

# [***China's Ships Sail Near Disputed Islands US Has Pledged To Defend***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BSK-1G81-DY68-100H-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 660 words

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**Highlight:** Observers believe Beijing means to establish the impression of de facto control over the Senkaku Islands, forcing the U.S. to clarify its defense obligations.

**Body**

China's coast guard sent a flotilla of ships into the territorial waters of the disputed Senkaku Islands on Friday, less than 48 hours after President Joe Biden reaffirmed the U.S.' "unwavering commitment" to defend the Japan-controlled territory from an attack.

A brief statement on its website and social media channels said the patrol led by the [*Chinese maritime law enforcement*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-coast-guard-xi-jinping-territory-claims-east-south-china-seas-taiwan-strait-1874109?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) vessel *2502*, a 5,500-ton Shuoshi II-class cutter, was "to protect China's rights."

The uninhabited island group, which Beijing calls the Diaoyu Islands, are located in the [*East China Sea*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/east-china-sea?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), roughly 120 miles northeast of self-ruled Taiwan, which China's leaders also claim.

Since Japan's nationalization of the Senkakus in 2012, the Chinese government has ramped up ship deployments into the islets' [*12-nautical mile territorial sea*](https://www.newsweek.com/japan-senkaku-diaoyu-islands-china-coast-guard-patrol-1881665?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) or the adjacent contiguous zone, which extends a further 12 nautical miles beyond that, according to Japan coast guard data.

*Newsweek*'s [*analysis of official statistics*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-japan-coast-guard-maritime-vessels-senkaku-diaoyu-island-data-1883397?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) found that China had sent a record 1,282 vessels into the waters surrounding the contested island group last year, including 129 ships into the territorial sea.

Since late December, the Chinese coast guard has maintained a near-constant presence at the Senkakus, dispatching ships there on 112 [*consecutive days*](https://www.newsweek.com/chinese-ships-enter-disputed-waters-100-consecutive-days-1885466?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), including every day in April so far, Japan's database shows.

Observers believe Beijing means to establish the impression of de facto control over the strategic features, [*driving Japan to rearm*](https://www.newsweek.com/japan-js-kaga-helicopter-destroyer-aircraft-carrier-upgrade-china-us-alliance-1888740?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and forcing the United States to clarify its defense obligations.

Washington recognizes the Senakus as being under Tokyo's administration, despite taking no position on their legal ownership. Although Japan has been a U.S. ally for over 70 years, it was only a decade ago, under former President [*Barack Obama*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/barack-obama?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), that the U.S. first publicly stated that [*its treaty commitments*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-japan-senkaku-diaoyu-islands-coast-guard-1833294?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) covered the Senkakus, too.

Speaking in the Rose Garden at the White House on Wednesday, Biden told Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida that the U.S.' "commitment to the defense of Japan under Article 5, including the Senkaku Islands, is unwavering."

"[*President Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) reiterated the unwavering commitment of the United States to the defense of Japan under Article V of the Treaty, using its full range of capabilities, including nuclear capabilities," the two leaders said in a joint-statement later the same day.

"We reiterated our strong opposition to any attempts by the [*People's Republic of China*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/china?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea, including through actions that seek to undermine Japan's longstanding and peaceful administration of the Senkaku Islands," Biden and Kishida said.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, responding from Beijing the following day, said the U.S. and Japan had "attacked and smeared China" on various issues.

"China's activities in the East China Sea and [*South China Sea*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/south-china-sea?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) are in full compliance with international law and there's nothing wrong about them," she said. "The Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands are China's inherent territory. We will take firm measures against illegal moves that violate China's sovereignty.

"U.S.-Japan relations should not [*target other countries*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-protests-after-us-rallies-allies-south-china-sea-1888283?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), harm their interests or undermine regional peace and stability. China firmly opposes the Cold War mentality and small group ***politics***. [*China*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/china?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) firmly rejects anything that creates and drives up tensions and may undermine other countries' strategic security and interests."

Japan's prime minister told a joint-session of [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Thursday that "China's current external stance and military actions present an unprecedented and [*the greatest strategic challenge*](https://www.newsweek.com/japan-map-china-navy-ship-movements-pacific-ocean-east-china-sea-1889238?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), not only to the peace and security of Japan, but to the peace and stability of the international community at large."

The Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., did not immediately respond to a written request for comment.

China's coast guard could not be reached for comment.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2377227/china-flotilla-sails-senkaku-islands.jpg)

**Graphic**

China Flotilla Sails Into Senkaku Islands

Costfoto/Future Publishing via Getty Images

A Chinese coast guard ship patrol the sea area off Yantai city in China’s eastern Shandong province on September 1, 2020. The China coast guard said a flotilla of ships sailed into the territorial waters of the Japan-held Senkaku islands on April 12.

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