

# COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

58 East 68th Street, New York, New York 10065  
tel 212.434.9400 fax 212.434.9800 www.cfr.org

## Teaching Notes

### What to Do About Tensions in Asia

Maritime disputes in East Asia, particularly between China and Japan, threaten to undermine peace and stability in the region. Jeffrey Bader of Brookings, Karl Eikenberry of Stanford, and Michael Green of CSIS discuss what to do about tensions in East Asia in a discussion led by CFR President Richard N. Haass. The panelists assess the gravity of the situation, assess U.S. options in regards to the issue, and answer a range of questions from the audience.

*This meeting is part of the "[What to Do About](#)" series, which highlights specific issues and features experts who put forward competing analyses and policy prescriptions in a mock high-level U.S. government meeting.*

- [Event video](#)
- [Event transcript](#)
- [Event audio](#)

## Background

### Questions for Class or Writing Assignments

1. What is the dispute in the East China Sea? Which countries are involved and what are they hoping to achieve?
2. What is the dispute in the South China Sea? Which countries are involved and what are they hoping to achieve?
3. Describe the dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. What issues – economic, historical, and political – make it difficult to resolve?
4. What is China's nine-dotted line and what is its relevance to this issue?
5. What is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea? What role does it play in maritime disputes?
6. What is the U.S. "pivot" or "rebalance" toward Asia? Why did President Obama pursue this policy?

## Supplementary Readings

1. [China's Maritime Disputes](#), CFR InfoGuide Presentation  
This online piece introduces the East and South China Seas disputes (5,500 words plus videos, maps, timelines, and interactive graphics).
2. [Competition and Confrontation in the East China Sea](#), National Bureau of Asian Research, February 2014  
This event summary covers recent developments in the East China Sea dispute (2,900 words).
3. [U.S. Policy Towards the Disputes in the South China Sea Since 1995](#), The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, March 2014  
Professor Taylor Fravel documents recent U.S. policy towards disputes in the South China Sea (6,700 words).
4. [Statement of Michael Swaine](#), U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, April 4, 2014  
Michael Swaine testifies about the East and South China Seas disputes, includes a brief timeline (5,800 words).
5. [South China Sea Tensions Stem from "Nine-Dash Line."](#) *Financial Times*, April 27, 2014  
A news piece that explains the origins and extent of China's "nine-dash line," which is referenced in other pieces in this package. Includes a map. (375 words)
6. [History Wars in Northeast Asia](#), *Foreign Affairs*, April 10, 2014.  
Asia scholars explain the historical origins of nationalist tensions in northeast Asia and argue the U.S. should help alleviate them (2,275 words).

## Stakes

### Questions for Class or Writing Assignments

1. The readings mentioned political, historical, and economic stakes for the leading countries involved in these disputes. What are the most important stakes for the United States, China, and Japan?
2. The U.S.-China relationship is changing as China rapidly develops. How is China's political, economic, and military growth affecting U.S. interests in the region?
3. Why are U.S. policymakers concerned about a ship collision or similar incident in the East or South China Sea?
4. What is the security relationship between the United States and Japan? How does that affect U.S. interests and options in managing the East China Sea dispute?

## Supplementary Readings

1. [Why Are China and Japan Sparring Over Eight Tiny, Uninhabited Islands?](#), National Geographic, October 26, 2012  
An overview of the energy resources in the East China Sea (1,800 words).
2. [Island Grabbing in Asia](#), *Foreign Affairs*, September 4, 2012.  
Michael Klare explores the political and economic issues at stake in the competition in East Asia's waters (1,500 words).
3. [Far Eastern Promises](#), *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2014  
This article explains U.S. interests in East Asia and describes the reasons the Obama Administration is pursuing a rebalancing toward the region (3,800 words)

## Options

### Questions for Class or Writing Assignments

1. What, if anything, should the United States do to reduce the chances for conflict in the East and South China Seas?
2. What more, if anything, should the United States be doing to secure a multilateral agreement to resolve the disputes in the East and South China Seas?
3. Should the United States encourage China and Japan to develop closer diplomatic and military communication? If so, how? If not, why?
4. What military steps, if any, should the U.S. consider taking now to protect its interests?
5. If there is a military confrontation between China and Japan, what should the United States do?
6. You read some articles arguing that China was a threat that needed to be contained, and others saying the United States should develop a closer partnership with China. Which were more convincing? Why? Which approach should the United States pursue?

## Supplementary Readings

1. [A Sino-Japanese Clash in the East China Sea](#), CFR Contingency Planning Memorandum, April 2013  
This eight page memo outlines U.S. options if China uses military force in the East China Sea (4,700 words).
2. [Keep Hope Alive: How to Prevent U.S.-China Relations from Blowing Up](#), *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2014.  
James Steinberg and Michael O'Hanlon outline specific steps the United States and China can take to reduce tensions between them (3,900 words).
3. [Roiling the Waters](#), *Foreign Policy*, January 21, 2014  
This article argues in favor of an assertive U.S. strategy in the West Pacific (1,750 words).
4. [Statement of Bonnie Glaser](#), U.S. House Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces and the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Asia Pacific, January 14, 2014  
Glaser testifies about Chinese strategy and offers policy recommendations for the United States (4,000 words).

## Class activities

1. Group presentations: Imagine that a Chinese fishing boat has collided with a Philippines coast guard vessel in the South China Sea. It is unclear who is at fault, but each side blames the other for the incident. Divide the class into groups and ask each group to make a presentation outlining how the United States should respond, taking into account American military relationships, regional political dynamics, and American interests in the region.
2. White House role play: Either individually or in small groups, students should place themselves in the shoes of a Presidential adviser. Suppose that China has just announced it has annexed the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Japan is asking the United States to support a strong, potentially military, response. Taking into account U.S. military alliances and political and economic interests, each student or group should make clear recommendations as to what the United States should do.