

Dangerous Crossroads: Japan to Seek NATO Support Against China

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By Liu Sha

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will write a letter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to call for closer ties in the face of China's rising maritime power.

The letter will say that China's frequent patrols in the disputed Diaoyu Islands and increasing maritime power has intensified the security situation in East Asia, Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun reported on Sunday.

In the letter, Abe will also mention that Japan is ready to take a more active role in maintaining stability and prosperity in East Asia, NHK reported.

According to the report, Katsuyuki Kawai, chairman of the Lower House Foreign Affairs Committee of Japan, will arrive at Brussels next Wednesday and bring Abe's personal letter to NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

This letter, viewed as another move by Japan to enhance its military capability, comes after the nation increased its defense budget for the first time in 11 years last Sunday against the background of the Diaoyu Islands disputes.

Japan Self-Defense Forces also conducted a 2,000-man island-retaking drill on Sunday, China Central Television reported.

Liu Jianguo, deputy director and professor of the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University, said that Japan would not succeed in uniting NATO.

"NATO's main task was to maintain the peace and protect human rights in Europe and many member countries of NATO are facing economic problems, which they hope to fix with the help of China," Liu told the Global Times.

Liu said Abe was repeating failed moves, referring to the fact that Abe was the first Japanese head to visit NATO headquarters in 2007 but no military ties resulted, as he wished.

Although the two sides shared security threats such as the North Korean nuclear and missile programs, most NATO members do not have a conflict of interest with China in terms of sea territory, Liu said.

In the letter that will be sent to NATO, Abe will also note that North Korea's behavior led to the tense security environment in East Asia, NHK reported.

Abe's first overseas trip after re-taking the position of prime minister was to South East Asian countries in January after his visit to the US was delayed due to US President Barack Obama's tight schedule, Reuters reported.

However, most Southeast countries would not take a side and risk conflict with China, Liu said, adding Japan is on the way to being isolated from other countries.

Lü Chao, a researcher with the Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times that despite Japan's efforts to fix the relationship with South Korea, Seoul's release of attempted Yasukuni arsonist Liu Qiang, a Chinese national, showed common ground with China.

Abe gave a speech on Friday, accusing China of deliberately targeting Japanese companies during protests against Japan as part of a strategy of confrontation over the territorial dispute.

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