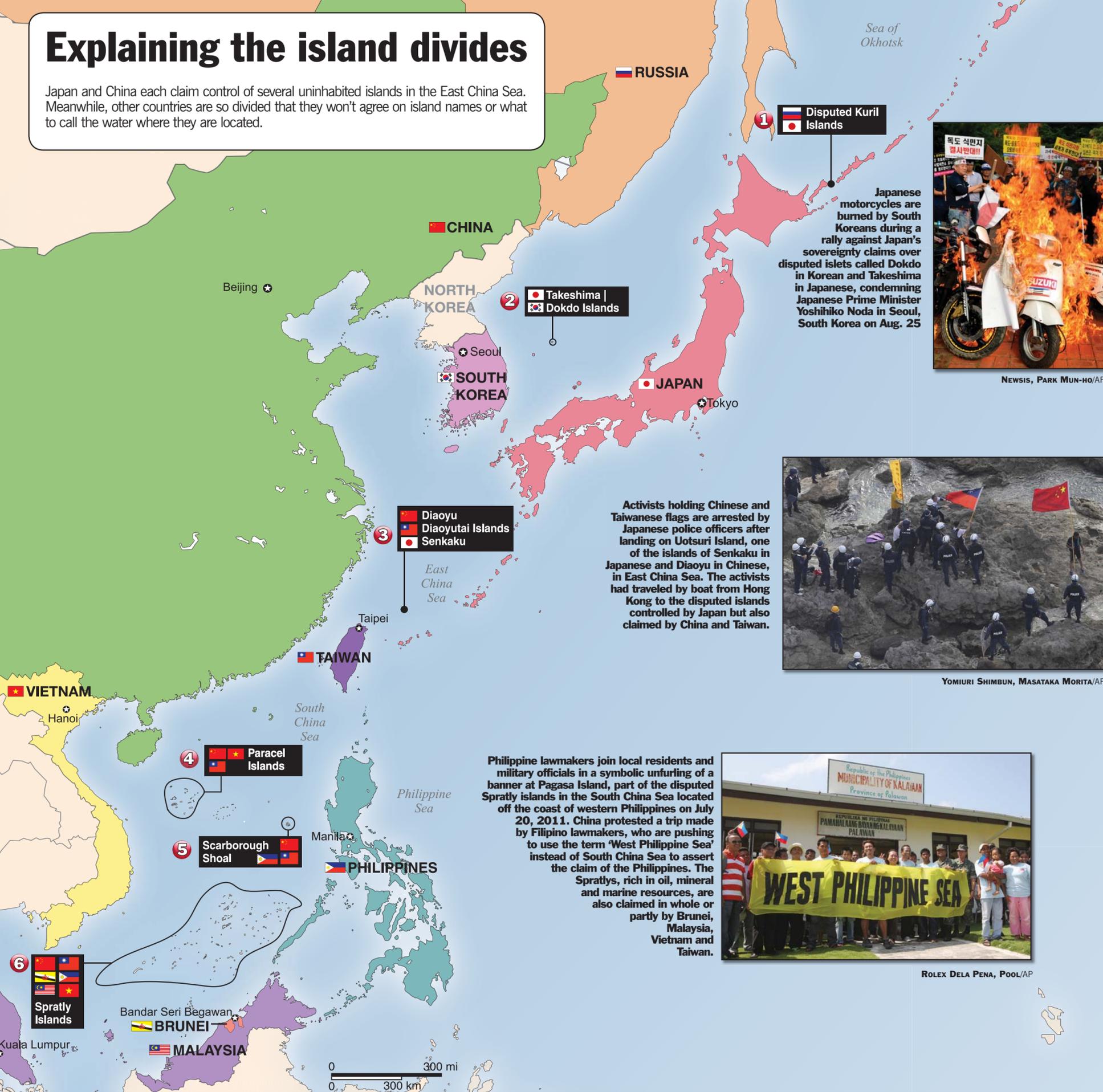


Explaining the island divides

Japan and China each claim control of several uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. Meanwhile, other countries are so divided that they won't agree on island names or what to call the water where they are located.



1 Disputed Kuril Islands

Japanese motorcycles are burned by South Koreans during a rally against Japan's sovereignty claims over disputed islets called Dokdo in Korean and Takeshima in Japanese, condemning Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in Seoul, South Korea on Aug. 25



NEWSIS, PARK MUN-HO/AP

2 Takeshima | Dokdo Islands

Activists holding Chinese and Taiwanese flags are arrested by Japanese police officers after landing on Uotsuri Island, one of the islands of Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese, in East China Sea. The activists had traveled by boat from Hong Kong to the disputed islands controlled by Japan but also claimed by China and Taiwan.



YOMIURI SHIMBUN, MASATAKA MORITA/AP

3 Diaoyu | Diaoyutai Islands | Senkaku

Philippine lawmakers join local residents and military officials in a symbolic unfurling of a banner at Pagasa Island, part of the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea located off the coast of western Philippines on July 20, 2011. China protested a trip made by Filipino lawmakers, who are pushing to use the term 'West Philippine Sea' instead of South China Sea to assert the claim of the Philippines. The Spratlys, rich in oil, mineral and marine resources, are also claimed in whole or partly by Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.



ROLEX DELA PENA, POOL/AP

1 South Kuril Islands, Russia
Minami Chishima/Hoppo Ryodo (Northern Territories), Japan

islands as integral parts of Japan.

International law: In the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan renounced possession of most of the Kuril Islands; the Soviet Union never signed the treaty. In 1956, the Japan-Soviet Union Joint Declaration agreed to transfer uninhabited Khamobai/Habomai and Shikotan back to Japan, but failed to agree on Kunashir/Kunashiri and Iturup/Etorofu. Amid Cold War politics, Habomai and Shikotan were never transferred and continue to be administered by Russia.

U.S. position: Supported Japan's claim during the Cold War, but the U.S. hasn't publicly announced any interest in wading into the conflict.

Russia: In 2012, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev became the first Russian/Soviet leader to visit the islands in 2010; he also visited as prime minister in and declared the four islands an important part of Russia.

Japan: Japanese officials condemned Medvedev's visits and labeled the four

2 Dokdo (Korea) | Takeshima (Japan)

Even the name of the sea surrounding these tiny islands also known as the Liancourt Rocks is disputed, and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's landing in August kicked off the latest series of claims and reactions.

Japan reacted by recalling its ambassador and sending an official diplomatic letter, which was returned unopened by Seoul. A South Korean men's soccer player made his emphatic, shirtless declaration for Dokdo after an Olympics bronze medal win over Japan.

Japan: Japan claimed the island in 1905 as terra nullius – no man's land – five years before annexing Korea as a colony in 1910. Seafaring clansmen received permission from a shogun in 1618 to hunt sea lions and fell bamboo on an island that supporters say was Takeshima.

Korea: A text from the year 512 mentions a small island kingdom called Usanguk, which supporters

say included the island. Later maps include an island of varying size and names east of the Korean peninsula. Korea built an outpost on the island in 1952 and has administered the island ever since.

International law: Although South Korea says it asked, the United States did not specifically address the island within the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, though a letter from the U.S. secretary of state named it part of Japan. When Japan pushes for referral to the International Court of Justice, Korea says it will not participate.

U.S. position: Official statements encourage both nations to come to an agreement through peaceful means. Tens of thousands of U.S. servicemembers in Japan and Korea, coupled with the sensitivities left over from colonization and war, make this dispute especially awkward for the United States.

3 Diaoyu (China) | Diaoyutai Islands (Taiwan) | Senkaku (Japan)

The latest scuffle over the islands and their resource-rich seabed began earlier this year when the governor of Tokyo said he wanted to purchase the small parcels in the East China Sea from a private Japanese owner.

Similar to a previous flare-up in 2010, rhetoric and open water confrontations ensued, only this time unsanctioned landings by flag-toting nationalists spurred violent protests in China.

China: The oldest references cite literature from the early 15th Century.

Japan: The Meiji government approved the islands for the

manufacture of dried fish flakes, collection of bird feathers and other businesses at the end of the 19th Century.

International law: Japan cites the San Francisco Peace Treaty – signed by 48 countries in 1951 – that established the U.S. administrative handover of the islands to them. China did not sign the treaty and considers it illegal and invalid. Taiwan agrees.

U.S. position: Protection falls within the scope of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, but the U.S. takes no position on the ultimate issue of sovereignty.

4 Paracel Islands

This collection of small islands and reefs totaling about five square miles of land was once part of colonial French Indochina until reverting to Vietnam.

The claims: The islands were documented by Chinese sailors and explorers in the 13th and 14th centuries. Taiwan's claim is based on the same rationale. Vietnam claims the islands were illegally conquered by China.

U.S. position: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in Vietnam in 2010 that the United States supported freedom of navigation but would not take a position on South China Sea disputes.

The clashes: China took control of all the Paracel Islands after defeating South Vietnamese forces in 1974. It maintains a military presence. In July, China incorporated the islands into Sansha city, triggering a diplomatic protest from Vietnam. China retorted that the islands were "indisputably" belonged to that country and slammed a Vietnamese law passed in July claiming the islands.

5 Scarborough Shoal

This horseshoe-shaped reef and group of other small land masses is separated by the Manila Trench from the Philippine main islands.

The claims: China claims discovery since at least the 13th Century, as well as use by its commercial fishermen. Taiwan's claim exists on the same rationale. The Philippines claims the shoal based on proximity and international law.

U.S. position: None on sovereignty, but the U.S. has recently transferred former U.S. Coast Guard ships to the Philippines and offered surveillance flights and data, Philippine government officials have stated.

International law: The islands are within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, under the terms of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The clashes: In April, Chinese maritime surveillance ships blocked the Philippine navy from boarding Chinese fishing vessels, leading to an extended standoff. Philippine news reports say that Chinese ships remain near the islands.

International law: The islands are within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, under the terms of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

6 The Spratly Islands

This collection of more than 100 islets, rocks and reefs in the South China Sea are claimed by China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei. All except Brunei have militarily occupied some of lands, which composed less than three square miles in total. Rich fishing grounds and billions of tons of untapped oil and natural gas reserves are at stake.

The claims: China claims nearly all of the South China Sea, based on discoveries dating back 2,000 years; Taiwan makes similar claims based on historical discovery. The other nations base their claims on international law and physical extensions of their continental shelves.

The clashes: In 1988, China sunk multiple Vietnamese ships over possession of Johnson Reef, killing 70 servicemembers. Taiwan and the Philippines have also had firefights with Vietnam. Noncombat hostilities have occurred repeatedly in recent years between Chinese vessels and ships from the other nations.

International law: In 2002, China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed to resolve their claims over the islands by peaceful means.

U.S. position: Settle the claims in multilateral talks. China opposes such talks and will only discuss the islands bilaterally with each nation. U.S. hasn't publicly announced interest in wading into the conflict.

Flags of the countries involved in the island disputes

	JAPAN		RUSSIA
	TAIWAN		SOUTH KOREA
	PHILIPPINES		MALAYSIA
	CHINA		BRUNEI
	VIETNAM		

SOURCES: Interfax, The National Bureau of Asian Research, U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2012 CIA World Factbook, AFP, New York Times, Reuters, Stars and Stripes

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