

China Stands Firm on Air Defense Identification Zone

CHINA's Defense Ministry announced the establishment of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on November 23, 2013: Aircraft in the area must report their flight plans to Chinese authorities. Despite this practice being nothing new internationally, justified by international norms as a precaution to safeguard national airspace, it has still been met with strong protests from the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

The U.S. immediately challenged the Chinese regulation by dispatching two B52c bombers into the declared zone on November 26. Japan's Abe administration, in addition to refusing to recognize the China ADIZ, also issued a warning, attempting to rally other countries to scrap the Chinese attempt.

During his visit to Vietnam last December, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told the media: "The United States does not recognize the zone and does not accept it." South Korea announced an expansion of its own ADIZ on December 8, as a countermeasure to China's announcement.

A standard defense plan by China has hence been blamed for escalating tensions in East Asia, but all these spats actually reflect entrenched bias and mistrust of China.

National Security Concerns

Several of China's neighbors had already established ADIZs decades ago. South Korea set up its ADIZ in 1951, Japan in 1969, India in 1975, and Thailand in 1977. Japan and South Korea's zones span the East China Sea. As the largest nation along the seacoast, it is natural and reasonable for China to establish its own ADIZ, as a necessary buffer zone outside China's sovereign airspace. The need for such a zone is to be expected in a situation where protection of China's airspace over the East China Sea and of its vast inland calls for consolidation, given the heating up of territorial disputes and the prospects for aerial confrontation between the countries involved.

The coastal provinces of southeast China are the most economically developed, industrialized and populated regions of the country. According to 2012 statistics, the coastal provinces alongside the East China Sea – Shan-



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dong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong – are home to 21 percent of the country's population, and produce 55 percent of its GDP. Without an ADIZ over the East China Sea, this large swathe of prosperity is vulnerable to possible air-strikes – a security loophole that cannot be overlooked by China, which has been committed to improving its self-defense capacity over the past by enhancing national security and military modernization.

All things considered, the ADIZ in the East

China Sea is a logical maneuver for defense and strategic security, at a time when the weight of China's economy is increasingly tilting toward its southeastern provinces.

China has long primarily relied on its land forces for national defense. In the past, it was incapable of early warning, monitoring, patrol and supervisory systems over air and marine spaces immediately outside its borders, and therefore held back on its desire to set up any ADIZ. The situation has changed over recent years, with remarkable advances made in China's military modernization. The establishment of the East China Sea ADIZ is a natural outcome. Such a zone is anyway in the best interests of China's security.

Beijing, while aware that the ADIZ might arouse diplomatic disputes, believes it can convince the world of its well-intentioned strategies for peace by adhering to the construction of a new type of relationship between big powers. As promulgated by China's new leadership, this boils down to a "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, cooperation and win-win" situation. Instead of challenging the U.S.'s alliances and strategic dominance in the Asia-Pacific, China is ready to step up communication and cooperation with the U.S. over hot issues in the region, confident that diplomatic and military repercussions will eventually evaporate under the consensus of "the Pacific is big enough for both the U.S. and China," as reiterated by Chinese and U.S. leaders and senior officials on several occasions.

"Whose Cheese Is Moved"?

The establishment of the East China Sea ADIZ has drawn the understanding and support of most countries. By December 20, 2013, a total of 55 civilian flights from 20 countries had sent notifications to China while flying over the zone. The Obama administration also advised

U.S. airliners to comply. Yet the U.S. and Japan still openly refuse to recognize the ADIZ.

The rise of China has catalyzed a power transition in the Asia-Pacific, stoking anxiety and vigilance among the countries involved. China's ADIZ is, in fact, a blow to the U.S.'s 68-year airspace ascendancy and liberty over the seas in East Asia since the end of WWII. The zone is close to Okinawa, site of the Futenma air base in the south-east, imposing a perceived restraint on U.S. air-force flights over the East China Sea. China's ADIZ overlaps that of Japan, and covers the Diaoyu Islands, which are claimed by both. Japan senses its hands are tied in the airspace over the East China Sea, where it once enjoyed unrestricted freedom in dispatching fighter aircraft and monitoring Chinese planes, it therefore strongly opposes the Chinese ADIZ.

The Diaoyu Islands constitute a major, though not the sole, factor in the wrangle concerning the Chinese ADIZ. Since the first tour of China's ships to enforce the law in the waters surrounding the islands, on September 12, 2012, this disputed area has been under *de facto* joint administration by China and Japan. With the Diaoyu Islands as part of China's ADIZ, Japan feels further threatened at the prospect of losing control of both the waters and airspace involved. But we cannot overlook the fact that tensions over the East China Sea are attributable to Japan's absolute denial of the Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute, which rules out any hope that both parties will sit down and hold talks over the issue.

The Abe administration has been self-contradictory and arrogant in its policies toward China. It puts on an innocent face for the international community by whining about a "China threat," but meanwhile refuses to open negotiations with China on the Diaoyu Islands issue. The "China threat" allegation gives Japan an excuse to hike its military budget, build up military forces, and seek collective self-defense. All these serve the goal of reshaping Japan into a big power, evident in Shinzo Abe's proclamation on taking office, that "Japan is back."

The Abe administration hopes to realize the "normal country" dream Japan has aspired to over the past 22 years since the end of the Cold War, shaking off the restraints on its institutions and capabilities resulting from its ignominy in WWII. War victims like China are of course vigilant. Yet China sincerely hopes to maintain friendly and cooperative ties with its neighbor, but Japan instead of sitting down at the negotiation table, has hyped the "China Threat" allegation to scoop political legitimacy for its strategic and diplomatic schemes.

The U.S. and Japan accuse China of attempting to change the status quo in the East China Sea by imposing the new ADIZ – a charge Japan has itself been found guilty of more than once. Back in 2009, the Naoto Kan administration walked away from the long-held consensus to put off the Diaoyu Islands issue for resolution by later generations after the two countries normalized bilateral relations, saying that there was no dispute over the issue. In September 2012., the Yoshihiko Noda ad-

ministration "nationalized" the island despite China's protests, another attempt to change the status quo. Abe unabashedly announced that countering China's rise is his country's largest contribution to world peace, and that he is spearheading the campaign to amend Japan's pacifist Constitution. All of this is aimed at altering the status quo in the Asia-Pacific.

Drop the Bluster

By any reckoning, the heated spat over China's ADIZ in the East China Sea is disturbing. It will cast a pall over regional security if defiance by the U.S. and Japan, bolstered by their military predominance, continues. It is actually not necessary for the two countries to over-interpret or over-respond to the ADIZ, as it will in no way alter the balance of power in East Asia or the military contours in the western Pacific.

The U.S. alliance still wields absolute military predominance over China in terms of air, marine and strategic forces. The Chinese ADIZ is only meant to add a layer of protection to China's economic advances along its south-eastern coast, and amounts to no more than a psychological and sensationalized impact on the U.S. and Japan. It is obvious exaggeration to claim that it is an attempt by Beijing to challenge the existing security order in East Asia.

China will not accept the idea of rescinding the ADIZ in the East China Sea, it being absolutely in line with international norms. But China is open to talks and proposals if any country has concerns or misgivings, and is ready to provide prompt and frank clarifications and explanations accordingly. For instance, Beijing can work with concerned parties to further define the "defensive emergency measures" to be adopted in case foreign flights fail to identify themselves as required when flying through the ADIZ.

The world should have noticed that, since announcing the establishment of ADIZ last November, China's approach is moderate and restrained, reconfirming China's non-provocative attitude. China hopes other countries, including the U.S. and Japan, will respect its legitimate need for such an air defense identification zone. But it will not be intimidated by the diplomatic and military saber rattling of any country intending to coerce China into revoking its decision. Those who bet on such a scenario shall be disappointed.

The overlapping of the Chinese and Japanese ADIZs in the East China Sea calls for levelheaded talks between the two countries. However they feel at this moment, China and Japan have an unavoidable obligation to effectively manage the crisis in a timely manner, to prevent clashes and work out constructive measures. In accordance with dynamic changes in the geopolitical situation, they must defuse tensions in the East China Sea and restore peace and stability. It is irresponsible of the Abe administration to instruct Japanese civilian airliners not to comply with China's identification regulations.

In order to solve the dispute over the East China Sea ADIZ, the U.S. and Japan must drop the bluster. ■