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Military dialogue key to building trust between China, US

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General Fan Changlong, vice-chairman of the Communist Party of China's Central Military Commission, currently on a multi-city US tour, is China's highest-level military leader to visit the country since 2012. As part of regular dialogue efforts between the Chinese and American militaries, the tour comes at a delicate time as Washington is seen trying to press Beijing on multiple occasions over the South China Sea issue and ahead of the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, to be held later this month. In September, Chinese President Xi Jinping will visit the US.

Fan is scheduled to visit a Boeing factory in Seattle, a US army base at Fort Hood in Texas, tour the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier and meet with Pentagon chief Ashton Carter.

There have long been structural contradictions in the China-US relationship. As many consider the US is losing its leadership position while China rises rapidly, the two powers harbor much suspicion and mistrust over the strategic purposes of each other.

Recently, concerns have grown about the increasing possibilities of military miscalculations and hence conflicts between the two given the harsh US stance on China's construction activities in the South China Sea. In this context, a visit that enables military leaders from China and the US to express their bottom lines and concerns is certainly useful to alleviate unfavorable emotions.

The South China Sea issue doesn't actually touch upon core US interests and can't represent the entirety of the China-US relationship. It's true that pessimistic and apprehensive attitudes about the China-US relationship are often heard in academic and political circles. Some prominent China experts think that bilateral relations are at a crisis point and call for a major adjustment or even shift to containment in its policy on China. But overall, the China-US relationship is an enormous and complicated system.

China and the US are forming a new type of relations and various exchanges have been conducted to better understand each other and reduce the chances of miscalculations. Meanwhile, the extensive and sizable exchanges in economic, cultural and personnel sectors that have massive implications worldwide will ensure the two sides will act cautiously when making decisions.

There will be friction and divergences between China and the US, but as neither wishes for conflict, military ties will steer in a positive direction. In this process, frank communication and exchange between them is always helpful.