

Suspected Chinese sub detected off Japan coast

Yomiuri Shimbun/ANN

TOKYO, Nov. 10. — A suspected Chinese Navy submarine entered Japanese waters at about 5 a.m. today, cruising underwater off Taramajima island, part of the Miyako Islands in Okinawa Prefecture. Maritime Self-Defense Force P-3C patrol aircraft confirmed the intrusion after tracking the submarine.

At 8:45 a.m., Defense Agency Director General Mr Yoshinori Ono issued an order for the MSDF to patrol the waters after obtaining approval from Prime Minister Mr Junichiro Koizumi.

It was the first invocation of the maritime policing act since March 1999, when a North Korean spy ship was spotted off the Noto Peninsula.

The prime minister expressed regret over the incursion into Japanese waters by the unidentified submarine. "The intrusion of an unidentified submarine into Japanese waters cannot be condoned," he said. Mr Koizumi said he had received a phone call at about 8 a.m. concerning the incident.

China claims the waters about 370 kilometers from its territorial sea boundary as its exclusive economic

zone, which is close to the area where the submarine cruised.

Beijing is at odds with Japan over the demarcation of the sea border due to China's development of natural gas fields in the area. According to Defense Agency officials, MSDF pursued the submarine, which left Japan's territorial waters after sailing submerged for about three hours.

The agency chief invoked the order after the submarine's departure. After the submarine entered Japanese waters, the MSDF P-3C dropped a sonar buoy into the sea, asking the submarine to surface and show its flag.

Since the submarine did not respond, the MSDF demanded that it leave Japanese waters. The MSDF did not fire a warning shot, but it mobilized two P-3C patrol planes to track the submarine in addition to dispatching two destroyers and helicopters to the waters.

Judging from the sound of the screw, the Defense Agency believes that the submarine is a Chinese Navy Han-class nuclear submarine with a displacement of 5,550 tons. This type was the first nuclear submarine China built and was deployed in the latter half of the 1980s.

According to government sources, at noon today the submarine was cruising toward the east coast of China, where the Chinese Navy has a base.

Since the Senkaku Islands are on the route Chinese ships would take to the naval base, the patrol aircraft continued to follow the submarine out of concern that it might reenter Japanese waters.

At a press conference, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda said the P-3C patrol planes had confirmed early Wednesday morning that a submarine was cruising in Japanese waters off the Sakishima islands, Okinawa Prefecture. "The submarine has left Japanese waters, but the patrol aircraft are tracking it," he said.

Mr Hosoda said the submarine's nation of origin had yet to be determined. He said the government would try to find out why it entered Japanese waters, adding that Japan would lodge a protest if the nation of origin of the submarine was confirmed and the nation admitted that the vessel belonged to it. A law revision approved in 1996 allows for the maritime policing act to be invoked by the Prime Minister, without prior consultation with the cabinet.

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