

Japan: U.S. Pawn In Campaign To Encircle China

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Time for Tough Measures

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China should forget about forging Sino-Japanese economic integration and fight against Japan's resurging militarism

Behind the farce of "buying" the Diaoyu Islands, Japan has a much bigger plan. Since the United States announced its strategy of returning to Asia, Japan has been acting as "a pawn of the US" to encircle China.

By getting involved in the South China Sea dispute, playing up the "China maritime threat" and frequently holding large-scale joint military exercises with US forces, Japan, together with other US allies, is trying to contain China's rise.

In 1971, Japan and the US signed the Okinawa Reversion Agreement, which arbitrarily included the Diaoyu Islands in the territories and territorial waters to be "handed back" to Japan. The Chinese government has condemned such backroom deals between Japan and the US.

The Japanese government claims to have "purchased" China's Diaoyu Island and Nanxiao and Beixiao islands for 2.05 billion yen (\$26.15 million) from the Kurihara family, the so-called private owner of the Diaoyu Islands, and "nationalized" them.

Ignoring China's repeated and strong representations, Japan stuck to its decision to "nationalize" the islands. Since Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara announced the metropolitan government's plan on April 16 to "buy" the Diaoyu Islands, Japanese right-wing forces have been wolfishly pushing their luck on China's Diaoyu Islands.

Besides, the Japanese Lower House Committee on Land, Infrastructure and Transport has passed two amendments, granting Japan coast guards the power to arrest non-Japanese nationals, if necessary, from the uninhabited islands.

Ironically, the Japanese government has claimed that the Diaoyu Islands are being brought under state ownership to "maintain and manage them in a peaceful and stable manner", not to irritate China.

To avoid a strong reaction from China, Japan also tried to downplay the Diaoyu Islands dispute by sending a letter written by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda to Chinese President Hu Jintao, conducting "corridor diplomacy" on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation meeting, and promising not to change the status quo or build new structures on the Diaoyu Islands. It is clear that Japan is using both hard and soft tactics to further consolidate its illegal occupation of the Diaoyu Islands.

Behind the farce of “buying” the Diaoyu Islands, Japan has a much bigger plan. Since the United States announced its strategy of returning to Asia, Japan has been acting as “a pawn of the US” to encircle China.

By getting involved in the South China Sea dispute, playing up the “China maritime threat” and frequently holding large-scale joint military exercises with US forces, Japan, together with other US allies, is trying to contain China’s rise. Japan is not expected to stop provoking China and does not take seriously either the overall situation of Sino-Japanese relations or the peace and stability in Asia-Pacific. On the contrary, it has intensified its offensive against China, which poses the most serious challenge to Sino-Japanese relations in the new century.

Japan has ignored the Chinese government’s strong representations and resolute opposition and President Hu’s solemn warning at the APEC meeting against “purchasing” the Diaoyu Islands, which is a gross violation of China’s sovereignty. It has trampled historical facts and international law, made a mockery of the anti-fascist war (World War II) and poses a challenge to the post-war international order.

China should understand that under the garb of attempting to be a “normal country”, Japan is actually reviving its militarist past. History tells us that appeasement and compromise cannot halt the pace of an aggressor, and the result of appeasement will only be an even greater disaster. To avoid a repetition of history, China should exert sustained political and economic pressure on Japan, and take steps to avoid being led by the nose and to prevent Japanese right-wing aggressive actions.

First, a broader view is needed to resolve the Diaoyu Islands issue. The stealing of the Diaoyu Islands by Japan is a provocation for China and a blatant denial of the values and lessons of the anti-fascist war. So China needs to take a clear-cut stand on protecting these achievements, and use historical facts to expose Japan to the rest of the world.

China is a defender of the order in Asia-Pacific, particularly Western Pacific. It can further unite countries and peoples that once suffered under Japanese aggression. And the United States, as a dominant power and defender of the international system, should stand with it.

Second, the Diaoyu Islands dispute is intricately related to the status of the Liu Chiu or Ryukyu Islands. In 1951, the Treaty of San Francisco, which China says is illegal, was signed between Japan, the US and other countries, placing the Liu Chiu Islands (known as Okinawa today) under the trusteeship of the US. In 1971, Japan and the US signed the Okinawa Reversion Agreement, which arbitrarily included the Diaoyu Islands in the territories and territorial waters to be “handed back” to Japan. The Chinese government has condemned such backroom deals between Japan and the US.

China’s goal should at least be to gain actual control of the Diaoyu Islands. Also, because Japan unilaterally broke the understanding and agreement on the Diaoyu Islands that it reached with China during the talks to normalize bilateral diplomatic relations, China can change its decision to abandon claims of monetary compensation from Japan and make the compensation a prerequisite of the second normalization of bilateral ties.

Finally, China should get fully prepared to confront Japan's right-wing extremism and militarism. Japan launched two wars against China – 1894-95 and in 1937-45 – which halted China's modernization process.

Now after 30 years of reform and opening-up, China is rising peacefully. But many Japanese see that as a nightmare for Japan and are trying to foil China's modernization drive a second time. Given Japan's provocations, China should not adopt an ostrich-like policy.

Economically, China can forget about Sino-Japanese economic integration and instead impose political and economic sanctions on Japan. On the diplomatic front, China's strategic competition with Japan should be direct until Japan unconditionally accepts the post-World War II order in East Asia.

Japan has to recognize China's sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands and atone for its past aggressions and atrocities, and take measures to punish those Japanese who deny the country's violent past, in the way that Germany has been doing for decades. Only if Japan does that will China and other Asian countries see it as a normal country. Otherwise, China should prepare for a long-term struggle.

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