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## Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba interview – Financial Times

### Japanese minister urges China to stay calm

Japan's foreign minister has urged China not to link the controversy over a contested island chain to other historical grievances, as a visit by two of his cabinet colleagues to the Yasukuni war shrine threatened to inflame tensions further between the Asian rivals.

The Japanese-controlled islands – known as the Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China – are also claimed by Beijing and Taiwan. Japan's purchase in September of three of the East China Sea islands from their long-time private owners sparked violent demonstrations in cities across China and has led to widespread boycotts of Japanese goods.

"I think it is necessary to think about the Senkaku Islands by delinking them from the past," Koichiro Gemba told the Financial Times on Thursday during a visit to London.

Earlier in the day Yuichiro Hata, Japan's land minister, and Mikio Shimoji, postal reform minister, visited Yasukuni, the shrine to Japan's war dead that many in Asia regard as a symbol of Japan's past militarism. Yasukuni is dedicated to almost 2.5m soldiers and civilians who died in the service of Imperial Japan and some of the deceased honoured were convicted war criminals.

Mr Gemba sought to downplay the ministers' visit, saying it had been made in their capacity as "private citizens" rather than government officials.

On Wednesday, Shinzo Abe, leader of Japan's main opposition party and probably the next prime minister, also visited Yasukuni. This drew an angry response from Chinese state media, which described the visit as shortsighted and cowardly.

China's media frequently press their claim to the Senkaku in the context of the repeated invasions and other encroachments the country suffered at the hands of Japan and other imperial powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

After the two ministers' visit to Yasukuni, China's foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei called on Japan to "strictly abide by its solemn statements and pledges regarding historical issues".

Mr Gemba reiterated Tokyo's claim that the disputed islands were "inherent territory of Japan based on historical fact and in light of international law".

Tokyo argues that the islands were confirmed as Japanese territory in the peace treaty that ended the second world war. "When it comes to the issue of sovereignty, Japan cannot concede what it cannot concede. That is the basic premise here," the foreign minister said. He added that Tokyo and Beijing should "calm down the situation in a peaceful manner".

He defended Japan's purchase of the islands as a "practical measure" intended to pre-empt Tokyo's nationalist governor, Shintaro Ishihara, who this year goaded China by threatening to buy and develop them.

"Overall, I believe the government of Japan as well as the Japanese people are responding in a calm manner as well as in a restrained manner," he said.

In contrast, China's response, Mr Gemba said, had been "excessive" in sending government-owned ships to the area of the islands and cancelling cultural exchanges.

China's rise was part of a rebalancing of power from Europe towards Asia now under way, Mr Gemba said. But, he added: "I believe China has to develop into a responsible power" which should be encouraged to respect the rule of law.