


New Line of East Asia: Can Japan return to Asia?

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Japanese Prime Minister Noda confirmed that the central government will purchase the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese), a declaration which stimulated deep-rooted anti-Japanese sentiment in China. China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Weimin warned 'China's holy territory is not up for sale to anyone'. Three Chinese patrol boats also approached the Islands on the 11th of July. Japan summoned China's ambassador to make a complaint about this appearance near the disputed chain of Islands in the East China Sea. However the intent to buy the Senkaku Islands by Japan was previously stated by Ishihara Mayor of Tokyo this April during his visit to Washington D.C. He criticized Noda's decision, claiming it is designed to gain popularity for the coming election.

2012 is the 40th anniversary of the normalization of relations between China and Japan. To celebrate this relationship, China sent two pandas early last year to Japan, who bore a baby on 5th of July. Tokyo Mayor Ishihara suggested the baby panda be named 'Sensen' or 'Kakukau' an association with the Islands. Unfortunately, the baby panda, a symbol of friendship and hope after Fukushima, died just 6 days after his birth.

This territorial dispute surrounding Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is basically similar to the Dokdo/Takeshima Islands between Korea and Japan although there are some important differences between two territorial debates. The Dokdo issue is more focused on diplomacy and nationalism, while the Senkaku/Diaoyu conflict is more about the natural resources in the region including oil and gas currently being controlled by Japan. Another critical difference is that the US is silently involved since Senkaku was incorporated by the US when Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972. Recent debate about buying the Senkaku Islands will strengthen widespread negative sentiments in China and Taiwan about Japan. The memory of the victims of Japanese imperialism before World War II is deeply rooted in the people of Asia.

The Noda regime is pursuing collective self-defense in the nation's constitution, a position opposed by the domestic public. Nowadays it is hard to see any difference between DJP and LDP. Tokyo Mayor Ishihara who criticized the Noda regime seems to be preparing another party for the next Lower House election in cooperation with popular Osaka Mayor Hashimoto. Both of them are very critical of the policy of the present DLP regime on nuclear issues and diplomacy. This would definitely be considered another major weakness of the political leadership in Japan.

This rightist shift in Japan might result in a new line in Northeast Asia. In other words, Japan might be isolated if it chooses to strengthen its alliance with the US over peacefully returning to Asia.

—[Yi Kiho](#), NAPSNet Contributor

*The **Nautilus Peace and Security Weekly Report** presents articles and full length reports each week in six categories: Austral security, nuclear deterrence, energy security, climate change adaptation, the DPRK, and governance and civil society. Our team of contributors carefully select items that highlight the links between these themes and the three regions in which our offices are found—North America, Northeast Asia, and the Austral-Asia region. Each week, one of our authors also provides a short blog that explores these inter-relationships.*

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