

‘China Threat Theory’ Drives Japanese War Legislation

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Since his war legislation has failed to gain public support, Prime Minister Abe has suddenly brought up the China Threat as a last resort. However, a rational analysis of reality reveals that the theory is unfounded.

On July 21, 2015 a defence white paper was published. Unusually, it contained an addenda with a statement inserted at the end of a section on China: "China has been building new offshore platforms and other facilities on the Chinese side of the Japan-China median line in the East China Sea since June 2013. Japan has repeatedly lodged protests against China's unilateral development and demanded the termination of such works."

It had been known that China was building offshore platforms one after another; however, past defence white papers included only an objective description ("China is engaged in oil and gas drilling as well as building facilities and surveying for the drilling in the East China Sea and South China Sea"), with no expression of criticism. The 2015 white paper too, had originally followed the same approach; but oddly the addendum was suddenly inserted after printing and just before distribution.

Previous defense white papers did not consider China's gas field development a defense issue because the gas development is taking place on the Chinese side of the Japan-China median line of the East China Sea that Japan accepts as the boundary between the two countries exclusive economic zones (EEZ). However, on July 22 (the day after the insertion of the addendum),

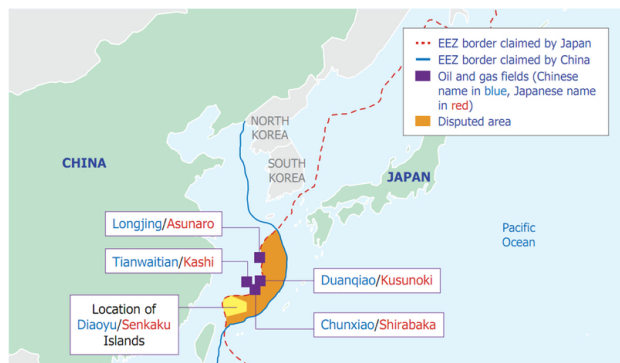
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released photographs of sixteen Chinese marine platforms in the East China Sea, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Mr Suga, commented "it is extremely regrettable that China should conduct unilateral development of resources."

The government is suddenly highlighting this issue because of the unexpectedly strong waves of public opposition to its security-related legislation; by appealing to a "China Threat" the government hopes to gain public "understanding" by grasping at straws.

Since around 10 years ago, in Japan there have been accusations that "China is drilling gas near the median line and siphoning off gas from the field that stretches underground to the Japanese side of the boundary." A similar claim was made by Saddam Hussein when Kuwait began oil drilling operations in the Rumaila oil field near the border with Iraq. Accusing Kuwait of 'stealing oil from Iraq' he invaded Kuwait.

Abe's Nonsensical Diplomacy

At that time, I wrote "It is Kuwait's right to drill oil within its territory. Hussein is hurling false accusations." But now that a similar issue has emerged in my own country, it seems that Hussein's claim is not entirely incomprehensible. Yet, as in Hussein's case, it is highly doubtful that other countries will accept such a claim from Japan today.



Perhaps Japan should also develop a gas field on the Japanese side of the median line. In July 2005 the government granted test-drilling rights to Teikoku Oil; however, nothing materialised because the project was not deemed profitable. To build a pipeline to Japan, the distance would be 600 km to Kyushu, 1,300 km to Osaka and 1,800 km to Tokyo.

If natural gas is liquefied by cooling to -162C, the gas can be transported in ships; but that would require building liquefaction plants as well as power plants at sea. On the other hand, for China the distance is 300 km to Ningbo and 400 km to Shanghai; so gas can be transported by pipe without liquefaction. As the largest importer of oil and gas, China is keen to develop its own gas fields, even if it costs more than importing for the moment.

If Japan does not intend to develop gas fields, a rational approach would be joint development rather than simply letting the gas be siphoned off, thereby gaining a share of the profits. In 2008, Japanese and Chinese governments agreed to jointly develop the Shirakaba (Chunxiao) and Asunaro (Longjing) fields, while leaving the details to be determined in negotiation towards a treaty. In September 2010, however, a collision occurred between a Japanese patrol boat and a Chinese fishing boat near the Senkaku Islands and popular support for bi-lateral cooperation dissipated in both countries. Negotiation over joint development has since been halted. Since the Senkaku issue was also shelved at the Abe-Xi meeting in

November 2014, negotiations over joint development should also resume.

Since Chinese offshore platforms are equipped with helipads, some analysts have argued that they "could become military strongholds." But helipads are also common in the North Sea and at US offshore oil fields, as they are essential for replacing workers and transporting fresh food. If they were for patrol helicopters, they would also need a hangar that fits several helicopters and a maintenance facility. This would require a huge structure, one which could be easily destroyed by an anti-ship missile.



There is also speculation that even though these platforms currently do not have radar installed, in future they may be equipped with anti-aircraft radar. But since the earth is round, 30 m-height radar would only be able to detect low-flying planes flying at an altitude of 100m within a 60m radius. It is easy for a foreign aircraft to avoid this level in approaching China. Hence such radar would be pointless.

Mr Abe said in his policy speech on February 12, 2015 that he will "strengthen our stable friendship from a broad perspective, while

deepening dialogues at various levels, and rise to the expectations of the international community." The "international community" here, of course, means the US. Mr Abe, acknowledging US wishes, has been making great efforts to improve Japan-China relations since the end of 2014. At the same time, as soon as his security legislation meets opposition, he appeals to China Threat Theory. His politics is utterly incoherent.

When it comes to China's advance in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands, many Japanese people are under the impression that territory of the Philippines is being invaded. But to begin with, in the 1898 Treaty of Paris in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the US, the object of cession was east of 118 degrees longitude (116 in the South); and the Spratly Islands fall outside (West) of that line. The US therefore did not claim these islands to be the US territory when in 1938 Japan declared them to be Japanese territory and incorporated them as connected to Taiwan under the name of 'Shinnan Gunto'. The Japanese government now considers the territorial status of these islands 'undetermined.'

China's Navy Is Weak

Of the 12 islands that comprise the Spratlys, The Philippines and Vietnam control five islands each, while Taiwan and Malaysia each control one; each country has built an airfield. China arrived late so it could only secure reefs, and has been reclaiming surrounding areas to build airfields. It is true that the "scale of China's reclamation is larger than that of any other country," though other countries have secured islands that required only partial reclamation.s

China has deployed three nuclear submarines with ballistic missiles in the Hainan islands. Conflict has arisen when the US Navy gathers information in preparation for anti-submarine activity in the South China Sea, and China attempts to interfere. China's reclamation and

construction of airfields can be seen as a means to defend a submarine base.

However, since economic relations between the US and China are enormously important, it is highly likely that they will compromise to avoid dangerous contingencies. For Japan, the South China Sea is an important route for importing oil. But even if conflict were to erupt in the area, all Japan has to do is move to the east of Bali, Indonesia, pass through the Lombok Strait, and pass east of the Philippines.

The core of the China Threat Theory is Chinese naval buildup. Examined in detail, however, the Chinese Navy is weak. The aircraft carrier Liaoning does not have a catapult to propel carrier-based aircraft to high speeds during launch. The takeoff of J15 fighter jets relies solely on engine thrust so the fuel and equipment capacities are limited, making it dangerous to take off if there are high waves. Besides, the Liaoning can only carry about twenty fighter jets and has no early-warning aircraft (indispensable for the defence of an aircraft carrier).

A US nuclear aircraft carrier normally carries 44 aircraft but in times of emergency it can carry 55 aircraft. Currently there are ten of these carriers, and next year the number will be back to 11. China's single aircraft carrier with around 20 planes is no match for the US's ten aircraft carriers with a total of 550 aircraft.

China's submarines, excluding extremely old models, consist of three nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, two nuclear-powered anti-ship attack submarines and 30 plus conventional diesel-electric submarines. The noise level of China's new model submarines is comparable to that of the Victor submarines made by the Soviet Union in the 70s, and are easily detected. Battery-powered submarines are of course quieter, but with limited underwater capacity they are likely to be overwhelmed by the advanced anti-submarine capacities of Japan and the US.

China's anti-submarine capability is, moreover, extremely poor.

In reality, the area in which the Chinese navy is likely to be able to compete with the navies of the US and other countries, is limited to the coastal area covered by the operational radius of ground-based fighter aircraft (about 1000km). In the future, too, it will be impossible for the Chinese navy to protect the long routes for importing resources from all over the world, including the Middle East, against the US navy. As China - the largest beneficiary of today's world order - increases its reliance on overseas resources and overseas markets, it will deepen its cooperation with the US, which maintains naval supremacy throughout the world.

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