



CHINA'S ADIZ: REACTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

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On 23 November 2013, Chinese Air Force spokesperson, Shen Jinke announced that, “any aircraft flying through the newly designated East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone must seek prior permission from the Chinese authorities in advance and follow instructions from its air-traffic controllers”. He further stated that “China’s armed forces will adopt “defensive emergency measures” to respond to the aircrafts that do not cooperate in the identification or refuse to follow the instructions”.¹ With this proclamation, East China Sea Dispute has again come in the limelight. China and Japan are at loggerhead with each other vis-à-vis eight uninhabited islands and rocks in the East China Sea which are under Japan’s administration at present. Taiwan also lays its claim of sovereignty over these islands which are called Diaoyu in China, Senkaku in Japan and Tiaoyutai in Taiwan.

China’s decision to create its Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the skies above the disputed islands in the East China Sea is altering the dynamics of East Asian Security Architecture. This initiative is proving to be nerve wracking for all the countries which are involved in maritime disputes with China in the East Asian waters. Additionally, this move by Chinese side is bound to create ruckus in the region given that these disputed islands are covered under the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America* signed in 1952. The clauses of the treaty put an obligation on the US to defend Japan in an event of any covert or overt attack on Japan’s controlled territories.

This sudden declaration from Chinese side has been vehemently opposed by the US, which is a proponent of freedom of navigation in the international skies, and its security protectorate, Japan. While Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his discontent by terming China's action to create a new ADIZ over the disputed islands as dangerous, the US President Barack Obama also responded swiftly by sending two unarmed B-52 bombers as a 'routine exercise' to fly over the new ADIZ without informing China on November 26, 2013. The US and Japan plan to step-up air surveillance in the East China Sea, with Japan stationing E-2C airborne early-warning aircraft at the Naha base in the Okinawa region and expanding the use of unmanned Global Hawk aircraft.ⁱⁱ The US Defence Secretary, Chuck Hagel also criticised China's ADIZ openly by calling it a "destabilising attempt to alter the status quo in the region". South Korea and Australia have also joined hands with the US and Japan in criticising China. Nonetheless, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang defended China's ADIZ by stating that it is not aimed at any specific country nor target and it is absolutely a measure designated to exercise the right of defense effectively.ⁱⁱⁱ China maintains that it is a mere attempt to secure its airspace from aerial incursions and further clarifies that in an event of non-compliance of ADIZ rule, China will scramble fighter jets and intercept the trespassers. In fact, China scrambled warplanes to monitor two US surveillance aircraft and 10 Japanese planes, including early warning aircraft, surveillance aircraft and fighter jets, crossing through the ADIZ.^{iv}

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Creating ADIZ by countries is not an unusual phenomenon. A number of countries have declared their respective zones where in other countries' unidentified aircrafts, both military and civilian have to identify themselves before entering into their air zones. The US, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Russia and Taiwan are to name a few. What is so peculiar about China's ADIZ is that countries criticising China's ADIZ says that it is beyond China's

national airspace. It also overlaps Japan and South Korea's ADIZ. This ADIZ also covers the sky over Leodo Reef which is claimed by both China and South Korea. Japan's ADIZ was created in 1969 and since then, it has been unilaterally extended twice in 1972 and 2010. For obvious reasons, China does not recognise Japan's ADIZ.

Though China has spelled out that its ADIZ is not targeted against any other country, it is evident that China-Japan overlapping claims on the disputed islands in the East China Sea lie at the core of this move. Seemingly, China's latest move to identify ADIZ over the East China Sea is a retaliatory measure against Japan's provocative warning in September 2013 that it may shoot down foreign unmanned drones that infringe upon Japanese airspace. Additionally, Japan maintains that there exists no maritime dispute between China and Japan over the disputed islands; apparently, by demarcating its own ADIZ, China is keeping the conflict alive. In more pertinent terms, China is trying to reiterate its official position that these disputed islands are an integral part of China.

China's new ADIZ implies that China, which has offered considerable concessions in maximum number of its territorial disputes in the past, is reluctant to compromise on its stand of sovereignty in its maritime dispute with Japan. Through the new ADIZ, China is displaying assertive postures vis-à-vis East China Sea dispute. ADIZ is perceived as China's new strategy to reinforce its sovereignty claims over the disputed islands in the East China Sea. Needless to say that claims of sovereignty over these uninhabited islands and a few rocks are least about controlling a territory or national pride and more about getting hold of the resources available beneath the sea bed. China is the world's largest energy consumer. It is mostly because of China's rising energy needs that hold it back to make compromises in its maritime disputes. Besides this, demarcation of China's own ADIZ suggests that China is

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inevitably engaged in a process of enhancing its military capabilities in order to ensure a smooth passage for China to become an invincible maritime power.

Whether or not, China will be having a military stand-off with Japan, China's ADIZ has jeopardized the possibility of further constructive talks between China and Japan over the disputed islands. This is indeed alarming for Japan. Not only the likelihood of China-Japan rapprochement appears to be problematic, peace and tranquility of the entire East Asian region is at stake.

Endnotes:

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

ⁱ "Announcement of the Aircraft Identification Rules for the East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone of the PRC", November 23, 2013 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-11/23/c_132911634.htm (accessed on November 24, 2013).

ⁱⁱ David Lerman, "U.S. Said Making Daily Flights into China's Air Zone", November 30, 2013 at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-11-29/u-s-said-making-daily-flights-into-china-s-air-zone.html> (accessed on November 30, 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of National Defence, The People's Republic of China, "China's ADIZ Will Not Cause Tension: Spokesman", November 30, 2013 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-11/30/content_4477144.htm (accessed on November 30, 2013).

^{iv} "China Scrambles Jets in Air Zone to Monitor US and Japanese Planes", at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25155605> (accessed on November 29, 2013).