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US should 'butt out' of South China Sea disputes: Barry Grossman

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An international lawyer based in Indonesia says the United States should “butt out” the South China Sea and allow the countries with a direct stake in the sea to resolve their differences with China.

Barry Grossman made the remarks in a phone interview with Press TV on Monday while commenting on a top Chinese general's warning to Washington against meddling in Beijing's project of building an artificial island in the South China Sea.

"The US is obviously biased considering that the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam have already set up military facilities," People's Liberation Army Major General Luo Yuan said on Monday. "China is likely to withstand the international pressure and continue the construction, since it is completely legitimate and justifiable."

"These territorial disputes are a thorny issue with at least eight countries asserting territorial claims in and around the South China Sea, which is rich in natural resources," Grossman said.

"Unfortunately, the complex issues relating to each of these country's claims are yet again being distorted by hostilities between the United States and China," he added.

Beijing claims the South China Sea in its entirety, while other countries including the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam also have claims to the area and are in dispute with China.

China accuses Washington of meddling in the regional issues and deliberately stirring up tensions in the South China Sea.

“US interests in these disputes are at best derivative and certainly linked with its chequered history in the region which, in recent decades has culminated in close alliances with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, along with somewhat looser ties with Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei, all of which have claims, and conflicting claims to the South China Sea,” Grossman said. The US is of course also continuing with its Asian Pivot and its related policy of containing China.

“It is difficult to take issue with that part of the standing US policy on these disputes, which asserts that all involved should avoid unilateral action and be guided by existing international laws and mechanisms for resolving such disputes. Of course, the US lecturing China from afar in such terms comes off as being both arrogant and hypocritical, especially considering the long history of US interventions in the Middle East, Africa and South America.

“But it certainly doesn’t help also when the US makes implied threats by referring to its military alliances with countries in the region which come with an implied guarantee of nuclear intervention on behalf of some of these countries as circumstances require.

“It also does not help that the US interests in the region were largely established by colonialism, war and corporate adventuring.

“After all, it is the South China Sea we are talking about, not the Caribbean.

“China, on the other hand, is the dominant superpower in the region and asserts territorial claims, which at times run so far from its own territory and so much closer to that of other nations, that it often appears to be a regional bully in these matters,” Grossman noted.

On Monday, the Chinese foreign ministry dismissed as "irresponsible" US criticism of its construction of the island chain of Nansha, which is also claimed in whole or part by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. "External forces have no right to make irresponsible remarks."

“While in this instance, China's unilateral actions do seem to be provocative, comments made by China's foreign ministry that ‘the outside world has no right to make irresponsible remarks on China-related activities,’ are also valid as far as they go,” Grossman said.

“It would certainly be desirable for the various countries with a direct rather than vicarious stake in these disputes to try and reach some resolution instead of turning them into a political football to be kicked around by superpowers.

“It certainly seems extremely unlikely that the United States will ever resort to military force to oppose Chinese territorial claims and to enforce the interests it has vicariously through other nations in the region. That being the overriding reality, countries with a direct stake in these territorial disputes would do well to try and reach a negotiated resolution, but unfortunately, the issues are highly politicized in each country and all of the countries involved seem to be as intractable in their position as China itself , even if they do not enjoy China's overwhelming military and economic power.

“I think as ordinary ‘politically interested’ people, the best we can do is keep a watching brief on these disputes and not be too quick to speak out of turn or in ignorance about the complicated historical, legal and political issues involved. I would like to think that if the United States can butt out a little bit, there is a plenty of room for the countries involved - that is, those countries with a direct stake in the South China Sea – to resolve their differences with China.”