

《东亚岛屿争端的来龙去脉》

1) SENKAKU ISLANDS

Controlled by Japan. Called Senkaku by Japan, Diaoyu in Chinese.

The History: China's claim to the Senkakus is based in part on records dating to the early 15th century. Beijing claims the area was for centuries used by Chinese fishermen and for other purposes before it was taken by the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Japan dismisses China's position, saying it had never claimed its sovereignty before the 1970s. The U.S. took over administration of the islands after World War II, but returned them to Japan along with Okinawa in 1972, a decision China has since contested. Taiwan also claims the islands. The dispute has grown with China's rapid naval expansion in the South and East China Seas, culminating in a standoff in 2010 that chilled bilateral ties for months. The latest flare-up was started by combative Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara's move to purchase the islands from a private Japanese owner., which pushed the central government into making its own offer to buy them.

The Stakes: China's push for the Senkakus in the East China Sea contrasts with other territorial disputes it faces with Vietnam, the Philippines and others in the South China Sea. Oil and gas deposits in the East China Sea are believed to be much smaller than the potentially massive deepwater reserves in the disputed South China Sea.

The Senkakus do hold an important strategic position as a unique area where U.S. security obligations to Japan and Taiwan potentially overlap. The East China Sea and Yellow Sea have long served as an important buffer between China's advancing military capabilities and U.S. allies like Japan and South Korea.

Control over the Senkakus would be important as the military looks to expand China's security sphere. The East China Sea and the disputed areas near the Senkakus provide important shipping access to some of China's key ports, and Chinese leaders have long worried about direct U.S. influence there as well as proxy U.S. influence through the Japanese.

Chinese military strategy in part focuses on denying access to potential naval adversaries. Greater Chinese military control over the East China Sea, for example, would complicate U.S. efforts to intervene in the event of conflict with Taiwan.

2) LIANCOURT ROCKS

Controlled by South Korea. Called Dokdo by South Korea, Takeshima by Japan.

The History: The dispute with South Korea over the Liancourt Rocks, a set of islets halfway between the two countries, can be traced back several centuries.

The islets have appeared on maps in both countries back to the 1600s. Korea says that texts dated as far back as the 6th century mention them. Japan questions the accuracy of Korea's assertions.

Japan assumed control of them in 1905, shortly before its 1910 colonization of the Korean peninsula. Japan's assertion today rests in part on the fact that the U.S. did not include the islets in a list of territory Japan was forced to give up after World War II. South Korea has disputed that since early 1950s and controlled the islet with a small detachment of police since 1954. The latest spat came after South Korean president Lee Myung-bak visited the islets in early August. Japan has since started a process to request conciliation at the International Court of Justice.

The Stakes: The islets are surrounded by fertile fishing waters. In recent years, speculation arose of energy resources under nearby waters, but that hasn't been proven.

South Korea's state-run natural gas company says a 2007 survey found natural gas hydrate in waters near Ulleung Island, about 75 kilometers (40 miles) from the islets. Natural gas hydrate is a crystal compound that, when depressurized, converts to natural gas and water. Energy companies are still working on efficient ways to recover it.

In 2008, the South Korean national oil company, working with Woodside Energy Ltd. of Australia, identified geologic structures in the Ulleung area with significant volumes of gas or oil. But their first exploratory well came up dry and was closed earlier this year.

Japanese experts question the existence of significant natural resources reserves in the area.

