Japan's Strategy against Senkaku Islands Dispute

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(Excerpt below)

-- Demonstrating the will to defend the Senkaku islands

In order prevent such an escalation, Japan must consider utilizing law enforcement agencies such as the JCG, prefectural police forces, the riot police forces, Police Special Assault Teams (SATs), and other special forces, to respond to such a situation and keep JMSDF away from the scene as much as possible -- and train for such scenario.

Disappointingly, although Senkaku Islands fall under the jurisdiction of Okinawa Prefectural Police (OPP), training with OPP and Japan riot police in the Kyushu district is not occurring, and there is no effort to patrol the islands in a joint effort.

Specifically, the riot police and Special Forces should land on Senkaku islands via helo and boats, while JCG dispatches patrol ships and aircraft as soon as the first sign of a Chinese invasion is detected. The GOJ must officially order JSDF to conduct maritime patrols in support of the police and the JCG, and as soon as there are signs of forceful violation of security lines by the Chinese, JMSDF must shift into defense (kinetic) mode to protect the Senkaku islands. In order to train for this scenario, it is critical to gain the understanding and support from Ambassadors of various nations and Defense Attachés of the sensitivities and defense strategies surrounding the Senkaku islands.

Of course, in order to prevent possible invasion of China, Japan must strengthen its line of control of the Senkaku Islands. Currently, the only "defense" demonstrated by Japan is for four JCG patrol ships to routinely patrol in the vicinity of the islands, and for JMSDF P-3C's to conduct surveillance missions once a day.

In July, three Chinese fishing vessels repeatedly violated Japan territorial waters, and it was clear to JCG that maintaining security with merely four patrol boats is challenging and impossible to demonstrate line of control. In order to demonstrate sovereignty over the Senkaku islands, JCG must store fuel, food supplies, and other equipment necessary to conduct operations on a 24-hour basis on the largest island of the Senkaku islands -- Uotsuri-Jima. Over the years, GOJ left the islands uninhabited to prevent provoking China, but it is time to change the current situation as soon as possible.

Furthermore, the government must expedite the process of strengthening the two critical organizations in this situation -- JMSDF and JCG. JMSDF and JCG worked closely together shortly after the 3-11 disaster to conduct Search-and-Rescue (SAR) missions. While all JMSDF ships replenished fuel from refueling ships during these missions, JCG ships were forced to return back to the port to replenish fuel. The fundamental reason for that is the difference in fuel used -- while JMSDF uses light diesel, JCG requires heavy oil. Also, there's a difference in the fuel filler tube opening, making it impossible for JMSDF to provide fuel to JCG ships. These fundamental differences could be detrimental to the productivity of SAR missions. The ability to demonstrate line of control would significantly increase if the issue in conducting replenishment-at-sea is resolved.

For example, if JMSDF provides a refueling ship and an escort ship to support the four JCG patrol ships once a week in the vicinity of the Senkaku islands, Japan's "presence" will be significantly more visible. It is easy for JCG to change the fuel to diesel, as well as changing the fuel filler tube opening to meet the JMSDF specifications. Of course, the new JCG ships should be compatible with JMSDF ships for that reason. It is critical for Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) to remove any communication barriers so they are in sync with each other.

Demonstrating Japanese sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands, such as building structures on the islands and establishing surveillance and patrols, must be expedited -- but at the same time, GOJ must justify its argument to the international community and gain their support and recognition that the Senkaku islands belong to Japan.

GOJ passed a resolution to place the Senkaku islands under the administration of Okinawa during the January 1895 Cabinet Council -- and immediately thereafter launched development projects to install a concrete territorial claim and other various development projects. Immigrants were sent to the Senkaku islands every year, thereafter, to collect albatross feathers and to manufacture dried bonito flakes.
China and Taiwan began claiming sovereignty of the Senkaku islands in the 1970's after experts discovered oil reserves might be found under the sea near the islands. China claimed that Japan invaded the Senkaku islands during the Russo-Japanese War (1894-1895) -- however, GOJ began researching if the Senkaku islands were "terra nullius" in 1885, by ordering a steamboat from Okinawa to conduct site surveys.

Back then, the Qing Dynasty had supreme military power with powerful ships. In 1886, four Qing Fleet ships appeared in the coast of Nagasaki and landed on Japan soil. Sailors of the Qing Fleet assaulted and stole from the Japanese people, resulting to injuries and deaths. This incident -- known as the "Nagasaki Incident" -- proves how powerful China was; so, how could Japan "invade" the Senkaku islands? Japan must use historical documents to prove how China and Taiwan's claims are unsubstantiated, while gaining the international support that Japan has territorial rights. Japan must not forget that China is attempting to disprove Japan's claims to territorial rights.

Historically speaking, when a "status quo" nation is more powerful than a "change seeking" nation, the situation usually does not escalate to brute force. However, if the level of power is reversed, the situation can quickly turn to forceful resolution. The current military power between Japan and China is equal, but it is also apparent that China is rapidly expanding its power. With China's clear position on the Senkaku islands being their "core interest", it is unlikely that an amicable resolution is attainable.

The Chinese Communist Party cannot risk to be viewed as weak-kneed by its 1.3 billion population. However, China must also keep in mind that an armed conflict with Japan will lead to the involvement of the U.S. military, which will guarantee China's defeat. Therefore, China must be smart in its strategy -- i.e., to maintain the conflict with Japan within the realm where it does not involve the U.S.

If Japan should face conflict with China, will the U.S. really support Japan? Although Secretary Clinton clearly stated that the U.S. views the Senkaku islands to fall under article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, there has not been any clarification as to whether or not the U.S. endorses Japan's claims to territorial rights. In May this year, RADM (ret) Michael McDevitt, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies for the CNA Corporations stated at a symposium hosted by the Embassy in Tokyo, "Currently, Japan has administrative control of the Senkaku islands. Secretary Clinton's statement indicates that the Security Treaty will cover the Senkaku islands, as long as Japan has administrative control. However, if Japan loses administrative control, the treaty would not cover the Senkaku islands."

Japan must come to realization that it must demonstrate its willingness and intention to prevent forceful landing at all costs, or the U.S. will not execute collaborative defense in accordance to the treaty. JCG and remote island police must strengthen their security postures, with the support of JSDF, to validate the line of (territorial) control, while GOJ convinces the international community that Japan has territorial rights to the Senkaku islands.

Furthermore, Japan must align its military power with the U.S. to fully defend its territorial waters. Should Japan fail to take such actions, control over the Senkaku islands will definitely be lost.