



## **CLASH OF THE TITANS**

*By Wg Cdr Raj Mongia,  
Research Fellow, CAPS*

When China established an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) to support its claims over parts of disputed East China Sea, it definitely did not expect that USA would be dispatching its aircraft (two B-52 bombers) to fly through the contested area on 25 Nov 13, just two days after Dragon's announcement of ADIZ. Beijing announced on 23 Nov that, it would track and monitor all aircraft that enter the ADIZ. It was also emphasized that the aircraft that failed to notify it of their flight plan could face interception.

Is this Air Defense Identification Zone, or ADIZ, the latest flashpoint for the U.S.-China rivalry? China announced on 23 Nov that it set up an ADIZ over the East China Sea that overlaps with similar zones maintained by Japan, South Korea and Taiwan—all U.S. allies or partners. It is an extension into the air of disputes playing out at sea. China's move infuriated the region, [especially Japan](#). Japan registered a serious protest in response to the move, describing it as an extremely dangerous development as it could result in unpredictable events. Flying of B-52 bombers through the so called ADIZ may signify just the beginning of unpredictable events Japan was hinting at.<sup>i</sup>

What are Dragon's intentions? What would be its further course of action is anybody's guess. The ADIZ over the East China Sea may be followed by the establishment of similar zones covering China's other frontiers. The stated objective of setting up these zones is to enhance China's territorial defences at an appropriate time after completing preparations. The ADIZ is predefined area over international air space within which Chinese military will monitor and track aircraft.

While the Chinese government said international fighter will not be affected, any other non-commercial flights that have not notified authorities will be likely to face interception and could also be brought down. But when B-52 bombers flew out of Anderson Air Force Base in Guam as part of earlier planned exercise and crossed over the zone, Chinese authorities did not make contact with the bombers. Aircraft flew above the disputed islands that are at the heart of a territorial dispute between China and Japan.

The Japanese government lodged a serious protest with Junichi Thara, head of the Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanic Affairs Bureau. This was also conveyed to Han Zhiqiang, Minister at the Chinese embassy at Japan. US officials have also expressed deep concern over the move, suggesting it would exacerbate tensions between China and Japan.<sup>ii</sup>

The back-and-forth move of the bombers has thrown a spotlight on a complex set of international agreements and unilateral policies that govern how one country's military aircraft operate around another's borders.

What distinguishes an ADIZ from a country's national airspace or Exclusive Economic Zone? The technical definitions lie in the small print scattered through complex treaties and national laws and regulations. Enumerated below are some of the key terms:

**AIRSPACE** – Under international law, a country's sovereign airspace extends to the outer limits of its territorial waters, 12 nautical miles from its coastline. Most countries require all foreign military aircraft to obtain permission to enter their airspace and reserve the right to take military action, including shooting them down, if they do not. China and Japan both claim the disputed East China Sea islands known as the Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China as part of their territory. They also claim sovereign airspace above them and over the waters extending 12 nautical miles around them.<sup>iii</sup>

**EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ)** – According to the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, each signatory state can claim an EEZ that gives it special rights to exploit marine resources up to 200 nautical miles from its coastline. When EEZs overlap, signatory states are supposed to negotiate an agreed boundary. Most countries allow freedom of passage for foreign vessels through their EEZ. However, some countries disagree on whether non-

aggressive foreign military operations – such as reconnaissance patrols — should be allowed in their EEZ. The U.S. says yes; China says no. China often intercepts and tracks foreign military planes over its EEZ, but usually does not try to repel them or force them to land.<sup>iv</sup>

**AIR DEFENSE IDENTIFICATION ZONE (ADIZ)** – An ADIZ has no basis in international law and is not overseen by any international organization. So definitions and rules vary between different countries. Typically such zones extend well beyond a country's airspace to give its military time to respond to potentially hostile incoming aircraft. Several countries have declared them unilaterally, including the U.S. and Japan. Many of those countries require foreign military aircraft to identify themselves and their flight plans on entering their ADIZ. They will often intercept and escort foreign military aircraft in their ADIZ but will usually not repel them or force them to land unless they consider them a threat. The U.S. says it only applies ADIZ procedures to foreign aircraft intending to enter its airspace. China's ADIZ is unusual in that it overlaps with Japan's, South Korea's and Taiwan's and covers disputed territory.<sup>v</sup>



*Pictorial representation of China and Japan's ADIZs*

*Source: Chinese Defence Ministry*



Computer screens display a map showing the outline of China's new air defence zone in the East China Sea on the website of the Chinese Ministry of Defence.

Though China and US are co-operating in so many spheres and their economies also mutually interdependent. China's ambition to live up to the sobriquet "Zhongguo- Middle Kingdom" and claiming their supposedly rightful place on this planet is also no longer a secret. Whether Clash of Titans in East China Sea is, beginning of yet another great game, considering the stakes and profile of players involved, only time will tell.

#### End Notes

- i. Ananth Krishnan, "U.S. Bombers fly through China's new defence zone", The Hindu, 27 Nov 13.
- ii. Ananth Krishnan, "China sets up air defence zone over disputed East China Sea", The Hindu, 24 Nov 13.
- iii. to v. China Real Time 27 Nov 2013, 12:22 pm. Available at website <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2013/11/27/the-a-to-z-on-chinas-air-defense-identification-zone/> accessed on 28 Nov 13.

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