

Japan Should Change China Policy amid Senkaku Row

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Japan must use every means including military force to block China's moves to deprive Japan of the Senkaku Islands. Arrangements to do so may work to enhance the Japan-U.S. alliance's deterrence against war. At various levels including Vice President Xi Jinping's meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, the Chinese side has exerted pressure on the U.S. government to refrain from applying the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty's Article 5 (a joint response to armed attacks) to the Senkakus. In contrast, the Japanese side has taken a wait-and-see attitude toward relevant developments within the United States supportive of Japan, instead of urging the U.S. government to fully support Japan's standpoint including its sovereignty over the islands.

Effective control and territorial sovereignty

On September 20, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell reiterated the U.S. government's views on the Senkakus at a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "We do not take a position on the ultimate sovereignty of these islands... We do acknowledge clearly ... that Japan maintains effective administrative control ... and, as such, this falls clearly under Article 5 of the Security Treaty."

The subcommittee's Chairman Jim Webb then asked Campbell if the U.S. government officially requested China to admit Japan's sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands. Campbell answered, "No," and remained silent while being unsettling. Senator Webb did not go further on the matter but made a new question.

The senator encouraged the State Department to conduct a tougher diplomacy with China in his remark at a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 15, 2009. He then said, "China still claims publicly its sovereignty over the Senkakus. Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party has never officially recognized Japan's sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands..." At the hearing, an expert on China said that while the State Department's principle of non-interference in territorial disputes was understandable, special considerations should be given to the Senkakus that

the U.S. government returned along with Okinawa to Japan.

Enhancement of Japan-U.S. cooperation and what Japan should do

In occupying Okinawa after World War II, the U.S. government had admitted Japan's "residual sovereignty" over the Ryukyu Islands including the Senkakus. This had meant that the United States would not transfer its sovereign powers over the Ryukyu Islands to any nation other than Japan. In presenting the Okinawa Reversion Treaty (signed in 1971) to the U.S. Senate for ratification, however, the Nixon Administration removed the Senkakus from its inclusion in the concept of Japanese residual sovereignty. This Nixon Administration policy shift was reportedly influenced by White House overtures to China during 1971-1972, culminating in the Nixon visit to China.

Even the U.S. remark that clearly subjects the Senkakus to the security treaty's Article 5 is a major bargaining card for Japan in diplomacy with China. Given the above-mentioned history, however, it is not unreasonable for Japan to ask the United States to assert its clear support for Japan and its sovereignty over the Senkakus at a time when the free world ally and the totalitarian enemy for the United States are intensifying their confrontation. (In fact, the United States under its Cold War strategy has clearly supported Japan in a territorial row with the Soviet Union or Russia over the Northern Territories.) In response to such Japanese request, the United States may ask Japan to become a real ally that would revise its interpretation of its collective self-defense right under the present Constitution in preparation for confronting with China and specify a plan to make Nansei (southwestern) Islands a military foothold. Such U.S. demand would be a desirable development. Japan then should faithfully meet the demand to enhance the bilateral alliance. At the same time, Japan and the United States should reduce their economic dependence on China under their strategic cooperation not to become vulnerable to China's economic terrorism such as a rare earth export ban as seen in 2010.

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