

Beat: Miscellaneous

Obama says U.S. would defend Japan in islands dispute with China

-, 24.04.2014, 22:57 Time

USPA News - U.S. President Barack Obama on Thursday affirmed the United States would be obligated to defend Japan in the event of a confrontation with China over a group of disputed islands in the East China Sea, though he urged all sides to resolve the issue peacefully. Obama, speaking at a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his visit to Tokyo, said the leaders had discussed various issues on Tuesday evening and agreed to deepen their security cooperation.

"As we modernize our defense posture in the region, our forces in Japan will include our most advanced military capabilities," he said. Obama added: "We stand together in calling for disputes in the region, including maritime issues, to be resolved peacefully through dialogue. We share a commitment to fundamental principles such as freedom of navigation and respect for international law. And let me reiterate that our treaty commitment to Japan's security is absolute, and Article 5 covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku Islands." China and Japan have been disputing the Senkaku Islands, which are called the Diaoyu Islands by China, for many years. The Chinese government claims they first discovered the islands in the 16th century and have been part of Chinese territory ever since, but Japan claimed and took control of the islands during the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Obama was later asked why he specifically mentioned the disputed islands as being covered by the decades-old security treaty, which entered into force in May 1960. "We don't take a position on final sovereignty determinations with respect to Senkaku, but historically they have been administered by Japan and we do not believe that they should be subject to change unilaterally," he explained. Obama added: "What is a consistent part of the alliance is that the treaty covers all territories administered by Japan. So this is not a new position, this is a consistent one." Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang, speaking at a news briefing, immediately criticized Obama's remarks on the controversial issue. "China's position on the Diaoyu Islands issue is clear, firm and consistent," he said. "I would also like to point out that the so-called U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which is a product of the Cold War, should not be against any third party, nor should it harm China's territorial sovereignty." "No matter what others say, or what they do, they cannot change the fundamental fact that the Diaoyu Islands are China's inherent territory," Qin added.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2136/obama-says-us-would-defend-japan-in-islands-dispute-with-china.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619