

Letter

To the Editor: In response to “Opportunities in Understanding China’s Approach to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands” by Lieutenant Colonel Bradford John Davis, USA (*Joint Force Quarterly* 74 (4th Quarter 2014)), I must argue against his proposal for joint patrols/resource development.

LTC Davis characterized the Senkaku Islands as “seemingly unimportant.” If China were to occupy those islands, however, it would be able to extend its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claim to the Okinawa Trough, and Japan’s insistence on the Middle Line maritime boundary would lose legitimacy. Also, China’s construction of intelligence facilities on the islands would create significant disadvantage for both the United States and Japan. I consider the Senkaku Islands to be a strategically important asset to check China’s Pacific advance. When I was the director of Japan’s Defense Intelligence Headquarters in 2004, a Chinese *Han*-class nuclear submarine intruded into Japanese territorial waters between Ishigaki and Miyako islands. The Senkaku Islands stand in the way of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy’s access to the Western Pacific.

Also, China’s occupation of the Senkakus would strengthen its position toward Taiwan and put U.S. forces in Okinawa at risk. While LTC Davis wrote, “China and Japan can change their approach from the current win-lose dilemma into a win-win solution acceptable to both countries,” I think the author’s approach is naïve and discounts or ignores China’s current “salami-slicing” strategy in the South China Sea. The United States should hedge with its strong ally, Japan, against Chinese expansion.

Second, Davis wrote, “Chinese fishermen used these islands as shelter and navigational aids back to the Ming Dynasty.” He failed to mention the fact that fishermen of the Ryukyu (Okinawa) Kingdom also used the islands for the same purpose. He also failed to mention

the fact that the Japanese government had surveyed and declared Senkaku Islands as its territory by cabinet decision in January 1895. Similarly, he failed to recognize that a Japanese dried bonito factory was established on the islands and that many Japanese had lived and worked there during World War II. He also omitted the very important point that China never claimed the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands after 1895 until 1971, when the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East announced the possibility of oil below the seabed in the area.

Third, the Senkaku Islands were part of the areas whose administrative rights were reverted to Japan in 1972 under the “Agreement Between the United States of America and Japan Concerning the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands.” The United States had used part of the Senkaku Islands as bombing and gunnery ranges until the mid-1980s. It is obvious that if the United States had recognized any Chinese sovereignty over the islands, it would not have used them as bombing and gunnery ranges. Therefore, the U.S. position over sovereignty should not be neutral.

Fourth, and most significant, the author put Japan and China on the same strategic level and recommended proposals such as joint patrols as well as joint resource development that ignore China’s expansionistic and hegemonic intentions. Reports by both the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and RAND have stated that by 2020, China will be well on its way to having the means to achieve its first island chain policy.

The second island chain is composed of the Bonin Islands, Marianas Islands, Guam, and the Palau archipelago. China has noticed that this second island chain is scantily guarded in part because Japan’s coast guard has augmented its presence in the Senkaku Islands in response to China’s dispatch of over 200 red coral poaching ships in the

waters surrounding the Bonin Islands, where they engaged in illegal resource exploitation in Japan’s EEZ and territorial waters. Given the fact that red coral grows only 5 millimeters a year, we understand how China’s willingness to ignore resource preservation makes joint resource development unrealistic.

In a 2012 publication, the PLA think tank Military Science Academy insisted that the PLA Navy must protect Chinese national interests west of 165° East and north of 35° South.

According to Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660–1783*, translated by a Chinese scholar in 2004, the translator drew a three-line configuration including a third island chain, which included the Hawaiian Islands. We should remember that in 2012, members of a Chinese delegation reportedly suggested a potential People’s Republic of China (PRC) claim to Hawaiian sovereignty to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Admiral Timothy Keating, then-commander of U.S. Pacific Command, was also reportedly approached in 2007 by a Chinese admiral with a plan to divide the Pacific into U.S. and PRC zones of influence. In 2013, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China, stated to President Barack Obama that the vast Pacific Ocean has enough space for the two large countries of China and the United States.

The above indications demonstrate China’s intentions to change the status quo. Japan does not possess such an ambition. Therefore, China is the status changer while Japan is the status quo power. That point is not clear in LTC Davis’s article.

Last, but not least, China’s *Global Times*—the international version of *People’s Daily* by China’s Communist Party—published an article on September 17, 2012, titled “China should implement her major power’s responsibility to support the independence of Okinawa.”

The article stated, “On March 4, 2006, there was a referendum in Okinawa. Seventy-five percent of people demand independence and recover free trade with China. The remaining 25 percent wanted to belong to Japan but agreed to autonomy.” This article is completely fabricated and a typical example of China’s media warfare. China’s “Three Warfares Strategy” consists of media, psychological, and legal warfare. There was no referendum in Okinawa in 2006, and polling shows that a majority of people in Okinawa wants to remain part of Japan. In May 2013, *People’s Daily* even discussed the legitimacy of PRC possession of Okinawa, where about 75 percent of U.S. sole-use bases in Japan are located. It is obvious that China is trying to drive a wedge between Japan and Okinawa.

Since Japan controls the Senkaku Islands, agreeing to the joint patrols/resource development would mark a significant Japanese retreat. If Japan concedes sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands as LTC Davis proposes, China will advance to claim the entire Okinawa Islands, expel U.S. bases, and may claim the Hawaiian Islands. Already these phenomena have been happening in the South China Sea. There is no international justice or legitimacy by ignoring these Chinese expansionistic and hegemonic intentions.

Finally, I would like to ask a question: Would the United States accept joint U.S.-PRC patrols and resource development of Hawaiian waters because China claimed territorial rights in Hawaii? Would that really be building a stronger diplomatic relationship based on strategic cooperation between Washington and Beijing, as LTC Davis’s final statement about China and Japan suggests? If you do not think so, then you cannot support the author’s proposal. JFQ

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