

# 2015/2/1: Before the fall of the confederation in East Asia?“

## An imminent casus foederis in East Asia?

The USA and the Sino-Japanese Sovereignty Dispute in the East China Sea (part 1)

Martin Wagener



In the course of the past years, the conflict about the islands in the East China Sea which are called „Senkaku“ by Japan and „Diaoyu“ by China has intensified considerably. As of September 2010, when a Chinese fishing boat had collided with two ships of the Japanese coastguard, the two great powers of East Asia are in a manifest territorial conflict. Unilateral measures with which the opponents try to cement their own positions add to this situation. In September 2012 the Japanese government purchased three of the desired islands from a private owner. In November 2013 Peking, on the other hand, proclaimed an “air defence identification zone” which also includes these areas. Manoeuvres of both armed forces prove that both sides consider a military escalation possible. While China exercises amphibian landing operations, Japan prepares to reconquer lost islands. Because of its escalation potential the territorial conflict in the East China Sea is of special relevance. The USA are covenanted to Japan by the Common Security Treaty of 1960 and have declared several times that the assurance of protection also includes the Senkaku-/Diaoyu-Islands. For this reason, a conflict between two neighbours can quickly become a showdown of global dimensions. Thus, if China tries to occupy the islands in the East China Sea which are under Japanese administration at the moment, the USA will have to take military measures against China. The result of this would not only be a security-political, but also an economic disaster. With the USA, China and Japan the three greatest economic powers of the world, which together produced 41,3% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013, would be at war. Depending on the dimensions of the conflict, this would lead to turbulences in the international stock exchanges and to a considerable restriction of global production networks. Against this background this essay, which is published in two parts, investigates the following questions: Which role do the USA play in the Chinese-Japanese territorial conflict? How likely, given the latest escalation of the situation in the East China Sea, is the proclamation of the American-Japanese case of confederacy, and how could it develop? In order to give answers to these questions, in part 1 the basic information, legal conceptions, motives of action of decision makers, and efficacies of the conflict on the Senkaku-/Diaoyu-Islands are presented. Here we must differentiate: a “motive of action” is influenced by decision makers and is the basis of their conduct. “Efficacies” (history/narratives, social preferences, security dilemma) have some influence on decision making processes, but often evade the control of the actors. After these statements, part 2 deals with a contemplation of the American East-Asia-Policy, which creates the framework for Washington’s positioning in the East China Sea conflict. Afterwards, the author outlines how an escalation of the territorial conflict could be broken up. Finally, it will be necessary to clarify whether there will be a declaration of the case of confederacy in East Asia, and how the USA will presumably behave in case of an escalation.

[read more](#)

