



'Friendly diplomacy' gaffe

Mineo Nakajima

The Sept. 7 collision between a Chinese fishing boat and the Japan Coast Guard patrol vessel Yonakuni in Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands resulted in the arrest and detention of the fishing boat captain on suspicion of obstructing the coast guard's official duty. He was released last weekend.

As the incident obviously was the willful wrongdoing of the fishing boat captain, the Japanese government should have handled this matter immediately and strictly. The Japanese government was wrong if, out of diplomatic considerations, it tried not to treat the matter as a problem between Japan and China.

Intrusion or intimidation by China in or near the Senkaku Islands has occurred frequently in the past, and seems likely to continue in the future. If the Japanese government stands firm in the belief that there is no territorial dispute between Japan and China over these islands based on its stance that the Senkakus are integral parts of Japan, there is no choice but to take strict measures in light of domestic and international laws — not only in this case but also in the March 2004 incident in which Chinese activists intruded on the islands.

Setting aside the question of whether Japan has the diplomatic capability to resolve this issue, or the question of striking deals over the development of gas fields in the East China Sea, there is no sign that China will make concessions or express understanding on the Senkaku Islands issue, since China regards the South China Sea even as a "core interest" and is strengthening its military capability by using economic development as leverage to expand its naval influence to cover as far as the Western Pacific."

While the Chinese government has paid much attention to the Senkakus, the Japanese government has naively worked to improve Japan-China ties. In a Nov. 27 2004 Sankei Shimbun Seiron

column about China's marine strategy involving nuclear submarines, I stated that the Chinese government began to speak of its territorial claims to the Senkaku Islands following the discovery of rich offshore resources in the area through the U.N. Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East's 1968 investigation.

One thing that left an impression on Japanese people was an opinion on the Senkaku Islands that then Deputy Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping gave during his visit to Japan in the fall of 1979. He said the matter should be resolved by our grandchildren or grandchildren's grandchildren. Both the Japanese government and the media welcomed him as an understanding leader.

Then, in February 1992, while Deng was expanding his political power, the Chinese government adopted the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone" at the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Seventh National People's Congress and announced that the Senkakus (called Diaoyu in Chinese) are part of China.

According to Article 2 of the law: "The territorial sea of the People's Republic of China comprises the entire sea belt adjacent to the land and the internal waters of the People's Republic of China. The land of the People's Republic of China includes the mainland of the People's Republic of China and its coastal islands; Taiwan and all islands appertaining thereto, including the Diaoyu Islands; the Penghu Islands; the Pratas Islands; the Paracel Islands; the Macclesfield Islands and the Spratly Islands; as well as all the other islands belonging to the People's Republic of China."

In this unrequited and hegemonic territorial view, not only Taiwan, the Penghu Islands and the Senkaku Islands, but also the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands (disputed with Vietnam and the Philippines) acquired a legal basis within China.

Japan's government, including the

Foreign Ministry, should have realized the urgency of this situation at the time and protested China's definition of territory. But diplomatic action was never taken. Even worse, Japan's government dedicated itself to keeping ties with China friendly through Communist Party chief Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan two months later and the Emperor and Empress's visit to China in the fall of 1992.

The Japanese government was dominated by a pro-China lobby, such as Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and Ambassador to China Tadashi Hashimoto. They were proactive about the Emperor and Empress's visit to China, but paid little or no attention to the Senkaku Islands issue, which was crucial to Japan's national interest.

Deng Xiaoping started busying himself with reform tasks for China and with opening doors by visiting such places as Shenzhen and Zhuhai in the southern part of China, and giving important lectures. In the meantime, he suppressed resistance from conservatives. This showed the real hardline sense of China's diplomacy.

Recently the Chinese government has been playing out its aggressive diplomacy and military strategy, thus making the U.S. government extremely cautious. As I have called this situation a "U.S.-China New Cold War," it goes without saying that the Japanese stance will be tested.

Whoever is prime minister, be it Naoto Kan or Ichiro Ozawa, I strongly urge the Democratic Party of Japan not to repeat the mistake of visiting China in large numbers as it did in December 2009 — seeking an "audience" with Chinese State President Hu Jintao. Japan should not pursue diplomacy resembling that of a Chinese tributary state.

Mineo Nakajima is the president of Akita International University. This article was translated from the Sankei Shimbun's Seiron Column of Sept. 14 with some modification.