

The East China Sea Crisis September 2012 - Ongoing

Letter from the Crisis Director

Greetings statesmen and women,

It fills me with great pleasure to welcome you to the fifth annual Tufts Model United Nations Conference, and more specifically, the East China Sea Crisis Committee! While we will meet under incredible unusual and exceptional circumstances, I can ensure that myself, along with the crisis staff and chairs, have all worked diligently to provide you with an experience to remember. While we may not be in person, I still look forward to meeting all of you and engaging in some thoughtful and stimulating debate!

The East China Sea conflict is of particular interest to me because while I not only take a class on Chinese Foreign Relations during the year at Tufts, I lived in and grew up in Shanghai. The time period of 2012-2014, which we are focusing on for our crisis committee, was right around the time I moved to Shanghai and was able to witness the direct impacts of the conflicts between China, Japan, and Taiwan. The political conflict quickly developed into protests in cities throughout China and Japan, and marked a turning point of an increased tension between the two nations. The relationships between countries in East Asia are among the most important in the world, and are of particular interest to me due to the long histories and cultures impacting how each country views one another, and how delicate and intricate each relationship is.

I love Model UN for many reasons, but mostly because it gives us all an opportunity to learn about important global issues, all while meeting new people who are all passionate about similar issues we face in the world. MUN also gives all of us great opportunities to grow with public oration, cooperation, and thinking creatively. I hope to witness this growth within you all during the weekend of our conference! The environment is as intense as it is educational, but all the while remaining so incredibly fun.

I am a first year studying International Relations and Chinese at Tufts, and I am loving every second of it. I have attended numerous Model United Nations conferences throughout high school in various cities throughout China, Singapore, and Washington DC. While I'm not up to my neck in homework, I enjoy hanging out with friends, finding great restaurants in Boston, and fantasizing about when I'll finally be able to go to a concert again—I'm thinking The Strokes, Tame Impala, or Billie Eilish will have to be my first concert in the post-pandemic world.

In all seriousness, I hope you all find this topic as mesmerizing as I do, and take the time to really understand your assigned delegations, policy views, and the other intricacies of this crisis. I cannot wait to meet you all, and wish you the best of luck!

Luke Heald
Crisis Director of the East China Sea Committee

Background

The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (shown in Figure 1) are islands lying in the East China Sea between the countries of China, Japan, and Taiwan. The region is a collection of 8 uninhabited islands and rocks in the East China Sea. It should be noted that they are currently controlled by Japan. The islands are of incredible importance to China, Japan, and Taiwan not only because of the valuable fishing and oil reserves that are present in the waters surrounding the islands (relating to the potential to be acquired in a country's exclusive economic zone, which will be discussed later), but also due to China expanding its line of defense, and competing against American primacy in the Asia-Pacific region.¹ This will also be discussed at greater in depth in a later section.



Figure 1 — Map of conflict area with Exclusive Economic Zones and Territorial Claims, The BBC.

Historically speaking, Japan has claimed the islands since 1895, although they have been owned privately for roughly 120 years before 2012. With the exception a brief period when the United States took control of the islands during World War II, they have been controlled by Japan since the time that the islands were claimed.² China, however, claims that the islands were named during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), controlled during the Qing Dynasty, and then seized by the Japanese in the name of wartime expansion. Due to a post World War II treaty that forces China to return territory seized during the war to China, Beijing believes that this is the reason why the islands are their own territory.³ Nonetheless, it should be noted that multiple think tanks and international law scholars believe that both sides have a relatively weak legal basis for claiming the islands as their own territory.

In the 1970s, China began to assert control over the area, claiming that it had historic rights to the area. This is a particular sticking point for the Japanese government, as they claim that the Chinese and Taiwanese governments had no interest prior to the discussion and discovery of great natural resource reserves.⁴ Although Taiwan has enjoyed friendlier relations with Japan than China has over the years, Japan does not

¹ "How Uninhabited Islands Soured China-Japan Ties." BBC News. BBC, November 10, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11341139>.

² "Tensions in the East China Sea | Global Conflict Tracker." Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed January 5, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/tensions-east-china-sea>.

³ "A Dangerous Escalation in the East China Sea," October 5, 2013. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/chinajapan/dangerous-escalation-east-china-sea>.

⁴ "How Uninhabited Islands Soured China-Japan Ties." BBC News. BBC, November 10, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11341139>.

recognize Taiwan as an independent state.

The year 2012 signified the beginning of a point of increased tensions in the relationship between China and Japan. This is because the Japanese government purchased three of the eight disputed islands from private owners. While the government did this to prevent the nationalist mayor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, from bidding on the islands, the international consequences of the actions were incredibly great. As a direct consequence of the Japanese government's decisions, China has threatened economic retaliation (some of which it has actually carried out), has increased its military exercises and launched combat drills within its navy, army, and missile corps, and has even refused to attend meetings of the IMF and the World Bank hosted in October of 2012.⁵

Furthermore, anti-Japanese protests broke out in cities around China, much like the protests of 2005, and anti-Japanese sentiment amongst civilians within China reached an all-time high. This is creating issues not only for relations between Japan and China, but also created large instability within China due to large scale nationalist protests.

This is causing increased discussion by the Chinese government on how to cautiously balance the benefits of a nationalist society without increasing domestic instability, when it can be seen that the government is not doing enough to protect China's interests abroad.

UNCLOS and EEZ's

The laws surrounding The UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) are what make this crisis in particular so complex. With UNCLOS, any given country is given exclusive right to perform economic activities within 200 nautical miles of their shoreline.⁶ However, because China and Japan are only separated by 360 nautical miles, their exclusive economic zones overlap.

As previously stated, UNCLOS Article 57 defines the limitation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) as permissible up to 200 nautical miles from a nation's coast, or to the median line if the claims overlap, which happens to be the case with China and Japan. However, Article 76 of the same law also states that states can claim up to the outer edge of their continental shelf, or 350 nautical miles from a nation's baseline.⁷ While Japan claims the median boundary, China claims the extended continental shelf as

⁵ "A Dangerous Escalation in the East China Sea," October 5, 2013. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/chinajapan/dangerous-escalation-east-china-sea>.

⁶ "Tensions in the East China Sea | Global Conflict Tracker." Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed January 5, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/tensions-east-china-sea>.

⁷ Sato, Yoichiro. "The Sino-Japanese Maritime Dispute in the East China Sea." The Maritime Executive, September 20, 2020. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/the-sino-japanese-maritime-dispute-in-the-east-china-sea>.

its maritime border, causing an overlap of 81,000 square miles of water.⁸

The implications the islands have on exclusive economic zones is one of the main reasons that the conflict became very intense over a short period of time. Japan is not using the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands to further push the EEZ claim northwestward. This would require a series of land claims that would become very complicated, and unlikely to be recognized under the setting of international law.

It is also unlikely that China's claim to the extended continental shelf will become unrecognized over Japan's median line boundary claim.⁹ Continental shelf claims have been recognized in other instances in which they were undisputed.

Obviously, this is not the case with the East China Sea conflict. This is being discussed in great detail here so during committee, members are not bogged down and try to become too engaged with the technicalities of UNCLOS.

Rather, delegates are expected to be able to peacefully resolve conflicts as quickly as possible while having a basic

idea about the articles of UNCLOS that apply to the situation, instead of fully understanding the legislation.

Resources

One of the key reasons for conflict in the region is because of the valuable natural resources that blanket the area surrounding the islands. Such resources include fish, oil, and pockets of natural gas.

This issue has precedent, as China discovered pockets of natural gas in its claimed territory in 1995, which caused Japan to immediately reject Chinese drilling. China heeded the demands of the Japanese Government demands, wary of an international conflict and less willing to be aggressive in the 1990s.¹⁰ In the 2000s, China began to drill in areas near the overlapping parts of their EEZ's, but has stopped short of digging within the overlapping areas. This has angered Japan, prompting them in 2005 to start demanding survey data from the Chinese government to ensure that no gas is being siphoned from the Japanese side.¹¹ China has refused to share this data, but instead proposed in 2008 to a joint

⁸Sato, Yoichiro. "The Sino-Japanese Maritime Dispute in the East China Sea." The Maritime Executive, September 20, 2020. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/the-sino-japanese-maritime-dispute-in-the-east-china-sea>.

⁹Sato, Yoichiro. "The Sino-Japanese Maritime Dispute in the East China Sea." The Maritime Executive, September 20, 2020. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/the-sino-japanese-maritime-dispute-in-the-east-china-sea>.

¹⁰"Tensions in the East China Sea | Global Conflict Tracker." Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed January 5, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/tensions-east-china-sea>.

¹¹Sato, Yoichiro. "The Sino-Japanese Maritime Dispute in the East China Sea." The Maritime Executive, September 20, 2020. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/the-sino-japanese-maritime-dispute-in-the-east-china-sea>.

development of a rig in the waters. However, the terms of joint operation were never ultimately agreed to, and China continued to develop rigs in the “Chunxiao field” along the median EEZ dividing line.¹²

Fishing has also been the source of numerous instances of conflict between China and Japan. Chinese and Japanese fishing vessels have many times been caught in the crosshairs of the conflict. One of the most well known examples of this occurred in 2010 when a Chinese fishing boat allegedly rammed two Japanese Coast Guard ships.¹³ The incident occurred when Japanese Coast Guard officials surrounded the vessel of captain Zhan Qixiong when it was fishing in waters around the disputed area. He was subsequently arrested and held in Japan for around two weeks. The fisherman and Chinese officials were both angered, citing that since they both believed the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands were a part of Chinese territory, he did nothing wrong.

Patrols

The patrols that caused this confrontation are also a sticking point in Chinese-Japanese relations in the East China Sea. China considers the patrols of



Figure 2 — Japanese Coast Guard ships confronting a Chinese fishing vessel, The BBC.

Japanese ships in the area illegal because it lays claim to the waters surrounding the islands.¹⁴ However, the number of vessels patrolling the area has only increased since 2012, and has spiked considerably in the past year.

The Chinese Government also organizes a vast collection of militias to help safeguard territory within the East China Sea. While operating merely as commercial fishing ventures, they occasionally perform as part of the “People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia” (PAFMM). This occurs when they are called to assist the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).¹⁵ Analysts have speculated that this is the reason the Chinese fishing industry has the largest fishing fleet in the world. These

¹²Sato, Yoichiro. “The Sino-Japanese Maritime Dispute in the East China Sea.” *The Maritime Executive*, September 20, 2020. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/the-sino-japanese-maritime-dispute-in-the-east-china-sea>.

¹³Tiezzi, Shannon. “Japan Seeks Chinese Compensation Over 2010 Boat Collision Incident.” – *The Diplomat*. for *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/02/japan-seeks-chinese-compensation-over-2010-boat-collision-incident/>.

¹⁴Tiezzi, Shannon. “Japan Seeks Chinese Compensation Over 2010 Boat Collision Incident.” – *The Diplomat*. for *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/02/japan-seeks-chinese-compensation-over-2010-boat-collision-incident/>.

¹⁵ Kraska, James. “China’s Maritime Militia Vessels May Be Military Objectives During Armed Conflict.” – *The Diplomat*. for *The Diplomat*, July 8, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/chinas-maritime-militia-vessels-may-be-military-objectives-during-armed-conflict/>.

fishing vessels conduct military exercises with the PLAN and even receive compensation for their work from localities.

Air Defense Identification Zones

Tensions rose further with the introduction of a Chinese Air Identification Zone that extends into parts of the East China Sea into the disputed areas in the fall of 2013. Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ) are not a new concept and have been implemented by the US, Japan, and several other countries before. Their purpose is to act as a buffer zone outside of a country's sovereign airspace. Foreign aircrafts traveling within the ADIZ are usually required to identify themselves for entry into the respective country's airspace. ADIZ's are unilaterally imposed, and require negotiations with neighboring nations.¹⁶

While China did not consult Japan or South Korea before implementing the extension of its ADIZ, the main reason it garnered uproar is due to the overlap in the disputed waters and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. In addition, China's ADIZ overlaps with training areas used for joint exercises by the US Air Force and Japanese Air Self-Defense Force, further looping the US into the crisis.¹⁷

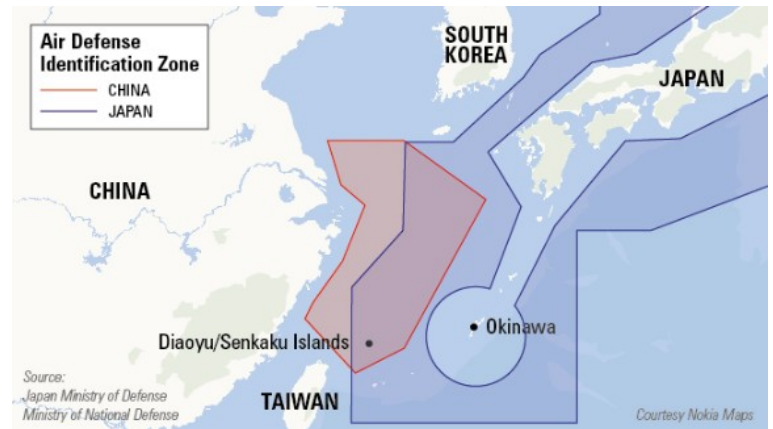


Figure 3 — Chinese and Japanese ADIZ's, CNN

Shortly after the ADIZ was implemented, the Japanese army engaged in the largest joint army-naval training session since WWII. Japan also positioned its surface to ship missiles near the Miyako Strait for the first time. This is significant due to the strait being China's main gateway to the Western Pacific. This further ensnared tensions with China, as the Chinese Government believes the Japanese Army interfered with China's normal training exercises.¹⁸ Thus, the island dispute not only merely exists in the sea, but in the sky as well.

The Island Chain Strategies

The Island Chain Strategy was first conceived in the 1940s by the United States as a way to deter the Soviet Union ambitions of creating a world-class navy.¹⁹ As seen in Figure 4, the first

¹⁶ Park, Madison. "Why China's New Air Zone Incensed Japan, U.S." CNN. Cable News Network, November 27, 2013. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/25/world/asia/china-japan-island-explainer/index.html>.

¹⁷ Osawa, Jun. "China's ADIZ over the East China Sea: A 'Great Wall in the Sky'?" Brookings. Brookings, July 13, 2013. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/chinas-adiz-over-the-east-china-sea-a-great-wall-in-the-sky/>.

¹⁸ Osawa, Jun. "China's ADIZ over the East China Sea: A 'Great Wall in the Sky'?" Brookings. Brookings, July 13, 2013. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/chinas-adiz-over-the-east-china-sea-a-great-wall-in-the-sky/>.

¹⁹ Espena, Joshua, and Chelsea Bompig. "The Taiwan Frontier and the Chinese Dominance for the Second Island Chain - Australian Institute of International Affairs The Taiwan Frontier and the Chinese Dominance for the Second Island Chain," August 13, 2020.

island chain comprises of the Kuril Islands, the Okinawa archipelago, northern areas of the Philippines archipelagos, and Taiwan. The second island chain contains islands stretching from Japan, Guam, and Micronesia.

China cannot become the dominant power in Asia without taking control of the first island chain. This is because China relies heavily on maritime trade routes in this area for its economy.²⁰ Breaking past both of the island chains is incredibly important for China, because it will allow them a gateway to the Western Pacific, and thus much broader military power within the Asia-Pacific region. This directly challenges American primacy in the region, which Japan heavily supports, and thus further complicates the islands crisis.

In the instance China can successfully claim the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as its own, it instantly has access to the Western Pacific, whether it be for the purposes of defense or trade, without violating Japan or Taiwan's territorial waters.

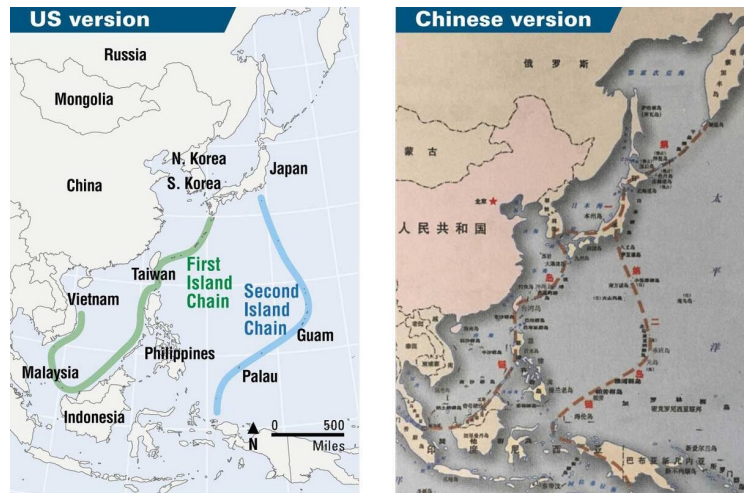


Figure 4 — The First and Second Island Chains, Defense News

²⁰ Espena, Joshua, and Chelsea Bompig. "The Taiwan Frontier and the Chinese Dominance for the Second Island Chain - Australian Institute of International Affairs The Taiwan Frontier and the Chinese Dominance for the Second Island Chain," August 13, 2020.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the historical aspects and certain cultural barriers causing the conflict to spiral out of control?
2. What are China and Japan's stated goals? Do they differ from their actual goals?
3. How does Taiwan's role in the crisis further complicate ongoing negotiations with Japan?
4. Why is the US so invested in what is happening between China and Japan?
5. What role does the US have to play in this conflict? Is the US deescalating the conflict or causing a further escalation?
6. What is the first and second island chain strategy, and why is it so important?
7. What alternatives exist to the current conflict situation? Is it possible to just ignore the island crisis in order to move further forward with diplomacy in Xi Jinping's China, Tsai Yingwen's Taiwan, and Shinzo Abe's Japan?

IMPORTANT NOTE

As members of this committee, the goal of delegates should be to avoid war at all costs. It is difficult to understate the magnitude of the ramifications that would occur if war would occur. This could trigger a world war, and cause immense damage not only to northeast Asia, but the entire planet. While China, Japan, and Taiwan have been on the brink of war (this is the reason this crisis exists), there is a reason the two countries are still relatively peaceful. Both sides recognize that the collateral damage as a result of an armed conflict would be too great. Please recognize this as committee members as well, and try to exhaust all other options as a means of conflict management.

Characters in Committees

Xi Jinping, President of China

Xi Jinping is the most powerful figure in all of Chinese politics. He is the head of the Communist Party, leads the military, and has the final say in all decisions. He is much more nationalist than his predecessors, resulting in more aggressive foreign policy. His goal is to ensure that China is recognized as the de facto power in Northeast Asia, and that the US does not continue to assert as much power. He is seen by foreign experts as being just as powerful, if not more, as Mao Zedong.

Li Keqiang, Premiere of China

Premiere Li Keqiang is the #2 leader of China's government. He is a leading figure behind China's foreign policy, financial and economic affairs, national security, and deepening reforms. Although he and Xi do work closely together, numerous reports have shown the relations between the two have soured. Political sources have shown that the two disagree on various domestic policy issues, such as Xi's anti-corruption campaign, further adding complications to the government's ability to effectively govern.

Shen Jinlong, Head of the People's Liberation Army Navy

Admiral Shen Jinlong is the head of the People's Liberation Army Navy, or PLAN, and works very closely with Xi Jinping. He is no stranger to the Chinese armed forces, starting out as an enlisted soldier. He is highly opposed to US freedom of navigation missions, and is close to Xi Jinping.

Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister

Wang Yi is a deeply celebrated figure within the Chinese Communist Party. He is a member of the Communist Party's Leading Group on Foreign Affairs headed by Xi Jinping. He is very nationalist, and cares deeply about asserting China's foreign policy abroad. He is fluent in Japanese and English, and formerly acted as the Chinese ambassador to Japan.

Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan

Shinzo Abe was previously Prime Minister until he was forced to resign due to health reasons in 2007. He took back the role of PM in 2012. Back at the forefront of Japanese politics, and has been described as the most nationalist Prime Minister Japan has seen in decades. This has caused his foreign policy towards China to be more on the aggressive side.

Itsunori Onodera, Japanese Minister of Defense

Itsunori Onodera is the Japanese Minister of Defense. A pick of Abe's cabinet, he has the presiding role over the Japanese military, and works closely with Abe to determine the role the military needs to take in certain situations.

Fumio Kishida, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs

Fumio Kishida, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, is the longest serving Foreign Affairs Minister in post-WWII Japanese history. He helped arrange President Barack

Obama's historic visit to Hiroshima in 2015. It is widely known that he has his sights set on LDP (liberal democratic party) leadership.

Ma Ying-Jeou, President of Taiwan

Re-elected by a comfortable margin in 2012, Ma Ying-Jeou, a member of the KMT, or the conservative Kuomintang Party, remained the president of Taiwan. He supports pursuing closer ties with China and deescalating conflict due to the close economic links the two nations, which China views as a rogue territory, have.

Kao Huachu, Taiwanese Minister of Defense

Minister Kao served from 2009-2013, and is in direct control of Taiwan's military. He is a very experienced politician, and looks towards supporting Ma Ying-Jeou's administration and foreign policy objectives. He was praised for his 2009 response to Typhoon Morakot, which brought the worst instances of flooding and mudslides that Taiwan had seen in 50 years. However, his term was cut short due to the scandal surrounding the death of soldier Hung Chung-chiu during his conscription. He resigned amid allegations of military abuse, public protests, and the abolition court martial during peacetime in Taiwan.

Barack Obama, President of the United States

Barack Obama, known for commencing the US's "Asia Pivot" strategy in a post-9/11 America, has been very clear that it will protect its allies in the Asia Pacific. Most notably, this means the US protecting Japan from threats made in the East China Sea by China. The US notably flew aircraft through the ADIZ right after it was implemented, which occurred at the direction of the president. While Barack Obama always prefers diplomatic means, he made confronting China for primacy in the Asia Pacific one of his main foreign policy objectives.

John Kerry, US Secretary of State

After a failed presidential bid in 2004, John Kerry was the second nominated Secretary of State in Barack Obama's administration. He and Barack Obama are in agreement that the islands are under Japan's administration, but did not comment on their sovereignty. Kerry is definitely concerned about the crisis getting out of control, and closely works with Fumio Kishida to ensure that no unilateral or coercive action is taken by other actors to change the status quo.

Chuck Hagel, US Secretary of Defense

Secretary Hagel is the second Secretary of Defense under the Obama administration. Hagel believes China added great tension to the region by unilaterally implementing their ADIZ without any discussion to neighboring countries. Furthermore, he greatly respects the mutual self-defense treaties the US has with Japan. His tumultuous tenure at the White House stemmed from a lack of support in Obama's inner circle, and competing for influence with Susan Rice and other National Security forces.