



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Chinese blockade on Japanese seafood - the first political response to the Camp David summit



China has launched a new trade war, this time with Japan, introducing a complete ban on seafood imports, thus continuing the policy of economic coercion in the Pacific region.

Without any scientific basis, China has introduced an embargo on Japanese seafood, defying both Japanese and International Atomic Energy Agency findings that the water discharged from the Fukushima power plant into the sea is harmless to the environment.

On the overall scale of the huge Japanese economy, the ban on seafood exports to China is not of great significance. Exports totalled just under \$600 million last year, accounting for a third of Japan's total food exports to China.

China is the largest Japanese market for seafood, but marine products account for less than 1% of total Japanese global trade, which is dominated by cars and technical goods.

This ban will not particularly disrupt the market in China. Seafood imports from Japan are only about 4% of total Chinese imports of about \$19 billion.

## Chinese motives are not economically or health-related

Everything points to the fact that the new Chinese trade restrictions have nothing to do with the country's economy and even less with defending its population from the dangers associated with allegedly defective food. China is a long way from having such strong public health concerns.

Beijing does not want to talk to Tokyo about scientific measurements, according to which the Fukushima plant does not pose any danger

to marine life.

It is particularly hypocritical that both Japanese and Chinese fishermen fish in the same waters, which China regards as health-controversial, so following the logic of banning imports from Japan, Beijing would also have to impose a ban on its own fishermen.

Beijing's motives lie outside the domains of food safety and economics. The customs ban, now targeting Japan's fishing sector, is a weapon Beijing often uses to pressure economic competitors and political opponents in the Pacific region.

Just 3 years ago, Australian wine producers were the victims of China's economic measures, including higher tariffs, as Australia's prime minister called for an international investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 virus in China.

## Japan is amortising the damage

Japan took this prohibition very seriously, appropriately with a touch of anger, despite the fact that the ban would only inflict relatively minor economic harm. This is because Beijing does not appreciate or want to examine the high-standard scientific arguments that would invalidate the Chinese ban.

About 700 Japanese seafood exporters are affected by the ban, and it is their biggest foreign market, so they will now be forced to find an alternative.

The government in Tokyo is now exposed to requests to help the endangered fishing sector by stimulating the increase of domestic consumption, but also to help open new export markets, primarily in North America

and Europe.

Expectations are that the Chinese embargo will not be short-lived, as Beijing shows no signs that it could move towards a compromise.

The complete ban now in force was a previously planned move by Beijing, regardless that it had no scientifically verified argument for such decisions.

Last July, China banned the import of seafood from 10 Japanese provinces, including Fukushima, which has now been extended to all 47 Japanese provinces.

In the initial phase of obstructing Japanese exports, Chinese customs delayed sanitary inspections, influencing the freshness of perishable goods.

Even then, it was clear that Beijing was moving towards a complete embargo, but Tokyo was hoping for a dialogue based on scientific facts, which failed.

Therefore, the government in Tokyo insists on solving the crisis in talks with Beijing, but, at the same time, is developing alternative measures to isolate China at international level as an unpredictable and arrogant economic partner.

In addition to the announced subsidies for fishermen and exporters, Tokyo has announced a significant investment of 30 billion yen (about \$200 million) in marketing channels everywhere except in China to combat rumours and misinformation.

## Russia is part of the Chinese operation

The political motives for the Chinese embargo on Japanese seafood became even more evident when a lightning-fast reaction came from Russia that they were ready to jump in and fill the void created by the export ban from Japan.

The Russian regulator is complying with the Chinese ban and claims that currents in the North Pacific, where Russian fishermen catch 70% of the total national catch, "would prevent contamination" of fish and other seafood.

Understandably, as in the case of China, there is a lack of more detailed scientific confirmations for such claims.

The speed with which Russia, as a major seafood exporter, offered to replace halted Japanese exports suggests that China had at least arrangements, if not an agreement, on the "partnership takeover" of Japan's export contingent.

The embargo imposed on Japan by Beijing is part of its response to the recent summit of the US, South Korea and Japan at Camp David, where the 3 allies strengthened their partnership, not only regarding security as a principal issue but also the economy and shared influence in the Pacific region.

With this, China started a small-scale trade war with Japan and announced that there would be more frequent similar decisions.

It has a faithful ally in Russia, for which the Chinese market and the political support of Beijing are the only remaining hope regarding general global isolation.

With Russian suppliers, Beijing will easily find a replacement for halted imports from Japan because the Russian mafia "controls most of the fishing fleet", as stated by the US Naval Institute in 2017. Perhaps such an agreement was reached even before the halt on Japanese exports to China.

The embargo on Japanese seafood exports shows that Beijing is not giving up on the policy of economic pressure, blackmail and

coercion towards the Pacific region, which its competitors view as the main threat to regional stability.

This decision came as the first serious official Beijing's response to the trilateral summit at Camp David. It demonstrates that China feels threatened by the strengthening of strategic cooperation between the US, Japan and South Korea in the Pacific region, and that there is no other answer to that than an ungrounded trade blockade.