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The Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands Disputes In Geopolitical Analysis And Relation Between China And Japan And It's Impacts On Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands issue is an issue between China, Taiwan, and Japan. Sovereignty, maritime entry points, and rights to resources have been making the three countries struggle in a geopolitical dispute regarding the east China Sea. The islands are controlled by Japan and are strategically located close to vital sea lines of communications and have speculated huge hydrocarbon deposits. Therefore, their significance results from both economic and military motivations. Historically, China grounds its claims in both Ming and Qing dynasty evidence, which holds the islands part of integral Chinese territory; Taiwan binds the islands to its own territorial status by claims of sovereignty. The controversy escalated primarily following the acquisition by Japan's government of the islands from private ownership in 2012, broadly seen by China as an inciting act of nationalization, leading to a reciprocally skewed escalation of maritime patrols and diplomatic tensions along with nationalist mobilization in both nations. The wider strategic dimension contributed by the intervention of the US with all its defense guarantees to Japan could be understood as a last characteristic of this rivalries, symbolizing Sino-American rivalry in the region. The cross-strait situation gets even complicated because, from the Chinese point of view, China's territorial claim to Taiwan also includes the islands, whereas Japan and the U.S. indirectly sanction Taiwan's strategic importance. This additional militarization of the area destabilizes East Asian security and even risks entrapping great powers, highlighting the high-stakes nature of the issue in determining the new geopolitical contours of the Asia-Pacific.

INTRODUCTION

The deep-seated and shifting territorial dispute between China and Japan for example over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands has implications that reach far beyond its intrinsic geopolitical significance. At its mere geographical dimensions, however, is this seemingly trivial spot likely to have much general significance? This issue affects not only these islands, referred to in China as Diaoyudao, in Taiwan as Diaoyudao, and in Japan as Senkaku but also concepts of national strength, military security and access to resources. The struggle over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is driven by broader geopolitical ambitions that deeply affect a nation's energy security, trade routes and international relations. Located close to vital shipping routes and possibly energy-rich waters, their disputed status has been a source of friction between Beijing and Tokyo for generations. The roots of this tension are a combination of ethnic, historical, and regional issues which have led to an increasingly dangerous tinderbox. This is an ideal condition for regional and international players, each with their agendas and goals. But the fallout from the dispute also reaches Taiwan, an important player in regional power politics. Taiwan's special status as participant in, and object of, interests of the broader Sino-Japanese dispute underlines the importance of understanding how the latter affects stability in the region and Taiwan's strategic. The dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands goes back to the latter part of the 19th century, when Japan occupied the islands after defeating China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). (Nguyen, (2025)) Japan says it included the islands (*terra nullius*), but China says historical records prove they were Chinese territory before Japanese annexation of them. The dispute was relatively dormant through most of the 20th century until in the late 1970s there were reports of the possible presence of oil and gas. These are the islands along with a region which China claims to have administrative control over. Taiwan is a blend of history as well as modern-day relevance. They relate to interests compellingly. China claiming sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands is part of a strategy to contest Japanese hegemony over the region and weaken the Japan–United States security alliance. Regaining control over the Senkaku Islands is important for Japan to preserve their territorial integrity, alongside consistently retaining its alliance with America. (Smith, (2013))

The controversy deepened in the 1970s when geological surveys proposed that the region surrounding the islands, which had previously been ignored, might contain massive reserves of oil. This prompted Taiwan and China to renew their claims. The US controlled the islands together with Okinawa from the end of the WW II until 1972, when they were ceded to Japanese control under an Okinawa Reversion Agreement. This cession sparked contention from both China and Taiwan who contended the islands ought to have been returned to them because of the contested post war boundaries dictated treaties. (Pedrozo, (2016))

A number of incidents have augmented these worries. For example, in 2012, Japan's purchase of three privately-owned islands sparked protests across Taiwan and China. Japan assumed such an action would mitigate plans by local officials to implement development schemes that were provocative. China, on the other hand, took it as an attempt to reinforce Japanese control over the region. To counter, in 2013 China created an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over parts of the East China Sea, which included the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. This move intensified military confrontations between the two countries. Routine clashes between Chinese and Japanese coast guard vessels around the islands have kept the issue alive in the geopolitics of the region. (Nguyen, (2025))

The effect on Sino-Japanese Relations: The dispute has adversely affected the bilateral relationship between Japan and China. For Japan, sovereignty over the contested islands is national security issue. A treaty with the United States works to the advantage of Japan, as it supports Japan through the mutual security treaty. Japan is believed to face

external aggression from China, considering its claim to the Diaoyu Islands as part a larger strategy to consolidate territorial integrity. The issue has become emblematic for both nations but largely for Japan. (Smith, (2013))

Taiwan also bases its sovereignty of the islands on geographic and historical connections. Furthermore, Taiwan's stance is greatly complicated by its distinct political reality as a self-administered region facing the pressures of a "One-China" policy. Taiwan needs to navigate this dispute with great precision considering both its claims over the islands and the need to avoid angering Beijing. The dispute has a bearing on Taiwan's bilateral relations with China and Japan and impacts American policy toward the region. With growing competition among major powers in this region, Taiwan is drawn into a puzzle of balancing between asserting claims over the territory and maintaining relations with neighbors. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Conflict is not an encapsulated case but rather an ongoing case in a case in an increasingly competitive and bi-polar area. Taiwan is at the confluence of U.S.-China tensions and cross-strait competition. Taiwan sees the claim of the Diaoyutai Islands as one of its historical rights but also as a present-day issue concerning national defense, maritime supremacy, and resource extraction. To comprehend how the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute influences Taiwan's foreign policy toward China and Japan. (The East China Sea dispute: China's and Japan's assertiveness, (2024))

This article looks into the blend of these factors which include the historical claims, strategic considerations, and diplomatic that explain the Taiwan issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The strategic and nationalist dimensions are covered by many authors. Rose (2014) offers a critical assessment of the situation, arguing that China has a stronger legal claim to the islands under international law as Japan's narrative of being in effective control of the islands is fatally flawed and indicates the strategic importance of the islands for China's coastal defence in the context of US-Japan security relations. (Lee, 7 May 2014) Spanier (2013) on the other hand, highlighted the work on nationalism has demonstrated the capacities of ethnic nationalism, economic nationalism and military nationalism have shaped both countries' governmental decisions, creating tensions between them. Drifte's (2013) analysis of nationalism considers how economic interest, national identity and historical memory work to frame the dispute, while noting that they have broken that long standing tacit agreement from the late 1970s onwards, which has exacerbated bilateral tensions. Delina (2023) examines the international law question of UNCLOS 1982, but notes that the islands may not be qualified as fully sovereignty possessions because they may not produce exclusive economic zones based on their geological formations—rocks instead of islands capable of human occupancy, complicating issues of sovereignty in the surrounding waters. (Delina, (2023).)

Research Questions:

1. How do resource competition (oil, gas, fisheries) and economic interests intersect with alliance security commitments to shape the persistence and intensity of the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute?
2. What is the role of the United States in the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, and how might future developments impact global security and alliances, especially considering realism theory?

Theoretical Framework

Neorealism proposes the anarchism of the international system; it considers state actors as central and the pursuit of power towards survival. It serves as a theory to sustain an excellent historical explanation in tie with this research. Most importantly, neorealism represents a solid framework for analyzing the geopolitical, legal, and economic dimensions

in this dispute, as well as examining its predisposition from Taiwan's vantage point. What follows are some insights into the ways neorealism explains the important dimensions of this dispute and its consequences for Taiwan. In neorealism, states find themselves in an anarchic international system where according power acquisition survival is possible. The cause for China's claim on the Diaoyu Islands is that of challenging Japan's hegemony and US security arrangements in the region. (Biscontini, June 5, 2023) The deployment of coast guard vessels and the establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the islands therefore signals the intent of Beijing to project power in the East China Sea. Critical for Japan's territorial integrity is control of the Senkaku Islands to contain China's regional aspirations. Japan has increased the self-defense forces while strengthening alliances with the united states to balance China's rising esteemed position. (Lee, 7 May 2014)

In between both major powers, Taiwan finds itself. Although it states that the islands indeed fall under its territory (Diaoyu), Taiwan should navigate caution so as not to irritate either China or Japan regarding the territory claim. The geopolitical position makes it Regional stability in regard to China, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States as three parties. The potential flash point of disputes over territorial and maritime boundaries has witnessed the effects of crumbling in the aftermath of the Cold War while the tensions are on the rise at an accelerated pace since the time nationalization of the Islands by Japan. Two, justify the economy-neorealism, their neorealist interpretations highlight how regional disputes are also influenced by economic considerations. (Biscontini, June 5, 2023) (Delina, (2023).) The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are believed to be surrounded by rich fishing grounds and potential oil and gas reserves, which lend economic significance to the islands. Both China and Japan regard energy security as contingent upon control of these resources. While reserves of hydrocarbons appear to have been downscaled, fishing grounds remain a contentious subject. Historically, Taiwan's fishermen have relied on waters near the Diaoyutai islands. With agreements signed by Taiwan regulating fishing rights with Japan, the fishing issue has become a pragmatic way for Taiwan to protect its economic interests without unnecessarily risking tensions. China and Japan believe to have historically claimed these islands and access to the natural resources. For Taiwan, the economic argument is tied to geopolitical strategy and is, in fact, an integral part of its geopolitical stance. Thus, it cooperates with Japan on fisheries and engages in tacit acceptance of Japanese fishing interest within a broader context. (Lee, 7 May 2014)

Neorealism highlights how states prioritize their sovereignty while also engaging in practical diplomacy when the situation calls for it. For instance, China frames its claims over the Diaoyu Islands as part of a broader effort to restore historical sovereignty that was lost during periods of imperialist aggression. This narrative not only strengthens domestic legitimacy but also supports China's ambitions in the region. On the other hand, Japan maintains that there's no dispute over the islands, as it has administered them since 1895 in accordance with international law. This position allows Japan to sidestep legitimizing China's claims through any negotiations. When it comes to Taiwan's approach, despite asserting its sovereignty over Diaoyutai, Taiwan has opted for practical agreements with Japan regarding fisheries management. This strategy reflects a neorealist perspective, prioritizing economic benefits over territorial disputes and steering clear of entanglements in Sino-Japanese tensions. Neorealism also emphasizes the importance of alliances as tools for balancing power in a chaotic international system. The dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is deeply intertwined with alliance politics, particularly the U.S.-Japan security treaty, which plays a crucial role in deterring Chinese aggression in the area. By supporting Japan's claims, Washington helps maintain regional stability while countering China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. While China backs Taiwan's claim over Diaoyu as part of its larger sovereignty narrative, it remains cautious about Taiwan's informal relationships with Japan and the

United States. Any overt alignment by Taiwan with Tokyo or Washington could provoke a strong reaction from Beijing. Neorealism sheds light on Taiwan's careful diplomatic strategy; by cooperating with Japan on fisheries while keeping informal ties with the U.S., Taiwan aims to enhance its security without provoking the major powers. (contributors., 2002, May 1))

METHODOLOGY

The case of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in regard to the geopolitical relations between China and Japan, and implications for Taiwan, requires an integrated, multidisciplinary qualitative approach where methodology would incorporate historical-legal research, geopolitical strategic analysis, and discourse analysis. First, I would make a historical-legal study of the sovereignty claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands by China, Japan, and Taiwan. I would have the examine archival documents, treaties, and principles of international law in order to clarify the foundation and evolution of each party's claims to the islands. The analysis would include the examination of narrative history and legal claims of the People's Republic of China, Japan, and the Republic of China as to the territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. (Chadha, Jun 23 2022) Second, I would hold a strategic geopolitical analysis arguing in the military, diplomatic, and economic context including the role of the United States and its alliance with Japan, assertive Chinese military presence in the East China Sea, and implications of the dispute on regional security dynamics and Taiwan's strategic position. Such would include analysis of speeches, defense white papers, and frameworks for security alliances. Thirdly, I would do discourse analysis of the political speeches, media coverage, and policy documents of the involved states, to highlight how national identity, historical grievances, and strategic imperatives. (Drifte, July 28, 2014)

DISCUSSION

The Intersection of Resource Competition and Security Commitments in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute:

The dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands stands out as one of East Asia's most enduring territorial conflicts, drawing in Japan, China, and Taiwan over a cluster of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. (Chubb, November 14, 2024) (Xiaolin, Jun 26 2022). While they may seem small and insignificant, these islands are at the heart of intricate geopolitical tensions where competition for resources, economic interests, and security alliances come together, making the conflict particularly stubborn. This analysis delves into how these elements interact through the lens of neorealist theory, shedding light on why the dispute remains so persistent and intense. At the core of the territorial dispute surrounding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is the economic significance of the waters and seabed that envelop them. The strategic value of these islands goes far beyond just territorial claims.

The World War II Agreements and the Senkaku Islands

Based on its assertion about the Sino-Japanese war and the Senkaku Islands being part of Taiwan, the PRC government argues that the allied agreements concerning the postwar period (Cairo Communique and Potsdam Declaration), and the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 (neither the Guomindang government on Taiwan nor the PRC government were invited to the conference leading to the treaty) required Japan to return the Senkaku Islands. The Cairo Declaration in December 1943 demanded the return to the Republic of China of 'all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores.'(Article 8) of the Potsdam Declaration states that ' The terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out and Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as we determine (b) of the San Francisco Treaty stipulates that ' Japan renounces all right, title and claim to Formosa and the

Pescadores'. The Senkaku Islands are nowhere mentioned in these documents, but because of its assertion about the islands being part of Taiwan the Chinese (Retrieved, Senkaku Islands Q&A, (2012)). However, the PRC has never recognized the legality of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Treaty itself does not even clarify to what China Taiwan should be returned, In an unsigned draft planning document of May 1950 from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the PRC's possible participation in the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and published in the Japanese media only in December 2012 as proof of China recognizing Japan's ownership, the islands are referred to by their Japanese name, and it is proposed to examine whether these islands are part of Taiwan, thus throwing doubt on China's claim today that they have always been part of Taiwan and not Okinawa, and had been ceded to Japan in 1895 as part of Taiwan. (36 Professor Liu Jiangyong of Qinghua University) explained the use of the Japanese name by the circumstance that this name was, after the Japanese colonization of Taiwan, (Retrieved, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (2012))

Another battle field between Japan and China for proving their sovereignty is the use of maps. Both sides have been trying to prove their title to the islands by referring to maps where the islands are either shown as belonging to China (or Taiwan) or Japan, or using Chinese names instead of Japanese names. However, until 1970 when the islands became an object of dispute, the inconsistencies on both sides seem to have more to do with ignorance, disinterest and confusion concerning these very minor and far-flung islands rather than being the object of centrally-directed and authorized map making, as was also demonstrated in the above-mentioned May 1950 draft document of the PRC. (dispute, (2010)) During World War II and in its aftermath, there was considerable confusion within the government about whether it should or could claim the Ryukyu Islands (but no explicit mentioning of the Senkaku Islands) or mentions that the ROC government at one stage demanded to take part in the Trusteeship of Okinawa. According to an article in the newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, Roosevelt even offered Jiang Jieshi Okinawa (which then would have naturally included the Senkaku Islands) during the Cairo conference in 1943, but Jiang turned it down. (Situation of the Senkaku Islands, 2019)

Hydrocarbon Resources

The potential discovery of oil and gas reserves in the East China Sea has dramatically shifted the dynamics of this dispute. Historical records indicate that China only began to assert its sovereignty over the islands in the latter part of the 1970s, coinciding with the emergence of evidence pointing to oil reserves in the region. This timing is particularly telling, as a declassified U.S. intelligence report revealed that China did not claim sovereignty over these islands until December 30, 1971, following the discovery of petrochemical resources nearby. (Declassified intelligence report on China's claim over the Senkaku Islands., (1971)) From a neorealist viewpoint, this situation exemplifies how resource competition can drive state behavior. As Kenneth Waltz's structural realism suggests, states operating in an anarchic international system will naturally vie for limited resources that bolster their power and security. (The East China Sea dispute: China's and Japan's assertiveness, (2024)) The potential energy reserves near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are precisely the kind of resource that holds immense value for both China and Japan, especially as energy-dependent economies looking to lessen their reliance on foreign imports. (Ross, (2019)).

Fisheries and Maritime Resources

In the neorealist view, the international system is marked by anarchy, meaning there's no higher authority above states, and the idea of self-help reigns supreme. In this setting, having control over territory rich in strategic resources is a significant power play that states are often unwilling to give up. The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute is a perfect example of this; both Japan and China see control of these islands as crucial for boosting their security and economic interests in a competitive regional landscape. Neorealism points out that states are

not just focused on absolute gains but also on relative gains—how their outcomes stack up against those of their rivals. Any compromise regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute is likely to be seen as a loss by one or both sides. Japan, which currently administers the islands, has little reason to back down, while China views challenging Japan's control as vital to its broader ambitions in the region. The security dilemma is clear here: actions taken by one state to bolster its security can make others feel more vulnerable. (The East China Sea dispute: China's and Japan's assertiveness., (2024).) For instance, Japan's nationalization of the islands in 2012, which was framed as a moderate step away from private development, was interpreted by China as a bold move to reinforce its sovereignty claims. Likewise, China's growing naval presence near the islands is perceived by Japan as a threat, leading to further defensive actions. The United States plays a key role in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, even though it doesn't directly claim the territory. Through its alliance with Japan and its strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific, the US helps shape the balance of power and the potential outcomes of this conflict. Additionally, the US's involvement has implications for Taiwan's security and influences the wider geopolitical landscape, including alliances and global security. Understanding the US role requires examining its security commitments, strategic objectives, and the implications of great power competition. (Sasaki, (2016).)

Fishing is a major interest for all littoral states of the East China Sea. Although Japan and China have concluded consecutive fishery agreements for the East China Sea, the 1997 agreement (effective from June 2000) excludes from the application of the fisheries agreement the territorial waters adjacent to the Senkaku Islands. Instead, the extant 1975 Fishery Agreement, which deemed the areas around the Senkakus as part of the high seas, was allowed to prevail. In 2012, a letter related to the 1997 Agreement about fishing in the EEZ was revealed in which Foreign Minister Obuchi had stated to the Chinese ambassador in Tokyo, Xu Duxin, that Japan's laws and regulations would not apply to the 'waters in question'. It is understood that the 'waters in question' include the Senkaku Islands, although their name is not mentioned and the Japanese government today denies it. Sato Masaru, a former analyst of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, explained that this letter referred to the EEZ around the Senkaku Islands and applied only to Chinese fishermen. (Retrieved, Senkaku Islands Q&A, (2012)) However, the Japanese government seems not to want to allow foreign fishermen uncontrolled access to the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands, and has been patrolling the area, which has resulted in the expulsion of Chinese fishermen and subsequent protests by Taiwan and the PRC. The Japanese controls have apparently increased in the decade since 2000, while Chinese fishing activities have also vastly increased. More research is needed on these developments to judge whether here there is yet another 'unofficial understanding' between Tokyo and Beijing which has been undermined. (The East China Sea dispute: China's and Japan's assertiveness., (2024).)

Finally, in this context, one has to mention the issue of private and state ownership of the Senkaku Islands which falls under the headings of international law, as well as the role of non-state actors. In 1896, Koga Tatsushiro obtained a free lease of 30 years for the islands of Uotsurijima, Kubajima, Minami Kojima and Kita Kojima. After the death of Koga Tatsushiro in 1918, his son, Koga Zenji, took over the business on the islands. In 1926, after the end of the free lease, the Japanese government converted it to a rental basis. In 1932, the Japanese government changed the status of these four islands from state-owned to privately-owned land by selling them to the Koga family. After 1945, Kubajima and Taishojima (the latter was always state-owned) were leased to the US as firing ranges. In 1972, Koga Zenji sold Kita Kojima and Minami Kojima, followed by Uotsurishima in 1978, and Kubajima in 1988, to Kurihara Kunioki, a real estate investor, and his family. In 2002, Kitakojima, Minami Kojima and Uotsurijima were leased to the state which paid Yen25 million per year for them in rent. (The East China Sea dispute: China's and Japan's assertiveness., (2024).) The US military

used Kubajima and Taishojima from 1957 as firing ranges, and after the reversion of Okinawa in 1971, continued to do so until 1979. It paid rent to the private owner of Kubajima, but after 1971, the rental payment was effected by the Japanese government. The relevant point here is that, since the shelving of the territorial issue in 1972 and 1978, the islands changed private owners, and the state rented three of the islands from their private owner and owned one. The leasing in 2002 and the 'nationalization' (no money was involved) of the Uotsurijima beacon in 2005 caused Chinese protests, but the private ownership changes did not cause any Chinese reaction.⁹¹ This is an important point, because it was the sale of three islands to the Japanese central state which touched off the 2012 crisis. (Sasaki, (2016).)

The US Role in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Dispute

At the heart of the US involvement is its security alliance with Japan, which is laid out in the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. This agreement commits the US to defend Japan in the event of an attack, and that protection includes the Senkaku Islands, currently administered by Japan. While the US has chosen not to take a definitive stance on who owns the islands, it has made it clear that any attempt to alter the status quo through force is simply unacceptable. This position serves as a deterrent to China, discouraging any military attempts to take the islands. When it comes to deterrence and military presence, the US has a robust military footprint in the area, with naval bases and air forces stationed in Japan, South Korea, and Guam. These forces regularly conduct patrols and freedom of navigation operations in the East China Sea, pushing back against excessive maritime claims and upholding international law. (Lee, 7 May 2014) By projecting its power, the US helps maintain a balance that prevents any one nation from dominating the region. This military presence not only reassures Japan and other allies but also sends a clear message to China that aggressive actions will have repercussions. Neorealism suggests that states are not just focused on absolute gains but also on how outcomes affect their standing relative to their competitors. Any compromise regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute is likely to be seen as a relative loss by one or both sides. Japan, as the current administrator of the islands, has little reason to back down, while China sees challenging Japan's control as crucial to its broader ambitions in the region. (Studies East Asian territorial disputes, focusing on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the US role in regional security, (2025, June 10)) The US also plays a diplomatic role, promoting dialogue and peaceful resolutions while backing its allies, all in an effort to manage tensions and avoid military conflict. (Studies East Asian territorial disputes, focusing on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the US role in regional security, (2025, June 10))

Impact on Taiwan

The situation in Taiwan is a key element of the US strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. While the US doesn't have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, it still offers military assistance and political backing through the Taiwan Relations Act. This support aims to counter Chinese aggression and ensure stability in the Taiwan Strait. The dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is connected to Taiwan, as China claims these islands as part of its territory. If tensions over these islands escalate, it could lead to increased friction across the Taiwan Strait, potentially pulling the US into a larger conflict. The US follows a policy of "strategic ambiguity" regarding Taiwan, intentionally keeping its military response to a potential Chinese attack unclear. This approach is meant to deter both aggressive actions from China and any moves by Taiwan toward formal independence, as such a conflict could have dire consequences for both regional and global stability. (Studies East Asian territorial disputes, focusing on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the US role in regional security, (2025, June 10))

Future Impacts on Global Security and Alliances

The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute stands out as a potential flashpoint. A simple miscalculation, an accident, or even a deliberate provocation could spiral into a military confrontation involving China, Japan, Taiwan, and the US. With the existing alliance commitments and rising nationalist sentiments, such a conflict could escalate quickly. In light of China's increasing assertiveness, the US has been busy bolstering its alliances and partnerships in the region. This effort extends beyond Japan to include South Korea, Australia, India, and various Southeast Asian nations. The goal of these partnerships is to establish a network of countries that can effectively counterbalance China's influence. This dispute is just one piece of a larger puzzle regarding the future of the Indo-Pacific. (Mastro, (2019)) The US aims to uphold a rules-based international order that safeguards freedom of navigation and honors sovereignty. On the flip side, China is looking to reshape this order to better reflect its growing power. The outcome of this ongoing contest will significantly influence global security, trade, and diplomacy for years to come. (Retrieved, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, (2012)) The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute is a snapshot of this broader struggle. From a realist viewpoint, alliances are formed not on shared values but rather on mutual interests and power dynamics. The US-Japan alliance aligns with American interests by containing China and safeguarding crucial sea lanes. Realism posits that as long as China continues to grow stronger and assert its claims, and as long as the US and its allies push back, disputes like Senkaku/Diaoyu will remain. The anarchic nature of the international system means there's no higher authority to enforce peace, leaving power politics to take center stage. (dispute, (2010))

CONCLUSION

The United States plays a pivotal role in the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, influencing the strategic landscape through its partnership with Japan and its broader Indo-Pacific strategy. This dispute serves as a snapshot of the global rivalry between the US and China, carrying significant implications for Taiwan, regional security, and the future of international relations. By applying realism theory, we can better grasp these dynamics, which highlight the lasting significance of power, alliances, and strategic interests in shaping how states behave and the outcomes on the world stage. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute is a tangled web of resource competition, security alliances, and nationalist sentiments, perfectly showcasing key neorealist ideas. The mix of valuable resources, a strategic location, and the competition between great powers creates strong motivations for both Japan and China to uphold their claims. (Delina, (2023).) Additionally, the US's involvement through its security alliance with Japan adds another layer of complexity to the situation. Looking ahead, neorealism suggests that the intensity of this dispute will likely ebb and flow with shifts in the regional balance of power. As China's military and economic power continues to rise in comparison to Japan and possibly the United States, we can anticipate ongoing challenges to Japan's control over the islands. However, as long as the U.S.-Japan security alliance remains strong, it's likely that the dispute will stay below the level of armed conflict. The most likely scenario involves China employing "salami-slicing" tactics—gradually increasing its presence and activities around the islands without provoking military responses, which would slowly undermine Japan's effective control. This strategy fits well with neorealist theories about how emerging powers challenge existing territorial arrangements while avoiding direct confrontations with established powers. (Lee, 7 May 2014) Ultimately, the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute highlights how territorial conflicts, fueled by resources, strategic interests, and nationalist feelings, create particularly stubborn situations in international relations—just as neorealist theory suggests. The author proposed that a commission involving China, Japan, and Taiwan could be formed to jointly manage resources, ensure environmental protection, and maintain

maritime safety in the disputed area. This commission would operate under mutually agreed rules, feature rotating leadership, and provide transparent reporting to all stakeholders, including international observers. Additionally, establishing hotlines and joint incident response teams could help prevent accidental clashes and effectively manage emergencies, drawing on successful practices from other maritime disputes. (Chadha, Jun 23 2022)

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