

Japan, U.S. plan military response to Chinese threat to Senkakus

TOKYO

Japan and the United States plan to draw up an operations plan for a combined response by their armed forces to Chinese threats to the Senkaku Islands, government sources said.

The Japanese and U.S. governments are already discussing how to respond in the event of an emergency on or around the uninhabited islands in the East China Sea, the sources said, and aim to finish crafting the plan by next March.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has said Washington's commitment to defend Japan under Article 5 of the two countries' security treaty extends to the Senkaku Islands. The article obligates the United States to help protect territory under Japanese administration in the case of an armed attack.

But the U.S. government has repeatedly said it will take no position on the issue of sovereignty over the Japan-administrated islands, which China claims and calls the Diaoyu.

By working out a plan to deal with a potential military conflict with China, Japan is hoping the United States will take a more active role regarding the sovereignty issue.

The plan being drawn up assumes such emergencies as armed Chinese fishermen landing on the islands, and Japan's Self-Defense Forces needing to be mobilized after the situation exceeds the capacity of the police to respond, according to the sources.

The Self-Defense Forces on its own has studied how to respond to such threats. The focus of these inter-government talks is how to incorporate the U.S. military's strike capabilities, the sources said.

"Given that military organizations always need to assume the worst possible situation, it is natural for the two countries to work on this kind of plan against

China,” said Bonji Ohara, a former naval attache at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing who is now a senior fellow at Sasakawa Peace Foundation, a Japanese think tank.

The negotiations between Japan and the United States have been taking place mainly within the framework newly created by the 2015 defense guidelines, called the Bilateral Planning Mechanism, or BPM.

The guidelines stipulate that the SDF and the U.S. military will “conduct bilateral operations to counter ground attacks against Japan by ground, air, maritime, or amphibious forces.”

The two countries already have combined operations plans in the event of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula and other situations.

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