Japan's reluctance to station military personnel in the Senkaku Islands: step towards peace or counterproductive move?

By Alex Calvo

Tokyo’s policy of not deploying ground troops on the Senkaku/Diaoyau/Diaoyautai Islands is designed to lower tensions, as Chinese trawlers and coastguard ships keep probing the waters around them. Beijing may land troops or 'activists' on one or more islands, without opening fire on Japanese forces, in order to prompt negotiations on her terms and dare Tokyo to be the first to resort openly to force in order to recover them. This could take the form of an airborne landing, against which Japanese Coast Guard units and the ROEs under which they operate are not prepared. Helicopters could be deployed conventionally, or from hangars in converted trawlers. The key difference between ships and aircraft is that while one can physically block boats without sinking them, it is much more difficult to prevent the passage of an aircraft without downing it. The lack of a 'tripwire', that is troops on the ground, makes it easier for Beijing to miscalculate, invading in the hope that Japan will not react. Therefore, in order to promote peace and reduce the risks of war, it is the opposite policy which must be pursued. Deploying ground troops would signal to Beijing that no bloodless invasion could take place, reducing the scope for a miscalculation.

Keywords: Senkaku, Diaoyu, Diaoyutai, Japan, Deterrence, Amphibious Warfare, Mixed Warfare

Introduction: No boots on the ground, olive branch or open door to miscalculation?

Despite hints that the permanent stationing of government personnel (an ambiguous expression which may refer to SDF or other public agencies' staff) in the Senkaku Islands was being considered, recent reports seem to indicate that at least for the time being Tokyo will not be taking such a step. Media commentary has generally considered this to be an olive branch to China and thus a contribution to peace, but before we reach that conclusion it is necessary to carefully examine what it entails, both at the tactical and at the political levels. Having previously considered in another short
paper Tokyo’s options from a political perspective\(^1\), we will now turn our attention to Chinese tactics and the impact that a ground deployment may have on them.

**Chinese tactics: is Beijing trying to gain a foothold in the islands?**

After some years replete with incidents, we are now in a position to analyse Beijing’s tactics\(^2\), which seem to be to:

- Deploy a permanent maritime presence around the Senkaku Islands.
- Regularly penetrate Japanese territorial waters.
- Seek or at least not avoid physical contact with Japanese Coast Guard units, while refraining from firing any weapons.\(^3\)
- Employ quasi-military agencies, not the Navy, to carry out the above.
- Also resort to fishing vessels, nominally private but closely linked to the authorities.
- Launch or promote 'civilian' expeditions resulting in landings on the Islands\(^4\).

From a legal point of view, some observers have noted that Beijing’s intentions may be to contest Japanese sovereignty claims, by disputing Tokyo’s actual control over the Islands and their surrounding waters, establishing precedents. While this may well be true, there is no evidence that Beijing intends to submit the dispute to any international


\(^2\) Concerning China’s ultimate goals, although not the object of this paper, it seems clear that they are the annexation of the Senkaku Islands, to be followed by further territorial demands. This is not speculation but has been repeatedly announced by Chinese sources.


\(^4\) This is also intended to promote the Anschluss of Taiwan by involving groups from the island, and more generally promote a pan-Chinese national identity and effective control over Hong Kong and Macau, both territories having featured in the incidents of the summer of 2012. Since this is a higher level political issue, however, we shall not be discussing it in this paper, other than noting it. Needless to say, it is a national security imperative for Japan to prevent Beijing from annexing Taiwan, and the defence of the Senkaku Islands rests on the unstated assumption that Taiwan will remain away from Beijing’s grasp.
court, or more generally that she is ready to accept international law as a limiting factor, as clear from her refusal to accept the international arbitration case concerning the South China Sea initiated by the Philippines.\textsuperscript{5} Rather the contrary, it appears that what China would like to see is a return to the Tribute System that used to govern her relations with neighbouring countries before the irruption of Russia and Western powers on her borders. For this reason, while conceding that the legal aspects of the dispute and of Chinese actions in the region are a legitimate academic subject, and furthermore that they may have some weight in diplomatic fora and the court of public opinion, they are not the main topic for this paper.

Setting thus aside the establishment of precedents, and the propaganda value of showing that China is free to enter Japanese waters with impunity\textsuperscript{6}, what do the above points tell us about Chinese intentions at the tactical level?. We know, because Beijing is declaring it publicly day after day, that China wants the Senkaku Islands, but how is she planning to secure them?

In order to answer this question, let us first consider the different ways in which that goal could be achieved:

- First of all, China could win a conventional war, not necessarily featuring those islands among its theatres, and demand them at the negotiating table.
- A variation of the former scenario would be to occupy them after having won a victory elsewhere, destroying either Japan's navy and air force or her will to fight.
- Another variation would be a landing in the context of a wider conventional war.

\textsuperscript{5} For an overall examination of the case, see Alex Calvo, 'Manila, Beijing, and UNCLOS: A Test Case?', in The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, Vol. 11, Issue 34, No. 11, 26 August 2013, at \url{http://japanfocus.org/-Alex-Calvo/3988#}, and Alex Calvo, 'China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and International Arbitration in the South China Sea', in The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, Vol. 13, Issue 42, No. 2, 26 October 2015, at \url{http://japanfocus.org/-Alex-Calvo/4391/article.pdf}

\textsuperscript{6} A double-edged sword, since Beijing risks losing part of her soft power and prestige as an allegedly 'peaceful' power, something not very much supported by historical evidence but still en vogue in certain journalistic and academic quarters.
Conventional operations could also take place under cover of nuclear threats. Alternatively, a terrorist campaign could be employed in conjunction with non-conventional threats, although the characteristics of Japanese society make it more difficult than elsewhere.

We can see no evidence of any of these approaches being pursued. We will see in the next section how Communist China's way of using force is quite different, for now let us examine an alternative and see whether it fits with Beijing's observed behaviour. This alternative explanation is that what China is trying to do is to:

- Test Japanese defences, exploring possible venues for a 'non-violent' landing, meaning one not involving the firing of weapons and the death or injury of Japanese military or other personnel. This may include, among others, observing operational methods and deployment schedules, noting the technical characteristics of Japanese equipment, and checking the morale of Coast Guard and other personnel.

- Desensitizing Japanese and worldwide (including US) public opinion, in order to prepare the ground for a coup de main. To an extent, Beijing has already succeeded, since her repeated violations of Japanese territorial waters have prompted little more than some diplomatic noise. However, this is a two-edged sword, since at the same time we can appreciate a hardening of public opinion in Japan as well as in other countries such as the Philippines, with a growing number of people favouring defiance instead of surrender.

With a view to finally:

- Occupying one or more of the islands, while avoiding shedding Japanese blood. This would differ from the cases seen to date, involving 'civilian' expeditions, in which the landing parties offered no resistance to arrest and were simply deported. Instead, whereas Chinese forces would strive not to open fire to get to the islands, once there they would dig in and make it clear that they were not ready to surrender or leave, daring Japan to be the first to shoot.
- Escalating the resulting incident into a major crisis. This would involve blurring the actual facts behind the incident, putting both parties on the same plane or ideally even making Tokyo look like the aggressor.

- Appearing as 'reasonable' and looking for a 'peaceful' resolution not only of the episode but of the wider territorial dispute, putting on the table proposals for an interim joint administration scheme, a mutual withdrawal of forces, or others, designed to effectively remove any Japanese presence from the islands, thus opening the way for their later takeover.

- Making it clear at the same time, more or less overtly, that while not wishing to escalate matters further, Beijing was ready to use force on a greater scale unless she was reasonably satisfied that her concerns were being addressed.

- Playing the 'far away, no essential interests involved' card in the US, pushing for the view, both in private and government channels and through public diplomacy, that Washington had nothing to gain and a lot to lose by supporting Japan. This could involve a mixture of the carrot and the stick. On the one hand there could be veiled threats that widespread hostilities may negatively impact US interests and citizens, while on the other some sweeteners may be put on the table, ranging from support on other unrelated issues to offers of playing a mediating role. Concerning this we should be aware of the powerful attraction that this could prompt in some diplomatic quarters, ever tempted to set aside the national interest and basic principles for the sake of appearing to be doing something to defuse a conflict. Some people find it difficult to understand that diplomacy is a tool, not an end in itself.

- Use her permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council to veto any resolution providing international legal cover for Japan and other countries to react. This is important because over the last few decades some voices have put forward the view that military action is only legitimate under UN cover, thus effectively handing over a veto to Beijing. The seat may also be used to try to internationalize the dispute,
bringing additional pressure to bear on Tokyo to accept the loss of at least some of the islands.

**Communist China's approach to force**

At this stage in our paper it may be useful to take a more panoramic view, go back in time, and briefly analyse how the People's Republic of China has been using force as an instrument of statecraft since its birth, following the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. For this purpose, we will summarize an article by Professor Brahma Chellaney⁷, which explains this on the basis of the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Chellaney lists the following six characteristics of that offensive, which saw the Chinese Army penetrate deeply into India for 32 days, after which 'Beijing announced a unilateral ceasefire, and the war ended as abruptly as it had begun. Ten days later, the Chinese began withdrawing from the areas they had penetrated on India’s eastern flank, between Bhutan and Burma, but they kept their territorial gains in the West—part of the original princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. India had suffered a humiliating rout, and China’s international stature had grown substantially'. The six principles are:

- **Surprise.** As already advised by Sun Tzu, who wrote that all warfare was 'based on deception'.
- **Concentration,** 'hitting as fast and as hard as possible'.
- **First Strike.**
- **Waiting,** and choosing the right moment.
- **Camouflaging offence as defence,** engaging in 'defensive counterattacks'.
- **Daring.** A tendency to gamble and take risks.

Let us briefly explain the meaning of each of these principles and see whether they would apply to an invasion along the lines previously discussed.

Concerning surprise, we can see a clear distinction between 1962 and our scenario in terms of strategic surprise. Beijing is announcing every day that she wants the Senkaku,
and not making any effort at all to pretend that she is only ready to resort to non-violent means. No ambiguity here, therefore no strategic surprise is being sought. At the tactical level, on the other hand, there is no surprise either in the constant harassment at the hands of paramilitary assets or 'civilian' expeditions, but as explained earlier this could be a cover behind which to prepare a landing by military or other government personnel. That landing would likely take place by surprise, or at least Beijing may well try to achieve it. The idea would be not just to land but to quickly transfer supplies and equipment to establish a permanent presence while the hoped for negotiations took place.

With regard to concentration, the nature of the islands means that this principle would not be applicable in exactly the same sense as it was in 1962. Rather than hitting 'as fast and as hard as possible', as Chellaney explains China did against India, the goal would be still be to do it as swiftly as possible but not as hard as possible, rather the contrary, since the idea would be to avoid a clash with the Japanese Coast Guard or other government agencies. The reason, as we will explain later in more detail, would be to force Tokyo to take the always difficult decision in a democracy to fire the first shot. Thus Chellaney's explanation that 'The aim is to wage 'battles with swift outcome' (sujue zhan)' would still hold true, but understanding that by 'battle' we are referring to the initial phase of the operation, that is the insertion of a force on one or more islands. The overall battle, including the political-diplomatic phase, may take much longer.

When it comes to striking first, again we have to note an essential difference. Beijing would still be interested in surprise, as already noted, that is she would try to make the first move (and by definition she would, since the islands are already in Japanese hands) but not to shoot first. We will later examine why in more detail. This would be a major difference with 1962 or with the 1979 'lesson' against Vietnam. In addition to the relative weight of territorial ambitions in the dispute, a key difference may be the victim's awareness of and sensitivity to casualties. Vietnam is not a democracy, India is

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8 Against Vietnam, China's main goal was not territorial conquest but cutting down to size a hostile neighbour. In the case of India the goal was mixed, as apparent in the fact that Beijing relinquished part but not all of her territorial gains, and has later failed to demarcate the border. Concerning Japan we can also see both territorial claims, on the Senkaku Islands and Okinawa, plus other minor islands, and a desire to gain the upper hand. A third factor, not present in relations with India and Vietnam, is revenge and long running hatred. A fourth one would be the need to destroy the legacy of colonial Taiwan in order to pave the way for the island's annexation.
but part of the fighting took place in remote areas, and in both cases it was at a time before the current social media technological revolution. Therefore Chinese forces did not need to be as subtle as they would probably have to in an offensive against Japan.

The idea that an attack should be launched at the right time, with a view to a favourable worldwide state of affairs, remains as relevant as ever. This is linked to one of Beijing's imperatives, preventing the US from coming to Japan's aid. It would also involve other, regional, powers however. China has a need to keep an eye on Russia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and India, among others. It must be said, concerning this, that while it is true that Beijing has usually been smart to launch its limited offensives at the right time⁹, when it comes to Japan it miscalculated when in 2010 it imposed an embargo on rare earths exports in reaction to the arrest of a trawler's skipper, which not only failed to secure any objective beyond his release¹⁰ but unleashed a major effort to implement alternative technologies, recycle, seek new suppliers, and even explore seabed deposits.

The tendency to carry out 'defensive counterattacks' seems to be a constant in Chinese behaviour, which Chellaney reminds his readers had already been noted by the Pentagon in its 2010 report on 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China' to Congress¹¹. This report lists a number of instances where Beijing chose to seize the initiative, while framing her actions in a 'response' narrative. In a way this is already happening in the Senkaku Islands, since after each incident Beijing is not only rejecting Japanese protests but actually issuing protests of her own, saying that it is her territory and that therefore it is Japanese units which are trespassing it. The text also points out how Chinese doctrine calls for waiting for the enemy to strike first, while defining that first strike in political, not necessarily military, terms.

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⁹ In addition to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, which took place at roughly the same time as the Sino-Indian War, Chellaney lists the following instances: 'After America pulled out of South Vietnam, China seized the Paracel Islands. In 1988, when Moscow’s support for Vietnam had faded and Afghanistan had killed the Soviets’ enthusiasm for foreign adventures, China occupied the disputed Johnson Reef in the Spratlys. And in 1995, when the Philippines stood isolated after having forced the U.S. to close its major military bases at Subic Bay and elsewhere on the archipelago, China seized Mischief Reef' Brahma Chellaney, 'How China Fights: Lessons From the 1962 Sino-Indian War', 29 October 2012, at http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/10/28/how-china-fights-lessons-from-the-1962-sino-indian-war.html


Thus it is fine to be the first to resort to force in reaction to a political offensive. The report quotes from 'the authoritative work, *Science of Military Strategy,*' to explain that 'Striking only after the enemy has struck does not mean waiting for the enemy’s strike passively…. It doesn't mean to give up the 'advantageous chances' in campaign or tactical operations, for the 'first shot' on the plane of politics must be differentiated from the 'first shot' on that of tactics... if any country or organization violates the other country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the other side will have the right to 'fire the first shot' on the plane of tactics'"\(^\text{12}\).

Would this doctrine be compatible with a sneak landing on the Senkaku Islands? It could fit with it if we expanded it to comprise three, as opposed to two planes. The first one would still be the political, with Beijing claiming (as she does) that the islands are hers and that therefore the Japanese are invaders, a position made much easier to sustain by Tokyo’s reluctance to develop the islands\(^\text{13}\), thus contradicting her claims that not only do they belong to the country but that there is no territorial dispute. The second one, where Beijing would be taking the initiative, would be the 'tactical-cold' one, that is the employment of force (in the sense of deploying military or paramilitary personnel in violation of Japan's borders but without inflicting casualties). Finally, the third would be the 'tactical-hot', that is the actual employment of weapons with live fire, where China would rather have Japan be the first to shoot, in the knowledge that it is difficult for democracies to take such decisions and thus in the hope that Tokyo would refrain from doing it or that, if she did, this could be used to Beijing's advantage on the propaganda and diplomacy fronts.

Finally, with regard to China's tendency to gamble and take risks, Chellaney notes that this could be furthered by her 'second-strike nuclear capability and unprecedented economic and conventional military strength'. In addition to these two powerful factors, we could perhaps mention two additional ones, whose impact is less clear cut but which may nevertheless have some influence: a possible economic crisis and popular demand for the seizing of the Islands. Concerning a crisis, a growing number of voices are


\(^{13}\) This reluctance, or rather opposition, is similar to Great Britain's rejection of the Shackleton Report on the Falkland Islands, which Buenos Aires saw as evidence of London's disinterest in their fate.
alerting about the possibility that the country's uninterrupted economic growth may sooner or later be brought to a halt\textsuperscript{14}. Whether that would prompt a more cautious foreign policy or on the contrary whet Beijing's appetite for adventures is open to debate. With regard to her domestic public opinion, Beijing is playing a dangerous game by pushing so hard for the Senkaku Islands and thus risking becoming a prisoner of her own narrative. This brings to mind Hugh Bicheno's comment, in his unofficial history of the Falklands War, that territorial conflicts may be useful to 'distract the masses', but that this 'creates an issue others will exploit to question the Nationalist credentials of whoever is refraining from recovering the lost lands\textsuperscript{15}. All this may prompt Beijing to take risks to even higher levels. Furthermore, we may also note that calculated risk taking may be easier when historical hatred is not at play.

Two precedents for unopposed occupations: The Rhineland and Southern Thule

Some examples of invasions where the attacking force avoided firing on its enemy can be found in history. One of them is Hitler's taking of the Rhineland, an area which according to the Versailles Treaty was under German sovereignty but demilitarized. When he ordered troops into it he made it clear that they should turn around if fired upon, they were not and, furthermore, Paris did not react. He would later admit that 'The forty-eight hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-racking in my life. If the French had then marched into the Rhineland we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs, for the military resources at our disposal would have been wholly inadequate for even a moderate resistance\textsuperscript{16}.

Another example was Argentina's setting up in 1977 of a clandestine base in Southern Thule (South Sandwich Islands), uninhabited like the Senkaku Islands.\textsuperscript{17} On detecting the 'Corbeta Uruguay' base, London sent a naval task force (Operation Journeyman)

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\textsuperscript{14} See for example T. Moss '5 Signs of the Chinese Economic Apocalypse', in \textit{Foreign Policy}, 2 July 2012, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/07/02/5_signs_of_the_chinese_economic_apocalypse?page=full

\textsuperscript{15} Hugh Bicheno, \textit{Razor's Edge. The Unofficial History of the Falklands War} (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 64.


\textsuperscript{17} Alex Calvo, 'South Sandwich Islands', in Andrew J. Hund (ed), \textit{Antarctica and the Arctic Circle: a Geographic Encyclopedia of the Earth's Polar Regions} (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 2014, pp. 675-677.
under secrecy and very restrictive Rules of Engagement (ROEs) to deter a wider move against South Georgia and the Falklands but did not remove the Argentine facilities and personnel. The 'scientists' and military personnel stayed there until the closing days of the 1982 Falklands War, when they were removed in what was effectively the closing operation of the war.

This case is interesting because London tried on the one hand to prevent Buenos Aires from expanding military operations to cover other disputed territories, in particular the Falkland Islands, while at the same time seeking to avoid pressure from her domestic public opinion by not revealing the existence of the Corbeta Uruguay base. On the other hand, Argentina was testing the waters, observing the British reaction, and combining military action with diplomacy, seeking to defeat the UK not in the field of battle but rather on the diplomatic table. The plans for invasion drafted at the time of the Southern Thule incident involved a joint Navy/Air Force plan to occupy the Islands, to be coupled with a simultaneous appeal for intervention by a UN peacekeeping force to pre-empt British military counter-measures. We can note how democracies often find it difficult to openly use force first.

The interesting case of the opening hours of the 1982 Falklands War

When, five years later, Argentina attacked Southern Georgia and the Falkland Islands, her purpose was also to force negotiations, as clear from the words of her Foreign Minister Costa Mendez: 'in the diplomatic circumstances the peaceful and bloodless occupation of the islands would make the Argentine will to negotiate the solution of the underlying conflict evident. This occupation would make it possible for us to negotiate once and for all the underlying dispute. It would also induce the international community, the interested parties and even the United States of America to pay more attention to the reasons for the dispute, its character and the need for a rapid solution. The United Nations would not be able to procrastinate if faced with a military action

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and would have to discuss it at the highest possible levels. Buenos Aires did not expect Great Britain to meet force with force, but rather at most to acquiesce to some face-saving formula hiding beneath it an effective transfer of sovereignty. To secure this goal, though, two factors were essential, none of which Buenos Aires succeeded in achieving fully. First of all, British casualties (above all civilians) had to be avoided. Second, Washington had to be brought on board as mediator and shield behind which to hide, preventing London from reacting. Buenos Aires carefully examined US policy at Suez and the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, observing that ‘The Americans had not blindly supported their closest ally, but, where necessary, had exerted considerable pressure to ensure a reasonable diplomatic posture.’

Concerning a silk glove invasion, Argentine plans retained this principle, ‘the guidelines remained that the operation had to be as bloodless as possible and should not excessively impinge upon the life of the population’ and this was apparent in the employment of ‘stun grenades not (not) the splinter type’ by the enemy troops assaulting Government House. They were, however, accelerated by the Davidoff affair and more generally the quick deterioration of the Junta's political standing and the country’s economy. This meant that when Argentine forces landed in the Falklands they had to contend with twice the number of royal marines, since they were in the midst of a unit changeover. Furthermore, the political need to inform the restive population even before the landings, and the carelessness with which Argentine vessels employed their radios, put an end to any pretence of surprise, an essential component to avoid a

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21 ‘A factor in all this was the American Administration’s policy of strengthening ties with Argentina as part of its strategy of resisting Cuban-based communist influence in Central and South America, and the Argentinians had gained a wildly exaggerated idea of their importance to the United States.’ Margaret Thatcher, Thatcher’s War: The Iron Lady on the Falklands (London: Harper Press, 2012), p. 7.
24 Noted by Governor Sir Rex Hunt in his telegram providing an account of his final hours at Government House. P. Biles 'Falklands telegrams reveal UK response to invasion', in BBC News, 28 December 2012, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20817088?SthisFB . The author would like to thank Jonathan D’Hooghe, then a fellow postgraduate student at Birmingham University, for having pointed out this source to him.
25 ‘Whatever the intended strategy, the course of the fleet through the South Atlantic on Thursday, ship-to-ship radio at full blast, deprived it of any element of surprise. Nor was Buenos Aires any more cautious. Faced with the collapse of domestic order, the junta had let it be known that ’by tomorrow the Malvinas will be ours’. Broadcasting stations relayed the news. Newspapers were told to prepare special
firefight. Even more troubling for Buenos Aires was the fact that Governor Sir Rex Hunt was in command, with no meddling from London, as his instructions made clear. A telegram received the day before the invasion said 'We have apparently reliable evidence that an Argentine task force could be assembling off Stanley at dawn tomorrow. You will wish to make your dispositions accordingly', and this was followed by another message saying 'We are aware in general terms of your plans for the defence of the seat of government and resistance to any kind of incursion…The conduct of any operation, of course, is entirely a matter for you and the forces under your command. But is there any additional guidance you wish to have…about specific rules of engagement?'. What were the options open to the governor, who could only count on '79 lightly armed Royal Marines and a few members of the part-time volunteer Falkland Islands Defence Force, civilians with a modicum of military training' facing 'a fast-approaching Argentine armada with 10,000 troops and armoured vehicles, and 200 warplanes massed on the mainland'? Let us first examine the three courses of action he did not choose:

- **Surrender before contact with the enemy.** This would have had the advantage of safeguarding the civilian population, while avoiding military casualties. However, it would have fully played into the hands of the Argentines, who were precisely looking for a kids gloves takeover as the basis for renewed negotiations. Furthermore, it would have helped appeasers in Great Britain to make their case.

- **A fight to the last man.** This would have ruined the Argentine plan and inspired Great Britain to strike back, albeit at a very high cost and in contravention of British and Western military culture. Furthermore, it would have been difficult to carry out without endangering the civilian population.

- **Resistance involving the civilian population.** This would have shattered even further Buenos Aires' plans, but at a much higher cost. In addition it
would have required a period of training and planning that was not available, and would have run even more counter to Great Britain’s military culture.

What did Sir Rex Hunt do, then? He basically tried to strike a balance between the need to avoid civilian casualties and the imperative to prevent a peaceful invasion. When examining his actions\textsuperscript{26} it becomes clear that what he was trying to do was to prepare the ground for the recovery of the Islands. He was not thinking of the immediate battle ahead, but beyond. He knew he could not resist the invasion but at the same time he was aware that the matter would not end there, that it was necessary to prepare the ground for what would follow, bearing in mind that as in any conflict it would be necessary to contend with two enemies, not only the invader but also the appeaser at home. He succeeded by postponing the surrender until some combat had taken place, fortunately at no cost for British troops but resulting in the death of 'Lieutenant-Commander Giachino' and the wounding of two men, who survived, during the attack on Government House. In a separate action against Argentine armoured troop carriers, an 'Argentine marine was slightly wounded by a sliver of metal cutting his hand'\textsuperscript{27}.

The damage to Buenos Aires' plans for a bloodless invasion was compounded by events in South Georgia, where the tally of casualties was even higher, with 'four Argentinians dead', two injured, 'and one British NCO badly wounded in the arm', following an intense exchange of fire which included British marines damaging a helicopter and hitting a corvette 'with three 84 mm Carl Gustav anti-tank rockets and more than 1200 rounds of small-arms fire'\textsuperscript{28}. Five onboard were injured\textsuperscript{29}. Although British troops soon surrendered, the myth of a peaceful occupation was clearly shattered. This was also aided by the Argentine decision to photograph a group of marines in Stanley who had surrendered 'face-down on the ground to emphasise their humiliation'\textsuperscript{30}.

\textsuperscript{26} And account of the hours before the invasion and the combats until surrender is available from, among others, Martin Middlebrook, \textit{The Argentine Fight for the Falklands} (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2009), pp. 13-45.
\textsuperscript{27} Martin Middlebrook, \textit{The Argentine Fight for the Falklands} (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2009), pp. 37 and 39.
\textsuperscript{28} Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, \textit{The Battle for the Falklands} (London: Pan Books, 2010), p. 94.
\textsuperscript{29} Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, \textit{Signals of War: the Falklands Conflict of 1982} (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 120.
Thus the combination of some Argentine mistakes with the long-term view of Governor Sir Rex Hunt succeeded in laying down the ground for the British response, facilitating the decision to send a naval task force to repossess the islands.

Concerning the second great Argentine goal, getting Washington to prevent the UK from responding, here Buenos Aires held a mistaken view of her importance to the US, motivated in part by recent cooperation in Central America and more generally American attempts to prevent Communist advances and improve relations with her Southern neighbours. Although, misled by both his and Britain's own diplomats, President Reagan failed to make a public statement warning Buenos Aires, he told Galtieri in no uncertain terms by telephone that his plans would fail, and the Defense Department under Caspar Weinberger provided vital support to London from day one.

31 'The Argentines saw the lifting of the Carter embargo as a victory for their hard-nosed line on Human Rights, but their obsessions led them to overrate their importance to US policy makers: not in Central America, where their role was indeed valued, but in the South Atlantic, where it was not. They based their self-delusion on the war across the South Atlantic in Angola, where some 36,000 Cuban troops, acting as proxies for the Soviet Union, maintained an avowedly Marxist-Leninist government in the face of two groups of insurgents backed respectively by South Africa and the USA. Soviet objectives were to gain preferential access to Angolan natural resources and to create a base from which their naval forces could threaten the Western jugular: the sea route for oil tankers from the Persian Gulf. The Argentines and South Africans alike convinced themselves that the USA needed their help to counter this threat, whereas the view from Washington was that their bases at the British islands of Ascension in the Atlantic and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean were more than sufficient, and that the US Navy could protect the sea lanes without additional shore facilities. The Cape Route was indeed a vital US geopolitical concern, but the Argentines failed to realize that they counted for less than a couple of little British islands in the equation.' Hugh Bicheno, Razor's Edge. The Unofficial History of the Falklands War (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 77.

32 'there can be little doubt that the Argentines would not have invaded the Falklands if Washington had warned them it would back Britain militarily. The main reason Washington did not is because, since the British had not themselves made it clear they would fight, there was no reason for the Americans to commit themselves in advance' Hugh Bicheno, Razor's Edge. The Unofficial History of the Falklands War (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 74 and 'Reagan made the US position clear to Galtieri in their private pre-invasion conversation. If the FCO/State combine had not so thoroughly muddled the waters, he would have followed this with a public declaration. What Reagan was not prepared to do was come out openly and unequivocally on the British side while there was the slightest chance they were bluffing and might cut a deal at the last minute. Thus as well as creating the preconditions for the original Argentine miscalculation, US and British diplomats ensured the matter would be settled in blood by misleading Reagan about Thatcher's resolve.' Hugh Bicheno, Razor's Edge. The Unofficial History of the Falklands War (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 80.

33 'The result was such a close working defence relationship that in 1982 Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger did not feel it necessary to obtain formal presidential approval before authorizing full support for the British.' Hugh Bicheno, Razor's Edge. The Unofficial History of the Falklands War (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 80.
To conclude, we need to stress that each case is different, and history while useful is always and imperfect guide to future events. However, it makes sense to look at similar situations, while noting the differences, in order to best ascertain what the future may have in store for the Senkaku Islands. The Falklands are a particular case in point since they also involve a strategic triangle.

**Could this really work?**

What we have traced up to here is a hypothetical path based on the summer of 2012's events, Beijing’s traditional approach to force as an instrument in international relations, and some historical precedents. However, beyond theoretical constructions it is necessary to ask ourselves the question whether it would really be possible for a Chinese force to land in one or more of the Senkaku Islands, occupy them, demand negotiations, and dare Japan to be the first to employ open force to dislodge them. A key to the answer may be the fact that the Chinese have already shown themselves to be able to do part of this. To be precise, they have on a number of occasions sent activists, who have been arrested and deported. This happened, for example, on 15 August 2012.

It is true that in all these cases Japan's Coast Guard was able to detect and track the vessels involved, and that activists were met onshore. However, the ROEs under which the Coast Guard operates mean that preventing a landing is not an absolute priority, since although this is welcome, other considerations take precedence, such as avoiding the death or injury of the activists. As long as we are talking about unarmed 'civilians' this is perhaps not of great consequence beyond embarrassment, but the fact that up to now Beijing has played this cat and mouse game does not mean that she will never decide to change the rules. That is a constant in history, one cannot assume that the other side will always play ball.

There is no doubt that a Chinese naval task force would be promptly detected far from Japan's shores. It is furthermore doubtful that China would openly seek to start a conventional war, or that she would risk a fleet without first securing air superiority. On

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the other hand, embarking military or paramilitary personnel in civilian vessels like the ones employed to date, keeping them out of prying eyes, and landing them if the opportunity arose, is not beyond the realm of the possible. Beijing could well do so without committing herself in advance to a landing, just waiting to see whether a window of opportunity opened. Furthermore, in order to save face, such an expedition could be two-sided, involving a visible contingent of 'activists' and a hidden number of military or paramilitary personnel. The former could engage in the usual game of harassment, symbolic landings, and deportation, while the latter remained in the shadows, hidden in the ships' holds, awaiting an opportunity. The possibility that China may simultaneously land unarmed activists on one island, troops on another, and the corresponding need to develop a wide spectrum of capabilities, makes it possible to recall the US Marine Corps' “three blocks” concept, which we may perhaps call “three islands” in contested maritime spaces.35

More sophisticated methods of achieving this kind of surprise cover landings may include the use of low-flying helicopters launched from converted trawlers, or rigid raiders and combat divers deployed from them at night. China could convert a trawler so that it carried a helicopter inside a hangar in a way which was not apparent from the outside. A few such trawlers could approach the islands as if transporting unarmed activists, or actually transporting them. If the opportunity arose they could then use the helicopters to insert a force without firing a shot. Current Japanese ROEs and the lack of reaction time would probably mean that this would result in the occupation of one or more of the Islands. Alternatively, Beijing may simply go for the straight use of helicopters, probably marked as belonging to one of the myriad civilian or paramilitary agencies active in the maritime domain. We must note that while ships can be stopped through non-lethal force, in the form of for example water cannons or ramming, this is much more difficult to do with aircraft without endangering their crews.36

Concerning the question whether it is feasible to convert a trawler or other civilian ship so that it could covertly transport and fly helicopters\textsuperscript{37}, the short answer is no, it would not be too difficult, but it would not be cheap, particularly if one wanted to have it below deck level whilst travelling. British helicopters were carried on bulk carriers like the Atlantic Conveyor and Causeway as deck cargo, obscured from view (and the weather) by standard containers. With their rotors either folded (marinised versions) or removed, they could be 'hangared' in any superstructure extension if the idea was to carry them undercover. Providing they are not expected to operate at extreme range with maximum pay load, a vertical takeoff is feasible. Any clear deck space would do as a helipad - it needs to have a clear lane for takeoff and landing but does not need to be concerned with wind direction, since one turns the ship into wind as required. One would need a flat and clear approach from the hangar to the helipad, since the helicopter would have to be manhandled into position for takeoff.

So much for the general theory. One now needs to work on dimensions. The term helicopter can mean anything from a two-man police helicopter to something like a Blackhawk, Merlin or Chinook. A Chinook, for example, can carry an assault force of up to 40 armed men but it needs 500 m\textsuperscript{2} to be stored with its rotors on and take off and land. It also creates a lot of downdraft (and jet efflux from the rear), so it can do a lot of damage to unsecured equipment. The other thing to consider is the fuel - aviation fuel is nasty stuff and takes a lot of space. Depending on how one gets the helicopter aboard, one may need to factor in a fly on and refuel. If you take the rotors off, you will need a mechanic to put them back on.

One might be better putting troops ashore by rigid raider at night rather than by helicopter, because helicopters are very vulnerable to low level anti aircraft fire, even rifle fire from trained troops.

On the other hand, however, we must note that the success of such an operation would not just demand the successful insertion of a sizeable armed contingent. In addition, Beijing would need to sustain it logistically during the crisis, while Tokyo may seek to

\textsuperscript{37} This paragraph and the two following ones are an slightly edited version of a private communication by the author from Squadron Leader M D Green BSc RAF (Rtd), WWII MA graduate from Birmingham University.
prevent this by blockading the occupied islands. In a way, Japanese policy to date is precisely that, some sort of blockade so that the islands cannot be reached, a middle of the road approach between development and handover. This is possible, at least in the short run, because Chinese attempts to reach the islands to date have mostly involved ships, not planes. We should note, however, that on 13 December 2012 a maritime surveillance plane violated Japanese airspace near the Senkaku Islands. Zhou Yongsheng, a foreign policy expert at China Foreign Affairs University, said China would 'normalise this kind of flight since we already announced our territorial baseline' However, Mr Zhou said the number of such flights would be limited since the State Oceanic Administration’s Maritime Surveillance Department had only four aircraft. An important aspect of this incident is that while, according to the Japanese Defense Ministry, 'The Japanese air force scrambled eight F-15 fighters and an airborne early warning aircraft in response to the Chinese flight' NHK 'reported that the Chinese aircraft had already left the islands' territorial air space by the time the Japanese fighters arrived on the scene. Some other air incursions have followed.

The key difference between ships and aircraft is that while one can physically block the former without sinking it, by interposing another vessel between it and the Islands, it is much more difficult, some would even say impossible, to prevent the passage of an aircraft without endangering it and its crew. Tactics such as water cannons do not work against aircraft. Therefore, the current ROEs under which the Japanese Coast Guard operates are clearly not appropriate to prevent an airborne landing on the Senkaku Islands, and it is imperative to discuss and amend them before any such operation is attempted.

**Desert islands: is the absence of a tripwire a step towards detente or an invitation to a landing?**

This discussion of methods whereby China may try to insert a force on one or more of the Senkaku Islands brings us to the core of this paper, namely the debate on whether

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39 Ibid
the absence of a ground deployment is a step towards or away from peace. First of all we need to remember that what counts here are results, not intentions. There is no doubt that in choosing not to deploy troops on the Senkaku Islands, or more generally in refusing to promote their economic development, successive Japanese administrations (headed by different parties) have sincerely hoped that this would help reduce tensions with China and bring down the risk of war. However, this does not automatically mean that such policy actually reduces the likelihood that the current territorial dispute may lead to a military conflict. In addition to this distinction between hopes and objective results, we should not forget that Beijing has never ruled out the use of force, and that since 1949 the PRC has resorted to war quite a few times.

The idea that dispensing with a ground force reduces tensions rests on the assumption that it leaves the door open to some sort of settlement, while reducing the domestic pressure which may make such an agreement impossible to conclude or implement. From a political point of view, even though it is not the main focus of the paper, we shall briefly note that this may perhaps make sense if the other side was sincerely committed to negotiations and compromise. Sadly, this is not the case. Any such flexibility is only seen as weakness, and despised instead of appreciated. In Churchill’s words, it just amounts to feeding the crocodile.40

From a tactical point of view, the problem with not having anybody on the ground on the Senkaku Islands is that it makes it easier for Beijing to land on them, from the air or from the sea, with the goal of splitting the US-Japanese alliance and forcing negotiations on sovereignty. By making it more likely that a force could be inserted without the need to engage the Japanese military, they raise the potential for miscalculation. China could be tempted to expect Japan not to react, although anybody who knows Japan well will probably doubt that proposition. Tokyo may have been trying to defuse tensions, but expecting the country to acquiesce in a Chinese takeover of the Senkaku Islands does not look very realistic given the gradual hardening of...
attitudes towards China and the slow but relentless 'normalization' of public attitudes towards the military and the use of force as an instrument of statecraft.

We thus have in sight a very dangerous mixture: a well meaning policy aimed at defusing tensions which nevertheless increases the chances of miscalculation, and a growing determination by the Japanese population not to surrender to territorial designs. Since this trend seems unlikely to be reversed, the only logical conclusion is that ground troops should indeed be deployed on the Senkaku Islands, and that this should go hand in hand with a review of the applicable ROEs (including those concerning hostile aircraft) and the opening of the Islands to economic development.

The key principle: he who fires first loses

One of the key principles in these games combining diplomacy, threat of force, and faits accomplis, is avoiding being the first to open fire. This is important for a number of reasons, which include appearing reasonable, appealing to the principle of self-defence, gaining support before third countries and international organizations, and splitting alliances. Let us briefly discuss this last point.

One of the key goals in any Chinese invasion of the Senkaku Islands would be to prevent Washington from reacting and, ideally, even to get the US to bring pressure to bear on Tokyo not to respond with force and instead be 'reasonable' and for the sake of world peace negotiate with Beijing. This may involve a combination of threats and incentives, as already mentioned, and would benefit greatly from appearing not to have spilled any blood, instead pushing Japan into a corner by daring Tokyo to be the first to do so in order to repossess her islands.

That Washington may baulk at that thought already became apparent in October 2012, when the US were reluctant to engage in an exercise featuring the retaking of an island, and the joint drill was finally cancelled41. It is not surprising that the United States was apprehensive towards such a drill, since many voices would have seen it as overly aggressive. This is, objectively speaking, unfair, since the retaking of an island means

that someone has taken it first. The problem is, what if that someone has taken it
without spilling any blood? Who is the aggressor then? From a legal, political, and
moral perspective, it may still be the invader, but domestic and world public opinion
may not always see it that way.  


Another important point here is that according to this treaty, Washington is bound to
defend Japan if attacked, but not if it was Tokyo attacking another country. The issue
whether the treaty covers or not the Senkaku Islands has been extensively debated, and
a certain consensus exists that it does, albeit without prejudicing the US position on the
ultimate question of sovereignty over the Islands, where Washington insists in not
taking sides. Beyond legal minutiae, it could be much more difficult in practice to
invoke the treaty to retake an island than to defend it against a landing in the first place.
Therefore, there is a strong incentive for Tokyo to make sure that a landing does not
take place, whatever its form.

Conclusions: the lack of a land-based tripwire is increasing, not decreasing, the
chances of an armed clash with China

From all of the above we can see how Tokyo's reluctance to deploy ground troops on
the Senkaku Islands, while well meaning, could be counterproductive. It may well
prompt Beijing to believe that she could successfully launch a bloodless invasion,
pushing Tokyo into a corner by forcing her to be the first one to open fire, and causing a
split between Japan and the US, with the latter reluctant to support and participate in
operations deemed offensive. China's recent use of aircraft is a reminder of the potential
for airborne landings, which the Coast Guard's traditional approach against ships would
find it very difficult to prevent.

The time has thus come to reconsider the applicable ROEs to defend the Senkaku
Islands, together with the decisions not to deploy ground troops and to oppose their

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42 US policy later changed, and some amphibious drills featuring the retaking of an island have
taken place.
economic development. The alternative, while attractive on the surface and in the short run, may well bring closer the war that neither Tokyo, nor Washington, nor the other maritime democracies desire.

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