

US stokes China-Japan dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands

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The United States is deepening its support for Japan in its standoff with China over disputed uninhabited islands in the East China Sea, known as Senkaku in Japanese or Diaoyu in Chinese.

On October 14 the Japanese daily *Asahi Shimbun* reported that Japan's Western Army Infantry Regiment and the US Marine Corps' 31st Expeditionary Unit would conduct a drill to recapture an island occupied by enemy forces. It will take place on November 8, on Iriunajami Island in Okinawa Prefecture, near the disputed islands.

The paper wrote that the drill, the first of its kind in Japan, "would be a warning to China." It coincides with the beginning of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) National Congress, which will decide on a critical and highly contentious leadership transition.

Japan and China have both used the dispute to stage right-wing, nationalist protests and escalate war tensions. They are threatening to launch a naval arms race, with Japanese officials now demanding that Tokyo build more ships to supplement the 30 1,000-ton patrol vessels Japan has in the area. China Marine Surveillance, which has 28 1,000-ton vessels and nine aircraft nearby, has boasted that its "equipment is constantly being enhanced."

The Obama administration's role in stirring up the island dispute goes back to the diplomatic row that erupted over Japan's arrest of the captain of a Chinese fishing boat in 2010 for allegedly colliding with a Japanese coast guard vessel.

The current flare-up began during a visit to Washington by right-wing Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara. Speaking at an April 16 forum of the Heritage Foundation, Ishihara provocatively proposed that Japan purchase the islands from their private owners, the Kurihara family, to protect the islands from China.

Ishihara—notorious for his anti-Chinese views and for referring to China as "Shina," the term associated with Japanese imperialism's murderous 1937-1945 occupation of China—launched a public campaign inside Japan over the islands.

Washington then backed the unpopular Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda as it adapted to Ishihara's campaign, trying to distract popular anger over social cuts such as its consumption tax increase. On July 7, the 75th anniversary of Japan's 1937 invasion of China, Noda said that he could "nationalize" the islands.

On July 9, senior US State Department officials declared that the Senkaku Islands fall within the scope of the 1960 US-Japan Security Treaty. That is, should Japan and China go to war over the islands, the United States will also declare war on China.

With chauvinist hysteria mounting in both China and Japan, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta intervened to tacitly support Tokyo's September 5 announcement that it had finalized a deal to purchase the islands. The purchase went through on September 11.

On September 17, while touring Japan, Panetta announced that the United States would deploy a second high-tech radar in Japan, as part of plans for a US missile shield in northeast Asia. Before Panetta's trip, a "senior US official" told the *Wall Street Journal* that the Pentagon would struggle to convince Beijing that the missile shield was not aimed at encircling China. "It sure looks like containment," the official said.

Despite their ostensibly defensive purpose, such missile shields involve Washington in planning terrible wars. They are discussed in US foreign policy circles as offensive weapons. Incapable of halting a full salvo of China's nuclear arsenal, a missile shield would be

effective primarily to try to halt the few missiles China would fire back if a pre-emptive US strike largely destroyed its nuclear arsenal.

This comes after a 2008 decision by then-US Defense Secretary Robert Gates to expand Washington's pre-emptive war doctrine to include possible US nuclear strikes.

As Washington escalates a confrontation with China over Syria and Iran in the Middle East, it is escalating the risk of war in Asia amid remarkably little press coverage. Devastating wars are being prepared behind the backs of the American people during the US presidential election campaign, while Washington urges on a dramatic shift to the right by the entire Japanese ruling class and goads a politically bankrupt, crisis-ridden CCP regime towards conflict.

Some of Washington's calculations were laid out in a recent study by the influential Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "The US-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia." It called for mobilizing Japan as an adjunct of US imperialism against Iran and China, to assert control over key sea lanes.

With 88 percent of Japan's energy and industrial supplies transiting through the Strait of Hormuz or the South China Sea, "a sealed-off Strait of Hormuz or a military contingency in the South China Sea will have severe implications for the security and stability of Japan. ... [Japan] and the United States increasingly share a core strategic interest in ensuring that shifts in global oil trade do not destabilize global geopolitics and threaten access to, and shipment from, energy suppliers in the Middle East."

As the Japanese bourgeoisie plans more social cuts, including to Social Security, the CSIS also called for new attacks on the Japanese working class. Writing that "Japan continues to have tremendous economic potential that could be unleashed by reform and competition," it pressed Japan to enter Washington's planned Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade zone.

Perhaps even more striking were the CSIS' comments on China, which is facing an escalating economic slowdown and a deep crisis inside the CCP. Significantly, the CSIS called for Washington and Tokyo to prepare for both an arms race with China and also the possibility of a catastrophic internal collapse in China.

Noting that China's internal security budget at \$120 billion is as large as its defense budget, the CSIS wrote: "The [US-Japan] alliance must develop capabilities and policies adaptable to China's changing trajectory and a broad range of possible futures. High economic growth and static political authority are not the future China's new leaders are expecting, and we should be informed by their judgment."

Nevertheless, the CSIS demanded that Japan's military develop "offensive responsibilities," adding: "A China that stumbles badly could present the alliance with challenges that are not necessarily smaller—just different."



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