

China-Japan: Military Moves around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands

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China-Japan: Senkaku showdown taxing forces – Coast guard, SDF in game of chicken with China intruders

The past few months have put the Japan Coast Guard and Air Self-Defense Force to the test, as they defend the nation's territorial waters and airspace around the Senkaku islets in the East China Sea, a flash point for potential military clashes with China.

China continues to send ships around the Japan-controlled islets, which are also claimed by Taiwan. While both the coast guard and Self-Defense Forces plan to significantly beef up their presence around the uninhabited islets, this also increases the chances of unintended conflict, experts say.

"The situation has started to be like playing chicken. The Chinese are waiting for the Japanese side to give up," said Tetsuo Kotani, a fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs, a nonprofit think tank affiliated with the Foreign Ministry.

Masayuki Masuda, a senior fellow at the National Institute for Defense Studies, said Japan's patrol and defense capabilities are strong enough to repel China's threat for now.

However, over the long term, it will become increasingly difficult to keep Chinese ships away from the islets, considering Beijing's soaring defense budget, he said.

Five Chinese government organizations - dubbed the "Five Dragons" - operate patrol ships that can be sent to the Senkakus, including the China Coast Guard, the Land and Resources Ministry and the fisheries bureau under the Agriculture Ministry.

The Five Dragons - not counting the Chinese navy- own about 47 1,000-ton ships, while the Japan Coast Guard has 51 of comparable size. China is expected to add another 20 such vessels or more by the end of 2015, according to Masuda.

"In two or three years' time, the number of Chinese government ships (of that size) will exceed 70. If China starts sending more ships to (the Senkakus), we can easily imagine a situation where the coast

guard won't be able to handle them," Masuda told *The Japan Times*.

Chinese ships have intruded into Japan's territorial waters many times since September, when Tokyo effectively nationalized the five-islet chain north of Taiwan by purchasing three from their Saitama titleholder.

The same is true for the skies. Okinawa-based ASDF fighter jets scrambled a record 160 times in the April-December period around the Senkakus, known as Diaoyu in China, as aircraft, mainly of the Chinese government, made repeated intrusions into Japan's air defense identification zone.

More alarmingly, on Dec. 13 a Chinese government aircraft approached within 20 km of the Senkaku airspace, the closest incursion ever, according to the Defense Ministry, which, along with its predecessor have been keeping records on such incidents since 1958.

China upped the ante last month when one of its frigates locked its weapons-guiding radar onto a Maritime Self-Defense Force helicopter flying over the East China Sea. Another Chinese frigate later did likewise with an MSDF destroyer on the high seas near the Senkakus.

Amid the tension, the coast guard and ASDF have mobilized ships and aircraft from distant bases to temporarily bolster patrols and defenses around the islets.

There are plans to make these temporary measures more permanent.

The coast guard is poised to form a special unit to patrol the Senkakus.

This unit will have 12 new 1,000-ton patrol boats and one helicopter by the end of fiscal 2015, procured through a ¥19.8 billion supplementary budget approved last October. The unit's 600 members will be tasked solely with patrolling the Senkakus.

The coast guard also plans to upgrade some of its 51 ships - including increasing their maximum speed - to better cope with intruders.

"This is one of the biggest supplementary budgets, and we really need to prepare for the situation near the Senkakus," one coast guard official said.

Currently, the coast guard's 11th Regional Headquarters, which covers the Senkakus, only has seven 1,000-ton patrol boats, keeping watch on several Chinese vessels in constant proximity.

In response, to bolster security around Okinawa and the Senkakus, the government has, for the first time in 11 years, increased defense spending for the next fiscal year starting April 1 to ¥4.754 trillion, up ¥40 billion from the previous year.

The government has earmarked ¥13.5 billion to operate ASDF E-767 and E-2C airborne warning and control system aircraft. Six F-15 interceptors will also be upgraded.

With their advanced radar systems, the E-767 and E-2C AWACS planes greatly enhance the capability of the SDF units, providing a significant advantage over the Chinese navy and air force, which do not have similar systems.

Currently, the ASDF operates E-2C propeller-driven planes out of Misawa, Aomori Prefecture, and E-767 jets out of Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture.

The Defense Ministry is meanwhile mulling the possible stationing of ASDF fighter wings in

Okinawa's Sakishima Islands, which include Miyako Island.

Currently, F-15s scramble from the Naha base on Okinawa Island, 420 km from the Senkakus. A Sakishima deployment would halve the distance.

However, given the strong antimilitary sentiment among Okinawa residents, it's uncertain if the ASDF can find any place to base its interceptors there.

The F-15s in Naha are on 24-hour alert, ready to take off within minutes if radar detects unknown aircraft approaching Japanese airspace.

Faced with an unknown intruder, the first step is a verbal warning and maneuvering to get an intruder to change course. If the plane enters Japan's territorial airspace regardless of the warnings, ASDF fighters are theoretically allowed to fire warning shots.

However, warning shots have only been fired one time, in 1987 when a Soviet plane intruded. In fact, 36 unauthorized foreign aircraft have entered Japan's territorial airspace since 1967.

Giving the green light to the ASDF to take such tough action against Chinese aircraft would involve great risk.

If China sends a fleet of privately owned trawlers to the Senkakus, it would also prove extremely difficult to stop anyone from landing on the islets, as some Chinese activists from Hong Kong did last August.

Masuda of the NIDS stressed the importance of setting up a military hotline with China to avoid armed conflict.

"(Japan needs to consider) ways to secure continued communication between personnel of both countries. If we can build up such interaction, then a sense of security between the two nations" may slowly grow, Masuda said.

At the same time, it's crucial for Japan to bolster the Japan-U.S. alliance and enhance interoperability to keep China in check, he said.

Mizuho Aoki and Ayako Mie, *Japan Times* Staff Writers, Feb 22, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/22/national/senkaku-showdown-taxing-forces/#.USmX3jfA55s>

Japan not to disclose evidence over China radar incident

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Japanese government has decided not to disclose evidence related to China's recent locking of weapons-targeting radar on a Japanese warship as doing so would be tipping its hand on intelligence operations, government sources said Monday.

It had considered disclosure after Beijing denied Japan's accusations that a Chinese frigate directed the radar toward a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer on Jan. 30 near a group of islands in the East China Sea at the heart of a bilateral dispute.

Disclosure has “great risk in terms of defense as it would mean that Chinese military authorities would be looking at the MSDF’s secrets concerning information-gathering operations,” a senior Defense Ministry official said.

A government source also said that disclosure is “difficult” as the evidence data touch on the “subtleties” of Japanese security.

They added that the United States’ expression of support for Tokyo’s allegation has also prompted Japan not to disclose the evidence.

Japan will not officially announce it will not disclose the evidence, however, in a bid to maintain pressure on China, the sources said.

Japan has frequency analysis data of radio waves the Japanese warship received from the Chinese ship, photos and footage at the time of the occurrence, according to a Defense Ministry source.

China’s Foreign Ministry said Japan is “spreading false information” by alleging weapons-targeting radar was directed toward the Japanese vessel. It has argued the Chinese frigate used monitoring radar and not fire-control radar.

Japan also said a Chinese naval ship was suspected of having directed fire-control radar at a Maritime Self-Defense Force helicopter on Jan. 19 in the East China Sea.

For the time being, Japan will closely monitor Chinese vessels and military jets near the islands, while at the same time continue to call on Beijing to soon start operation of a bilateral maritime safety mechanism to avoid an accidental clash.

Some political sources said Japan’s decision not to reveal the evidence may cause the international community to view Japan as stumbling to produce effective arguments against China’s denial.

Kyodo News, February 19, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130219p2g00m0dm035000c.html>

Abe should calm down, correctly calculate China’s determination

BEIJING, Feb. 23 (Xinhua) — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe boasted on Friday that he has always handled the Diaoyu Islands issue “in a calm manner.”

When meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, Abe promised to “continue to do so.” In a later speech to a top Washington think tank, the Japanese premier also claimed that he had “absolutely no intention to climb up the escalation ladder.”

But his deeds could hardly match his words.

It is unfair to say that Abe was personally responsible for the row with China. But it is fair to say that Abe did not seize the opportunity of his re-election as Japanese prime minister to cool down the territorial dispute and to improve relations with China. < From the Chinese perspective, Abe has been active in mustering foreign support, particularly U.S. support, on the Diaoyu Islands issue.

What he did ran counter to his claim that he would like to see improved Japan-China relations.

Demonstrating his strong stance on the Diaoyu Islands dispute in his address to the think tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Abe warned that China should not "make any miscalculation or underestimate" the firmness of his resolve.

However, it seems that it is Abe himself who has miscalculated and underestimated China's determination to protect its territorial integrity.

Chinese people long for peace, but will not be intimidated by the threat of force and tough rhetoric when it comes to the country's core interests.

With China and Japan being powerful players in the region and the world's second and third largest economies respectively, it is not hard to see that the standoff will bring harm instead of benefits to their development and to peace and prosperity of the region.

Japanese politicians are advised to calm down and seek pragmatic ways to resolve the dispute. They probably could begin by admitting the existence of such a dispute with China over the islands, which Japan stole from China during the 1890s.

The United States, as the most influential country in the world, should not be hijacked by Tokyo's right-leaning politicians. Instead, Washington must be vigilant against the rightist tendency in Tokyo and try to contain it.

As the two largest economies in the world, the United States and China should work together to safeguard the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and contribute to global development.

Xinhua, February 23, 2013

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2013-02/23/c_132187642.htm

Defense minister tones down suggestion of releasing data on China's radar lock

Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera has toned down his earlier suggestion that the government will consider releasing evidence that a Chinese warship locked its pre-firing radar on a Japanese destroyer in the East China Sea on Jan. 30.

"China will probably not admit to the incident. If not, disclosure will not be in Japan's interest," Onodera told a Fuji TV program on Feb. 10.

While emphasizing that Japan has clear evidence of China's provocative act, Onodera expressed concerns that disclosure would compromise Japan's intelligence.

"We have clear data," he said. "But we're afraid that releasing it would reveal the capabilities of the Defense Ministry, and the type and location of its actions."

The previous day, Onodera had said that the government would consider releasing some evidence. However, he later said bilateral ties must be considered.

"The word 'consider' has various meanings. I meant that the government will consider the matter while watching the development in the bilateral ties," he said.

The defense minister indicated that the government should place priority on efforts to resume dialogue with China to prevent a recurrence, such as establishment of a hot line linking Japanese and Chinese defense officials.

"Creation of a mechanism to prevent clashes in the sea, which we've discussed for some time, is the most constructive and important issue," Onodera said.

The government has been sharply divided over whether Japan should release evidence of China's provocative act.

"We should demonstrate Japan's justification (for its claims)," commented one government official in favor of disclosing evidence.

However, another official cautioned, "Disclosure would only lead to a 'he said, she said' battle."

Mainichi Shimbun, February 11, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130211p2a00m0na009000c.html>

U.S. backs Japan's claim on radar incident in East China Sea

WASHINGTON (Kyodo) — The United States on Monday expressed support for Tokyo's allegation that a Chinese naval vessel used weapons-targeting radar to lock on to a Japanese destroyer in the East China Sea last month.

"With regard to the incident, we were briefed by our Japanese allies on the incident, and we've satisfied ourselves that it does appear to have happened," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told a daily briefing.

Her remarks came after China denied the Japanese allegation, with its official Xinhua News Agency quoting a statement by the Chinese Defense Ministry which said Tokyo has "repeatedly spread false accusations."

The issue has emerged as a new source of friction between the two countries which have been involved in a bitter dispute over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

Nuland indicated that Secretary of State John Kerry shares the view with his predecessor Hillary Clinton that Washington is against any unilateral action to undermine the Japanese administration of the uninhabited islets.

"We urge all parties to avoid actions that could raise tensions or result in miscalculation that would undermine peace, security, and economic growth of this vital part of the world," she added.

Kyodo Press, February 12, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130212p2g00m0dm014000c.html>

Japanese GSDF troops board U.S. Ospreys for 1st time in drill

CAMP PENDLETON, California (Kyodo) — Troops of Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force boarded the U.S. Marines' MV-22 Osprey aircraft for training for the first time Wednesday.

In a Japan-U.S. joint drill open to the media in California, about 50 members of the GSDF Western Army Infantry Regiment for defending Japan's remote islands boarded the four tilt-rotor aircraft to recapture a remote island occupied by an enemy.

The drill between Japan's Self-Defense Forces and the U.S. military was designed to demonstrate their close cooperation amid a Japan-China row over the sovereignty of a group of islets in the East China Sea.

The drill also served to emphasize the safety and usability of the Ospreys, which have a record of fatal crashes. Twelve of the transport aircraft were deployed last October to a U.S. Marine base in southwestern Japan's Okinawa Prefecture, triggering local protests.

The GSDF said it used the Ospreys because no GSDF helicopters were mobilized in the drill.

Japan's Defense Ministry has earmarked 8 million yen in the draft fiscal 2013 budget to study Osprey operations, with an eye to introducing the aircraft for SDF troops in the future.

Kyodo News, February 14, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130214p2g00m0dm071000c.html>
