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China flexes naval might in East China Sea

Military drills may fuel tensions with Japan over disputed islands surrounded by rich fishing grounds and possibly oil.

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Japan and China have been displaying their naval prowess during a bitter dispute over the uninhabited

China has carried out a series of naval exercises in the East China Sea, a move that may fuel tensions with Japan over disputed islands.

The exercise involved 11 vessels from the East China Sea fleet and eight aircraft and was coordinated with the marine surveillance agency and the fishery administration, the official Xinhua News Agency said on Friday.

The drills focused on patrol tactics and responses to emergencies that threaten China's territory, Xinhua said.

State TV footage showed a frigate, a fighter jet and some helicopters participating in the drills. It showed the vessels and aircraft operating near shore, not on the high seas or close to the disputed islands.

Xinhua said patrol vessels from the fishery administration and the marine surveillance agency have recently been stalked and harassed by foreign vessels while carrying out missions.

Japan and China have been displaying their naval prowess during an unexpectedly bitter dispute over the islands, called Diaoyu in Chinese and Senkaku in Japanese.

Tokyo angered Beijing last month by nationalising some of the islands, in a move that sparked violent protests in China.

Nearby Taiwan also claims the islands, which are uninhabited but surrounded by rich fishing grounds and possibly lucrative undersea energy deposits.

Disputed islands

On Tuesday, Japanese military aircraft spotted seven Chinese warships not far from the disputed islands. China said the ships were on a routine training mission.

On Sunday, Japan's navy marked its 60th anniversary with a major exercise involving about 40 ships, including state-of-the-art destroyers, hovercraft able to launch assaults on rough coastlines, and new conventionally powered submarines.

For the first time, Japan's navy was joined by warships from the United States, Singapore and Australia.

Representatives from more than 20 countries, including China, attended the event staged in waters south of Tokyo.

Japan also plans to hold a joint exercise with the US military later this year, reportedly using a scenario of taking a remote island back from a foreign intruder.

China's exercise also takes place after dozens of Japanese parliament members, including two Cabinet ministers, visited the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which honours 2.5 million war dead but

also commemorates 14 Japanese wartime leaders convicted of war crimes.

Chinese media slammed the head of Japan's top opposition party for also going, calling his visit a provocation.