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Update: China deploys patrol ships as Japan announces purchase of disputed islands

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Update: China deploys patrol ships as Japan announces purchase of disputed islands

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Key Points

- China sent six patrol ships to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands after Japan agreed to buy the three islands
  - Beijing's rhetoric has been equally forceful, with Prime Minister Wen Jiabao saying China would "never yield an inch over the islands"
- Six China Marine Surveillance (CMS) patrol ships entered waters near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea on 14 September, the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) said, adding that it was the largest group of Chinese surveillance ships to enter Japanese waters near the Senkakus at one time.

Two unarmed cutters from the State Oceanic Administration's China Marine Surveillance (CMS) service -

Haijian 51

and

Haijian 66

- entered waters around Taisho island, one of the Senkaku's five major islets, at around 06.20 h local time, the JCG reported. Four others entered waters near Kuba island at around 07.05 h. Three of the six ships had left the waters by around 08.30 h, it added. China deployed the vessels on 11 September after the Japanese government agreed to disburse JPY2.05 billion (USD26.3 million) from reserve funds to buy three of the uninhabited islets from their private owner.



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Chinese marine surveillance ship Haijian 51, front, is shadowed by a Japan Coast Guard ship in waters near the Japanese-controlled Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea on 14 September. (PA Photos)

On 10 September the Chinese Foreign Ministry warned Japan not to proceed with the purchase. "The Chinese government will not sit idly by watching its territorial sovereignty being infringed upon," the Chinese statement said. "Long gone are the days when the Chinese nation was subject to bullying and humiliation from others. The Chinese side strongly urges the Japanese side to immediately stop all actions that may undermine China's territorial sovereignty."

Images published by Chinese state news agency Xinhua on 14 September show 3,000-ton cutter

Haijian 50

and 1,900-ton patrol vessels

Haijian 27

and

Haijian 15

close to the islands. Xinhua also quoted a government statement as saying that the "law-enforcement and patrol activities" aimed to demonstrate "China's jurisdiction over the Diaoyu islands and its affiliated islets and ensure the country's maritime interests". In an unsigned editorial, Xinhua added: "China's patrolling is a strong counteraction against Japan's provocation, dealing a big blow to the inflated swagger of Japan".

Japan's

Mainichi Shimbun

newspaper reported that

Haijian 50

had ordered a JCG vessel to leave the area, saying in Japanese through radio: "We are doing our rightful duty. Please leave these waters immediately."

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda told reporters in Tokyo that Japan would "take all possible measures" to maintain surveillance of Chinese activities around the Senkakus. Chinese Ambassador to Japan Cheng Yonghua was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, where Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Chikao Kawai lodged a protest against the intrusion and demanded the CMS vessels' immediate withdrawal from Japanese waters.

## COMMENT

While China's deployment of six CMS vessels is a major escalation of the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands, Beijing would argue that it is merely responding to Japanese provocation. Tokyo, for its part, decided to purchase the islets from a private Japanese owner after being forced to act



by Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, a longtime critic of the national government's Senkaku policy who in April had asked for public donations so that the islands could be bought and incorporated into the city.

Ishihara's offer also led 14 Chinese nationals from Hong Kong to land on the disputed islands on 15 August: an assertion of Chinese sovereignty that Japan quickly curtailed by arresting and deporting the protestors. News of their arrest ignited nationalist sentiment across China, with anti-Japanese protests taking place in Beijing, Guangzhou, Jinan, Qingdao, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xian.

In addition to its operational response, China's rhetoric has also been robust, with Prime Minister Wen Jiabao saying on 10 September that Beijing would "never yield an inch over the islands".

As with its island disputes in the South China Sea, China has decided not to field People's Liberation Army Navy vessels, instead deploying the paramilitary CMS. As of mid-2011 the CMS had about 300 marine surveillance ships, including 30 vessels displacing more than 1,000 tons, and 10 aircraft (including four helicopters) to monitor marine affairs. The force was created in 1998 and is responsible for law enforcement within China's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, along with environmental protection, navigation aids and maritime surveys.

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