

'Nine-dash line' sovereignty claims make no sense: ex-AIT chief

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By Joseph Yeh ,The China Post

TAIPEI, Taiwan -- A former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) official yesterday urged the Taiwan government to abandon its sovereignty claim to the entire South China Sea based on the so-called nine-dash line, saying such an approach lacks legal or practical sense.

William Stanton, a former AIT Taipei office director from 2009 to 2012, made the call in his address at a seminar in Taipei yesterday. The AIT represents U.S. interests in Taiwan in the absence of official diplomatic ties.

According to Stanton, the “nine-dash line” was first published in a map by the Republic of China government on Dec. 1, 1947 and originally consisted of 11 dashes. The claim was later used by the People's Republic of China. PRC then-Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩來) later removed without explanation two of the dashes, reducing the total to nine.

However, Stanton noted that neither the R.O.C. nor the PRC has ever explained the justification or meaning of the map which lacks specific geographic coordinates.

Both sides of the Taiwan Strait have also failed to make it clear how the dashes would be connected if they were to form a continuous line and how that would then affect the extent of the claimed territory in the South China Sea, he noted.

“It is precisely because the territorial disputes over the South China Sea are so dangerous and so intractable that Taiwan should seriously consider abandoning its claims to the entire South China Sea based on the nine-dash line,” he noted.

The U.S. government has already publicly proposed such a course of action for China, the ex-official said.

Claim Based on Presence

Asked to comment on the issue following his address, Stanton told Taiwanese reporters that Taipei should instead make its sovereignty claim in the South China Sea based on its presence on Taiping Island.

“You (Taiwan) have a claim to Taiping Island because you have been there since 1949,” he noted.

Under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, Taiwan could make the claim that it has 200 miles of exclusive economic zone around the island, he noted.

“It is an international law that everyone agrees on except China and Taiwan,” he said.

Most countries in the world, however, have regarded the “nine-dash line” claim made by China and Taiwan as “laughable,” he noted.

“It doesn't make any legal or practical sense to make the claim base on the 'nine-dash

line.”

Stanton made the remarks at an international symposium on “U.S. Presence in Asia and Regional Peace and Security” held in Taipei yesterday.

Taiping is the largest island in the Spratlys archipelago. Currently, around 100 Taiwanese Coast Guard personnel are stationed on the island, which is 1,384 kilometers southeast of Kaohsiung.

Asked to comment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) spokeswoman Anna Kao (高安) yesterday did not give a direct response to Stanton's suggestion.

Instead, she reaffirmed Taiwan's sovereignty over four island groups in the South China Sea, while urging neighboring countries and territories involved in territorial disputes in the area to resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation.

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