《不明身份潜艇令日本提高警戒》

Japan patrol craft spotted unidentified submarines just outside the country's territorial waters, prompting Tokyo to issue a warning that it may order security action if submersible craft enter its waters岸developments that could further aggravate strained ties with Beijing amid a territorial dispute.

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Japan's defense ministry said a submarine was spotted by a P-3C Maritime Self-Defense Force patrol aircraft Sunday night passing near Kume Island in Japan's Okinawa Prefecture in the East China Sea. The ministry said the submarine had left the area by Monday morning.

?????????????????????P-3C????????????(East China Sea??????)???????(Kume Island)??????????????????????????????

In a separate incident, another unidentified submarine was detected traveling west of Amami-Oshima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture on May 2.

???????????5?2?????????????????????????????(Amami-Oshima)?????

Japanese media said government officials believe the submarines were likely to have been Chinese. China's foreign ministry didn't respond to faxed questions seeking comment.

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While the submarines didn't violate international maritime law?they didn't enter the 12-nautical-mile territorial waters near the areas in question?their sightings rattled Japanese officials and led the government to issue a warning that an order deploying the military to maintain maritime security could be issued if submarines enter Japan's territorial waters.

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'These are serious acts. If [submarines] enter our territorial waters while underwater, we would have to implement maritime security action,' Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told parliament Tuesday. Defense Minister Itsunori onodera said the government won't reveal information on the nationality of the submarines due to intelligence concerns.

????????(Shinzo Abe)??(Itsunori Onodera)????????????????????????????

Japan's top government spokesman, Yoshihide Suga, said Monday that the two incidents were publicized as it was deemed 'worthy of attention.'

???????????(Yoshihide Suga)????????????????????????

While the Japan Coast Guard is responsible for protecting Japan's coastlines, the defense minister can order the Self-Defense Forces to be deployed for maritime security operations if the situation is considered beyond the coast guard's capabilities.

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There have been two such occasions in the past around Japanese waters. In the first case in March 1999 the SDF chased two North Korean spy ships and fired warning shots after the ships were spotted off Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture.

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The second incident took place in 2004 when a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine entered Japanese territorial waters near Okinawa Prefecture's Ishigaki Island. While international law calls on submarines to surface and raise their national flags when cruising in the territorial waters of a foreign nation, the submarine didn't.

????????2004????????????????????(Ishigaki Island)??

The sightings and warning follow months of renewed tension between Japan and China over a group of strategically important and resource-rich islands in the East China Sea, known as the Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese.

??(Senkaku)???????????

On Monday, the Japan Coast Guard said three Chinese maritime surveillance vessels entered Japanese territorial waters near the islands. The incident prompted Shinsuke Sugiyama, director general of the foreign ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, to lodge a protest with China through its minister to Japan, Han Zhiqiang.

??(Shinsuke Sugiyama)??????????????????

A coast guard official said Tuesday that the intrusions brought the number of days this year that Chinese ships have entered Japanese waters near the islands to 24 days, surpassing the total of 23 days Chinese vessels entered territorial waters last year.

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The territorial dispute between Tokyo and Beijing flared up again last September when the Japanese government bought three islands in the chain from their private owners, prompting a wave of anti-Japan protests across China. Tensions escalated further in January when Tokyo said a Chinese warship locked weapons-controlling radar on a Japanese ship and helicopter.

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