The Sino-Japanese Geopolitical
Confrontation in the East China Sea-I

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Since the Democratic Party of Japan (DJP) took power in Nagata-cho, the heartland of Japanese politics, on 16 September 2009, some expected that the climate of the Sino-Japanese geopolitical confrontation over the East China Sea would change. In sideline talks at the Forum for East Asia-Latin American Cooperation in Tokyo, however, Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya stated, “If China violates the agreement, Japan will have to take certain action.” Okada referred to an agreement over a disputed gas exploration project, signed by the Chinese President Hu Jintao and the Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo in 2008. Even though Hatoyama Yukio’s foreign policy debut indicates some significant changes in Sino-Japanese relations, the issue of the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea seems unlikely to change. Will Tokyo and Beijing change their positions since Japan with the new Nagata-cho regime in place? Can DPJ make any compromises with its Chinese counterpart in order to resolve the issue of the territorial space in the East China Sea? This paper will examine the developments of Sino-Japanese territorial disputes over the Diaoyu Islands. However, because of space limitation, this paper will not discuss the conflict over the Chinese trawler conflict which occurred in September 2009. The trawler incident will be explored on another occasion. This paper focuses on the Sino-Japanese territorial disputes in the East China Sea, paying close attention to Sino-Japanese relations since 1993, especially movements involving the East China Sea during the 21st century. Furthermore, it explores why and how Sino-Japanese relations have reached a nadir since WWII during the Koizumi Junichiro Administration (2001-2006) by analyzing Japanese neo-nationalism, geopolitics, and the intricacy of their relationships. The ultimate purpose is to show that war might be inevitable between Japan and China if both governments mismanage their diplomatic relations regarding these territorial disputes. The complexity of the territorial disputes involves many peripheral issues, such as the Yasukuni Shrine visits, junior high school history textbook screening, abandoning chemical weapons in China, and war reparations. It is impossible to
settle the ongoing territory disputes without addressing the peripheral issues, especially that of the Yasukuni Shrine visits, which resulted in the hottest discussions during the last Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) trio administrations (Abe Shinzo, Fukuda Yasuo, and Aso Taro) after Koizumi left his office. If these issues are not addressed appropriately, confrontation between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea may become unavoidable.
Introduction

Since Hatoyama Yukio took office in the fall of 2009, relations with China have been improving. As Hatoyama’s article published in the Japanese monthly journal Voice in September indicates, “Due to the historical and cultural conflicts existing between the countries of the region, in addition to their conflicting national security interests, we must recognize that there are numerous difficult political issues. The problems of increased militarization and territorial disputes, which stand in the way of regional integration, cannot be resolved by bilateral negotiations between, for example, Japan and South Korea or Japan and China.” Hatoyama refers to the territorial conflicts among Japan’s neighbors and he has proposed the “fraternity foreign policy,” in particular the creation of the “East Asian Community,” in order to resolve these disputes. He, therefore, has discussed his idea of “the fraternity of sea” on many occasions. Yet, the response from Beijing is relatively slow and unclear. China appears to have lingering concerns over other loggerheads issues, such as the Yasukuni Shrine visits by the Japanese Prime Ministers, honoring the nation’s war dead (including those who China may see as war criminals) from WWII.

A Geopolitical Overview of the Sino-Japanese Territorial Disputes

The Diaoyu Islands are located in the East China Sea, about 120 miles northeast of Taiwan, approximately 180 miles west of Okinawa, Japan, and approximately 250 miles east of China’s mainland. The islands are a set of eight uninhabited islets including three barren rocks, which are claimed by China (People’s Republic of China or PRC), Taiwan (Republic of China or ROC), and Japan. Currently, Japan controls these islands administratively, which are “officially” under the jurisdiction of Ishigaki city of Okinawa prefecture. Until 1968, the Diaoyu Islands were essentially “worthless” islets for both China and Japan, and neither country appreciated the value of these islets. But in 1968, all this changed. As soon as the Committee for Coordination of Joint Prospecting for Mineral Resources in Asian Offshore Areas, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), reported substantial petroleum deposits under the area of the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, both Japan and China have claimed sovereignty of these islets which are estimated to contain 10-100 billion barrels of oil. To date, neither China nor Japan has actually drilled oil and gas in the disputed area. Nor has an international solution been possible since neither party is willing to submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
In the current debates, two competing views have emerged. China’s claim emphasizes the use of historical evidence, from the archives of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Japan’s claim is based upon the “discovery” theory in international law, arguing that the Japanese “rediscovered” these islands in 1884, as *terra nullius* (i.e., unadministered territory or no-man’s-land). In reality, the Diaoyu Islands have become “hostage” to the disputed parties: Japan and China since the 1970s.

**China’s Claim**

The majority of the Chinese claim is supported by the Chinese scholars in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese, as well as, a few well-known Japanese historians, such as Inoue Kyoshi and Murata Tadayoshi. The pro-China irredentist claim traces the Diaoyu Islands as far back as the Ming military defense system in the 14th century, when the Chinese discovered and named the islands as early as 1403. During the over 500-year-old relationship between the Kingdom of C: Liuqiu/J: Ryukyu (which was an independent country until Japan annexed it in 1879), and the Ming and subsequently Qing dynasties, both the Chinese and the Liuquans recorded the name of the Diaoyu Islands in historical documents. Important to this claim is the fact that, the Chinese envoys recorded the name of the Diaoyu Islands in *Shilu*, or *Shi Liuqiu Lu* [The Record of the Mission to the Liuqiu Kingdom], which contained travel records of the Liuqiu Kingdom, maps, and scholarly works.

Under the 500-year *Pax Sinica*, there were no territorial disputes involving the Diaoyu Islands between China as the suzerain and the Liuqiu Kingdom as a tributary nation. All evidence, including writings by Liuqian scholars, supports the pro-China irredentist claim of the Diaoyu Islands. In addition, China’s supporters in this matter claim that the Japanese used Chinese names for the islands as late as 1996, and the Japanese name of the Diaoyu Islands, which is copied from a British navy document, was only recorded into an official historical archive as early as the 1950s. Therefore, it was not until the 20th century that the Japanese government recognized its name and acknowledged the existence of these islands. In 1895, the Japanese “stole” these disputed islands as a consequence of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, under which China ceded Taiwan, along with Pescadores and their surrounding islets, to Japan after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894.

The wartime Cairo Declaration stipulated that Japan must return all Chinese territories that it had stolen during the war. And, pursuant to the Potsdam Proclamation, which Japan accepted upon its surrender, Japan agreed to execute the terms of the Cairo Declaration. Based
upon these requirements set forth in the Potsdam Proclamation, the pro-China irredentists claim that Japan should have returned the Diaoyu Islands to Chinese rule, and that sovereignty of the disputed islands should have reverted to China. According to the pro-China irredentists, the San Francisco Peace Treaty (SFPT), signed in 1951, did not change ownership of the islands simply because neither Taiwan nor mainland China was invited to the conference, and the PRC has consistently rejected the treaty. Moreover, the pro-China irredentists claim the U.S. return of Okinawa to Japan under a 1971 reversion treaty did not vitiate China’s claim to the Diaoyu Islands, since the US government recognized that the treaty did not prejudice any particular claims to the disputed islands.

Japan’s Claim

The majority of the Japanese scholars who are right-wing politically and Japanese nationalists, support Japan’s claim including Okuda Toshio, who had an irreverent debate with Inoue Kyoshi in the 1970s when the issue of the Diaoyu Islands became a sizzling topic in Japan and Taiwan. The pro-Japan irredentist claim points to 1884 when Koga Tatsushiro, a native businessman from Fukuoka prefecture, “rediscovered” both Diaoyu Island and Huangwei Island, two of eight islets of the Diaoyu Islands group. Consequently, Koga started a new business of collecting tortoise shells and other kinds of shells, guano, and feathers of albatross until WWII after the United States embargoed the petroleum export to Japan. According to the Okinawan prefecture reports there was no indication that the disputed islands, which were uninhabited for years, belonged to the Chinese. After the Japanese won the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, the Japanese government adopted a cabinet-level decision that placed the Diaoyu Islands under the jurisdiction of the Okinawa prefecture by erecting a territorial landmark. But, strictly speaking, as Blanchard notes, “the islands were not transferred to Japan pursuant to the Treaty of Shimonoseki.” After World War II, the United States occupied the Okinawa Islands or former Liuqiu Kingdom, until 1972. Although Washington remained neutral on the status of Diaoyu Islands, Japan considers it as part of the Japanese territory known as Nansei Shoto [Nansei Islands].

During the post-WWII period, the pro-Japan irredentist view claimed that the Diaoyu Islands were not included in the territory that Japan renounced under the SFPT with allied nations. Rather these disputed islets were controlled by the United States, which occasionally used the islets for shooting practice. In accordance with the Agreement signed on 17 June 1971 between Japan and the United States of America concerning the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito
Islands, the Diaoyu Islands being part of the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa) were explicitly returned to Japan, so claims the pro-Japan irredentist group.

The Disputed Islands as “Hostages”

The Cold War geopolitics changed the geopolitical landscape of the East Asian region. Because of the Sino-Soviet split, the PRC ended its alliance with the Soviet Union in 1960. As tensions between the two communist nations reached its peak in 1970, the United States capitalized on the conflict to shift the balance of power in favor of the West. In what would later be known as playing the “China Card,” President Richard Nixon purposefully improved relations with PRC to gain a geopolitical advantage over the Soviet Union. China successfully entered the United Nations in October 1971; and President Nixon became the first American President to visit “Red” China in February 1972. The “China Card” utilized by the United States shocked Japan. In response, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei (1918-1993) rushed to establish diplomatic relations with PRC, despite the opposition by some pro-Taiwan and nationalist politicians in his ruling LDP. Chinese Primer Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) and Tanaka signed a Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of People’s Republic of China on 29 September 1972 (i.e., the first key bilateral document). By agreement, the communiqué did not address or even mention the disputed territorial issue.

Since ECAFE disclosed its survey results with regard to the East China Sea in 1968, the clash between China and Japan regarding the disputed islands has deepened. In October 1970, some overseas Chinese, in particular Chinese students in North America, along with people in Taiwan and Hong Kong, joined hands to form the Bao Diaoyutai Yundong, or the “Protect the Diaoyutai Movement,” headquartered at the University of Chicago in the United States. During this period, mainland China was relatively quiet on the question as a result of Beijing’s international isolation and apparent unwillingness to let the dispute stand in the way of normalization of relations with Japan, which took place in the summer of 1972.

On 12 August 1978, Japan and China signed the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship (i.e., the second key bilateral document), despite the opposition by some LDP members. Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) made a special trip to Tokyo to celebrate the treaty with Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo (1905-1995). Both governments, however, failed to solve the disputed islands issue. During the press conference in Tokyo, Deng Xiaoping publicly stated that the Diaoyu Islands issue should be left to posterity when a Japanese reporter inquired about the sovereignty issue of these islets. Furthermore, neither Japan nor China was willing
to work out a solution to the disputed islands when Jiang Zemin visited Japan for his first state visit as President of China in November 1998. Because Jiang pressed about the historical issue of Sino-Japanese relations during the banquet with the Japanese emperor, this led the rise of a neo-nationalists voice not to compromise with China for any issues. The third key bilateral document – Japan-PRC Joint Declaration on Building a Partnership of Friendship and Cooperation for Peace and Development – resulting from this visit, was signed by Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Obuchi Kezo (1937-2000). This document also failed to address the issue of the Diaoyu Islands. As a result, since 1972, each of the three important documents signed by Japan and China, have shelved the Diaoyu Islands dispute.

While both Tokyo and Beijing have been willing to postpone the final settlement of the territorial boundaries in the East China Sea, activists including private individuals in both countries have been eager to fight for the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands. In 1996, even though mainland Chinese focused on the less controversial of the territorial issues such as the Diaoyu Islands, overseas Chinese, in particular in Taiwan and Hong Kong, once again joined forces to provide momentum to the Bao Diaoyutai Yundong (Protect Diaoyutai Movement) after right-winged Japanese “repaired” a lighthouse on the disputed islands. The movement spread all over the world, including a 20,000 people march in San Francisco. This was the so-called Di'er Bao Diaoyutai Yundong (The Second Protect Diaoyutai Movement). A climactic event was the sending of a ship of activists from Hong Kong to Diaoyutai, in an attempt to “assert” Chinese sovereignty, but it was marred by the drowning of one activist, 45-year-old David Chan, who fell into the sea while trying to climb up onto one of the disputed islets, in a clash with the Japanese Marine Self-Defense Force. Yet, during this Second Protect Diaoyutai Movement, the Japanese and Chinese governments, for their parts, both tried to downplay the territorial issues in order to avoid escalation of Sino-Japanese tensions.

Sino-Japanese Collision in the 21st Century

At the turn of the new century, the territorial disputes in the East China Sea increasingly bedeviled Sino-Japanese relations. In October 2002, for example, once again the Japanese government registered, and flaunted, its rental of three of the five disputed islands (C: Diaoyu Dao; C: Beixiao Dao; C: Nanxiao Dao), for the period of April 1, 2002 through March 31, 2003, under a 22 million Japanese yen contract. In fact, the Japanese government considers itself the owner of one island in the group, the Chiwei islet, while the others are privately held. This move by the Japanese government sparked protests from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Eventually,
Chinese resentment against Japan, resulting in the so-called “anti-Japanese movement,” erupted inside China during the Asian Football Cup in 2004. Massive attacks by Chinese individuals throwing stones and splattering color ink on the Japanese consulates in Shanghai and Beijing, as well as other large cities, were reported in April 2005. By the end of 2005, the Diaoyu Islands had turned into a heated issue of contention between Tokyo and Beijing.

**Shanghai Consulate Agent’s Suicide**

Probably the worst event in the history of Sino-Japanese relations was the suicide of a Japanese consular official at the consulate-general in Shanghai as Sino-Japanese relations reached the nadir point since WWII. The timing was bad when exposed in Japan. The 46-year-old Japanese envoy was in charge of communications technology for official messages sent between the Shanghai consulate-general and the home government in Tokyo and was responsible for encrypting and decrypting coded confidential communications. According to the *Shukan Bunshun* [Bunshun Weekly] which broke the news, the 46-year-old Japanese consular official killed himself in the Shanghai Japanese consulate-general, leaving five suicide notes for his wife, his colleagues, and his boss, Sugimoto Nobuyuki, the consul-general in Shanghai.\(^{27}\) Based on the official investigation report, the Japanese envoy in June 2003 received threats concerning his “personal relationship” with a Chinese karaoke hostess who had worked as a prostitute. The hostess provided the envoy’s name to what was believed to be Chinese intelligence, after being threatened with labor camp and worse punishment if she did not comply. In the beginning, the hostess arranged for him a meeting with two men, who asked general questions, such as the names of officials in the Japanese consulate-general and flight numbers of airlines that carried confidential documents from Shanghai to Tokyo. Gradually, however, the Chinese demanded that the envoy provide classified information from the consulate-general, including information regarding Japan’s policy on the Diaoyu Islands dispute.\(^{28}\)

Threats against the envoy escalated in 2004, eventually leading to his suicide. The consular agent had requested to be transferred to Japan’s Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk consulate in Russia, only to anger the Chinese intelligence officials, who threatened not only to punish the hostess, but also to repatriate the envoy himself. In his suicide note to his boss, the envoy noted, “If I were to do more, I would have to sell out Japan. I cannot sell my own country by any means.”\(^{29}\) After thorough investigation of the suicide, the Japanese government confirmed the involvement of Chinese intelligence. The Japanese government demanded an explanation from the Chinese government but was angered by China’s refusal to cooperate, in violation of
the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. The Chinese government repeatedly denied that China’s intelligent agency was involved, claiming that the Japanese envoy’s suicide was related to job stress. By the end of 2005, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a statement on its web site, to refute the Japanese government complaint. The Chinese media began to run a long story to support the Chinese claim. To be sure, the reciprocal accusations involved in the suicide case are certain to add to the tension of Sino-Japanese relations.

The Diaoyu Islands dispute that ultimately led to the Japanese consular official’s suicide signifies the complications of the territorial issue. One week before the suicide story broke, tension had already skyrocketed between Japan and China, as comments made by high officials of the Japanese Foreign Ministry regarding Chinese military power inflamed the ongoing dispute over oil/gas fields in the East China Sea between the two countries in what is known as the Chunxiao (J: Shirakaba) controversy in the East China Sea.

**The Chunxiao Oil/Gas Field Agreement**

On 28 May 2004, a bombshell was dropped by the Japanese media on the already shaky Sino-Japanese relations. The media reported that, starting in August 2003, China began to develop a natural gas field exploration project in the East China Sea – the Chunxiao oil/gas fields. The Japanese government worried that this drilling would enable the Chinese to siphon off the 1.6 trillion cubic feet of precious natural gas buried under their side of the disputed islands – the Diaoyu Islands. The Chunxiao oil/gas fields grew to be another issue of contention for both Tokyo and Beijing. Japan has considered that China has used the Chunxiao islet, which is located outside of Japan’s unilaterally-drawn center line in the East China Sea, to “suck out Japan’s natural resources with a straw.”

Starting in May 2004, Japan and China held several rounds of bureau chief-level talks and occasional informal negotiations. Basically, the Chinese side claimed sovereignty over the Chunxiao oil/gas field, which is located immediately outside the median line or the economic exclusive zone (EEZ) claimed by Japan, and has rejected all Japanese requests to hand over any data from Chunxiao or to suspend drilling. Even though the Chinese side made a proposal for joint development of the disputed territory in the eastern section of the East China Sea, the Japanese side insisted on its sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands and refused the joint development proposal. On other hand, Japan made a proposal to jointly develop four oil fields: Chunxiao, Duanqiao (J: Kusunoki), Tianwaitian (J: Kashi), and Longqing (J: Asunaro), which are only tens of kilometers northeast of the Diaoyu Islands. It was rejected by the Chinese side.
As the Japanese government argued, one of the four oil fields crosses the median line claimed by Japan, and the remaining three are completely inside Japan’s EEZ. Yet, Beijing has refused to accept the median line set by Tokyo. Instead China has argued that its EEZ extends to the far reaches of its continental shelf, which ends west of the Okinawa Prefecture. Hence, the Japanese and Chinese sovereignty claims overlap over a large section of maritime territory in the East China Sea.

During the 4th round talks, Beijing made a new proposal on joint development of the Longjing field, but Tokyo did not agree to the proposal. Furthermore, the Japanese government in April 2005 granted the rights to Teikoku Oil Co. for exploratory oil drilling opposite to where the Chunxiao oil/gas field is located.

**Sino-Japanese Consultation Concerning the East China Sea, Bureau Chief Level**

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A major breakthrough occurred when the two superpowers in the East Asian region finally reached a final agreement after the Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Japan in May 2008 after holding the ministerial meeting in Beijing on 1 December 2007, Fukuda visited China during 27-30 December 2007, and the opening of the Sino-Japanese strategic dialogue meeting (Beijing) on 22-23 February 2008. During the summit meeting in Tokyo, both Fukuda Yasuo
and Hu Jintao emphasized that the East China Sea should be a “Sea of Peace, Cooperation and Friendship.” On 18 June 2008, both Tokyo and Beijing simultaneously announced the pact of the Chunxiao oil/gas field. Two major developments are contained in this accord: to jointly explore 2,700-square-kilometer area south of the Longjing oil field, which stretches across the Japanese-claimed median line, and to allow Japanese corporations to invest in the Chunxiao oil/gas field under Chinese law.37 A Chinese scholar has claimed this Sino-Japanese agreement utilizes the Chinese compromising-model similar to the solution of one of the Sino-Vietnam territorial disputes in the South China Sea.38 Unfortunately, there is no new development since the announcement was made in 2008, according to the Japanese media, because the Chinese side is reluctantly processing the deal due to various reasons in Beijing. By 2009, China completed their drilling facilities in the Chunxiao oil/gas field, according to the Japanese media.39

The Last Attempts by the LDP

After Koizumi left his office, political leaders of the LDP ruling party in Japan had continued to seek sovereignty of the disputed islands in the East China Sea. Meanwhile, China is ready to build its first aircraft carrier, making Japan’s neo-nationalists nervous.

Daily Patrols

As the right-wing Aso Taro took office after Fukuda resigned as prime minister, the Prime Minister expressed his hard-line attitude toward the Diaoyu Islands with China in the East China Sea. In February 2009, Japan dispatched permanent patrol vessels to these island waters increasing “periodic patrols” to “daily patrols,” according to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan reacted by placing oceanographic survey vessels near the disputed islets on 8 December 2008,40 and these vessels conducted their “scientific research” within the area of the Diaoyu Islands in East China Sea. Since 2008, two Japan Coast Guard patrol boats, Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF) aircraft and a Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) destroyer have been assigned to patrol waters around the disputed Diaoyu Islands daily.

February Fiasco

As soon as the 44th president of the United States took his office on 20 January 2009, Aso Taro tried to bring Barack Obama into the messy geopolitical confrontation between Japan Beijing in the East China Sea. Both the media and the government in Japan have pushed for the involvement of the United States. The following details occurred during the subsequent February fiasco in Japanese politics. Aso Taro believed that the United States would be required to help Japan under a bilateral security treaty if a foreign country invaded the Diaoyu Islands in the
East China Sea based upon his meeting with Obama in the White House. Aso’s comments were made at a meeting on foreign affairs at the House of Representatives Budget Committee when Maehara Seiji of the DPJ asked a question regarding Sino-Japanese territorial disputes. This issue became the news in both the Japanese and Chinese media, as well as, in the international media. The facts of the time line of the events include the following:

1. On February 23: Prime Minister Aso Taro left at night from Tokyo for Washington D.C. It took 26-hours (a round-trip) to go to the USA (Japan Times).
2. On February 23: Prime Minister Aso Taro arrived at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland at night (Japan Times).
3. On February 24: There was a 60-minute talk between Prime Minister Aso Taro and President Barack Obama. Aso Taro was the first foreign dignitary to visit the White House since the 44th president took office (Japan Times).
4. On February 24: North Korea announced that it would launch a satellite into space soon (Jiji News).
5. On February 25: Aso returned to Japan claiming that the meeting with President Obama was a “great success” regarding the Japan’s security. That night, Aso summoned all members of his cabinet to report on his visit to the White House; it is unusual to summon all cabinet members in the middle of the night (Nippon News Network).
7. On February 26: The Chinese Foreign Minister spokesman Ma Zhaoxu stated that the Diaoyu and adjacent islets had been Chinese territories since ancient times.
   The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States, as a bilateral arrangement, should not undermine the interest of any third party including China. Any attempt to cover the Diaoyu Islands under the Treaty is absolutely unacceptable to the Chinese people. We have lodged a solemn representation to Japan once again and urged the U.S. to make clarification over the relevant reports. We hope Japan and the U.S. can realize the great sensitivity of the issue with discretion in words and deeds and refrain from doing anything that may undermine regional stability or the overall interests of China-Japan relations and China-U.S. relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC).
8. On February 27: Japanese Foreign Minister Nakasone Hirofumi stated that the U.S.-Japan Treaty is applicable to the Diaoyu Islands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).
9. On February 27: China rejected the Japanese Foreign Minister Nakasone’s remarks that the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and United States is applicable to the Diaoyu Islands. “Any words and deeds that bring the Diaoyu Islands into the scope of the Japan-U.S. Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty are absolutely unacceptable for the Chinese people…. We have lodged stern representations to Japan again and required
the United States to clarify reports on the issue (Embassy of the PRC in Japan; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC; Xinhua News).”

10. On February 28: Larry Walker, a spokesman for the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto U.S. embassy in Taipei, states, “The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security signed by Tokyo and Washington in 1960, which states that it applies to the territories under the administration of Japan, does apply to the island…. The U.S. does not take a position on the ultimate sovereignty of the islands. We expect the claimants to resolve the issue through peaceful means and among themselves (Kyodo News).”

11. On February 28: Nakasone Hirofumi arrived at Beijing to meet the Chinese leaders. Both sides agreed that it should not escalate in the case of the Diaoyu Islands disputes (Nihon TV Network News).

12. On February 28: State Department officials read the statement to Hong Kong Phoenix TV regarding Sino-Japanese territory disputes in the East China Sea. “The United States position on this issue of the Senkaku Islands is long standing, and has not changed…. The United States does not take the position on the question of the ultimate sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands. We do expect the claimants will resolve the issue through peaceful means among themselves (Phoenix TV News).”

13. On March 2: During the daily press briefing, Gordon Douguid, Acting Deputy State Department Spokesman, answered the question of the Diaoyu Islands as following: “QUESTION: Yes, on Senkaku Island, I just want to – can you clarify the position of – current U.S. position on Senkaku Island, because U.S. plans that – Japan is (inaudible) U.S. agree with the idea of Senkaku Island north to Japan? Does U.S. really agree with that?”

MR. DUGUID: I’ve seen reports on the discussions going on between Japan and Russia on this. I’ll have to take that question, though. I don’t have a formal opinion for you at this time (U.S. Department of States).

Before analyzing the whole story, there are some corrections that should be made to the U.S. Department of States statements that appear to be the result of a lack of knowledge of the geography of the islands. First of all, in the question section, the Senkaku Islands are not located in “north of Japan” (that is, northern four islets territorial disputes between Japan and Russia), but rather “southern Japan,” near Okinawa. Second, in the answer section, it is not “between Japan and Russia,” but “between Japan and China.”

14. On March 5: Cabinet Secretary Kawamura Takeo stated that the Japanese government had confirmed with the United States that the countries' bilateral security treaty applies to the Japanese-administered Diaoyu Islands. “We have confirmed that the U.S. government's understanding is not different from the conventional view” that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty applies to the disputed islets in the East China Sea (Kyodo News).

15. On March 5: During the daily press briefing, Gordon Douguid, Acting Deputy State Department Spokesman, answered the question of the Senkaku Islands as following: “Question: On Senkaku Islands, because our reporter just - in Japan just had an exclusive
interview with spokesperson of Japan-U.S. affair. **MR. DUGUID:** Yes. **QUESTION:** And he indicated that U.S. has advised Japan on the Senkaku Islands issue very clearly, that the Senkaku Islands actually is included in Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. So can you confirm that statement? **MR. DUGUID:** I can’t confirm that statement right now. I’ll try and get you something right after the briefing (U.S. Department of States)."

On the internet, Chinese citizens have called for war focusing only on Aso’s claims of sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands. “It has been so many years since we fought a proper war. Let’s fight a good one now, boost domestic consumption and the people’s moral…” “It’s timely to fight now with the American and Japanese economies are in troubles (*Straits Times*).” In the end, as a TV commentator in Hong Kong states, “Riben Dachao Diaoyu Dao [Japan is trying to make a big deal over the Diaoyu Islands],” “Zhongguo Wenzuo Diaoyu Chuan [China is sitting on the fishing (i.e., Diaoyu) boat steadily]!” During this February fiasco by Aso Taro, one thing is clear: the U.S. has not changed its position regarding Sino-Japanese territorial disputes. Probably when Aso visited the White House, he received a guarantee from President Obama at the White House to protect Japanese territory if North Korea launched missiles to Japan under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. Subsequently, Aso implied the guarantee that the U.S. would join Japan to claim the Diaoyu Islands. During the 60 minutes summit meeting between Obama-Aso, they probably talked about substantive issues for only 30 minutes because their conversation was interpreted between Japanese and English. During their 30-minutes talk, many issues, including the financial crisis and North Korean missiles needed to be addressed. There was no chance to go into details regarding a specific issue such as, Sino-Japanese or Japanese-Russian territorial disputes. In addition, the Sino-Japanese territorial issue is not an immediate threat to American interests. Since Obama had not filled all levels of the State Department after a month when he took office, U.S. foreign policy toward the Diaoyu Islands position was unlikely changed by the meeting as can be seen in Duguid’s daily press brief (above #13). As can be see, the State Department did not know what exactly happened in the Diaoyu Islands of the East China Sea or even the location of the islets.

**Yonakuni Islet**

On 4 July 2009, the Japanese government under the control of the LDP decided to send its Self-Defense Force (SDF) to the Yonakuni Island. This led to an alert by the Chinese media, including both Taiwan and Hong Kong. Very few people in Japan’s mainland have the geographical knowledge of Yonaguni Island, Japan’s westernmost island. The area of the Yonakuni Island is about 28 square kilometer with 1,700 citizens including two policemen,
located south about 500 kilometers from Naha, Okinawa, less than 110 kilometers from Taiwan's eastern coast, about roughly 120 kilometer from the south of the disputed Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. On 8 July 2009, Defense Minister Hamada Yasukazu, indicated that the ground SDF troops would be deployed to Yonaguni Island, Japan’s westernmost islet. On 8 July 2009, Defense Minister Hamada Yasukazu, indicated that the ground SDF troops would be deployed to Yonaguni Island, Japan’s westernmost islet.43 Japan’s move was broadcast widely in the Chinese media, such as Phoenix TV in Hong Kong, who picked the topic as the top news story.

**Okinotori Islet**

Furthermore, on 1 December 2009, the Japanese government decided to develop Okinotori islet, a bare rock, which is located in 1,740 km south of Tokyo, building a port and other facilities and finishing within 5 years. However, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated its opposition to the Japanese government’s decision because its claims to the 400,000 square kilometer marine footprint, which is larger than Japan’s entire land area.44 In September, the Chinese government repeatedly expressed its opposition against Japan’s bid to extend Okinotori islet’s continental shelf in the southern Pacific to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf because Okinotori islet is a rock which can not sustain human habitation or economic life of its own, according to Article 12 of the UNCLOS III, having no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf. This has primarily been the Chinese objection against the development of the Okinotori islet. In the public, “Japan plans to explore the seabed resources and fishing grounds in what it claims as its exclusive economic zone extending 200 nautical miles around Okinotori [islet], which lies half way between Taiwan and Guam.”45 The real reason is geopolitically once Japan begins to station its navy in the Okinotori islet, the Chinese submarines will face difficulty passing through the Okinotori islet into the Pacific Ocean.

-- To be continued --

**Reference**


**Endnotes**

1 This is the first part of the paper. The second part will be published in the next issue.

2 Note: Chinese and Japanese personal names are given in the text in the customary order of family name first. Works published in English by Chinese and Japanese authors, however, are given in the Western order of putting the surname last. In addition, the chapter provides double Chinese/Japanese pronunciations for Chinese characters as follows: C: Naba/J: Naha. This paper is revised and expanded version of a chapter originally published in *China and Japan at Odds*, edited by James C. Hsiung (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The author thanks Dr. James C. Hsiung for granting permission to revise the original chapter, and acknowledges Dr. Hsiung’s comments and suggestions regarding Sino-Japanese territorial disputes in the East China Sea. Needless to say, the author is solely responsible for any mistakes in the final version of this research.


4 For convenience sake in this discussion, the islands will be referred to as the Diaoyu Islands their Chinese name, rather than by their Japanese name Senkaku Islands. This is not intended, however, to imply an unquestioning acceptance of the Chinese claim of sovereignty.


6 Hatoyama Yukio, “‘Subsidiarity’ Society’s True Path,” *Japan Times*, 9 September 2010, p. 3.

7 Today, Japan has three territorial conflicts in the sea: Russo-Japanese over four islands in the north, Japanese-Korean Takeshima/Dokdo Islands in the west, and Sino-Japanese Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the south.

8 Japan does not have unified names for these islands and often uses Chinese, English, or Japanese names. Unryu Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations: Irredentism and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands* (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 95. A group of eight small islets: (1)-(5) are five small islets, and (6)-(8) are three rocks:

Since Taiwan currently is a non-member of the United Nations and is claimed by mainland China as a renegade province. This chapter addresses only two parties between Japan and China.


Amidst the Cold War climate of the early 1950s, 48 countries signed the SFPT in 1951. However, this treaty did not include those countries, such as China and Korea, that had suffered the most at the hands of Japanese aggression. Without attendance of the Soviet Union, neither the government of PRC nor ROC was invited to the peace conference due to a difference of opinion between the British government (which wanted to recognize the PRC) and the American government (which favored continued recognition of the ROC). Because the Japanese government worked extremely hard behind the scenes with the United States regarding war reparations, the American government was insistent that the signatories to the peace treaty should waive all claims to reparations since Japan was not in a position to pay for full damages, and that providing full reparations would work hardship for Japan’s economy and create a breeding ground for Communism. Caroline Ross, *Sino-Japanese Relations: Facing the Past, Looking to the Future?* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), pp. 43-44.


The United States government has consistently insisted on a neutral position regarding the Diaoyu Islands. As late as 24 March 2005, undersecretary of State, John Bolton, noted, “It’s a question of the evolution of Japanese thinking on its own. Japan has made it clear they want to resolve all of the territorial disputes by diplomatic means and that’s certainly something that we agree with. Our kind of getting in the middle of it is probably not the most productive way to proceed.” Regarding Obama’s policy toward the disputed islands, see the section of the last attempts by the LDP in the discussion.


30 Since the person involved was a consular official, not a diplomat, at issue should be the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. But, the Japanese government invoked the 1961 Vienna Convention instead.

31 “Consulate Said Envoy’s Suicide Due to ‘Work Stress,’” Daily Yomiuri, 16 May 2006.


34 Japan has called the Chunxiao as Shirakabu, whose sovereignty is not disputed with China because the Chunxiao is located in the outside of the Japanese-claimed median line.


40 *Huanqui Shibao* [Global Times], 9 December 2008.


45 Gilles Campion, “Remote Rocks at Center of Dispute,” *Japan Times*, 13 March 2010, p. 3.