2012 China anti-Japanese demonstrations

The China anti-Japanese demonstrations of 2012 were a series of initially peaceful demonstrations held across major cities in China during August and September 2012. The main cause of the demonstrations was the escalation of Senkaku Islands dispute between China and Japan around the time of the anniversary of "September 18 Incident". The protesters in several cities later became violent and the local authorities began arresting demonstrators and banning the demonstrations.

Background

The Senkaku Islands (in Japanese; Diaoyu Islands in Chinese) are offshore islands near Taiwan, and have been a subject of territorial dispute between the governments of the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China and Japan.[1] Prior to the demonstrations, there were many cases of protests over the sovereignty of the islands, most notably those in China in 2005. September 18 marks the anniversary of the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the memories of which fuel anti-Japanese sentiment in China.[2]

After the 2010 Senkaku boat collision incident, China stopped exporting rare earth to Japan.[3]

Incidents leading up to the protests

On 16 April 2012, Japanese governor Shintaro Ishihara publicly announced his decision to let Tokyo Municipality purchase the island from its private owner.[5]

On 4 July 2012, three Japanese coast guard boats made an official inspection of one Taiwanese ship near the disputed island.[4] After the inspection, Japanese coast guard and Taiwanese coast guard stood face to face.[4]

On 7 July 2012, Japanese prime minister Yoshihiko Noda expresses his consideration for the Japanese government to buy the disputed islands. The Chinese government angrily protested; Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin retorted "No one will ever be permitted to buy and sell China's sacred territory".[6][7]
On 15 August 2012, activists from Hong Kong sailed to, and landed on one of the disputed islands, but were stopped by the Japan Coast Guard. Seven activists jumped from the ships to swim ashore, five of whom reached the island; the other two turned back to the ships. The activists and their ship were detained by Japanese authorities. The detained activists were deported two days later.

First wave of protests

After the detainment of Hong Kong activists by the Japanese Coast Guard, Netizens in Mainland China called for a nationwide protest against Japan on 19 August. In Beijing, citizens began protesting in front of the Japanese embassy from 15 August. In the morning of 19 August, a crowd gathered and held placards bearing phrases such as "Return us the Diaoyu Islands" and "Japan must confess her crimes" in protest.

In Shenzhen, protesters marched down the streets chanting slogans such as "Defend the Diaoyu Islands" and "Smash Japanese Imperialism", called for the boycott of Japanese goods and for the government to retake the islands. In the process, many protesters tore up Japanese flags and smashed Japanese-branded cars and vandalized shops selling Japanese goods. Rocks were hurled at a Ramen shop. The protests lasted till about 2pm in the afternoon.

According to Sing Tao Daily, the government sent in large numbers of armed police, who called for an end to the violent protests, began driving the protesters away and detaining several over-reacting protesters. On 14 September, the Shenzhen Police detained 4 protesters for violating private property rights by deliberately smashing roadside cars.

The anti-Japanese protests were occasionally exploited by protesters who sought to criticize the Chinese government. Such demonstrations included marching with posters of the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong - perceived to be more assertive on issues of sovereignty than current leaders, as well as signs about corruption, food safety, and income inequality. Supporters of the ousted anti-capitalist leader Bo Xilai also had a showing during the protests.

There were also protests of varied intensities in other major cities such as Jinan, Qingdao, Guangzhou, Taiyuan, Shenyang, Changchun, Harbin, Chengdu and Hangzhou. There were police officers maintaining order at the scenes to prevent incidents of violence.

Reactions
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China

• On 19 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has strongly protested to the Japanese Ambassador to China. Spokesperson Qin Gang expressed, with regards to the landing of Japanese activists on the disputed islands, that such illegal action is a breach of Chinese territorial sovereignty and that Japan should handle current actions appropriately to avoid stirring up bilateral relations. [24]

• On 20 August, the Fujian provincial government decided to delay commemoration activities held with the Japanese Okinawa prefecture, citing current unsuitable atmosphere for such celebrations in the country. The activities were originally scheduled for 4 September. [25]

Japan

• On 19 August, Vice Foreign Minister Kenichiro Sasae expressed that the protests made by China are "unacceptable" and voiced regret over anti-Japanese protests in China. [26][27]

• On 20 August, the 10 Japanese activists who landed on the disputed islands were prosecuted for law-breaking and put under trial by the Okinawan police. [28][29]

• On 20 August, Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura told a news conference that "Both countries do not want the Senkaku issue to affect overall bilateral ties. The Sino-Japanese relationship is one of the most important bilateral ties for Japan, and it is indispensable for the stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region for China to play a constructive role". [30]

• On 20 August, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan proposed to the government to take appropriate actions to prevent incidents of detaining activists from recurring. [31]

Media comments

• China Youth Daily commented that the protests occurred as a result of wrongful attitude and actions on Japan's part, which had "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people". It claimed that the boycott of Japanese products is a sharp stand to "express the inviolable dignity of the Chinese people", and denounced instances of beating and smashing. [32]

• BBC correspondent in Beijing Martin Patience claims that the protests were "almost certainly sanctioned by the Chinese authorities" and that the government frequently used anti-Japanese sentiment to "deflect criticism of their rule" in the past. [33]

• CNN expresses that "both nations would benefit from resolving the dispute quickly, with China facing a leadership change later in the year and Japan facing separate territorial fights with Seoul and Moscow". [34]

• Reuters remarked that the anti-Japanese protests "reflect bitter Chinese memories of Japan's occupation of large parts of China in the 1930s and 1940s." [30]
Second wave of protests

2012 China anti-Japanese demonstrations
The main cities of anti-Japanese demonstrations on September 15, 2012.
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- On 11 September, China sent two patrol ships to the islands to demonstrate its claim of ownership. Japan formally nationalizes the three islands that were held in the ownership of Kunioki Kurihara.

- On 13 September, Chinese government submit nautical chart with baselines of the territorial sea on disputed islands to United Nations. Former president of Republic of China Lee Teng-hui remarked "The Senkaku islands were Japanese territory in the past and are still so at present."

- On 15 September, a large number of citizens in mainland China participated protest marches and called for boycott of Japanese products. But in some cities, demonstrations had become out of control, fire vandalism and other criminal acts occurred in Changsha and Qingdao. Across numerous cities, Japanese made cars have been targets of vandalism. Around 10 Japanese companies in Qingdao were damaged. Anti-Japanese protesters set on fire a sales outlet of Toyota Motor. Panasonic factory in Shandong was set ablaze and Panasonic factory in Suzhou was also damaged by protesters. Heiwado, Japanese department store in Changsha was ransacked. JUSCO, Japanese department store in Qingdao was also ransacked. Several thousand of protesters broke into Garden Hotel in Guangzhou housing the Japanese Consulate General, smashed windows and attacked Japanese restaurant.

- In the weekend of 15–16 September, Citizens in mainland China participated in protest marches and called for a boycott of Japanese products in as many as 85 Chinese cities, including Shanghai, Shenyang, Zhengzhou, Hangzhou and Harbin, as well as Hong Kong. Demonstrations escalated to arson of Japanese vehicles and other criminal acts in Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Changsha, Suzhou, Mianyang, Xi'an and Qingdao.

- There were protests in Los Angeles, Houston, San Francisco, New York and Chicago, as well as a petition to the US government and Congress to take a neutral stance over the dispute.

- South China Morning Post reporter Felix Wong was reportedly beaten by police in Shenzhen while covering the protests.

- US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told reporters "I am concerned that when these countries engage in provocations of one kind or another over these various islands that it raises the possibility that a misjudgment on one side or the other could result in violence and could result in conflict."

- On 16 September, China officially announced to submit the plan to request natural extension of their continental shelf up to Okinawa Trough extend the EEZ to UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. In Shenzhen, about 2,000 protesters tried to push their way into a Chinese Communist Party facility, and clashed with People's Armed Police. Protesters hurled bottles at the police guard in front of the Communist Party facility and threw rocks at the vehicles parked in the lot of the Communist Party building.

- On 17 September, Koichiro Gemba said that there was a mutual understanding that the United States would defend the islands, even though the subject was not discussed with the Americans.

- On 18 September, people in over 180 cities of China attend protests on the 81st anniversary of the Mukden Incident.
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- The car of Gary Locke, US Ambassador to China was blocked from entering the Japanese embassy, by protesters who chanted slogans referencing the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty. Protesters hurled bottles at the U.S. ambassador's car and grabbed the US flag. Then, Chinese security forces broke up the band of protesters such that, according to Locke, "It was all over in a matter of minutes, and I never felt in any danger." Chinese officials have expressed regret over the case and are investigating the "individual" incident.
- Anti Japanese protesters hurled ink bottles at the wall of the Japanese Consulate General in Shenyang.
- On 25 September, Japanese and Taiwanese ships sprayed water at each other after a Taiwanese flotilla briefly sailed into what Japan says are its territorial waters.

Reactions
- Between 17 to 18 September, Japanese School in Beijing canceled classes.
- Honda temporarily closed down all of its five major assembly plants in China. Toyota left temporary closure decisions to subsidiaries to decide on their own based on local conditions. Nissan temporarily closed two of its three factories in the country. Mazda decided to suspend production at its Nanjing plant for four days. Sony decided to suspend two of its seven factories in China for a short time. Two Panasonic factories in China, located in Qingdao and Suzhou, were damaged by attacks. Canon temporarily closed down three of its factories in China. Kobe Steel suspended operations at four factories by September 19, 2012. Fast Retailing suspended operations at 19 of its outlets in China.
- On 18 September, the Japanese right-wing group Ganbare Nippon, which had previously organized landings onto the disputed islands, organized an anti-Chinese counter-protest in Tokyo which commanded a turnout of about 50.

Crackdown

On September 17, police in the city of Xi'an banned large protests and forbade the use of phone and online messages to organize illegal protests. For the duration of the week, paramilitary troops in Shanghai provided round-the-clock protection to the Japanese consulate, stripping demonstrators of projectiles, warning them against violence with megaphones, and limiting demonstrators' time at the site to a few minutes. On September 18, police in Qingdao city arrested six people for violent acts in connection with the demonstrations. Guangzhou authorities arrested 18 people who committed anti-Japanese vandalism and asked the public to submit evidence against other violators. Governments elsewhere in Guangdong Province warned citizens against being present in large crowds.

On September 19, national authorities deployed riot police to suppress existing protests and to prevent their re-occurrence. Stations near to protest sites were closed by Beijing subway authorities, roads were re-opened to traffic, and Beijing-wide text messages warned citizens against further demonstrations. Outside of minor protests in Shanghai, no demonstrations were reported on the 19th. Police stations across the country vowed retribution against
rioters on Weibo, and China's commerce ministry urged foreign companies to report damage to the authorities.[77] The Japanese embassy in Beijing confirmed that there were no longer protests at that location, and Japanese businesses which had shut down during the protests re-opened.[2][76]

On September 21, dozens of Japanese coast guard officials and Okinawa prefecture police officers landed on the Uotsuri island, a largest island of Senkaku islands to prepare for the landing of Taiwanese activists.[78]

On September 22, the United States Marine and Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force proceeded with an amphibious assault drill on the scenario of retaking an island occupied by enemy forces.[79]

**Economic impact**

During the protests against Japan, there have been calls of boycotts of Japanese goods in addition to the destruction of several existing Japanese products.[80][81] Many Japanese businesses and factories in China were shuttered in reaction to the protests.[82] Since 16 September, most Chinese group tours to Japan were cancelled,[83][84] which has dealt a great blow to the Japanese tourism industry since the earthquake and tsunami disaster in March 2011.[85] The Japanese car manufacturing industry has suffered a loss of $250 million between 15–21 September due to the production of about 14,000 cars being suspended.[86] *The Guardian* predicted a global slowdown of economy due to the protests.[87]

Chinese authorities asked booksellers in Beijing to ban books by Japanese authors and titles about Japanese topics, and pressured Chinese publishers not to translate and publish Japanese content in response to China-Japan conflict.[88] Then Bookstores got rid of all publications related to Japan or written by Japanese authors.[89][90] On October 12, the entrepreneur-philanthropist Chen Guangbiao (陳光標) spent over $770,000 of his own money to buy new Geely cars for 172 owners of Japanese cars that were vandalized during the protests.[91]

**Reactions**

- **China**
  - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged people to express thoughts "rationally and within the law".[42]
  - Japan Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda urged China to prevent anti-Japan violence.[92]

- **Taiwan**
  - President Ma Ying-jeou remarked the waters surrounding the Diaoyutais are traditional fishing grounds of Taiwanese fishermen.[93]

- **United States**
  - United States urged calm in the China-Japan islands row.[94]
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