

Tension after Chinese warship last week directed “fire-control” radar at a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer

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We reproduce below articles from the English language Japanese press on the “radar” incident with China.

Contents

- [Chinese warship directs \(...\)](#)
- [China’s radar lock on Japanese](#)
- [China’s distrust of Abe \(...\)](#)
- [Abe slams China over radar \(...\)](#)
- [U.S. airs concern over China’s](#)
- [Japan seeks int’l backing \(...\)](#)
- [Japan, U.S. agree to work \(...\)](#)
- [PM Abe informed of China \(...\)](#)

Chinese warship directs ‘fire-control’ radar at Japan MSDF destroyer

TOKYO (Kyodo) — A Chinese warship last week directed “fire-control” radar at a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer in the East China Sea, where Japan and China are involved in a dispute over the ownership of a group of uninhabited islands, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said Tuesday.

As the radar activated was for targeting and the move could have set off an inadvertent military clash, Japan lodged a protest with China in Tokyo and Beijing on Tuesday afternoon, just hours after Japan condemned China over the intrusion of two Chinese vessels into its territorial waters around the islands the previous day.

The radar beaming, which a Japanese government source said had occurred in waters off the Japanese-administered, Chinese-claimed Senkaku Islands, called Diaoyu in China, is all but certain to further heighten tensions between the two countries.

“Beaming of radar for firing is very abnormal, and it could have put us in a very dangerous situation if one mistake were made,” Onodera said at a press conference, urging the Chinese side to refrain from making such aggressive moves.

When Tokyo lodged a protest with Beijing, the Chinese side said it first intends to confirm the facts

about what took place, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

In the incident that took place on the high seas in the East China Sea at around 10 a.m. on Jan. 30, a frigate of the Chinese navy directed fire-control radar at the MSDF's Yuudachi, which was conducting surveillance activities at the time, according to the Defense Ministry.

The two ships were about 3 kilometers apart, Onodera said, while declining to elaborate on where exactly the incident took place. A ministry official said the radar was beamed "for minutes."

By directing fire-control radar, the side activating it can determine a target's distance, direction, speed and altitude, among other things, and weapons linked to the radar can be fired immediately, according to the ministry.

Asked why the ministry announced the incident about a week after it occurred, Onodera said it took until Tuesday for the ministry to determine that fire-control radar had in fact been beamed at the MSDF vessel.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe instructed Onodera to handle the case properly and lodge a protest with the Chinese government so as "not to have a similar incident," the defense chief said.

Abe also said it is important not to react to the Chinese "provocation," noting the importance of handling the case calmly, according to a government official.

In a similar occurrence in the East China Sea around 5 p.m. on Jan. 19, another Chinese frigate was suspected of having directed fire-control radar at an MSDF helicopter in flight.

A warning went off on the helicopter, which was attached to the MSDF destroyer Oonami and was on a surveillance mission at the time, indicating the helicopter had been targeted with radar, according to the minister.

No firing occurred in either incident.

News of the incidents prompted some Japanese lawmakers to call for steps to prevent a similar incident, while vexing others about Chinese moves that could worsen already deteriorating ties between the two countries.

"This act damages the trust between the two countries," Shigeru Ishiba, secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, told reporters, adding that one needs to look into whether Beijing had condoned the act or whether Chinese navy personnel had acted on their own.

A senior member of the New Komeito party, the junior coalition partner of Abe's LDP, said the incidents occurred at a "bad time" given that Chinese leader Xi Jinping had expressed readiness to improve relations with Japan in a meeting on Jan. 25 in Beijing with a delegation of the lay Buddhist party.

Earlier Tuesday, Japan lodged a protest with China over the intrusion of two Chinese maritime surveillance ships in Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands for more than 14 hours on Monday.

* *Mainichi Shimbun*, February 05, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130205p2g00m0dm088000c.html>

China's radar lock on Japanese ship tests ties

The news that a Chinese warship last week directed “fire-control” radar at a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) destroyer in the East China Sea sent shockwaves through Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government, which had just embarked on a mission to mend frayed ties between the two Asian neighbors.

Efforts had recently been made to improve chilly Sino-Japanese relations, including a visit last month to Beijing by New Komeito leader Natsuo Yamaguchi, but the latest incident will inevitably aggravate bilateral ties. The Japanese Foreign Ministry lodged a strong protest with the Chinese side on Feb. 5 — about one week after the incident actually happened — because the Defense Ministry took much time to analyze exactly what took place.

“Have you seen a movie showing fighter jets? The incident is the same as the situation observed at the time of a lock-on. For the crewmembers, that must have been a big surprise,” said an official at the Prime Minister’s Office.

While floating the idea of permanently stationing public servants on the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture also claimed by Beijing, Abe had been exploring the possibility of improving Sino-Japanese ties by employing a carrot-and-stick policy. For example, Abe asked Yamaguchi to take his personal letter to new Chinese leader Xi Jinping last month. The latest incident happened at a time when there were signs of an improvement in bilateral ties as Xi said he would “seriously consider” holding a summit meeting with Abe. Such being the case, a Japanese government official said, “We want them to stop dangerous activities.”

During the Cold War era, there were cases of foreign warships pointing their artillery guns directly at SDF vessels, but such an incident had not happened since Japan and China got locked in a territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands. According to Defense Ministry officials, the SDF and the Chinese military have refrained from moving close to the Senkaku Islands. The latest incident occurred more than 100 kilometers away from the Senkaku Islands, but the Chinese and Japanese vessels were three kilometers apart — a distance that allowed them to visibly confirm each other’s position. “They (the two vessels) had remained in a standoff,” said an official close to Abe. Because the Chinese ship did not turn its cannon barrel directly toward the Japanese destroyer and helicopters on board, the MSDF decided to wait and see what would happen next without preparing for a counterattack. A Defense Ministry official said, “There is a possibility that China tested our capabilities.” There is also a view that military officials on the Chinese vessel made that decision on their own.

The Prime Minister’s Office first received information on China’s radar locking on a Japanese destroyer from the Defense Ministry on Jan. 30 — the same day the incident happened. After analyzing received data on radio waves, the Defense Ministry concluded on Feb. 4 that it was in fact a “fire-control” radar that had been directed at the Japanese destroyer. After receiving a report from Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera on the afternoon of Feb. 5, Prime Minister Abe allowed Onodera to release the information on the incident. An official close to Abe said, “It took much time to analyze.” His remark suggests that the government patiently waited until the details of the incident were confirmed.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida revealed on the evening of Feb. 5 that he was asked by the Defense Ministry to lodge a protest with China earlier on the same day.

On the morning of Feb. 5, Deputy Foreign Minister Akitaka Saiki summoned Chinese Ambassador to Japan Cheng Yonghua to the Foreign Ministry and lodged a protest over a separate incident in which two Chinese maritime surveillance ships intruded into Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands the previous day. It is unusual for the Japanese government to lodge a protest with China twice in a day.

In order to avoid an accidental clash in the East China Sea, the two countries have been considering setting up a "sea line communication mechanism," including sharing a frequency to be used to communicate between SDF and Chinese military vessels and aircraft, but the talks between the two governments have stalled due to the Japanese government's decision to nationalize the Senkaku Islands. A senior Japanese government official underscored the government's stance to continue to make efforts to improve ties through dialogue, saying, "We will not respond to provocation."

Mainichi Shimbun, February 06, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130206p2a00m0na016000c.html>

China's distrust of Abe gov't may have led to radar incident

BEIJING — A Chinese warship directing "fire-control" radar at a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) vessel in the East China Sea last week may be a sign that China has been increasingly frustrated with the Abe government's unyielding attitude.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping expressed a willingness to hold summit talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe when he met with Natsuo Yamaguchi, head of ruling coalition partner New Komeito last month in Beijing. However, Xi indirectly urged Japan to compromise its tough stance toward the bilateral dispute over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture, which are also claimed by Beijing. "The environment needs to be improved first," he was quoted as telling Yamaguchi.

Furthermore, Xi stressed in a study session of the Communist Party of China's Politburo on Jan. 28 that China "will not abandon its legal interests," reaffirming that China would never unilaterally compromise on the dispute over the Senkaku Islands.

The radar incident happened on Jan. 30, a day after the Japanese government approved a draft budget for fiscal 2013 that included measures to beef up the Japan Coast Guard that is responsible for guarding the Senkaku Islands and the surrounding area.

In particular, China distrusts Tokyo for its failure to take concrete action to improve its relations with Beijing even though Abe underscored the importance of bilateral ties in a letter sent to Xi.

"Japan needs to pursue a solution to the issue through sincerity and concrete action," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a news conference on Feb. 5 in reference to an incident in which Chinese maritime surveillance ships intruded into Japanese territorial waters the previous day.

Meanwhile, a diplomatic source in Beijing pointed out that Chinese authorities are not unified in their response to the issue, suggesting the possibility that the Chinese Navy acted alone when it directed fire-control radar at the MSDF vessel.

When radar was allegedly directed at a helicopter on an MSDF vessel on Jan. 19, Chinese media was extensively reporting on the possibility of a military confrontation with Japan, and the Chinese military joint staff section ordered all of the military to “prepare for war.” The possibility cannot be ruled out that such a situation led to China’s provocative action.

While China welcomed two former Japanese prime ministers, Yukio Hatoyama and Tomiichi Murayama, who visited Beijing in January this year, its maritime surveillance ships have repeatedly entered Japanese territorial waters. It has displayed both hard-line and moderate attitudes to see how Japan reacts.

However, as Japan has been employing the same tactics in displaying both a hard and moderate attitude, China has been unable to find a clue to a solution and may escalate its provocative acts. (By Akira Kudo, Chinese General Bureau)

Mainichi Shimbun, February 06, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130206p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Abe slams China over radar on Japan ship

TOKYO/BEIJING (Kyodo) — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe condemned China on Wednesday over the locking of fire-control radar on a Japanese destroyer in the East China Sea by a Chinese navy vessel in late January, calling it a “dangerous” act that could have led to a “contingency.”

“It was a unilateral, provocative act and extremely regrettable,” Abe told a House of Councillors session of the incident Japanese defense officials said occurred about 100 kilometers north of the Senkaku Islands administered by Japan but claimed by China. “I call on China to exercise restraint so the situation will not unnecessarily escalate.”

In Beijing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry suggested the Jan. 30 incident was an independent action by the military.

“We learned about this incident from press reports,” ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a press conference when asked if the ministry was informed about the incident before the Japanese government made it public Tuesday evening.

Abe’s government plans to ask Beijing to give a detailed explanation, including why the ship directed the radar at the Japanese vessel, through senior working-level diplomatic talks, Japanese government officials said.

While stressing a single mistake could have led to “a very dangerous situation” in the “extremely abnormal” case, Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera also unveiled a similar instance in which a Chinese naval ship was suspected of having directed fire-control radar at a Maritime Self-Defense Force helicopter Jan. 19.

In the wake of the cases, a senior Japanese official on Wednesday called for the establishment of a maritime contact system between the two countries' defense authorities.

"We will need to work on creating a mechanism" to avoid a contingency between the two sides, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said.

Shinsuke Sugiyama, director general of the Foreign Ministry's Asia and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, said Japan will closely cooperate with the United States and seek Washington's involvement in dealing with China.

At the upper house session, Abe said he regrets the Jan. 30 incident because it could undermine efforts to improve bilateral relations soured by the dispute over the Senkakus.

Abe said he had seen "signs for dialogues between the two countries," alluding to a meeting last month in Beijing between a delegation of the New Komeito party, a junior coalition partner of Abe's Liberal Democratic Party, and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who expressed willingness to improve strained ties.

Chinese spokeswoman Hua justified action by Chinese ships and planes in territorial waters and airspace around the Senkakus because the islands "are China's inherent territory."

Hua said "normal patrol and law enforcement activity" by Chinese government ships and airplanes in relevant areas "are normal performance of duty to exercise Chinese jurisdiction" over the islands.

"Recently, Japanese planes and ships repeatedly entered into waters and airspace of the Diaoyu Islands," Hua said. "China asks Japan to stop such illegal activities."

Kyodo Press, February 06, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130206p2g00m0dm072000c.html>

U.S. airs concern over China's radar locking on Japanese defense ship

WASHINGTON (Kyodo) — The United States on Tuesday expressed concern by a recent locking of a weapons targeting radar by China's warship on a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer in the East China Sea, saying such an action increases the risk of miscalculation and could undermine peace.

Asked to comment on the development that took place last week in waters off the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said, "With regard to the reports of this particular lock-on incident, actions such as this escalate tensions and increase the risk of an incident or a miscalculation."

"They could undermine peace, stability and economic growth in this vital region. So we are concerned about it," she told a daily briefing.

A Pentagon official also made a similar reaction earlier in the day, saying, "We have seen and are concerned by the reports of this incident."

“We continue to encourage all sides to avoid steps that raise tensions and increase the risk of miscalculations that could undermine peace and stability in the region,” the official said, adding that Washington also encourages Tokyo and Beijing to resolve the matter “peacefully through dialogue.”

The action by Beijing, which challenges Japan’s ownership of the uninhabited islands which are called Diaoyu in China, could further escalate tensions between the two Asian countries.

The United States says it supports Japanese administration of the islands and opposes any unilateral action to undermine Japanese control of them, reiterating U.S. security treaty obligations to defend Japan over the islets in the event of an armed attack.

At the same time, Washington says it takes no position over the sovereignty of the islands and urges Japan and China to resolve the dispute peacefully through dialogue.

Kyodo Press, February 06, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130206p2g00m0dm005000c.html>

Japan seeks int’l backing to restrain China’s provocations following radar lock

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government took the unusual step of disclosing military intelligence on an incident in which a Chinese naval vessel aimed its fire-control radar at a Japanese destroyer in an apparent bid to secure backing from the international community in discouraging further provocations from China.

The incident involving a Chinese navy frigate and a Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) destroyer gave the impression to the international community that tensions are running high in the East China Sea, where China, which has been beefing up naval activities in the region, has been locked in a standoff with Japanese and U.S. military vessels and aircraft. While calling for the need to set up a framework to avoid any contingency, the Japanese government is poised to take a wait-and-see approach to ascertain what China will do next.

In the East China Sea, Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and the Chinese military have had repeated face-offs since around last September, when Japan nationalized the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture. In autumn last year, the United States announced it had deployed two aircraft carrier strike groups from the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet to the Western Pacific, setting the stage for the U.S. and Japan to jointly keep China in check. On Jan. 19 (JST), then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented, “We oppose any unilateral actions that would seek to undermine Japanese administration.” Soon after Clinton made the remark, Chinese warships directed fire-control radars at a helicopter on board an MSDF vessel and at an MSDF destroyer in the East China Sea.

From China’s perspective, the East China Sea is a starting point for China’s naval foray, and the Japanese archipelago, including Okinawa, stands in the way of China’s naval endeavors. China made it clear that after gaining command of the air and maritime waters in the region up to the “first island chain” stretching from the Japanese archipelago to Indonesia, it would compete with the United States for hegemony in the Pacific by expanding its presence to the “second island chain” stretching from the Izu Islands to Guam. In this respect, the view that China is insisting on sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands just because of marine resources fades away.

Jun Yasuda, a professor at Keio University, says China is trying to boost its clout in the areas of commerce and security, rather than in natural resources.

Because of all this, both Japan and China have taken steps to prevent their respective naval forces from approaching the Senkaku Islands, thereby avoiding accidental military confrontation. The latest incident involving China's use of weapons-guiding radar on the MSDF vessel apparently took place in waters more than 100 kilometers north of the Senkaku Islands. But a senior SDF official commented, "The three-kilometer distance between the vessels is on par to being threatened at knife-point from a distance of about 1.5 meters."

The government's explanations of when the Prime Minister's Office received the initial report on the radar incident have swung back and forth. Initially, the government said it received the first report on Jan. 30 — when the Chinese warship directed its fire-control radar at the MSDF destroyer. But on Feb. 6, the government corrected the date to Jan. 19 — when another Chinese vessel was suspected of directing its fire-control radar at a helicopter aboard an MSDF vessel. According to a ruling party source, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera insisted on releasing information at the time of the first alleged radar incident. However, the radar-sensing device installed in the helicopter could not save radio-wave data. The Defense Ministry subsequently spent one week analyzing data on the radar aimed at the MSDF destroyer on Jan. 30.

A Japanese government source stressed the differences between the Abe administration and the previous government led by then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in handling such cases.

"There were fire-control radar incidents before and after the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands, but the Noda government didn't disclose the information," the source said.

Mainichi Shimbun, February 07, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130207p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Japan, U.S. agree to work closely over Chinese ship radar incident

WASHINGTON (Kyodo) — Tokyo and Washington agreed Thursday to work closely together in responding to an incident in which a Chinese naval ship locked fire-control radar on a Japanese destroyer in the East China Sea, Japanese officials said.

The agreement to share information and analyses came as senior foreign and defense officials of the two sides, meeting at the State Department, discussed the issue for the first time since the Japanese government disclosed the incident on Tuesday.

The move is apparently intended to serve as a warning to China, which has become more assertive in its territorial claim over the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands, which Beijing calls Diaoyu.

From Japan, Takeo Akiba, deputy director general of the Foreign Ministry's North American Affairs Bureau, and Ro Manabe, deputy director general of the Defense Ministry's Defense Policy Bureau, participated in the meeting.

Jim Zumuwalt, deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs, and David Helvey,

deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia, led the U.S. delegation.

During the meeting, the Japanese side briefed the U.S. officials about the details of the radar lock-on incident, while the U.S. officials are believed to have called for calm response by both Japan and China to prevent tensions escalating.

The locking of the fire-control radar by a Chinese naval vessel on a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer occurred Jan. 30 on the high seas off the Senkaku Islands.

In addition to the tense situation over the Senkaku Islands, the Japanese and U.S. officials also discussed how to deal with North Korea, which has threatened to conduct a third nuclear test in defiance of international criticism.

The two countries also reaffirmed their stance to implement the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station within Okinawa Prefecture as the two countries agreed.

Earlier in the day, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney also indicated U.S. readiness to cooperate with Japan in addressing the incident.

Asked to comment on the U.S. position on the matter, Carney told a daily briefing, "It's something that we have been monitoring regularly and engaging with our allies in the region about."

"We have an important role as a Pacific power. And therefore we're very engaged in it," he said.

Kyodo Press, February 8, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130208p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

PM Abe informed of China radar lock incident 6 days later

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Thursday that he was informed of a Chinese navy ship's use of fire-control radar on a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer in the East China Sea six days after it occurred, admitting he did not receive the report from officials quickly enough.

Abe told a Diet committee that Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera reported the Jan. 30 incident to him on Tuesday, although the premier said he was informed immediately of a similar instance on Jan. 19 in which a Chinese naval ship was suspected of having directed such radar at an MSDF helicopter.

In explaining the delayed report, which could raise questions about the effectiveness of civilian control of the SDF, Abe said officials faced difficulty in work to verify the case involving the helicopter on Jan. 19 and "became more careful" in examining the Jan. 30 incident.

He added he will request more prompt reports of such matters even if information is unconfirmed.

While reiterating that the incidents were regrettable, Abe said, "It is important we not close the window for dialogue."

He called on China to reaffirm the importance of the “strategic relationship of mutual benefit,” a concept Abe put forward during his term as prime minister from 2006 to 2007 to improve bilateral ties.

Onodera, meanwhile, said in parliament that the Chinese naval ship trained its radar on the MSDF destroyer on the Japanese side of the Japan-designated median line, which ostensibly separates the two countries’ overlapping 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zones.

The area is near the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands, claimed by China and Taiwan, which call them Diaoyu and Tiaoyutai, respectively. The radar incident occurred as China has repeatedly intruded into airspace and waters near the islands, prompting Japan to lodge protests.

Onodera also said that China’s radar could be considered a threat of military force by the United Nations.

“I believe (the Chinese act) may amount to a threat of military force under the U.N. Charter,” Onodera told the committee, suggesting it is inconsistent with the spirit of the international body.

Onodera also urged China to cooperate in looking into the incident that Tokyo claims could have triggered an accidental military clash.

“To prevent a recurrence, we need to establish a communication channel for Japan and China to discuss maritime security mechanism,” he said.

An article of the U.N. Charter says all member countries “shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purpose of the United Nations.”

A senior ministry official separately said Thursday that when the radar was used, missiles or other artillery were not directed by China against the Japanese ship.

“No artillery was directed,” Masanori Nishi, director general of the ministry’s Defense Policy Bureau, told a meeting of a panel at the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

The Chinese government Thursday accused Japan of creating tension between the two nations.

“Recently, Japan has been hyping crisis and deliberately creating tension to smear China’s image,” Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a press conference.

Asked if China would explain to Japan about the Jan. 30 incident, she only said “competent Chinese authorities” have been conducting “sincere and serious” investigations into the case.

Kyodo Press, February 8, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130208p2g00m0dm004000c.html>
