

Learn from India how to handle maritime disputes with neighbours, US tell China

08/07/2016 19:20 by admin

Washington: Ahead of the crucial ruling by an international arbitral tribunal over the South China Sea dispute, the United States has asked Beijing to learn from India how maritime disputes with neighbours are settled.

South China Sea

China has refused to accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Arbitration in a case the Philippines has brought against China's claims to nearly all of the South China Sea (SCS).

In 2014, the Permanent Court of Arbitration—the same court that will issue a ruling on the South China Sea next week—ruled against India in favour of Bangladesh in a three-decade-old maritime dispute, Abraham Denmark, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for East Asia, told lawmakers at a Congressional hearing.

To India's great credit, it accepted the decision and has abided by it, noting at the time that settlement of the issue would enhance mutual understanding and goodwill between the two countries. This is an example we would encourage China to follow, the top Pentagon official said.

The court, based in The Hague, is due to give its ruling next week, raising fears of confrontation in the region.

The Philippines has sought a decision from the tribunal regarding the validity of China's nine-dash line as a maritime claim under the Convention, as well as the clarification of maritime entitlements under the Convention of South China Sea islands and other geographic features.

The arbitral tribunal's upcoming ruling will present an opportunity for those in the region to determine whether the Asia-Pacific's future will be defined by adherence to international laws and norms that have helped keep the peace and enabled it to prosper, or whether the region's future will be determined by raw calculations of power, Denmark said.

China, in particular, will face an opportunity to stand within an open and principled regional architecture, he said, adding that the path of pursuing the peaceful resolution of disputes and the adherence to international law had been chosen in the past by those in China's position.

For example, India—an increasingly important partner to the US in Asia and globally—is an exemplar of how a proud and increasingly powerful country can handle such disputes with its neighbours in accordance with international law, Denmark said.

With the South China Sea at a crossroads, there is a degree of uncertainty surrounding how some claimants will act in the coming months, he said, but assured the lawmakers that the US would play an active role to shape the region's future.

- (With PTI inputs)