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No. 190

17 January 2014

A TECHNICAL ASPECT OF ADIZ

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On November 23, 2013, the PRC Government suddenly announced the Chinese Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over a part of the East China Sea. China's "salami-slicing strategy" (or "cabbage strategy") can now be said to be on open display.

It is not yet clear what kind of measures the Chinese authorities will take. Since this is the first Chinese ADIZ, the Chinese Air Force is probably unable to take actions immediately to comprehensively enforce the ADIZ.

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However, looking back on the Chinese Air Force's overreaction to the April 2001 collision between a US Navy EP-3 and a Chinese jet fighter near Hainan Island, or the most recent incident of a Chinese naval vessel illuminating its fire control radar on a Japan Maritime Self Defense Force destroyer in February 2013, we cannot completely eliminate the possibility of the Chinese military taking extreme actions that could have unexpected and serious consequences in this area.

Technically, the purpose of ADIZs, usually established far away from a nation's borders, is to identify whether aircraft approaching a nation's territorial air space (12NM) are friends or foes, and to give enough reaction time to the country's own air defense systems. There are no international regulations for setting ADIZs and the zones are supposed to be established individually according to domestic rules. Therefore, ADIZs, in essence, do not mean or guarantee the country's jurisdiction over the designated areas. Even if an ADIZ lies over international waters, there are no restrictions under international law to which foreign aircraft flying in the ADIZ are subject.

Japan's ADIZ has been in effect under the terms of an AIP (Aeronautical Information Publication, a publication that countries publish on their own containing information necessary for aircraft flights and that are issued at the advice of ICAO) since 1969, and aircraft entering the ADIZ are requested to issue their flight plans in advance. The flight plan submission is not, however, an obligation; all this is done on a voluntary basis. Naturally, military aircraft, even from neighboring countries, have seldom reported their flight plans.

As to commercial aircraft control, all countries have their own FIRs (Flight Information Regions, the largest regular division of airspace in use in the world today, are specified regions of airspace in which a flight service and alerting service are provided), established by the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization), so that each country can manage commercial aircraft flights smoothly and safely using the aircraft information. For example, Fukuoka FIR has complete access to all commercial aircraft flight plans and, in turn, provides all kinds of information to neighboring FIRs such as Shanghai FIR or Taipei FIR or others. The Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) receives flight information on commercial aircraft in the ADIZ from the FIRs, and just compares it with their

own data for identification. The JASDF itself does not request that commercial aircraft provide their flight plans in advance.

The point is not that the China's newly declared ADIZ overlaps with that of Japan, but that the international waters together with the adjacent air space directly above and covered by the Chinese ADIZ might ultimately end up falling under Chinese jurisdiction. In other words, the Chinese ADIZ actually interferes with the freedom of flight over international waters. Moreover, the Chinese ADIZ includes Japan's Senkaku Islands as if the islands were part of Chinese territory. This sort of action cannot be dismissed or ignored. Such a unilateral attempt to change the status quo could lead to unexpected incidents and upset the already precarious imbalance in this area.

China's Ministry of Defense (MOD) has declared that it will monitor the East China Sea ADIZ and that it will require aircraft flying in the Chinese ADIZ to report their flight plans to the Chinese MOFA or PRC aviation authorities and to follow orders of the MOD. If aircraft do not, as China's MOD has stated, China will take defensive measures against those aircraft. This Chinese ADIZ is unique not only in its jurisdictional claims but also in its structure and design. Clearly, this is nothing but China employing "tailored coercion aimed solely at Japan" to obtain the Senkaku Islands with an aim to drive a wedge into the Japan-US alliance.


The US reaction to the declaration of China's ADIZ was quick and well disciplined. The US immediately dispatched two B-52 strategic bombers from Guam into the East China Sea ADIZ. China might have miscalculated a US response of this kind. As it turned out, China brought the Senkakus issue onto the stage of US-China relations, rather than keeping it a mostly Japan-China matter.

China implies that, once the newly declared Chinese ADIZ over the East China Sea has been firmly established, it will continue to add other similar ADIZs in the South China Sea region; China asserts that about 90 percent of the South China Sea, encircled by what is called "Nine-dotted Line," is under PRC control. In setting an ADIZ over the East China Sea, China seems to have begun implementing a plan for controlling a broader area. If things keep going as China

intends, the area inside the “1st Island Chain” will eventually fall into China’s territory in the future.

In view of China’s recent domineering actions, we cannot help but presume that Xi Jinping has been bringing Deng Xiaoping’s strategy, i.e., “Yousuo zuowei (有所作為),” into the execution phase.

In response to China’s assertive efforts to alter the status quo, Japan needs to stay calm and stand resolutely as we have to date, observing domestic and international laws and keeping close contact with the US. From a long-term perspective, China intends to develop its A2/AD (anti-access/area-denial) strategy and try to gain control within the area of the “1st Island Chain” and make the area effectively PRC territory. Japan has to build up its own version of the A2/AD strategy structure in response to maintain stability in the area.

In December 2013, Japan established several pillars of national defense by establishing safeguards under the National Secrecy Law, forming the National Security Council, and issuing updated National Defense Guidelines and a Mid-Term Defense Program. Japan, facing serious challenges in its surroundings, is now heading toward “active pacifism, intending to make a more active contribution to a stable and peaceful international situation,” based on international cooperation. In sync with the US, Japan has been, and will be, one of the central figures for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The time has come for Japan to aggressively demonstrate its proper leadership role. 

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