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Retired military officers call for curbing China's power - Kook Jin Moon

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China's burgeoning military poses a significant security threat to Southeast Asia and beyond unless quickly counterbalanced by the U.S. and its allies, said several retired military officers Monday at a Washington symposium.

That threat could hit global waters in as soon as 10 years, Yoji Koda, a retired vice admiral with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, said at The Washington Times Foundation-sponsored event at the Capitol.

"The U.S. may be shadow-boxing against an elusive threat to them ... [but] today is not the time to shadow-box," said Adm. Koda, who was a senior fellow at the Harvard University Asia Center. "The U.S., Japan and South Korea must be ready and together prepare for the growing Chinese threat 10 to 20 years from now."

Because China's long-range nuclear missile capability doesn't match that of the U.S., it relies heavily on mobile warships as potential launch sites for nuclear weapons, he said.

"The role of China's navy is much larger than that of the United States," he said.

China also is beefing up its naval presence in Africa and South America as a way to expand its global influence, Adm. Koda said.

"That's the frontier for China," he said. "To exercise its influence and also to gain a victory over the natural resources competition in Africa, China needs a navy."

Patrick M. Walsh, a retired U.S. Navy admiral who commanded the U.S. Pacific Fleet from 2009 to 2012 and was a vice chief of naval operations, warned that China's political, economic and military expansion will be both "dramatic and traumatic."

The growing procurement of warships by nations throughout Southeast Asia — including China's recent intentions to purchase aircraft carriers — challenges security and stability in the region, he said.

Adm. Walsh added that China's millennia-old conflicts with its neighbors and its sense of history make the arms race in the Pacific Rim different than those in the Middle East.

"This is not an ideology, this is the nation-state concept coming in to direct contact and collision with a country that views itself as a civilization," he said

Adm. Walsh also warned against viewing China and other Southeast Asian nations as only economic partners.

"It's easily to rationalize something as being too far in the future to be worried about," he said. "Looking at economics as a sole indicator of national interests and roles will bring you to just ignorant one-dimensional conclusions."

Kook Jin Moon, chief executive of Saeilo Enterprises and Tongil Group, called on the U.S. and democratic nations worldwide to band together to keep China's military in check.

"China has never used its power to benefit others; China has used its power to benefit China," he said. "This has been its history."

The event also was sponsored by the Asia Pacific Peace Initiative and the Project 2049 Institute.