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Robert Lawrence Kuhn – China-Japan Tensions



Rico Hizon (HOST): In his most explicit warning yet to China, Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has warned that he will use force against Chinese government ships if they attempt to land on a group of disputed islands. Eight Chinese surveillance ships have entered Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands, which China calls the Diaoyu. Ten Japanese fishing boats are also in the area carrying members of a right-wing nationalist group. We can speak now to Robert Kuhn, an international strategist on Sino-Japan relations; he joins us now from our Tokyo studios. Mr. Kuhn, thank you so much for joining us on Newsday. You've been working on China-Japan relations with senior business leaders, how do they view these developments on the disputed islands?

Robert Kuhn (KUH): The previous two weeks I was in Beijing with leaders, senior ministers, friends; this week I'm in Japan, with senior business leaders, friends -- and I can tell you there is near unanimity in both countries on opposite sides of the issue. And that is very serious. However, both sides say they want stability, they know economic



relations between the two countries are critical. There is long-term necessity for both countries to work together, so they want to work it out, but there's very high emotion.

So how do you understand this? You must understand it in terms of new leaders, election cycles and campaigns. And in campaigns, candidates always tack nationalistic. Patriotism is important, every country knows that -- we saw that in Japan. In the Western model, in Japan, the campaigns come *before* the new leaders take office. In the China model, in China, the campaign comes *after* the new leaders take office, because even though they're not elected by the broad public, they still have to win the hearts and minds of the people. Just as we have to do in the West, but in China, this comes after the elections.

HOST: So Mr. Kuhn, do you think Japan would use force if there is any attempt made to land on these disputed islands?

KUHN: We have to understand the situation, because from the Chinese point of view, stability is the most important factor. Chinese people are very nationalistic. So we heard that these Chinese ships have come into Japanese



waters -- I heard this in Japan last night -- but what was not said was that there was a flotilla of Japanese right-wingers who were going to land on the island prior. So if China would have allowed that, there would have been great instability in China. So stability is the lens by which we must view the Chinese reaction. China is not going to provoke force, certainly government leaders won't do this, though there can always be rogue people.

HOST: So how do you think Japan is going to respond to this?

KUHN: Remember, the Chinese are only going to respond to what the Japanese rightists do. So we have a volatile situation, we have to see what each side does. It's not the Chinese that are initiating this; it may be some rogue elements in Japan. And so there is a potential for each side to escalate, but I do not look for a violent situation to occur. I think that cool heads in both countries will prevail, but one has to understand the lens through which China looks at this, and that's the lens of stability.

HOST: Robert Kuhn, an international strategist on Sino-Japanese relations, great to have you with us on Newsday.