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## **AS CHINA FLEXES ITS MARITIME MUSCLE, JAPAN'S DEFENCE MINISTER VISITS TROOP BASE ON 'FRONT LINE' ISLAND**

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South China Morning Post (7 April 2019)

Japans Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya on Sunday highlighted the nations resolve to defend its far-flung territory amid Chinas maritime assertiveness, by touring a newly opened base for the ground defence forces on the island of Miyako.

The Miyako Island camp is on the front line of our countrys defences. We are seeing steady progress over the defence of the southwestern region, he told the Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF) members deployed to the islet, about 290km (180 miles) southwest of Okinawas main island.

Miyako is about 210km from the Japan-controlled

[Senkaku Islands](#)

in the East China Sea, which China claims and calls Diaoyu. Chinese government ships have repeatedly entered Japanese waters around the islands, creating tensions.

The GSDF is gearing up to fill what is considered a defence vacuum in the waters around Okinawa, with Japanese troops having been stationed only on the prefectures main island until recent years.

On Miyako, a 380-member security unit was deployed to a camp established on March 26. Missile units are also expected to be installed as early as next year, with the total number of troops there to eventually increase to 700 or 800.

Some residents of the island group, who total about 54,000, have expressed opposition to the GSDF deployment.

Iwaya recently admitted that ammunition, such as mortar rounds, had been in storage on the camp site despite authorities earlier telling locals that only guns and flares were kept there.

On Sunday, the minister apologised to Miyakojima Mayor Toshihiko Shimoji and a representative of local residents over the incident.

Our explanation was insufficient. Im very sorry, he said.

The ammunition has been temporarily removed from the island to address safety concerns among residents. It will be brought back once an ammunition depot, which is under construction in a different part of the island, is completed, the defence ministry said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3004910/us-prepares-open-new-de-facto-embassy-taipei-amid-policy-shift>

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