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**Transcript**

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## **CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST**

Host: **Paul Haenle**

Guest: **Gary Roughead**

Episode 70: North Korea and The South China

Sea: What's Next?

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**Haenle:** I am here this morning with Admiral Gary Roughead, former U.S. navy officer, who served in his final position in the U.S. navy as the 29th U.S. chief of naval operations from 2007 to 2011. I had the honor of working with him a little as I was China director in the National Security Council as he might discuss. I always appreciated his leadership and his vision at that position. He's held six operational command through his career and he is one of only two officers in the history of the U.S. navy to have [had] command of both U.S. Atlantic and Pacific fleets.

Admiral Gary Roughead, I'm very grateful to have you on the Carnegie-Tsinghua podcast this morning, and we really appreciated it when you were out in 2015 participating in the Tsinghua Peace Forum. Carnegie-Tsinghua did a panel there on U.S.-China and it's great to talk to you this morning. Thank you for joining in the podcast.

**Roughead:** Paul, it's great to be on the podcast. Thank you for your kind words and thank you for the work you do in China.

**Haenle:** I would like, if I could, to talk to you about three topics this morning on which you have considerable experience and expertise: South China Sea, U.S.-China military relations and North Korea, which is once again in the headlines.

Let's start with the South China Sea. This is an issue that has dominated the headlines over the last few years. China has moved along a much more assertive approach than we have seen in the past. They've reclaimed features, and conducted reclamation activities. Frankly that is, when you add all up, more than the entire history of reclamation in the Asia-Pacific. They've done it in the pace and scope that is unprecedented. It has raised tensions in the region, considerably, and has become an issue front and center in the U.S.-China relationship and one that has created quite a bit of tension. In July of this year, there was a ruling by the UNCLOS tribunal, which invalidated China's expansive claims in the South China Sea. Now, there has been a bit of a cool down in the South China Sea, but some speculate that because China wanted the G20 to go off well, wanted President Obama to be present at the G20, and people wonder what to expect now, going forward.

I want to step back if I could and just ask you, given your experience, given your position in the U.S. government, what do you see here is at stake in terms of the strategic competition in the Asia Pacific for the United States in China? What are we seeing playing out, and broadly speaking, how do you see it going forward?

**Roughead:** I've been watching that area for many years and it remains an important area of focus for me. I'll focus in the South China Sea but I really do believe that you can't divorce the East China Sea and South China Sea as an issue for the region and the types of activities that the United States and our allies' like-minded partners need to be mindful of. In the South China Sea, first of all, I really don't believe that the conflict is imminent in the South China Sea. That said, I do believe that as activity increases, as the operators on scene maybe coming emboldened, I believe that you increase the risk of a misstep, a mistake, or a mishap, and the problem then becomes how do you de-escalate it. And there really aren't adequate mechanisms in the region and China to be able to calmly and confidently walk down the steps and back into a better position. That's my main concern.

**Haenle:** You hear people say that just the fact that China has more ships and aircrafts operating in the area, the United States and others are sort of picking up their operations. That just by itself creates a greater risk for inadvertent clash. Do you see that as a real risk?

**Roughead:** I think that the increased activity and the increase of population, if I may use that term—coastguard assets, because that's primarily the force that's being used. I do think that increases the probability. The other dimension is that the facilities that China has built out in the South China Sea have military value and there's no question about that. I think that's one of the main things that has unsettled so many the people as to what is really happening in that important waterway.

I think it's hugely important what the court of the arbitration did. The ability to provide an interpretation, not ruling on sovereignty, but rather what are the features and what is the map of the water that surrounds that, I think is hugely important. I believe that too can provide a way ahead for the disputes that our playing out in the region. I think it is important that the countries include the United States, [that they] look at this in a very calm and pragmatic way, to be able to cooperate in ways that allow us and others to share information so we have ground truths as to what is happening there, to be able to operate up freely in that area and the United States, are as you know, has conducted freedom of navigation operations. I believe those should continue.

I leave it to the circumstances and the leadership at that time to determine whether that should be the innocent passage or not innocent passage; but should be part of a menu of activities that we pursue and others pursue that demonstrate the freedom of the seas and the ability for countries who followed rules-based orders to operate in that important area.

I think it's also key that we conduct other types of operations and exercises, to include with the Chinese. There is no reason. Why you can't do humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, and environmental responses—all of these can be part of a constructive set of activities. And then also, to begin, to put in place viable means of knowing what is going on and we refer to that maritime domain awareness or air domain awareness. How can you share information so everyone has the accurate information that won't them lead to somebody's missteps that we started to talking about in the beginning.

**Haenle:** You lay out a more comprehensive approach than we hear discussed often, which I think is important. I want to ask specifically on the freedom of navigation issue, because this has been the issue that you see in the headline which just always helpful in terms of working through tension, but nevertheless there has been what appears to be some reluctance up until recently by the administration to pursue freedom of navigation operations very regularly. What do you make of that reluctance, and how do you do the things that you laid out in a way that actually contribute to decrease tension and not actually creating, provoking greater tension?

**Roughead:** Well, Paul, you've been in the government as well, at a fairly significant level, and you realize that a decision for particular action has many factors that fall into it—schedules and advance that are coming up, other areas and issues that countries may be working on, all that are the calculations. I won't get into what has been in people's minds, but I think one of the things that we really need to do as we conduct freedom of navigation operations, which in my view are not deterrence operations. Deterrence operations are completely different from freedom of navigation. Freedom of navigation is there to demonstrate the freedom of the seas and the basis of the law in those activities.

I think one of the things that we need to do is to not be announcing or indicating what we are about. That only begins to cause a counter-reaction before something is happening. I also believe it's important that as activities are taken whether they're freedom of navigation or the

broader set of activities, that we don't crow about them, that we don't make a big deal about them, because countries will know what we are doing. But once it gets into a way of hyper ventilating a public space, then it causes others to have to react. So I think continue the activities, but tone down the noise. But it's also important that when we do these, we do that without forewarning, because that kind of removes the purpose.

**Haenle:** Sound advice. Another area that you had very sound advice in the past is on the military-to-military relationship. I remember specifically you and I talking over lunch in the Pentagon, in fact, about looking at how our navies and militaries interact in the Asia Pacific and seeing the difference in how our navies and militaries interact in other parts of the world. I remember you making the point that we are actually doing the kind of piracy operations, other type of things in some way are easier when you're doing them outside of the region and is there a way in which you can use as a template, the kind of we are doing or begin to do things beyond the Asia Pacific and do them later within the Asian Pacific? And I also want to talk to you about something, get your view on that, and then secondly, on the mil-to-mil, you mentioned that humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Is there more we can do beyond that? Can we be more ambitious and move beyond the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief? I've heard you talk about this before, and I want to get your reactions on that.

**Roughead:** I think one of the things, that, as you said we've talked about before, is very good cooperation, very good coordination, and the farther you are from the areas of disputes and competing claims, and historical animosity, [the easier it becomes]. I think in walking back into the region with the set of activities to do some more benign types of exercise and begin in areas that are not as sensitive, particularly around some of the islands in question, or some of the features that have been identified in the ruling by the court of the arbitration. I think it is possible to begin working with some of the other countries and what I could call more military type of activities. Even things are just exercises, but to do them multilaterally and I understand the subjectivities that go with that. But you could begin to put together some very basic military skill exercise that would allow a higher level of professional activity, but is not a major war fighting demonstration and to include China in that, to include other countries. Because I think it's important that we, the United States, have to keep in mind—that the countries in the region have a unique relationship with China, economically, geographically, and we need to begin to craft activities that allow them to interact more normally in the military sense and we can be part of that we can be a catalyst and we can be a participant.

**Haenle:** We often say that countries in the region, as far as I can tell, are not looking to choose side between the United States and China. They want to try and figure out a how to maintain a relationship with both and I think that's part of what you're saying. I would be remiss if I didn't ask you about North Korea. Just this week, they've conducted their fifth nuclear test. It was the largest test that they've conducted. They've done a lot of missile tests this year, and they did their first ever successful missile launch from a submarine, which, all of this combined, gives them enhanced capabilities and moves them closer, of course, to being able to put a nuclear warhead on a missile, and potentially [threaten] the United States. How do these enhance the capabilities? How do you see these, especially the submarine aspect, the ability to launch a missile from a submarine, how does this change the equation for us?

**Roughead:** Well, I think it changes [things] a couple of ways. One, the continuing nuclear testing is very problematic. It's an issue that I believe not just the United States and China need deal with, on a global basis, this is a significant, serious development, particularly given the nature of leadership and particularly the judgment that's been displayed by the leader in North Korea. So that's a higher level that's in play. But I think it also indicates that the potential for North Korea to threaten the region and eventually the United States has moved into a new domain, and we can talk about various defensive systems, but the advent of a submarine as a potential launching mechanism is significant. This is not a new threat, because if you go back a few years and you remember the sinking of the ... that was done by a submarine, and so we now have to become very serious about this. Make investments in anti-submarine warfare, maritime domain awareness and intelligence sharing, so that there can be a common intelligence picture of what may be moving, what maybe import. And so I think it's important that regionally we begin to pull this together. I think it also means that as these capabilities are developed and particularly the advent of a submarine as a launching platform, that there has to be a realistic view by countries in the region that we and our allies will put in place the defensive mechanisms that we need to assure the safety of our people, of our allies, and the region. Because the warning times now that are able to disarm from the operation of a submarine are significantly reduced. So there has to be an acceptance, an openness, and a realization, that modern affective front line of missile defense systems are going to be in play until the behavior or actions of North Korea change.

**Haenle:** Democratically elected leaders of countries cannot stand by and not do anything in the face of enhanced danger and enhanced threat and clearly, we've seen that play out with North Korea. You and I are in the margin of a high level U.S.-China dialogue and of course China, has objected to THAAD. You know my own view is that North Korea is actually taking advantage of some of the tension U.S.-China relationship over THAAD and has done this nuclear test because they know that there's this widening gap between the United States and China. But what you said is these kind of defensive measures, missile defense and other things, will have to continue as the threat grows more imminent. How then will do we deal with that in the context of U.S.-China relations?

**Roughead:** I think in this case are and I have read some of the reactions in the open press by the Chinese that there has to be a realization on the part of China that we must do that what we must do to defend our people, our homeland, and that of our allies and partners. I believe that if China, as you alluded to, were to change their view on THAAD, which is a non-threatening system to China—it is absolutely nonthreatening—if that view were to change, that potentially could change the calculus of what North Korea is doing, but this is a serious problem. Taking that capability to launch from a covert platform reduces reaction time and it would be imperative that we would have to react quickly.

**Haenle:** How high would North Korea be in the next administration's agenda?

**Roughead:** My sense it's going to be extraordinary high, as it should be, because of the threats that it poses regionally and globally with their nuclear weapon program and eventually delivery systems that can unsettle the region and beyond.

**Haenle:** Always a pleasure to talk to you sir and love to have you come back and visit us in China at some point soon. Thank you very much. That's it for this edition of the Carnegie–Tsinghua China in the world podcast I encourage you to explore our site to see more work of the Carnegie–Tsinghua center. Thanks for listening and be sure to tune in next time.