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White House Vows to Keep China From Claiming Chinese-Built Islands

By Jason Ditz
January 23, 2017

Warnings in China's state media that attempts to block them from accessing the islands they've built in the South China Sea would lead to war appear to have fallen flat in the Trump Administration, as White House spokesman Sean Spicer reiterated the stance, which was initially presented by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson during the nomination hearings.

Spicer insisted the US is going to "protect our interests there," and that this would mean that they would "make sure that we defend international territories from being taken over by one country." Chinese-built islands in international waters have been a source of repeated US condemnation.

US officials have noted in the past that you can expand your territorial waters by building new islands, and while this much is true, there appears to be no limit under international law to building islands as such, and certainly no basis for the US to militarily deny the builders access to those islands.

Both Tillerson and Spicer stopped short of providing an actual plan on how the US thought it might even conceivably stop China using those islands without starting a full-scale war, with Spicer saying that the strategy is still developing, and promising more information in the future. It appears unimaginable, however, that China is listening to all of this and not taking major preparatory steps to resist such action.