
S. China Sea Dispute Resolution Unlikely in Near Term - Former White House Official

WASHINGTON, October 29 (Sputnik) - The dispute over the sovereignty of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea involving China and other Asian nations will not be resolved anytime soon, former White House Official Zack Cooper told Sputnik on Thursday. "I find it unlikely that China or other claimants will back down in the near term, so I think a resolution is unlikely," Cooper said. Claimants of the islands include Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and the Philippines. Over the past several months, China has been constructing artificial islands on top of the coral reef habitats of the more than 750 Spratly Islands and reefs. Beijing claims sovereignty over the land and the 12 nautical mile zone surrounding the islands. The United States has warned that it does not recognize the Chinese claims of sovereignty over the man-made islands, and has repeatedly raised concerns over Beijing's activities in the region. "Several of those features were low-tide elevations, meaning that they do not merit a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles," Cooper said. "As a result, the United States is simply sailing in international waters as is permitted of all states under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea." However, Cooper warned of a possible negative outcome if the issue between the United States and China is not resolved. "There is a chance of conflict that has been created by China's activities in disputed waters and airspace," Cooper said. On Tuesday, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said the US Navy sent a destroyer ship within 12 miles of the disputed islands, and plans to carry out similar operations in the coming months. The USS Lassen reportedly passed the Subi and Mischief reefs as part of a patrol lasting several hours, according to media reports. The Chinese Foreign Ministry claimed that the incident was illegal and a violation of China's sovereignty. Zack Cooper is a former White House Assistant to the Deputy National Security Adviser for Combatting Terrorism Juan Zarate.