



White Warships and Little Blue Men

The Looming “Short, Sharp War” in the East China Sea over the Senkakus

By: James E. Fanell and Kerry K. Gershaneck

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About the Authors

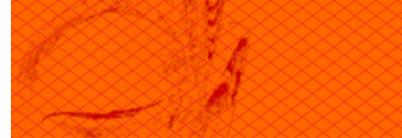
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James E. Fanell and Kerry K. Gershaneck

Abstract: China claims Japan’s Senkaku Islands and vows to seize them in a “short, sharp war,” if necessary. China’s successful seizure of the islands would shatter the Japan-America security alliance and severely undermine U.S. credibility. This study examines China’s attack campaign by tracing its territorial claims to the East China Sea and by addressing its Senkakus campaign doctrine, the military and paramilitary forces it will employ, how the campaign will unfold, the timing of the attack, how China might counter U.S. intervention, and steps the United States and Japan should take to deter it.

Keywords: short sharp war, China Dream, great rejuvenation, Diaoyu Islands, Senkaku Islands, Okinawa Agreement, East China Sea, Japanese Coast Guard, Scarborough Shoal, Scarborough Model, Xi Jinping, active defense, local war under conditions of informatization, people’s war, People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia, PAFMM, little blue men, maritime law enforcement forces, MLEF, China Coast Guard Bureau, white warships, joint war zones, Joint Fire Strike Campaign, People’s Liberation Army Marine Corps, PLAMC, strategic support force, counterintervention strategy, three warfares, political warfare, decade of concern

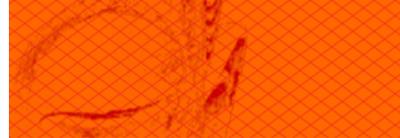
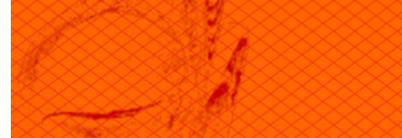


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Introduction

In a recent article entitled “Lessons Learned from Senkaku War Games,” a Japanese newspaper reported on a March 2017 wargame designed to help American, Japanese, and Chinese gamers, including former senior government officials, deal with two separate escalating crises regarding the disputed Senkaku Islands.¹ Oddly, each scenario was premised on Japanese actions initiating the crises: a seemingly inept pacifist democracy, Japan, forcing an aggrieved—albeit hypernationalist, expansionist, and totalitarian—China to react to protect its national sovereignty. The wargame designers ignored the harsh fact that it is the People’s Republic of China (PRC), not Japan, that has the intent and, increasingly, the capacity to create the most serious Senkakus-related crisis, especially one with the intent of wresting the islands from Japan for China.

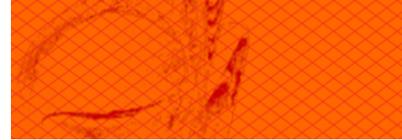
As troubling as its ironic premises, the wargame exposed serious miscommunications and policy misunderstandings between U.S. and Japanese officials that would have fatally undermined a united response in a real crisis. Despite an alliance spanning nearly 60 years, the American and Japanese gamers reportedly admitted they still did not understand the other country’s political concerns or security objectives. The exercise highlighted the U.S. team’s penchant to pressure the Japanese team to relent to PRC threats and interests. A Japanese participant is quoted as stating: “We learned the United States is more worried about avoiding a conflict with China than it is about Japan’s position on the possession of the Senkaku Islands.”²

In other words, from the Japanese perspective, the default American position was appeasement of the PRC’s core interests at the expense of Japan’s sovereignty and security interests. The Japanese perception was reinforced as the U.S. team reportedly cheered when it successfully pressured the Japanese team to back off its preplanned response of deploying additional coast guard cutters to the crisis.

China’s successful seizure of the islands would shatter the Japan-America alliance. The purpose of this article is to examine what the PRC is planning to do regarding the Senkakus, especially in the event of a Chinese attack, and to make recommendations that will better prepare the United States, Japan, and other affected countries to successfully respond to this inevitable confrontation. It is only a matter of time before China attempts to fulfill its pledge to seize Japan’s Senkaku Islands in a “short, sharp war.” This article examines how and when China will attack, with an emphasis on two Senkaku Island campaign scenarios: 1) a maritime law enforcement scenario, and 2) a People’s Liberation Army (PLA)-led assault. In addition, the authors address the role of the PLA’s informatization department and strategic support forces in

¹. Satoshi Ogawa, “Lessons Learned from Senkaku War Games,” *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo), 7 May 2017.

². Ogawa, “Lessons Learned from Senkaku War Games.”



a Senkakau scenario. China's activities in the region are troublesome and the U.S. and Japan must take proactive steps to deter China in the East China Sea.

The Origins of a Short, Sharp War

The idea that China is actively planning to conduct a limited, yet decisive, war to seize the Senkaku Islands was originally revealed by People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo on Beijing Television in January 2013.³ The actions of the PLA Navy and the Chinese Coast Guard have subsequently validated Admiral Yin's revelations. Rear Admiral Yin takes his cues from the highest level; Chairman Xi Jinping openly promotes China's maritime ambitions—and its campaign of coercive maritime expansionism—as an essential part of his “China Dream.”

To support these ambitions, the PLA has dramatically increased its military capability, lethality, and readiness for combat. In summer 2016, the PLA Navy proudly publicized a live-fire drill in the East China Sea, calling it a “sudden cruel war.”⁴ The verbiage is a minor variation of Rear Admiral Yin's short, sharp war.

It is important to note that the concept of a short, sharp war is nothing new to the PRC. During the PRC invasion of the Korean peninsula in 1950, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, its 1969 border battles with the Soviet Union, the 1974 Paracel Island assault, and the 1979 invasion of Vietnam, China sought victory in these similar wars based on doctrines emphasizing strategic deception, highly mobile offensive operations, and battles of annihilation. It is also worth noting that the PRC was willing to sustain massive casualties and economic hardship to win what it hoped would be short, sharp wars.⁵

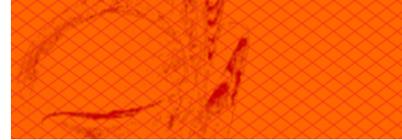
China would prefer never to fire a single shot to fulfill Chairman Xi's direction “to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”⁶ The great rejuvenation includes the “restoration” of the PRC's “core interests”—those areas the PRC believes are its sovereign territory, to include Taiwan (the cornerstone of core interests), the Senkaku Islands, the entirety of the South China Sea (as far south as James Shoal), and disputed territories with

³. PLA Navy RAdm Yin Zhuo speaking on Beijing TV, January 2013, during a period of heightened Chinese naval training in the East China Sea, stated, “The battle to take over the Diaoyu Islands would not be a conventional operation. . . . The real fight would be very short. It is very possible the war would end in a couple of days or even in a few hours. . . . The keys to winning the war are quick actions, and good planning.” *Short, sharp war* is a standard translation of the Chinese phrase “短暫且激烈的戰爭,” as when John Ivison in Shanghai, referring to RAdm Yin, wrote in the *National Post* (Toronto, Ontario) on 3 February 2013, “There is a sense of unfinished business in much of the public commentary, amid calls by some retired officers for a ‘short, sharp war.’”

⁴. “Chinese Navy Holds Live-Ammunition Drill in East China Sea,” *PLA Daily* (Beijing), 1 August 2016.

⁵. Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, Michael A. McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 26, 29, 127, 194.

⁶. “President Vows to Press Ahead with ‘Chinese dream’,” *Xinhua*, 17 March 2013.



India. However, if China's leaders perceive that the nonkinetic forms of their comprehensive national power will not produce the results they desire, they will employ the military option against the Senkakus sometime during what is termed the decade of concern, from 2020 to 2030, whereby the PRC intends to solidify all its outstanding territorial claims.

Contested Territorial Claims

While no Chinese government official has yet publicly declared that the Senkaku Islands (or the Diaoyu Dao Islands to the Chinese) are a core interest, all available evidence indicates that China believes the Senkaku Islands are an inherent part of its territory. To Beijing, the islands are no different than Taiwan and the South China Sea; PRC rulers assert they have been part of China since "ancient times." Nevertheless, the PRC's strategic interest in the Senkaku Islands is rather recent, despite official proclamations that they have been an inherent part of China historically.⁷ Following the end of World War II, the Senkaku Islands were under the control of the United States, as stipulated in Articles 3 and 4B of the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco.⁸ Control of the islands was then relinquished by the United States and given to Japan in 1971, as stipulated in the two nations' Okinawa Agreement.⁹ Since that time, the Japanese government has maintained administrative control over the islands.

Following a United Nation's report suggesting the continental shelf between Taiwan and Japan might be extremely rich in oil reserves, China's Foreign Ministry in December 1971 made their first formal claim to the Senkaku Islands. While China publicly set aside its differences with Japan over its sovereignty claims after World War II, that did not change Beijing's belief that the Diaoyu Dao Islands are within China's sovereign territory. Beijing's perspective on those islands was made clear in the following passage from a 2012 white paper on the topic:

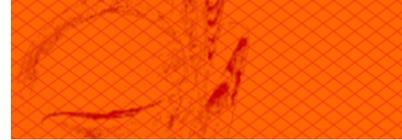
Diaoyu Dao [island] has been an inherent territory of China since ancient times, and China has indisputable sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao. As China and Japan were normalizing relations and concluding the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship in the 1970s, the then leaders of the two countries, acting in the larger interest of China-Japan relations, reached [an] important understanding and consensus on "leaving the issue of Diaoyu Dao to be resolved later."¹⁰

⁷. Xinhua, "Commentary: Meddling in Diaoyu Islands Issue Doomed to Be Bad Deal for Washington," *People's Daily* (Beijing), 7 February 2017.

⁸. Treaty of Peace with Japan, U.S.-J.P.N., 8 September 1951, U.S.T. 1832.

⁹. Agreement Concerning the Ryukyu Islands and Daito Islands, U.S.-J.P.N., 17 June 1971, U.S.T. 12037.

¹⁰. Reinhard Drifte, "Territorial Conflicts in the East China Sea—From Missed Opportunities to Negotiation Stalemate," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 7, no. 22 (25 May 2009); and Xinhua, white paper, "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China," 25 September 2012. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: "Japan has consistently maintained that there has never been any agreement with China to 'shelve' issues regarding the Senkaku Islands. This is made clear by published diplomatic records. The assertion that such an agreement exists directly contradicts China's own actions to change the status quo through force or coercion. In 1992,



For nearly 40 years, China's leaders followed Communist leader Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum to "bide time, conceal capabilities, but do some things."¹¹ China's leaders largely refrained from aggressively and publicly expressing their claims of sovereignty over the islands.¹²

After setting the issue of the islands aside, the Chinese then, indeed, began to methodically "do some things." On 8 December 2008, the Chinese conducted an operation that deliberately upended their previous maritime policy of avoiding confrontations; PLA naval forces sailed to the Senkakus, circumnavigated them, returned home, and publicized the act. It was completely legal within the context of international law, but it was an abrupt change that marked the operational beginning of China's maritime expansionism campaign in both the East and South China Seas. It was subtle at first, as China tested the resolve of its neighbors—whose maritime rights it intended to seize—and the ally of its neighbors, the United States. The first physical coercion operation occurred in September 2010, when a Chinese fishing trawler rammed a Japanese Coast Guard ship patrolling near the Senkaku Islands.¹³

The most significant event in this timeline, however, occurred not in the East China Sea, but in the South China Sea, with the Scarborough Shoal incident of April–June 2012. This standoff was a watershed event in China's expansionist strategy. After the U.S. Department of State brokered a compromise between the PRC and the Philippines, the PRC abruptly seized Scarborough Shoal. The Philippine president traveled to the United States to personally request the support of President Barack H. Obama, but received no specific statements of support, and no operational support followed. The PRC seized sovereign rights at Scarborough Shoal from a U.S. treaty ally—without firing a shot.

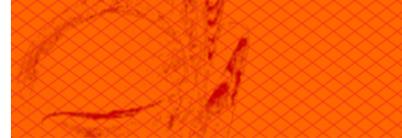
The head of the PRC's Leading Group, which orchestrated the seizure, was at that time not well-known in the West: a man named Xi Jinping. This event made him a national hero just when he most needed the political legitimacy. The acquiescence of the United States, the Philippines, and others became a significant turning point—a real pivot—for Xi and his vision to "restore" China's territorial claims. Xi's strategy included destruction of the system of alliances that had long contained China's expansionism. Meanwhile the Obama administration downplayed the Scarborough seizure as a minor fisheries dispute. Chinese scholars recognized

China enacted the Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, explicitly delineating its claim over the islands as part of Chinese territory. Since 2008, China has been sending government ships to the waters off the Senkaku Islands, and has repeatedly made incursions into Japanese territorial waters." "Situation of the Senkaku Islands," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (website), MOFA.go.jp, 14 April 2014.

¹¹. David Shambaugh, "Is China Ready To Be A Global Power?" Brookings, 10 November 2009.

¹². Shambaugh, "Is China Ready To Be A Global Power?" .

¹³. Martin Fackler and Ian Johnson, "'Lawful Countermeasures' and China's South China Sea Claims," *New York Times*, 19 September 2010.



the significance of Xi's template for mooted U.S. alliances by undercutting confidence in the agreements, calling it the "Scarborough Model."

Then in September 2012, Xi Jinping led the dramatic escalation in political tension surrounding the Senkaku Islands by leveraging the Japanese government's six-month advance notification to China of its decision to convert its lease on the islands to ownership on 11 September. Japan's actions were entirely administrative—an internal paperwork drill—but it elicited an immediate and furious response from China. China's ambassador to the United Nations, Li Baodong, condemned Japan's actions and stated that the "Chinese government and people will never waver in their will and determination to uphold China's territorial integrity and sovereignty."¹⁴

Also in September 2012, the PRC's State Council Information Office released an official white paper on the Diaoyu Dao Islands.¹⁵ The document reasserted China's position that the islands are "an inseparable part of the Chinese territory" and that "China enjoys indisputable sovereignty" over these islands.¹⁶ The paper concludes with these subtly threatening words: "The Chinese government has the unshakable resolve and will to uphold the nation's territorial sovereignty. It has the confidence and ability to safeguard China's state sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹⁷

Strike the First Blow Strategy

China's plans to take the Senkakus are best understood when placed into the context of Chinese strategy and campaign doctrine. Although the PRC has not published its strategic military campaign plan for taking the Senkaku Islands or even made "a unified, single doctrine for guiding military operations" available to the public, documents like the PLA's 2006 *The Science of Campaigns* and 2013 *The Science of Military Strategy* provide insight into Chinese military strategy and doctrine.¹⁸ Chinese military doctrine is "the combination of several documents and guidelines at different command levels of the armed forces, united into a hierarchical system that the Chinese refer to as a 'Science of Military Strategy'."¹⁹

¹⁴. Xinhua, white paper, "China's U.N. Ambassador Rebuts Remarks by Japanese Representative on Diaoyu Islands," 28 September 2012.

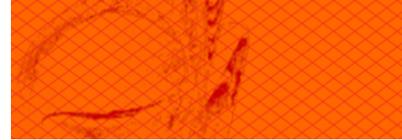
¹⁵. "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China."

¹⁶. Xinhua, "White Paper on Diaoyu Islands Hits the Market," 28 September 2012.

¹⁷. "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China."

¹⁸. Anthony H. Cordesman and Steven Colley, with Michael Wang, *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2015: A Comparative Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015), 112.

¹⁹. "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China," 112.



At the top of this hierarchy of Chinese military doctrine are the three concepts of active defense, local war under conditions of informatization, and people's war.²⁰ All three have some relationship to how the PLA would conduct an operation against the Senkaku Islands.

First, the PLA asserts that active defense, a Mao-era operational concept, is a "policy of strategic defense and [China] will only strike militarily after it has already been struck."²¹ However, that notion has given way to the concept of "gaining the initiative by striking the first blow" (*xian fa zhi ren*)—"the absolute requirement to seize the initiative in the opening phase of a war."²² Also noteworthy is that the policy of active defense includes the stipulation "that such a defensive strategic posture is only viable if mated with an offensive operational posture. . . . Moreover, the first strike that triggers a Chinese military response need not be military; actions in the political and strategic realm may also justify a Chinese military reaction."²³ In the context of the Senkaku Islands, this is especially important given Japanese government use of its coast guard to provide the first layer of administrative control over the island. For instance, Beijing could use something as innocuous as a change in Japan's Coast Guard force posture or even the language Japan uses when patrolling the islands as a justification for initiating an active defense military operation.

Second, local war under conditions of informatization—official PLA doctrine since 1993—asserts that future warfare will be conducted within local geography (primarily along China's periphery) and will be limited in scope and duration.²⁴ Under this doctrine, the PLA expects to act decisively and be victorious, especially when its forces are aided by modern, lethal weapons (both kinetic and nonkinetic) and are connected by robust, redundant, and reliable command and control systems. Situational awareness is a key priority for operating under this doctrine, and the PLA will use a densely layered intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance network to provide its agile force the capability for high-tempo power projection operations. Additionally, the PLA also will be expected to use offensive cyberattacks to degrade U.S. and Japanese maritime domain awareness. In this case, the aim is to take the Senkakus and place them under China's physical control.

Third, when discussing the macro levels of Chinese military doctrine as it relates to a Senkaku Islands campaign, the concept of a people's war is "one in which the people actively support the military during times of warfare: this active support can be logistical, political, or

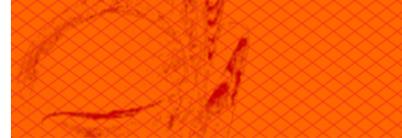
²⁰. "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China," 112.

²¹. "Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China," 113.

²². Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, *Chinese Warfighting*, 50

²³. Cordesman, Colley, and Wang, *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2015*.

²⁴. Cordesman, Colley, and Wang, *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2015*, 114.



operational.”²⁵ Under this doctrine, the PLA has designated the Chinese population and local governments as being vital resources, especially during a local war scenario like taking the Senkaku Islands. Ultimately, under the doctrine of people’s war, the PLA believes “the local population can be decisive even in a local, high-technology war.”²⁶

Specifically, the local population will be the principal maritime element of any people’s war against the Senkaku Islands. This will be in the form of the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) and China’s civil/military fishing fleets, the largest fishing fleets in the world.²⁷ The U.S. Navy War College China Maritime Studies Institute provides evidence that “China’s PAFMM is an armed mass organization primarily comprising mariners working in the civilian economy who are trained and can be mobilized to defend and advance China’s maritime territorial claims, protect ‘maritime rights and interests,’ and support the PLA Navy (PLAN) in wartime.”²⁸ Ostensibly civilians, but in reality trained and armed military assault forces, the PAFMM’s little blue men can be likened to the Russian little green men used to attack and capture large swaths of Ukraine in recent years. These little blue men will be supported by “White Warships”—China’s Coast Guard—which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Given the growing presence of Chinese sea forces around the Senkaku Islands during the past five years, it is obvious that China not only believes the islands are its sovereign territory, but that it is actively preparing a short, sharp war type of military campaign using the PAFMM as the vanguard to take back the islands.

Senkaku Island Campaign Scenarios

Much of the evidence regarding China’s actions around the Senkaku Islands remains classified by the United States and other governments. Still, there are indicators in unclassified press reporting that provide clear insight into the operational elements of a Chinese military campaign to forcibly take the islands.

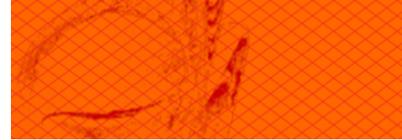
Given China’s doctrine and the observed actions of its military and paramilitary forces during the past five years, there are two major scenarios for its short, sharp war against the Senkaku Islands: 1) a maritime law enforcement scenario; and 2) a PLA-led assault scenario (exercise or Taiwan attack based). Under each scenario, the goal of the PRC would be to physically occupy the Senkaku Islands and maintain permanent control over them. To varying

²⁵. Cordesman, Colley, and Wang, *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2015*, 116.

²⁶. Cordesman, Colley, and Wang, *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2015*, 117.

²⁷. Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, *China’s Third Sea Force, The People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA*, China Maritime Report No. 1 (Newport, RI: China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, 2017).

²⁸. Kennedy and Erickson, *China’s Third Sea Force*, 2.



degrees, each scenario would have significant overlap in terms of forces used to seize the islands. The main difference is primarily how the attack will be initiated.

Maritime Law Enforcement Scenario

First among these scenarios deals with what is known collectively as China's maritime law enforcement forces (MLEF). China's National People's Congress in March 2013 passed legislation to create an "entirely new maritime law enforcement entity, to be called the China Coast Guard Bureau (zhongguo haijingju)."²⁹ As it did during the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident, China has dispatched an increasing number of MLEF ships to the Senkaku Islands. The mission of the MLEF in the Senkakus is to demonstrate resolve and to apply increasing pressure to the Japanese Coast Guard, which has patrolled the islands on a daily basis for years.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs reporting, from the period 2008 to September 2012, Chinese military law enforcement vessels rarely conducted intrusions into the 12-nautical mile (nm) territorial limit of the Senkaku Islands. There was only one intrusion in 2008 and one in 2011.³⁰ Following Japan's September 2012 announcement of nationalization of the islands, China's maritime law enforcement vessels dramatically increased intrusions into the Senkaku Islands territorial waters. In the final three months of 2012, Chinese intrusions increased to 23 times, with more than 68 Chinese Coast Guard ships (an average of 3 ships per intrusion) entering the 12-nm limit and directly challenging Japan's sovereignty of the islands (figure 1).³¹

²⁹. Ryan D. Martinson, "From Words to Actions: The Creation of the China Coast Guard" (paper for China as a "Maritime Power" Conference, Center for Naval Analysis, Arlington, VA, 28–29 July 2015). On March 21, 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China announced new "plans to deepen the reform of the Party and State Institutions." In this announcement, the Coast Guard and its related functions under the State Oceanic Administration will be transferred under the command of the People's Armed Police. For more see, "Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa <shenhua dang he guojia jigou gaige fangan>," *Xinhua*, March 21, 2018, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/21/c_1122570517_6.htm

³⁰. There are two primary sources for these numbers, the first of which measures intrusions by number of vessels per month, and the second of which measures incursions by the number of intrusions per month: "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response—Records of Intrusions of Chinese Government and Other Vessels into Japan's Territorial Sea," MOFA.go.jp, 7 September 2017; and "Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan" (PowerPoint briefing, Ministry of Defense of Japan, Tokyo, 1 February 2017).

³¹. "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Reponse"; and "Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan."

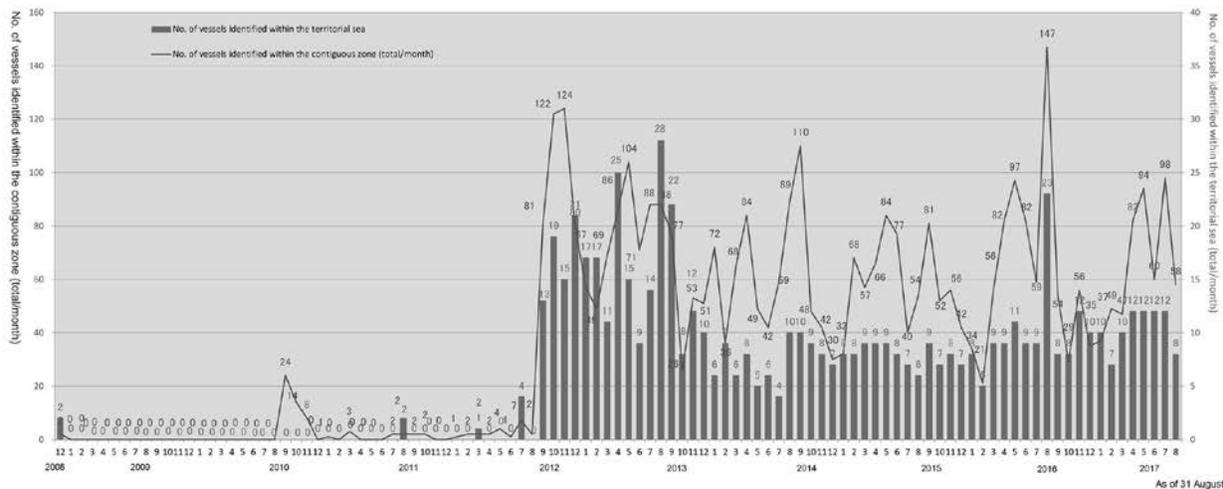
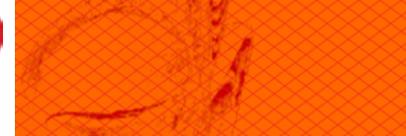


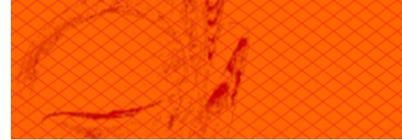
Figure 1: Intrusion trends for Chinese government vessels in waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands. (Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan)

But Chinese Coast Guard intrusions into the Senkaku Islands territorial waters was just the tip of the iceberg in China’s response. For instance, when the Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels were not conducting intrusions into the 12-nm territorial limit, they would remain in the general area of the islands (within 30 nm) and would frequently conduct intrusions into the islands’ 24-nm contiguous zone. The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines the contiguous zone as “the area where coastal State may exercise the control necessary to prevent the infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration or sanitary laws and regulations within its territory or territorial sea, and punish infringement of those laws and regulations committed within its territory or territorial sea.”³²

As at Scarborough Shoal, Beijing’s strategy has been to visibly ratchet up the pressure on Tokyo by increasing the presence of its MLEFs in and around the Senkaku Islands. Its strategy also is to demonstrate gradually increased Chinese civil administration over the islands, a key component of its maritime sovereignty expansion campaign. In the first year (September 2012–October 2013), Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels conducted 52 intrusions into the Senkaku’s territorial waters. Then from 2013 through 2016, these intrusions normalized to an average of 34 times per year, or two to three times per month. The pressure continued to build when, in December 2015, Japan reported that for the first time an armed Chinese Coast Guard cutter, Haijing(31239) (formerly a PLA Navy Jiangwei I-class frigate) entered the contiguous zone on 22 December and then the territorial waters on the 26th.³³

³². “Maritime Zones and Boundaries,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency Office of General Counsel (website), GC.NOAA.gov.

³³. “Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan,” slide 2; and Robin Harding and Charles Clover, “China Steps up Incursions around Disputed Senkaku Islands,” *Financial Times* (London), 21 January 2016.



China's probing of Japan's defense of the islands came in many forms. For instance, as the Chinese Coast Guard established a presence around the islands, it became obvious that its craft were deficient for the task of continuous presence due to the small size of its patrol boats. Generally smaller than 1,000 tons, these vessels had a limited ability to remain on station near the islands, especially during bad weather and in higher sea states, or significant wave height (usually higher than sea states 3–4).³⁴ This all began to change in 2014, when Chinese MLEF vessels patrolling the Senkaku Islands increased in size.³⁵

Size matters in confrontations at sea, especially in contests between coast guard vessels. In August 2014, at least one frigate-size 3,000-ton Chinese MLEF vessel deployed to the Senkaku Islands, and by February of 2015, there were reports of the first intrusion by three MLEF vessels greater than 3,000 tons.³⁶ As China has sought more of its neighbors' maritime sovereignty, it has had to build ever-larger coast guard ships. These are intended to enable its civil maritime forces to carry out China's campaign more aggressively by having the biggest ship on scene. The ships also allow them to conduct operations at increasing distances from China's coastline.

As such, China has demonstrated its commitment to have the largest coast guard vessels in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2014, China commissioned the largest coast guard cutter in the world at 12,000 tons, the China Coast Guard *Zhongguo Haijing* (CCG 2901) cutter. This cutter first went to sea for the first time in May 2015 and is subordinated to the East China Sea area of responsibility. A second ship of the class, CCG 3901, was completed and made ready for operations in January 2016. The Communist Party's *People's Daily* made the purpose of these ships crystal clear, stating they were designed to have "the power to smash into a vessel weighing more than 20,000 tons and will not cause any damage to itself when confronting a vessel weighing under 9,000 tons. It can also destroy a 5,000-ton ship and sink it to the sea floor."³⁷ Note carefully the combat assault mission of these Chinese Coast Guard ships: they are, quite simply, white warships.

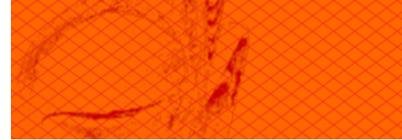
While most other nations emphasize their maritime law enforcement agencies' ability to support safety at sea, execute search and rescue missions, and lead humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations with an emphasis on saving lives and helping those in distress

³⁴. For comparison, sea state 0 has zero wave height while sea state 6 has a wave height of 9.9 feet (3 meters).

³⁵. The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence defines small vessels as being between 500 and 1,000 tons and large vessels as greater than 1,000 tons. *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), 45.

³⁶. "Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan," slide 2.

³⁷. Ryan Martinson, "East Asian Security in the Age of the Chinese Mega-Cutter," Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), CIMSEC.org, 3 July 2015; Huang Jin, "China Builds Second Mega Coast Guard Ship," *People's Daily*, 11 January 2016; and Jiixin Li, "China's New Generation of Coast Guard Ship is Powerful," *People's Daily*, 29 July 2015.



at sea, China has taken a different approach. China instead boasts its large coast guard vessels are not designed to save lives at sea; China publicly admits its large cutters are designed to sink coast guard ships and fishing boats. This “ram and sink” Chinese Coast Guard mission provides a unique insight into the PRC’s potential operational plan to take the Senkaku Islands by force.

While the size and scope of operations of China’s MLEF are important factors in being able to support a short, sharp war against the Senkaku Islands, so is the proximity of operational forces. Beijing quickly realized that any plan to use the MLEF as a proxy force in operations against the Senkaku Islands would be constrained by the distances of existing Chinese MLEF bases to the islands.

Consequently, in June 2015, the first reports emerged of China’s Coast Guard building a new base near the city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, much closer to the Senkaku Islands.³⁸ The plans, as posted to the city website (which have since been deleted) indicated the base is being designed to “occupy about 500,000 square meters and will have a pier around 1.2 km long with a facility where six vessels—including large ones with a displacement of up to 10,000 tons—can moor, a hangar for airplanes and helicopters, and a large training facility.”³⁹

Interesting, and no doubt related, were China’s plans for construction of another new base, this time for PLA Navy on the island of Nanji near the new coast guard base at Wenzhou.⁴⁰ Nanji Island is 60 nm closer to the Senkaku Islands than are the military bases of Japan and the United States located on Okinawa. Nanji is reported to already have “an advanced radar system in place and a heliport for use by carrier-based helicopters.”⁴¹ It is also expected to have a runway that would diminish flight time to the Senkaku Islands, as well as increase available on-station time by either Chinese Coast Guard or PLA air forces.

Another interesting element that can be derived from these reports is the emphasis China places on the integration of MLE and PLA forces. When it comes to the Senkakus, China’s leaders recognized that a closer proximity for its civil and military forces was essential to meet the demands of a short, sharp war to take the islands.

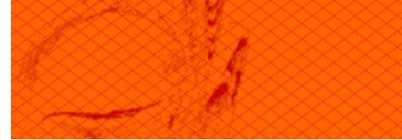
The Chinese would start the war the same way they started their seizure of Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines, by progressively leaning in on the feature with fishermen, and MLEF “protecting” them. They would increase their presence in fine increments—coming closer, anchoring, taking resources, landing on the islands, building on the islands—until the Japanese had one of two choices: either surrender territory to the encroachment, as the Philippines did at

³⁸. Kyodo, “China Plans to Build Coast Guard Base Near Senkaku Islands: Sources,” *Japan Times* (Tokyo), 13 June 2015.

³⁹. “China Plans to Build Coast Guard Base Near Senkaku Islands.”

⁴⁰. Kyodo, “Pier for Warships Built on Chinese Isle West of Senkakus,” *Japan Times* (Tokyo), 19 August 2016.

⁴¹. “Pier for Warships Built on Chinese Isle West of Senkakus.”



Scarborough Shoal when the United States declined to operationally support them, or take some defensive enforcement action.

That defensive action, no matter how slight and nonconfrontational, would be magnified in Beijing's propaganda and exploited as the excuse for China's rapid escalation to destruction of the Japanese Navy in the East China Sea—within hours, the short, sharp war—before calling for a truce. Beijing would anguish over the destruction caused by the Japanese provocation, and beseech the international community to stop the fighting with no more forces being poured into the region. The call for talks, of course, would be attractive to the United States, and it would leave China in place, in full control of its newly seized territory. This MLEF scenario is the most likely avenue of approach for any Chinese attempt to take the islands by force. This scenario is especially possible during a period of bad weather and high sea states that would drive away the Japanese Coast Guard from its patrol stations.

An event in August 2016 was likely a rehearsal of how China may take the islands. Around midday on 5 August, approximately 200–300 Chinese fishing boats swarmed into the contiguous zone around the Senkaku islands of Kuba and Uotsuri, accompanied by one Chinese MLEF vessel. By 9 August, as many as 15 Chinese MLEF vessels had first entered the contiguous zone and then drove on into the 12-nm territorial water limit of the islands. This was the first time China had ever put that many fishing ships and law enforcement vessels into the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands. This surge of 15 MLEF ships was a dramatic and significant increase compared to the average number of 3 MLEF vessels per year that had deployed into the contiguous zone since 2012.⁴² Particularly noteworthy was the fact that a large number of these vessels were observed with deck guns, greatly increasing the potential volatility of these intrusions.

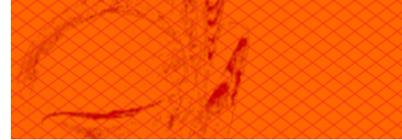
A PLA-led Assault Scenario

To understand how a PLA training exercise or an attack on Taiwan could easily be used as the launch pad for the Senkakus assault, it is necessary to examine the remarkable strides the PLA has taken in recent years in developing its power projection capabilities.

Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands

As stated previously, China would prefer to achieve its expansionist territorial ambitions without firing a shot. To this end, it has enjoyed successes in acquiring territory and maritime sovereignty from its neighbors through the mere threat of force, as evidenced by Scarborough Shoal in 2012 and the building of the new Spratly Islands from 2012 to present. Nonetheless, the Communist Party of China has charged the PLA with transforming itself into a force that will be

⁴². "Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan," slide 3.



ready to take Taiwan by 2020.⁴³ By all accounts, the PLA is well on its way toward achieving that goal.

Equally important is the reality that if the PLA can take Taiwan, then it can also take the Senkaku Islands. It is not hard to recognize the multiple overlapping military requirements for both scenarios, especially for the smaller Senkaku Islands. The military capabilities required to take Taiwan apply to a scenario like the Senkaku Islands; in fact, China is more likely to use them against the Senkakus because of the smaller scope and shorter campaign the PLA anticipates to be necessary to achieve victory. Likewise, a case can be made that the Senkakus could also be a prerequisite for the acquisition and assimilation of Taiwan.

Military and Command Reorganization

Since taking office, Chairman Xi has restructured the PLA in China's seven military regions into five theater commands. He also has "subordinated the ground force to an army service headquarters, raised the stature and role of the strategic missile force, and established a Strategic Support Force (SSF) to integrate space, cyber, and electronic warfare capabilities."⁴⁴

Furthermore, by early 2016, President Xi had reorganized and streamlined the senior echelons of the PLA by discarding "the PLA's four traditional general departments in favor of 15 new CMC functional departments."⁴⁵ To put a capstone on this transformation, Xi announced that the Central Military Commission (CMC) would now be in charge of the "overall administration of the PLA, People's Armed Police, militia, and reserves" with new theater commands (sometimes referred to as joint war zones) focusing on combat preparedness. Meanwhile, the various services would be responsible for the development of, what in the United States are called, the Title 10 Authorities to man, train, and equip the force.⁴⁶ A closer examination of each of the forces is necessary to appreciate their rapidly expanding capabilities.

The PLA Navy

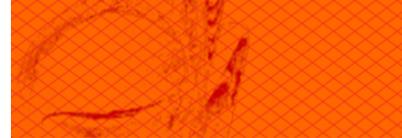
The PLA is benefitting from Xi's military transformation: it is the largest military modernization effort since the end of World War II. The PLA Navy is the prime beneficiary. Its build up from 2000 to 2015 far exceeds the buildup in any other nation's navy in the post-World War II era, save for the U.S. Navy during the Ronald W. Reagan years of the 1980s. The reason is simple: for China's leaders to achieve their vision of a "rejuvenated" and "restored" China,

⁴³. "Beijing's Diplomacy, Military Build-up Aims to Be Ready to Retake Taiwan by 2020 and Deter Foreign Assistance," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 28 October 2015.

⁴⁴. Michael S. Chase and Jeffrey Engstrom, "China's Military Reforms: An Optimistic Take," *Joint Force Quarterly* 83, 4th Quarter (October 2016): 49–52.

⁴⁵. Chase and Engstrom, "China's Military Reforms."

⁴⁶. Chase and Engstrom, "China's Military Reforms."



they needed a fleet that can expand China’s “interior lines” out into the maritime domain.⁴⁷ That goal will be largely met by 2020.

Concurrent with the PLA Navy modernization has been the changing pattern of its operations. Instead of continuing as a coastal water naval force steaming within 50 nm of China’s coastline, today the Chinese Navy has pushed out into the blue water of the Pacific Ocean and beyond (figures 2 and 3). An examination of PLA Navy blue water operations during the past 15 years reveals that “China’s ambitious naval modernization has produced a more technologically advanced and flexible force.” This evolving naval force will provide Beijing the capability to successfully conduct a military campaign to take the Senkaku Islands.⁴⁸



Figure 2: PLA Navy blue water operations 2000



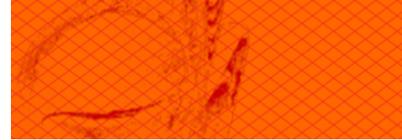
Figure 3: Expanding military capabilities and expenditures for the PRC, 2015

(Source: Order of battle based on author’s compilation of open source data. Build rate derived from Ronald O’Rourke, China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and issues for Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), pg 27.29)

This transformation has required a new force structure, one that has increased both the number and type of naval platforms. With respect to far seas operations, the Office of Naval

⁴⁷. In this instance, the term *interior lines* refers to a warfighting strategy whereby the lines of movement and communication within an enclosed area are shorter than those on the outside.

⁴⁸. The PLA Navy, 13.



Intelligence 2015 reports that the PLA Navy stated that “during the past decade, requirements for diversified missions and far seas operations have stimulated an operational shift and have catalyzed the acquisition of multi-mission platforms.” These multi-mission platforms are perfectly suited for naval combat against Japanese naval forces tasked to defend the Senkaku Islands.⁴⁹

Not only does the present-day PLA Navy present a significant threat to Japan, but it now also threatens the U.S. Navy. In Professors James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara’s recently published article, “Taking Stock of China’s Growing Navy: The Death and Life of Surface Fleets,” they assert the PLA Navy is “particularly well-suited to seize islands.”⁵⁰ They say the PLA Navy assault forces will be led by surface combatant strike groups comprised of its premier combatant, the Type 052D Luyang III-class guided missile destroyers, the Type 054C Luyang II-class guided missile destroyers, the Type 054A Jiangkai III-class guided missile frigates, and the Soviet-built Sovremenny-class destroyers.

Not only could these surface action strike groups provide withering naval gunfire support for an amphibious landing force with their superior (range, speed, and survivability) antiship cruise missile (ASCM) inventory, but these combatants would also provide a sea-based air defense that would constrain or even preclude U.S. or Japanese air operations near an amphibious operation.⁵¹ Given China’s superior number of advanced surface combatants, “it is far from clear that the United States retains its accustomed supremacy,” especially in a Senkaku Islands campaign where naval warfare will determine mission success.⁵²

In addition to China’s MLEF and PAFMM ships, PLA Navy forces have also increased their operations in and around the Senkaku Islands since 2012. Prior to 2012, PLA Navy warships generally patrolled on the west side of the median line. Since 2012, there has also been an increase in the number of Chinese warships operating for sustained periods of time east of the median line. This trend culminated on 19 June 2016, when the Japanese destroyer Setogiri confirmed a PLA Navy Jiangkai I-class frigate had entered the contiguous zone of the Senkaku Island of Kuba.⁵³

The challenge for the defending force of Japanese and U.S. warships operating within the first island chain is compounded by China’s ability to bring firepower of all three of its fleets

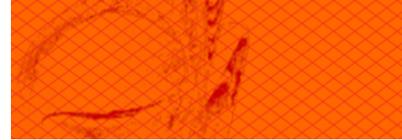
⁴⁹. The PLA Navy, 10–11.

⁵⁰. James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “Taking Stock of China’s Growing Navy: The Death and Life of Surface Fleets,” *Orbis* 61, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 276, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2017.02.010>.

⁵¹. Holmes and Yoshihara, “Taking Stock of China’s Growing Navy,” 277.

⁵². Holmes and Yoshihara, “Taking Stock of China’s Growing Navy,” 280.

⁵³. “Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan,” slide 5.



into the sea area around the Senkaku Islands.⁵⁴ In addition, naval firepower will also come from a densely populated submarine force armed with supersonic, sea-skimming, 290-nm-range YJ-18 ASCM, as well as air-delivered ASCMs from PLA Air Forces. With these surface, subsurface, and air forces at hand in the East China Sea, the PLA Navy has the capability to conduct a short, sharp war to take the Senkaku Islands.

PLA Navy Amphibious Forces

Perhaps the most important aspect to any successful Chinese Senkaku Islands campaign involves the act of physically moving forces ashore. China continues to build and train its naval and amphibious forces in the art of expeditionary warfare, a skill set easily applied to a Senkaku Islands campaign. Most recently in the South China Sea, two amphibious dock landing ships, three air-cushion landing craft, and two ship-borne helicopters conducted beach-landing exercises.⁵⁵ This type of training is ubiquitous across the East and South China Sea and is the most tangible evidence of the PLA's intention of being prepared to conduct such a mission.

One facet of President Xi's transformation of the PLA includes a dramatic expansion of the PLA Marine Corps (PLAMC) to 100,000 personnel—a tenfold increase of its marine corps of just a few years ago. According to the South China Morning Post, “two special warfare brigades had already been incorporated into the PLAMC, raising the forces' complement of soldiers to 20,000.”⁵⁶ While the reporting indicates that some of these new PLAMC forces will be dispatched to far-flung installations like in Gwadar, Pakistan, or the new PLA Navy base in Djibouti, there is little doubt that the growth of PLAMC personnel is necessary to achieve its maritime territorial ambitions.

To provide the amphibious lift needed for this vastly expanded Marine Corps, China is producing an increasing number of high-end, large amphibious warships, and is intent on building many more over the near term. According to the Office of Naval Intelligence, as of 2015 the PLA Navy has 56 amphibious warships, ranging from a few World War II-era landing ships to four of the large, modern Yuzhao-class Type 071 amphibious transport docks, “which provide a considerably greater and more flexible capability than the older landing ships.”⁵⁷ The Yuzhao-class ship is perfectly fitted for a Senkaku Islands campaign as it “can carry up to four of the new air cushion landing craft,” as well as “four or more helicopters, armored vehicles, and troops.”⁵⁸

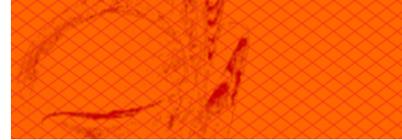
⁵⁴. The first island is a chain of archipelagos near the coast of the East Asian continental mainland. It includes the Kuril Islands, the Japanese Archipelago, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the northern Philippines, and Borneo.

⁵⁵. “Air Cushioned Landing Craft Participate in Beach Landing Exercise,” *PLA Daily* (Beijing), 28 March 2017.

⁵⁶. “China Poised to Expand its Marine Corps,” *People's Daily* (Hong Kong), 14 March 2017.

⁵⁷. *The PLA Navy*, 13 and 18.

⁵⁸. *The PLA Navy*, 18.



Not content with the Yuzhao, China has announced it “has started building a new generation of large amphibious assault vessels that will strengthen the navy as it plays a more dominant role in projecting the nation’s power overseas.”⁵⁹ The PLA Navy commander, Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong, reportedly visited the Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding company in Shanghai, where the new ship, identified as the Type 075 landing helicopter dock, is reportedly under construction.⁶⁰

The Type 075 is much larger than any other amphibious warship previously built for the PLA Navy and is uniquely suited to a Senkaku Islands campaign. It can carry a large number of attack and transport helicopters (as many as 30) and has the ability to launch 6 helicopters simultaneously.⁶¹ For a PRC amphibious assault force this is critically important, because at present the closest PLA airfield from which the PLA could launch attacking helicopters against the Senkaku Islands is farther than 180 nm away. The Type 075 will provide the critical element for the PLA to be able to project boots on the ground on the Senkaku Islands. By the early 2020s, the PLA Navy and Marine Corps will be well resourced and ready to fight when called upon by President Xi to take the Senkaku Islands.

PLA Air Forces

The importance of PLA air forces in a Senkaku Islands scenario became clear on 23 November 2013, when the PRC abruptly declared an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea.⁶² Despite this unilateral action being denounced by senior U.S. Defense and State Department officials as “a provocative act and a serious step in the wrong direction,” China has not backed down.⁶³

Not deterred by history or international norms, the PRC government and media propaganda statements declared the ADIZ gave China the right to take “emergency measures” against noncompliant aircraft in international airspace, even aircraft that were not vectored at the Chinese mainland.⁶⁴ While the ADIZ was portrayed to be about protecting China’s mainland, it

⁵⁹. Minnie Chan, “China Building Navy’s Biggest Amphibious Assault Vessel, Sources Say,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 29 March 2017.

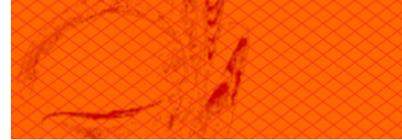
⁶⁰. Chan, “China Building Navy’s Biggest Amphibious Assault Vessel.”

⁶¹. Chan, “China Building Navy’s Biggest Amphibious Assault Vessel.”

⁶². “Announcement of the Aircraft Identification Rules for the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone of the P. R. C.,” *Xinhua* (Beijing), 23 November 2013.

⁶³. *Hearing on Maritime Disputes in East Asia, Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific*, 113th Cong. (5 February 2014) (testimony of Daniel R. Russel, assistant secretary of state, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs).

⁶⁴. “Announcement of the Aircraft Identification Rules for the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone of the P. R. C.”



could equally be a valuable tool in any Chinese active defense stratagem to take the Senkaku Islands.

Since the ADIZ declaration, the PLA Air Force has increased the scope and scale of flights in and around the Senkaku Islands. In December 2012, a China maritime surveillance aircraft entered the Senkaku Islands territorial airspace—the first time in 50 years for such an event to happen.⁶⁵ This event ushered in an era of expanded PLA Air Force activities in the East China Sea, where fighter, airborne warning and control, signal and electronic intelligence aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles have expanded their air operations farther southeast toward the Senkaku Islands.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Japan increased reactions to Chinese aircraft, from approximately 300 events in 2012 to nearly 700 in 2016.⁶⁷

In addition, the PLA Air Force began an aggressive transition from an exclusively territorial air defense force to one that is now more active and comfortable over the open seas. For instance, in 2013, the PLA Air Force began flights into the Western Pacific Ocean via the Miyako Strait, and have since averaged between five and six events per year with multiple aircraft.⁶⁸ The aircraft types conducting flights near the Senkaku Islands include bomber, fighter, refueling, electronic intelligence, and airborne early warning aircraft, all attesting to the comprehensive nature of how China would employ air power to help secure and maintain its control over the Senkaku Islands.

Adding complexity to the air domain, the PLA Air Force conducted “its first-ever exercise over the western Pacific via the Bashi Channel” in late March 2015.⁶⁹ Despite PLA Air Force public assertions that these drills were routine and not targeted against “any particular country, regions or targets,” there is little doubt that PLA air forces entering the Philippine Sea via the Bashi Channel or the Miyako Strait provide the PLA with considerable operational and tactical flexibility in any Senkaku Island attack campaign.⁷⁰

Upping the ante, the PLA Air Force announced in mid-September 2016 that it would conduct regular exercises flying past the first island chain.⁷¹ True to its word, the PLA Air Force has conducted routine flights through the Miyako Strait and Bashi Channel, with the most recent

⁶⁵. Hiroko Tabuchi, “Japan Scrambles Jets in Islands Dispute with China,” *New York Times*, 13 December 2012.

⁶⁶. “Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan,” slide 4.

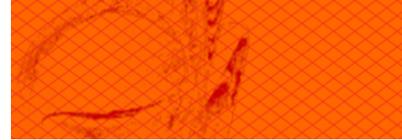
⁶⁷. “Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan,” slide 4.

⁶⁸. “Situations in East/South China Seas, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan,” slide 8.

⁶⁹. “China Air Force in West Pacific Drill,” *Xinhua* (Beijing), 21 May 2015.

⁷⁰. “China Air Force in West Pacific Drill.”

⁷¹. Jesse Johnson, “ASDF Scrambles Jets as China Sends More Fighters and Bombers through Miyako Strait as Part of Large Drill,” *Japan Times* (Tokyo), 3 March 2017.



significant event occurring on 3 March 2017 as China sent 13 aircraft through the Miyako Strait.⁷² According to the Japanese Ministry of Defense, this was “the largest number of foreign planes Japan has scrambled jets for since such data first became available in 2003.”⁷³

In response, Japan’s Defense Ministry announced in February that its Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) “doubled the number of fighter jets it scrambles when responding to airspace checks by foreign planes.”⁷⁴ According to the latest reports by the Japanese, the number of JASDF scrambles launched between April 2016 and January 2017 had already surpassed “the annual record of 944 set in fiscal 1984, when the Cold War was in full swing and airplanes from the former Soviet Union were active.”⁷⁵

The increasing proximity of Chinese aircraft toward the Senkaku Islands is of particular significance. According to Japan’s Ministry of Defense, China has increased the number of PLA air forces that fly south of 27 degrees north latitude, an unspoken demarcation line that Japan has considered a defensive borderline.⁷⁶ JASDF tactical objectives are designed to keep Chinese planes from flying within a minimum protective air umbrella of approximately 60 nm from the Senkaku Islands.

Given the dramatic increase in provocative PLA Air Force activity and Japanese responses to them in the East China and Philippine Sea, the likelihood for an explosive event has risen greatly. This is especially true since Tokyo and Beijing do not have a “hot line” communication network “that can be used by their militaries to avoid accidental aerial or maritime clashes.”⁷⁷ Beijing may use such an explosive incident as an excuse to move on the Senkakus.

China could easily begin its short, sharp war against the Senkaku Islands by exploiting and surprising local air commanders. Specifically, the PLA Air Force could launch a large number of fighters and other aircraft toward Okinawa via the Miyako Strait and up through the Bashi Channel with the goal of diverting, diffusing, and degrading JASDF efforts to get to the airspace over the Senkaku Islands. On these islands, an assault by the main invasion force, either airborne from helicopters or seaborne, would be conducted concurrently. And this combined

⁷². Johnson, “ASDF Scrambles Jets as China Sends More Fighters.”

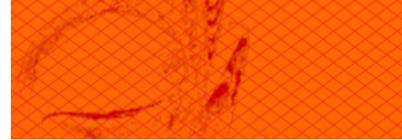
⁷³. Kyodo, “Japan Doubles Fighter Jets Deployed for Scrambles Against China,” *Japan Times* (Tokyo), 26 February 2017.

⁷⁴. “Japan Doubles Fighter Jets Deployed for Scrambles Against China.”

⁷⁵. “Japan Doubles Fighter Jets Deployed for Scrambles Against China.” It should be noted that the 944 scrambles reported in 1984 reflect all JASDF scramble events across the country, to include scrambles against Russian and other unidentified aircraft that penetrate Japan’s ADIZ.

⁷⁶. “Japan Doubles Fighter Jets Deployed for Scrambles Against China.”

⁷⁷. “Japan Doubles Fighter Jets Deployed for Scrambles Against China.”



arms diversionary and main assault would all take place under the cover of one of the most sophisticated missile and rocket forces on the planet.

PLA Rocket Forces

In terms of kinetic fires for all three scenarios, per the Chinese military doctrine of joint fire strike campaign, Beijing would likely use its extensive ballistic and cruise missile arsenal, from both the PLA Rocket Force and PLA Air Force/PLA Naval Air Force/PLA Navy, to disrupt rear area operations along the Ryukyu Islands. More importantly, Japan and the United States should expect attacks against military bases on the main island of Honshu and Guam, where the majority of Japanese and U.S. military strength resides. U.S. Navy Commander Thomas Shugart's recently published article, "Has China Been Practicing Pre-Emptive Missile Strikes against U.S. Bases?" convincingly argues that "the greatest military threat to U.S. vital interests in Asia may be one that has received somewhat less attention: the growing capability of China's missile forces to strike U.S. bases."⁷⁸

The purpose of these supporting fires, as articulated in joint fire strike campaign doctrine, would be to coordinate and synchronize antiship ballistic and cruise missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, air strikes with precision-guided munitions, and counter-C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) strikes with specialized weapons. These fires would facilitate the main objective of seizing the Senkaku Islands and isolating Japanese and U.S. military forces arrayed across the region.

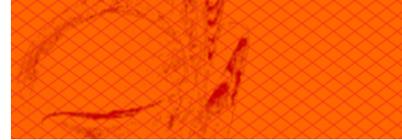
PLA Informatization Department and Strategic Support Forces

PLA strategy addresses informatization in both its offensive combat and counterintervention operations. Informatization is at the core of everything it wants to accomplish, especially in a short, sharp war to take the Senkaku Islands. From high-tech missions in space and cyberspace, to long-range precision kinetic and nonkinetic strike, to naval war-at-sea operations, "the ability to transmit, process, and receive information is a vital enabler."⁷⁹

Reforms to the PLA Informatization Department began in 2015 and are expected to be complete by 2020, when lines of responsibility are further delineated with the newly created Strategic Support Force (SSF). The SSF's mission is reportedly focused on "strategic-level

⁷⁸. Thomas Shugart, "Has China Been Practicing Pre-Emptive Missiles Strikes against U.S. Bases?," *War On the Rocks*, 6 February 2017.

⁷⁹. Elsa Kania and John Costello, "China's Quest for Informatization Drives PLA Reforms," *Diplomat*, 4 March 2017.



information support” for “space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare.”⁸⁰ One of its main missions will be strategic denial of the electromagnetic spectrum.⁸¹

The SSF is a critical enabler for joint operations through this mission of strategic-level information support. The SSF has also assumed responsibilities for strategic information warfare. Although usually discussed in the context of a Taiwan contingency, China’s cyberforces would play a critical role in any counterintervention strategy against both the United States and Japan in a Senkaku conflict. The two organizations responsible for this, the Third Department of the PLA General Staff Headquarters (3PLA) and the Fourth Department (4PLA), are both subordinated to the SSF.⁸²

China has invested heavily in countersatellite electronic warfare capabilities to force a “no satellite, no fight” environment for the United States. The SSF has consolidated the management and control over space-based ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) assets—and it may also have nonkinetic-antisatellite capabilities, such as directed energy weapons.

SSF and the Fight for Public Opinion

The fight for public opinion will be the PRC’s second battlefield, and thus requires special attention. Chinese strategic literature particularly emphasizes the role of psychological operations (psyops), legal warfare, and public opinion warfare to subdue an enemy ahead of conflict or ensure victory if conflict breaks out. The operationalization of psyops with cyber is key to this strategy.⁸³ China also has taken very real steps to empower its psychological warfare forces, most notably the “three warfares” base (or 311 base), located in Fuzhou. This base has been brought under the SSF and is integrated with China’s cyberforces.

Prior to initiating its offensive, China will begin worldwide psyops and public opinion warfare as part of a concerted political warfare campaign. Chinese front organizations and other sympathizers, along with both Chinese and other-nation mass information channels, such as the internet, television, and radio, will be used.

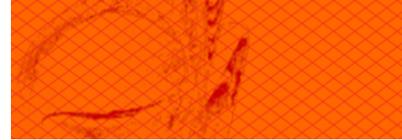
The focus of these influence operations will be to support China’s position and demonize the United States and Japan. Internally, this campaign will be important in mobilizing mass support for the “righteous” action, while externally the campaign will attempt to gain support for China’s position. This political warfare campaign will continue through the island operation and after—regardless of the success or failure of the operation.

⁸⁰. Kania and Costello, “China’s Quest for Informatization Drives PLA Reforms.”

⁸¹. Kania and Costello, “China’s Quest for Informatization Drives PLA Reforms.”

⁸². Kania and Costello, “China’s Quest for Informatization Drives PLA Reforms.”

⁸³. Kania and Costello, “China’s Quest for Informatization Drives PLA Reforms.”



SSF Impact

Ultimately the purpose of these SSF organizations is to ensure the sanctity of national- and theater-level command and control as well as enhance the warfighting effectiveness of each of the individual services. In the confines of a short, sharp war against the Senkaku Islands, these invisible forces will provide precise situational awareness, target identification of opposing forces, network defenses, and real-time command and control that will enable the PLA to take and hold the Senkaku Islands. They will also work to subvert, demoralize, and confuse the U.S. and Japanese national leadership and operational forces.

An example of these efforts was revealed in 2014, when the PLA established a permanent joint operations command (JOC) center responsible for integrating the operations of its army, navy, and air forces. It was the first time such a JOC had been established and is seen as being able to “boost the unified operations of Chinese capabilities on land, sea, air and in dealing with strategic missile operations.”⁸⁴ When combined with President Xi’s other PLA reforms, it seems clear that China’s ability to command and control all of its forces and disrupt opposing forces in a short, sharp war scenario against the Senkakus is well established and practiced.

How the PLA Exercise Scenario Will Play Out

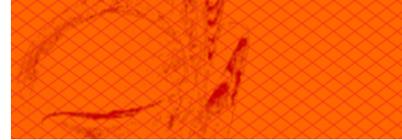
Since 2014, the PLA has conducted several large-scale exercises that could very well be rehearsals for a Senkaku Islands campaign. Of greater concern, these exercises also could be intended as a deception campaign designed to lure U.S. and Japanese audiences into complacency, so that when the actual short, sharp Senkaku Islands campaign commences, it is mistaken for just another exercise. Whether it is the Mission Action (Shiming Xingdong), Joint Action (Lianhe Xingdong), Stride (Kuayue), or even the Firepower (Huoli) series, the PLA is actively training its forces “to improve joint integrated operational capabilities by collecting data to support training and doctrinal development and then implement lessons learned from training assessments and evaluations.”⁸⁵

The PLA conducts its exercises under as close to actual combat conditions as possible for supporting research and development for future training and operational methods, but also as a means to overcome a lack of combat experience. During these exercises, the PLA focuses on command and control, logistics, civil-military integration, joint campaign planning, long-range firepower and precision strike, deployment of special operational forces, reconnaissance, information warfare, electronic warfare, and long-range mobility, to name a few.⁸⁶

⁸⁴. Kyodo, “Chinese Military Set up Joint Operations Command Center: Sources,” *Japan Times* (Tokyo), 7 August 2014.

⁸⁵. *2016 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2016), 288.

⁸⁶. *2016 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 288.



Timeline to Attack: the Coming Decade of Concern

Given the Communist Party’s desire for so-called restoration of territory, the obvious question is: How long will the PRC wait to celebrate the achievement of its goal of national rejuvenation and restoration? Some, like respected China expert Michael Pillsbury, assert that China desires to celebrate the complete restoration by the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 2049. Given that assumption is correct, the next logical question is: What will happen if Beijing is unable to achieve complete restoration via nonviolent means? Or to consider it another way, what if Japan or Taiwan resists; how long before the PRC rulers believe they will have to use military force to achieve their ultimate goal of national restoration? The answer to the last is not too long. The PRC will act as early as 2020 and no later than 2030. Call this period the decade of concern (figure 4).

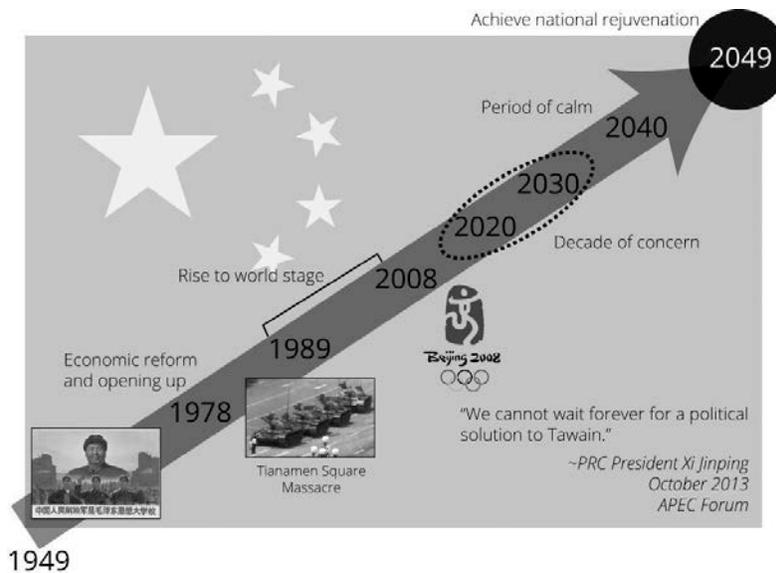
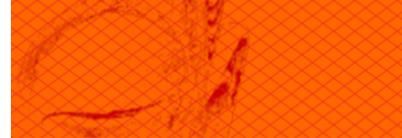


Figure 4: The Decade of Concern, 2020-30.(Source: Capt. James E. Fanell, USN (Ret), adapted by MCUP)

China has very likely calculated a timeline for when it could use military force at the latest possible moment and still be able to conduct a grand ceremony commemorating its national restoration in 2049. The template for calculating that date is the time period from Tiananmen Square to the 2008 Olympics.

China’s leaders remember well that in 1989, the international community largely condemned Beijing’s brutal slaughtering of its own citizens at Tiananmen Square. Yet just 19 years later, the world’s leaders eagerly flocked to Beijing to attend the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games.

Let’s remember the scene on 8 August 2008 at the Beijing National Stadium (a.k.a. Bird’s Nest). There were tens of thousands of people in the seats watching one of the most impressively orchestrated Olympic opening ceremonies in history. There at the top of the



stadium, in a cool, air-conditioned skybox were the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee, looking down over the masses of humanity. At the center was President Hu Jintao, wearing a black suit reminiscent of Chairman Mao Tse-tung. President Hu was cool, calm, and collected. And what did he see down in those seats, in the 95-degree heat and 95-percent humidity? The president of the United States, with big sweat stains under his armpits. That president later went on to describe the event as being “spectacular and successful.”⁸⁷

What was the strategic message from this event? It reinforced a belief among China’s leadership that the West has a short attention span regarding such issues as crimes against humanity, as reflected in the Tiananmen Square massacre. In short, Beijing believes the West can be counted on to forget even the most barbarous actions after a roughly 20-year time span. Given that logic, the latest Beijing could use military force to physically restore China’s perceived territory would be around 2030. This would then allow for 20 years of “peace” before Beijing would conduct a grand ceremony to memorialize the “second 100”—the 100th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. *Which leads to the question: When is the earliest China could use military power?*

Given the current environment and readiness of the PLA, it could start at any time. However, a more precise answer is 2020. As referenced earlier, intelligence analysis strongly indicates the PLA has, during the past decade, been given the strategic task of being able to take Taiwan by force by 2020. If the PLA is able to take Taiwan by force in 2020, then it stands to reason that the less-included task to seize the Senkaku Islands would also be achievable.

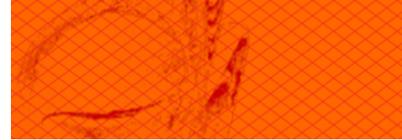
The decade of concern begins in 2020, when there will be mounting pressure within China to use military force to achieve the “China Dream” of national restoration by 2049. The chorus for the use of force will grow each year and will crescendo in the late 2020s, and possibly end in a violent clash to seize Taiwan, the Senkakus, and any other area Beijing deems to be a core interest.

Recommendations Regarding Chinese Aggression

Given China’s strategic intention to restore its so-called territorial integrity, its modernization and transformation of the PLA and its commitment to a predetermined timeline prompt this final question: What can be done to dissuade, deter, or in the worst case defeat a Chinese short, sharp war against the Senkaku Islands?

Below are eight recommendations that fall into three categories: (1) those the United States must take on its own, (2) those Japan must take, and (3) those both countries must pursue jointly.

⁸⁷. “News Feature: Bush Blends Sports, Politics at Beijing Olympics,” *Xinhua* (Beijing), 11 August 2008.



1. National Interest

First and foremost, President Donald J. Trump's administration must fundamentally transform the U.S. national security culture in regards to China: it must move from a culture of accommodation and appeasement to one that acknowledges that China is the biggest threat to our national security interests.

Given the dire nature of not just the Senkaku Islands situation, but all the other diplomatic, financial, economic, legal, and human rights points of friction that have emerged since U.S.-PRC relations were established in 1979, America must now deal with the PRC from a position of strength. The United States must assert its core interests just as the PRC relentlessly does, if not more so.

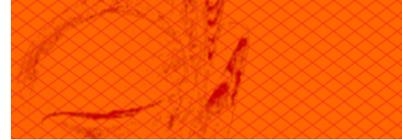
The administration should declare that U.S.-China relations have entered a new period. President Trump need not explicitly reject the new type of great power relationship asserted by President Xi, but should implicitly reject it by affirming that the United States' relationship with all countries, both great and small, is based on U.S. core interests in respect to international law, Westphalian sovereignty, and negotiated dispute resolution without coercion, with resort to third parties when bilateral negotiations fail. To this end, the U.S. government should explicitly support the 12 July 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, and explicitly reject all claims that conflict with it.

Regarding the Senkaku Islands, the United States must do more than simply say that the Senkaku Islands are covered under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Treaty Mutual Cooperation and Security. The United States must say that it will actively and aggressively reinforce its commitment to use military force against China should China ever attempt to conduct a short, sharp war or occupation by military or nontraditional forces.

Finally, on this theme, as in 1947 when George F. Kennan penned the famous "Article X," the current administration should articulate a new policy that describes a new U.S. approach to containing the PRC's aggressive expansionism around the globe. This will require a clear break with the past 40 years of the Kissinger Doctrine, which has placed engagement, cooperation, and even appeasement as the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy regarding China.

2. Assert UNCLOS Rights

Second, the Trump administration must actively and routinely reassert U.S. naval operations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. There should be no more walking on eggshells, worrying about whether or not routine actions in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region are provoking China. Beijing has deftly turned that fear into a tool to manipulate the United States. As an example, the U.S. Pacific Fleet should resume routine operations in the East China Sea, returning to pre-2000 levels where U.S. Navy warships routinely operated west of the median line, as well as in the Yellow Sea.



3. Adjust Policy

Third, while seemingly unrelated, the Trump administration should explore recalibrating the United States' China policy. Regardless of whether we call it, as Beijing does, the One China Principle or something else, the United States should be openly exploring new policy options, if for no other reason than to remind Beijing that threats to Japan will have far-ranging and significant consequences.

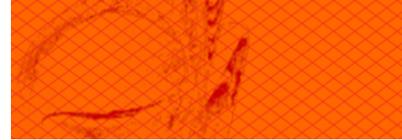
For instance, the notion that U.S. warships cannot make the occasional port call in Taiwan needs to be honestly examined, discussed with our friends in Taiwan, and—if deemed appropriate—executed without fanfare or advance notification. The message to China should be that freedom of navigation and free access to ports is a core interest of the United States and that America is not going to be constrained by Beijing's threats.

Closely related to this topic, the United States must end the practice of unconstrained engagement with China by the Department of Defense (DOD). Specifically, we should suspend China's invitation to the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises until Beijing alters its threatening behavior, economic sanctions, hate campaigns, and rhetoric against our allies, Japan and the Republic of Korea. RIMPAC should be returned to its origins as an exercise by which the free nations of the world practice the combat skills to deter lawless expansionism of dictatorships, rather than a naval social event. It is simply astonishing that periodically the U.S. does not invite a treaty ally because its form of democracy did not meet our standards (e.g., Thailand), yet we invite the Chinese and graciously host them even as they simultaneously aggress our allies and others.

4. Prepare for Contingencies

Fourth, President Trump and Congress must work together to adequately fund the DOD's return to a strategy that accommodates two major regional contingency operations, as it did during the Cold War. U.S. forces must be fully funded for the unique military requirements for fighting and defeating any PRC attempt to take the Senkakus, as well as any other major attack against the United States or our allies and interests.

In this regard, America needs to return to being a truly global maritime power. America's elected officials carelessly neglected this vital aspect of our national power during the past two-plus decades of emphasis on the Southwest Asia (U.S. Central Command) area of responsibility. While the U.S. Navy can dispatch ships around the globe, today, the Navy is not adequately sized or outfitted to meet U.S. national security requirements in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Even worse, it is certainly debatable whether or not the United States could stop a Chinese short, sharp war against the Senkaku Islands. The PLA Navy likely will have more than 500 ships and



submarines by 2030. To provide a credible deterrent force and to fight and win wars at sea, the U.S. Navy must get bigger—a lot bigger than the current plan for 350 ships.

5. Commit to Forward Deployment

Fifth, the Trump administration should proclaim its commitment to a forward-deployed presence, especially for our naval forces, and then it should follow these words with concrete, tangible actions. Not only are these necessary to bolster the flagging confidence of U.S. allies, it will also send a clear and unambiguous statement to China. In addition to the current forward-deployed force structure, new options can also range from home porting a second U.S. Navy aircraft carrier in Guam to home porting ships in South Korea, and forward deploying ballistic missile defense systems (e.g., Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD) in Japan.

6. Increase Public's Situational Awareness

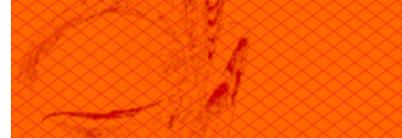
Sixth, and closely aligned with the forward deployment commitment, the United States should conduct a more robust and public information campaign to accurately portray China's campaign to expand its maritime sovereignty at the expense of its neighbors and our allies, and to counter Chinese propaganda and political warfare designed to neutralize resistance to its aggression.

While the introduction of the Boeing P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and Northrop Grumman's soon-to-be-deployed MQ-4C Triton unmanned aerial vehicle have improved DOD collection capabilities in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, overall, the United States has displayed a conspicuous lack of will to publicly report the PRC's actions in the maritime domain. For instance, during the recent deployment of China's aircraft carrier Liaoning (Type 001), U.S. Pacific Command did not provide unclassified pictures of China's inaugural carrier flight operations in the open ocean, even though reconnaissance flights had most likely been conducted.

There is a tremendous amount of scholarly documentation regarding China's military pursuits, led by experts in think tanks and academia, but even this research is grossly inadequate for truly understanding China's military.⁸⁸ Although this information shortfall cannot be faulted due to the secret nature of many of the movements of Chinese naval, coast guard, and militia forces across the vastness of the world's oceans, we do have institutions whose primary mission is to observe such activities and to compile databases regarding these activities.

It is a responsibility of the U.S. Navy to know the answers to these secrets, to track ships, submarines, and aircraft at sea. U.S. Navy intelligence has the capability and capacity to provide the kinds of primary source material that the academic and think tank community needs to more

⁸⁸. James E. Fanell and Ryan D. Martinson, "Countering Chinese Expansion through Mass Enlightenment," CIMSEC.org, 18 October 2016.



effectively comprehend China's nautical ambitions.⁸⁹ Sharing sanitized and declassified information "would not only improve the quality of scholarship and elevate the public debate, it would also go a long way to help frustrate China's current—and, to date, unanswered—strategy of quiet, coercive-expansion," especially as it relates to China's tightening noose around the Senkaku Islands.⁹⁰

The sharing of facts about Chinese activities at sea is not just good for democracy, but it is also smart diplomacy. Making such information widely available would help counter spurious Chinese narratives of American actions as being the root cause of instability in the Western Pacific. Both outcomes are in our national interest.

According to U.S. doctrine, a campaign's phase zero (shaping operations) are intended to shape the public perception environment, which should also drive what an adversary military can and cannot do. By allowing China to operate clandestinely in the South and East China Seas, the United States is forgoing an important opportunity of increasing its own soft power while degrading China's soft power. By providing such damaging information to the public, the U.S. Navy will better inform the public and provide U.S. leadership with bargaining leverage over China.

7. Encourage Japanese Occupation

Seventh, Japan should physically occupy the Senkaku Islands. Some will suggest that by adopting such a strategy Japan would cross a red line and thus force China to act militarily. However, given China's methodological approach to military campaign planning, it is more likely that Beijing would reconsider the military correlation of forces, as well as the international implications of launching an attack against occupied islands.

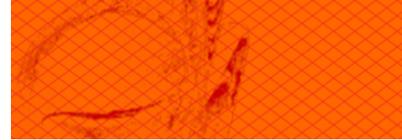
Practically speaking, Japan should construct permanent facilities, such as a weather station, lighthouses, heliports, and a harbor, across the Senkakus, as well as station personnel on the islands. The effect of Japan taking these actions on the islands today will lead to deterrence in the future.

[A] proactive policy is necessary now. Proactive does not mean aggressive (just as caution, in this case, has not translated into greater security). Indeed, one cannot be 'aggressive' in exercising one's sovereign rights over one's own territory. Proactive is thoughtful and consistent—and the time has come to move away from caution and towards a proactive approach to securing the Senkakus as the rightful territory of Japan.⁹¹

⁸⁹. Fanell and Martinson, "Countering Chinese Expansion through Mass Enlightenment."

⁹⁰. Fanell and Martinson, "Countering Chinese Expansion through Mass Enlightenment."

⁹¹. Robert D. Eldridge, "Opinion: Japan Needs a Policy for the Senkakus," *Japan Forward*, 29 March 2017.



8. Preparation and Defense

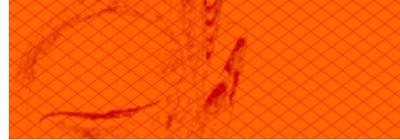
Eighth, the United States should offer to conduct joint operations with Japan in defense of the Senkaku Islands. The basic tenet of an alliance is that aggression against one is an attack on all, but the PRC aims to reduce our alliances to friendship agreements. The statement that the “U.S. takes no sides” on a sovereignty dispute involving an ally is illogical; an alliance is the taking of a side. Like the term marriage, the term treaty alliance means something. Disingenuous quibbling over issues such as the sovereignty of Scarborough Reef, Mischief Reef, and the Senkakus is an invitation for China’s expansionism. China has become bold in its campaign to diminish the Japan-America Security Alliance.

For instance, U.S. Pacific warships could conduct over-the-horizon patrols of the Senkaku Islands with their counterparts from Japan Maritime Self Defense Force and Japan Coast Guard. Likewise, American fighter aircraft from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps could be integrated with their counterparts from the JASDF when scrambling against Chinese probes of Japan’s ADIZ and the areas around the Senkaku Islands.

Perhaps most important, U.S. Marines and the amphibious-trained Japanese Ground Self Defense Force Southwest Army should conduct amphibious assault training exercises together in the Senkakus to demonstrate that if the islands were occupied by Chinese forces, the combined U.S. and Japan forces have the capability and will to retake the islands with boots on the ground. and bayonets.

By offering this joint operational support, the United States would not only be helping to relieve the stress that Japanese counterparts are experiencing, but it would be a significant enhancement in the interoperability between both forces. Finally, it would send another clear and unambiguous signal to China that if it was foolish enough to attempt such an attack, it would be facing an extremely integrated, competent, and committed fighting force.

While the building of the United States’ and Japan’s military interoperability is essential, the two nations should also reach out to other allies in the region to bring them into a broader coalition of nations. This will send the PRC an unambiguous message that any effort to take the Senkaku Islands by force will be met by a larger force of like-minded nations that respect the rule of law and the right to freedom and liberty. Nations such as Australia, India, and Korea all share these same fundamental views and thus should be solicited now for their support in a worst-case scenario for the future.



Conclusion

PRC action against the Senkaku Islands is just a matter of time. An incident precipitating such action could occur at any time, especially with the vastly increased, near-daily PRC provocations in the vicinity of the islands. From 2020 to 2030, the Decade of Concern, it will become increasingly likely that China could launch a short, sharp war to take the Senkaku Islands and put Japan's Nansei Shoto region under missile and air assault. Japan and the United States must take proactive steps now to ensure their allied response does not reflect the arrogance and ineptitude of the March 2017 Senkakus Wargame previously described. For the sake of long-term peace, stability, and freedom in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, Japan and the United States must develop the credible capability to dissuade, deter, and defeat the PRC's increasingly threatening behavior and seemingly inevitable attack to take the Senkakus.