: "What they (Chinese) fear is obstruction. They worry that an American-led world will try to stop them from fulfilling their ambitions and their destiny. And the leaders of China have their own special fear, that the denial of Chinese ambitions abroad could ultimately undermine their ability to rule at home." Then, a continued military expansion will be indispensable for the Communist Party leaders to stay in power. It may take less than expected for China to narrow the gap with the U.S., who is faced with a fiscal crisis and required to substantially cut military expenditures. If things remain, the military balance in the Asia Pacific region will be rapidly destabilized.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. NABESHIMA Keizo, former Chief Editorial Writer for Kyodo News, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Seiho" of JFIR on August 29, 2011.)