



## China, Japan Dispute Confronts Obama Second Term Asia Agenda

By: Scott Stearns - February 12, 2013

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STATE DEPARTMENT — There is increasing hostility between China and Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea. What does the maritime dispute mean for President Barack Obama's second term Asian agenda?

Most recently in the ongoing dispute, Japan has charged that its vessels and aircraft in the area have been targeted by Chinese weapons-guiding radar.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the incident dangerous, indicating it could lead to a miscalculation and an armed flare-up if China were to do it again.

"At a time when it seemed there are signs of improvement towards increasing talks between Japan and China, having this sort of one-sided provocative action taken by the Chinese is extremely regrettable," he stated.

Beijing says Japan is stoking tensions by sending ships and planes into areas claimed by China. Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying.

"Japan is deliberately spreading false information, tarnishing China's image, creating tensions and misleading international opinion," he said. "We can't help but maintain a high degree of alertness regarding Japan's true intentions."

Cato Institute analyst Justin Logan says it's a dangerous time.

"It is unnerving that you do hear both Chinese and Japanese sound an awful lot like they would fight a war with one and other over what -- compared to the prospective costs of a shooting war - - are worthless rocks," he explained.

Logan says the dispute is being fed by nationalism on both sides. "It's not just a case that this is a sort of a realist, get-the-map-out, secure-your-sea lines sort of dispute. There are real burning historical beliefs at stake here," he said.

The Obama administration says it is trying to maintain the status quo without taking sides.

Secretary of State John Kerry says it's part of a complex set of Asia-Pacific challenges facing President Obama's second term.

"China is an ongoing process. And it takes commitment and perseverance to break through on one issue or another. We have a lot of issues with China," Kerry stated.

Ruth Wedgwood, at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, says China's ambitions in the East China Sea and in the South China Sea push its smaller neighbors toward the United States.

"China would be, just by the sheer fact of its portliness and bulk a very important neighbor to every country in the region. So I suppose you could argue to them that this is counterproductive, that they are driving countries into our arms," she added.

U.S. officials say China's radar lock on Japanese vessels increases the risk of a miscalculation that could undermine peace and economic growth in the Asia-Pacific.