

U.S. Warns China on Crimea-Style Landgrab

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WASHINGTON — China should not doubt the U.S. commitment to defend its Asian allies and the prospect of economic retaliation should also discourage Beijing from using force to pursue territorial claims in Asia in the way Russia has in Crimea, a senior U.S. official said Thursday.

Daniel Russel, U.S. President Barack Obama's diplomatic point man for East Asia, said it was difficult to determine what China's intentions might be, but Russia's annexation of Crimea had heightened concerns among U.S. allies in the region about the possibility of China using force to pursue its claims.

"The net effect is to put more pressure on China to demonstrate that it remains committed to the peaceful resolution of the problems," Russel, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asia, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Russel said the retaliatory sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S., the European Union and others should have a "chilling effect on anyone in China who might contemplate

the Crimea annexation as a model."

This was especially so given the extent of China's economic interdependence with the U.S. and its Asia neighbors, Russel said.

Russel said that while the U.S. did not take a position on rival territorial claims in East Asia, China should be in no doubt about Washington's resolve to defend its allies if necessary.

"The president of the U.S. and the Obama administration is firmly committed to honoring our defense commitments to our allies," he said.

While Washington stood by its commitments, which include defense treaties with Japan, the Philippines and South Korea, Russel said there was no reason why the rival territorial claims could not be resolved by peaceful means.

He said he hoped the fact that the Philippines had filed a case against China on Sunday at an arbitration tribunal in The Hague would encourage China to clarify and remove the ambiguity surrounding its own claims.

Russel termed the deployment of large numbers of Chinese vessels in its dispute with the Philippines in the South China Sea "problematic" and said that Beijing had taken "what to us appears to be intimidating steps."

"It is incumbent of all of the claimants to foreswear intimidation, coercion and other nondiplomatic or extra-legal means," he said.

In Asia, China also has competing territorial claims with Japan and South Korea, as well as with Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan in potentially energy-rich waters.

Obama is due to visit Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines from April 22, when he is expected to stress his commitment to a rebalancing of U.S. strategic and economic focus towards the Asia-Pacific region in the face of an increasingly assertive China.

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