



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 29, 2018

## China and Japan Hold Talks on Improving Relations

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) held talks with visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono (left) on January 28 in Beijing, during which the two sides agreed to resume reciprocal visits by their leaders.



During more than three hours of talks, Kono and Wang confirmed the importance of their leaders making mutual visits as part of a full-fledged effort to improve Sino-Japanese relations, *Japan Times* cited a Japanese government official.

“We want to improve overall [bilateral] ties this year,” Kono, said at the beginning of the meeting during a media conference.

*Japan Times* reported that Kono also met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during the talks and asked Li to visit Japan as soon as possible to participate in a trilateral summit that would also include South Korea. Kono said Li replied “in a positive manner.”

The *Times* also quoted the Chinese officials in attendance, with Wang noting that China welcomes Japan’s “strong determination” to improve relations, and Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi telling Kono that he “enthusiastically” welcomed the foreign minister’s visit to China.

Reuters cited a statement from Kono maintaining that the two Asian countries shared a major responsibility in safeguarding the stability and prosperity of Asia and the world at large.

“Not only do we need to manage our bilateral relations, but we also need to work together to deal with issues facing the entire globe, in particular, the issue of North Korea,” Kono said. “We desire to extend mutual cooperation between our two countries in working towards resolving this issue.”

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The report noted that Japan has repeatedly pressed China to do more to help rein in North Korea’s missile and nuclear programs. China’s response has been that it is committed to enforcing UN sanctions against Pyongyang, but that all parties need to do more to reduce tensions and restart talks.

A Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman quoted by Reuters, Norio Maruyama, told reporters that China and Japan are planning to hold several high-level visits this year. These would include Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visiting China and Chinese President Xi Jinping going to Japan, he said, though no dates have been set.

“Let’s see. It’s all a question of the schedule,” he said.

A *Bloomberg* report observed that a three-way summit with China, Japan, and South Korea participating would demonstrate not only improvement in ties between Beijing and Tokyo, but in their relationships with Seoul, as well. China recently ended a months-long dispute with South Korea over a U.S. missile shield, and Abe last week announced plans to attend next month’s Winter Olympics in the South Korean town of Pyeongchang.

Xinhua News Agency (the official press agency of the People’s Republic of China) gave the meeting



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between the Chinese and Japanese officials generally favorable coverage.

It quoted a statement from Li to Kono: “We have noticed recent positive comments of the Japanese side on relations with China.”

“However, China-Japan relations are still confronted with uncertainties,” Li added.

Xinhua reported that Kono’s visit came as the two countries celebrate the 40th anniversary of the signing of the China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which is of special and great significance to bilateral ties.

“Bilateral ties have gone through an extraordinary journey over the past 40 years,” the report quoted Wang, who called on both sides to “remain true to their original aspirations, learn from experiences and promote the continuous improvement of the relationship.”

One of the few unresolved disputes between the two Asian nations was referenced in a press release from the January 28 meeting.

“China and Japan should work together to build the East China Sea into the sea of peace, cooperation and friendship,” Xinhua quoted the release.

The report in the *Japan Times* explains this issue in greater detail. It involves the Senkaku Islands, a group of uninhabited islets in the East China Sea known in China as the Diaoyu Islands. The tiny islets are administered by Tokyo, but also claimed by Beijing.

Tokyo and Beijing have waged a diplomatic battle over which nation rightfully owns the Senkakus for years. The dispute escalated after the government led by then-Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, Abe’s predecessor, decided to effectively put them under Japanese state control in September 2012.

Taiwan (the Republic of China) also claims the islands, calling them Tiaoyutai.

Although the United States does not have an official position on the conflicting claims, the islands are included within the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, meaning that a defense of the islands by Japan would require the United States to come to Japan’s aid.

The United States has been more directly involved in another disputed group of islands in the South China Sea claimed by China and several other countries, including Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and Vietnam. They are the Spratly Islands, which China calls the Nansha Islands.

The *Global Times*, a newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist Party’s *People’s Daily*, said in an editorial on May 25, 2015 that “U.S.-China war is inevitable in the South China Sea ... if the United States’ bottom line is that China has to halt its activities” in the disputed Spratly/Nansha Islands.

All of the above-named nations occupy some portions of the disputed islands, sometimes areas as simple as a reef or cay. Only China (PRC), Taiwan (ROC), and Vietnam have made claims based on their historical presence in the islands, but the Philippines has claimed part of the area as its territory under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) agreement, parts of which have been ratified by all of the countries involved in the dispute.

China is presently in the process of constructing seven artificial islands amidst the Spratlys/Nanshas and the United States fears that the communist nation might attempt to impose air and sea restrictions in the chain once it completes that construction.



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Neither the Chinese nor Japanese participants in the January 28 meeting in Beijing mentioned the disputed Spratly islands, indicating that perhaps the two nations are putting that dispute on the back burner as they seek a better relationship and a resumption of reciprocal visits by their leaders. However, the dispute is certain to resurface in the not-so-distant future.

*Photo: AP Images*

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