

Mounting anti-Japanese protests in China

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Sino-Japanese tensions are rapidly rising amid the largest anti-Japanese demonstrations in China since the two countries normalised relations in 1972. For the past four days, the Beijing regime has allowed protesters to rampage against Japanese-owned businesses, Japanese diplomatic offices and Japanese nationals.

The anti-Japanese rallies were triggered by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's provocative move last week to formally purchase the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea from their private Japanese owner. Protests erupted in 52 Chinese cities last Saturday, and spread to 82 cities the next day.

According to Hong Kong's *Singtao Daily*, hundreds of thousands of people joined the demonstrations, including 20,000 in Beijing, where protesters sought to storm the Japanese embassy and burnt Japanese flags. Police blocked the crowd outside the embassy, but allowed people to throw eggs, bottled water and tomatoes into the building. Participants shouted slogans such as "Japanese are dogs, let's hit them."

Japanese people and businesses came under attack in some cities. In Xian, several Sony mobile phone shops and Japanese restaurants were looted and damaged, and demonstrators tried to storm a hotel thought to have Japanese guests. In Qingdao, a Toyota auto shop was burned to the ground.

One of the most violent rallies occurred in Shenzhen, where over 10,000 people clashed with police. Demonstrators demanded military action against Japan. They held banners calling for a boycott of Japanese goods, and for the government to "send troops to Diaoyu." War-mongering chants included "declare war on Japan" and "down with the People's Liberation

Army"—denouncing the military for not defending China's claim to the islands.

The protesters attempted to storm the Shenzhen Communist Party headquarters, before about 1,000 paramilitary police dispersed them with tear gas and water cannons. The crowd then attacked a Japanese-owned department store, leading to another clash with police. Dozens of protesters were injured, and several arrested.

After reports of random assaults on Japanese visitors, the government in Tokyo demanded that Beijing ensure the safety of Japanese nationals and corporations. Many Japanese corporations in China suspended their operations after Japanese factories in Guangdong province's Zhuhai city were attacked.

Even Chinese people using Japanese goods or driving Japanese-made cars have been assaulted. As a result, some Chinese cities issued warnings to citizens not to wear clothes or carry items with Japanese brand names.

Initially, the Chinese regime encouraged and exploited the protests as a means of exerting pressure on Tokyo after the Japanese government rejected Beijing's request to reverse its decision to buy the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The Chinese public was bombarded with commentaries in the state media denouncing Japan's "illegal" seizure of Chinese territory, the "resurrection" of Japanese militarism and reviving memories of the atrocities committed during Japan's colonial expansion into China from the late nineteenth century through to World War II.

This propaganda campaign included expansionist and militarist sentiment. Several Chinese academics contributed articles to the state-owned press

encouraging a separatist movement in the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa (which administers Senkaku), and asserting that it was a protectorate of the Chinese Empire until taken over by Japan in the nineteenth century. The government media featured an article by an officer of the Second Artillery Corp (China's nuclear missile forces), declaring that, if war broke out, Chinese missiles would devastate the entire Japanese archipelago. In this chauvinist atmosphere, the military carried out major exercises in four regions in China's east and south east.

On Sunday, after the protests threatened to spiral out of control, and turn against party offices, as in Shenzhen, the Chinese regime began to deploy riot police and condemn the "violence." Clearly, it feared that the protests would become a focal point for broader social grievances, such as the rising unemployment and corruption, as the economy slows rapidly.

An editorial in the *Global Times* declared: "Violence cannot be tolerated simply because the protests are aimed at Japan." At the same time, it continued to push a nationalist, anti-Japanese line. "Violence can only weaken the current campaign against Japan," it insisted. "China is bound to face more conflicts in the future. We have to respond with the proper means and thus win respect from competitors."

It is not just Beijing that is resorting to reactionary chauvinism. Noda's government went ahead with the provocative plan to "nationalise" the Senkaku islands—an idea initially promoted by right-wing politicians such as Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara. With its opinion poll ratings falling below 20 percent after implementing two deeply unpopular policies—doubling the consumption tax and to restarting the nuclear power industry—the government is seeking to divert mounting social tensions by whipping up Japanese nationalism. It has not only reasserted its claims against China over the Senkaku islands, but also against South Korea over the Takeshima/Dokodo islands.

Within this context, two Japanese nationalists landed briefly on the Senkakus yesterday—the anniversary of Japan's annexation of China's northeast in

1931—provoking more protests in front of the Japanese embassy in Beijing, as well as its consulates in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenyang. China's state media once again stoked the anti-Japanese sentiment, highlighting the Japanese nationalists' landing, and using the anniversary to recall Japan's wartime atrocities. Air raid sirens were activated in a number of cities, creating a tense atmosphere.

US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta, who travelled to Tokyo and Beijing on Monday, cynically called for "calm and restraints on all sides," saying it was "in everybody's interest" for Japan and China to "avoid further escalation." In reality, the Obama administration has tacitly backed Japan's reassertion of its claim over the Senkakus, by declaring that it would be obliged to militarily assist Japan if a conflict broke out over the disputed islands.

Both the Chinese and Japanese governments have stirred nationalist "public opinion" to such levels that it could drive them into a military confrontation. China has deployed and maintained 12 maritime/fishery police ships to Diaoyu/Senkaku since last week. Some of them intruded into the 12 nautical miles of territorial waters claimed by Japan, provoking a strong protest from Tokyo. One thousand Chinese fishing ships are also reportedly heading to the area, after Beijing lifted a seasonal fishing ban on Sunday, in another attempt to demonstrate China's sovereignty.

Japan's prime minister Noda declared that Japan could not "sit by idly if [Chinese] fishing vessels reach Senkaku in large numbers." He warned of "a new stage" of confrontation between the two countries. Japan's *Asahi Daily* expressed concerns that if the Japanese coast guard could not control the situation, Japan's Self-Defence Forces or military might have to be used. The danger is that China would respond similarly, triggering an armed conflict with potentially devastating consequences.



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