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RESETTING SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

Small Wars in East Asia

By

Prof. Tomohide MURAI

Chairman

Department of International Relations
National Defense Academy
Japan

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Si vis pacem, para bellum
-Small wars in East Asia-

MURAI Tomohide
Dept. of International Relations
National Defense Academy of Japan

The Chinese Communist Party's View of War

War in today's international society is fundamentally illegal. After World War II, the United Nations banned intimidation by armed force or the use of armed force in principle. Under the United Nations Charter, use of military force is only permitted when the action is based on a resolution of the United Nations (Article 42); use of armed force under regional arrangements or by regional agencies (Article 53); or in self-defense in case of an armed attack (Article 51).

On the other hand, the Communist Party of China, "a government born from the gun," views war as the highest form of struggle for resolving class conflicts. According to the Party's view of war, there are just wars and unjust wars. A just war is one that advances the interests of the people, that is fought for class struggle and liberation of the people, and by which a sovereign state protects its sovereignty from invasion.

An unjust war, on the other hand, is one that goes against the interests of the people, interferes with social advancement, represses the people and invades other countries. In the Party's view, such wars are rooted in imperialism and hegemonism.

In China, it is believed that there is such a thing as "bad peace," such as colonialism which oppresses the people or a reactionary regime even in the absence of war, and that there are "good wars," intended to liberate the people and change a bad peace to a good peace.

The Economy and War

In many countries of East Asia today, economic growth buttresses citizens' support of their governments. Accordingly, governments devote their greatest efforts to developing their economies. Wars consume enormous amounts of human and physical resources, and big wars inflict major damage on national economies. Thus, governments seeking economic growth desire a peaceful international environment. Today, many wars are due not to economic interests but to ethnic or religious rivalries. Going to war even when doing so means probable loss of lives may occur when an ethnic group or religion is considered to be worth more than individuals' lives.

War entails major depletion of resources but can also bring about major political benefits. Values such as independence, freedom, safety, honor or religious beliefs were often viewed as universal values over which no compromise was possible. When war was waged for the sake of independence or freedom, the overwhelming political benefits gained as a result of war were perceived as more valuable than the costs in terms of human lives or physical assets, even if those

costs were considerable. If the benefits gained from war outweigh the costs, war becomes a practical policy.

The Cost of War

When using armed force, China's Communist Party calculates the cost of doing so. Taking a practical view, the Party will refrain from using armed force if the cost is high but not if the cost is low. Given that China used armed force to expel Vietnam and the Philippines from the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, the Party does not hesitate to use armed force if the other side is militarily weak.

If Japan were to demilitarize unilaterally, it would be less costly for China to use armed force against Japan. In other words, Japan's universal demilitarization would provoke China to use armed force. An eye must always be kept on the military balance to avoid war between China and Japan, and Japan, which maintains the status quo, must avoid becoming the weaker side. China's political landscape is continually shifting, and if China gained the upper hand militarily, intimidation or the use of armed force would make an appealing and effective diplomatic tool.

Big Wars and Small Wars

If the People's Liberation Army continues to gain strength, China's leaders may become more inclined to adopt policies of using military might to apply pressure as a more effective diplomatic tool for resolving territorial or maritime resource issues.

Big wars entail major costs, but small wars have a correspondingly smaller cost. If the cost of war is low, the benefits gained from war often exceed the costs. In other words, even countries that hesitate to engage in large-scale warfare may sometimes not hesitate to wage a small war.

Today, the United States has overwhelming military strength in East Asia, and no country can prevail against it in any war, large or small. The military strength of the Japan-U.S. alliance far exceeds that of China. Thus, if a major war broke out between Japan and China, the U.S. would join the fight under the Japan-U.S. alliance, and the Chinese government believes that it would be defeated.

But if the war were a skirmish over small islands along the maritime border between Japan and China that had no direct connection to the vital American national interests and if the United States, no matter its prior declarations, decided against direct intervention after considering its national interests and weighing the costs against the benefits, the Chinese government would probably believe that the engagement would be a direct conflict between China and Japan. The *People's Daily*, the Party's organ, asserts that as far as such small islands is concerned, the United States, while supporting neither side's claim to sovereignty, but based on its ambiguous strategy of repeatedly asserting that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty does indeed extend to such small islands, will try to exert a double deterrent but that effort will fail. If the Japan-U.S. alliance fails to function and the U.S. does not participate in the East Asia conflict, the military balance of power between Japan and China will be decided by the outcome of an armed clash between those two

countries.

Until recently, Japan had superior naval and airborne capabilities in the East China Sea, meaning there was less likelihood that China would choose war. But China has been rapidly strengthening its navy and air force. On April 26, 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that the military balance between Japan and China has been completely upset in the past two years. If China were to decide that its military was superior to Japan's Self-Defence Forces and that the United States would not get involved in a small war in the East China Sea, China might start a small war which would cost it little.

Chinese netizens overwhelmingly support going to war with Japan. Unlike Japanese, who believe war to be morally wrong, Chinese feel no distaste for war, and a small war is an appealing alternative for the Party-led government to strengthen its authority.

The weaker Japan's military capacity to defend islands on its borders is, the smaller the cost of waging war becomes to China, increasing the likelihood that it could choose war. If attacking the Senkaku Islands is a policy to boost the Chinese government's popularity, the most effective response for preventing an attack on them is to substantially raise the cost of doing so. If war becomes more costly, there will be less incentive to start. In other words, the most effective means of preventing the outbreak of war is for Japan to maintain adequate defensive strength and guarantee that attackers will not be able to win a small war.

This points to the need for Japan to station more Self-Defence Forces personnel in the East China Sea and the Nansei Islands that stretch from southwestern Kyushu to northern Taiwan. Japan must understand the military messages of the Party and respond vigilantly. The Party administration, being practical-minded and having weighed costs and benefits, will act if the benefits are greater. Conversely, it will not act if the costs outweigh the benefits. China does not act out of religious fanaticism, which means being ready to bear any cost and not fearing death for the sake of religion, in the belief that death in a religious war will open the gates of heaven. In the case of China, deterrence works.

If Japan boosts its capabilities in response to China's increased strength in order to maintain the balance of military power between the two countries, this could set off a competition in military expansion. Doing so would impose a great economic burden on the two countries. However, it costs much more to wage war than to expand military strength. If military expansion means that peace can be maintained, Japan should choose to bolster its forces, which is the less expensive option.

The Chinese Communist Party, Territory and War

Simultaneously with the Party's victory in mainland China, it sent a force totaling 5 million men to fight in the Korean War, suffering 900,000 casualties. In the 1960s, there were border skirmishes with India and the Soviet Union, and in the 1970s, China took the Paracels from Vietnam and sent roughly 200,000 men into Vietnam itself on a punitive expedition, at a cost of 60,000 dead and wounded. In the 1980s, China sank Vietnamese Navy troop transports in the South China Sea and

in the 1990s it took the Spratlys, which had been under the control of the Philippines. Chinese warships continue to shoot at fishing boats and government vessels from various Southeast Asian nations even today. The Party administration does not fear loss of human life and does not hesitate to get involved in wars. The Chinese government considers small wars such as territorial disputes to be simply one option in its peacetime diplomacy.

The Party says that it will not hesitate to go to war to protect its territory, which is its vital interest. A spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry stated on April 26, 2013 that China considers the Senkaku Islands part of its vital interest.

Every country in the world will justify starting a war by assuring its citizens that it is "a just war." To the People's Republic of China, "a just war" is one that protects the three vital interests of the Party: Party domination, sovereignty and territory, and economic growth.

If its domination were ever threatened, the Party would certainly be prepared to take major risks and pay a high price to maintain its dominance, which is its first vital interest. If China were to mount a military operation to occupy the Senkaku Islands, condemnation and sanctions by the international community would deal its economy a heavy blow. But to the Party, the cost of losing dominance is much larger than the economic cost of handicapping the growth of its economy. The Party would likely not hesitate to go to war to protect its dominance if it were ever threatened with collapse.

As far as China's dispute with Japan over the Senkaku Islands is concerned, to begin with this matter is meant to deflect the growing dissatisfaction of Chinese citizens over deepening domestic social injustices. As a result of anti-Japanese education over a long period of time, 90 percent of Chinese dislike Japan, so Japan is the perfect scapegoat for deflecting public anger. There is no point in making a scapegoat out of a country that the public is unfamiliar with, and a strong country with massive military power that would retaliate quickly in the event of provocation is an overly risky scapegoat. A non-bellacose country such as Japan, with its "peace Constitution," makes a perfect scapegoat. China's moves where the Senkaku Islands are concerned basically stem from domestic issues and are not a reaction to any Japanese action.

The aim of China's scapegoat strategy is to fan popular animosity toward Japan and distract the people from domestic unrest; it is not intended to start a major war. The cost of such a conflict is difficult to predict, and if China were defeated the Party's existence could also be threatened. A country with a good chance of defeating its attacker does not make a good scapegoat. In essence, the scapegoat strategy is intended to bolster the government's popularity at home.

Accordingly, the government is carefully controlling the conflict level: letting it fall too low would mean that the people would lose interest in the Senkaku issue and resume voicing their dissatisfaction with domestic conditions. On the other hand, the government must avoid overly escalating the conflict level, to avoid a large-scale action that could threaten its existence. In China, the Party's propaganda department and the Ministry of Public Security oversee news reporting and public opinion and control anti-Japanese demonstrations and anti-Japanese Twitter messages. The

Party is also a source material intended to influence netizen debate.

A perfect scapegoat is one that does not retaliate when provoked, so what then are the conditions under which Japan can escape being made such a scapegoat? For Japan, the best way to avoid becoming such a scapegoat is to make it clear that it will come back with a strong punch if provoked.

The Possibility of a Small War

There are various types and levels of military conflicts. For example, there are three stages to the level of use of armed force: once past the stage of verbal threats, 1) there are displays of military might through exercises and so forth; 2) small wars are undertaken while a country remains on a peacetime footing; and 3) the country shifts to a war footing and all-out war is waged. According to the theory of limited engagements, if the site of conflict is far removed from the territory of the countries involved, the warring parties are looking for a limited war, and they act in a practical manner, expansion of the conflict can be avoided.

In today's world of complicated international relations, the simplistic dichotomy of war on the one or peace on the other does not work. The small wars waged by China while the country remains on a peacetime footing are a form of peacetime diplomacy.

Lieutenant-General Qi Jianguo, deputy chief of the People's Liberation Army, speaking at the 12th Asia Security Summit held in Singapore in June 2013, declared that the PLA had not waged war in the past 30 years. But on March 14, 1988, four Chinese Navy destroyers attacked a reef off Sinh-Ton, part of the Spratly Islands, killing 64 Vietnamese Navy personnel guarding the reef, and sinking two troop transports moored nearby and heavily damaging a third. The PLA does not consider sinking two warships and killing over 60 sailors to be war.

Even though there may be no likelihood of shifting to a war footing and entering into a major war, it is impractical to deny the possibility that small wars will take place with a country remaining on a peacetime footing. The world takes it for granted that armed clashes are possible, even in peacetime.

To China, small wars are part of its foreign diplomacy arsenal rather than a last resort after all other avenues have been exhausted. Practical policies demand being prepared for a worst-case scenario: the possibility of small wars occurring in peacetime should not be dismissed.