

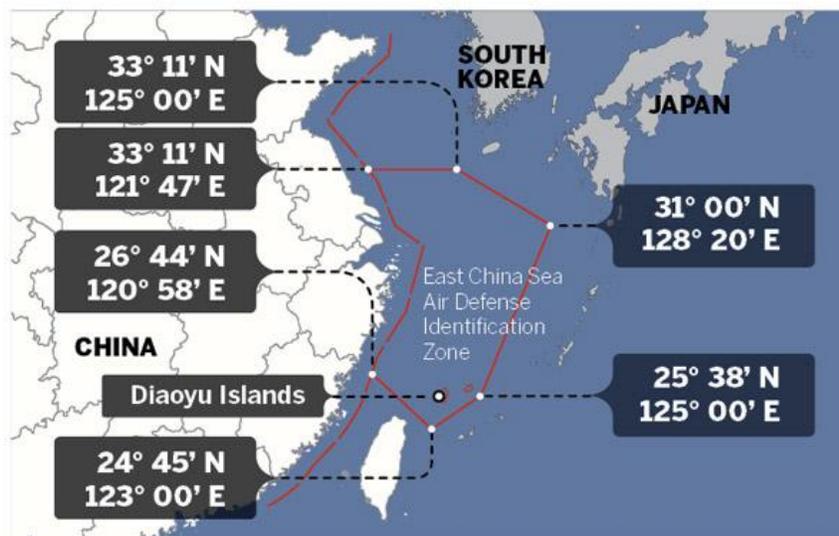


## CHINA'S EAST CHINA SEA ADIZ: CONFUSION AND ALARM

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**China's** surprise announcement on 23 November 2013 of creating a new ADIZ (Air Defence Identification Zone, refer figure-1) in the East China Sea has caused much confusion and alarm in the Asia -Pacific region. The new ADIZ overlaps the existing ADIZ of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan and covers the disputed Senkaku islands (the Chinese call them Diaoyu islands) claimed by China but administered by Japan. This move by China has further increased tensions between Japan and China over the disputed and uninhabited Senkaku Islands.

### CHINA AIR DEFENSE IDENTIFICATION ZONE



Source: Ministry of National Defense

ZHANG YE / CHINA DAILY

Figure-1: Map released by China showing the East China Sea ADIZ.

The Chinese announcement brought swift reaction from the United States, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia. United States Secretary of State John Kerry stated, “This unilateral action constitutes an attempt to change the status quo in the East China Sea. Escalatory action will only increase tensions in the region and create **risks** of an incident”<sup>i</sup>. The U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, in a separate statement, said that “ we view this development as a destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo in the region. This unilateral action increases the risk of misunderstanding and **miscalculations**.” He further emphasised that the US-Japan Mutual Defense treaty applies to Senkaku islands also.<sup>ii</sup> On November 26, 2013 the USAF (United States Air Force) flew two unarmed B-52 bombers through the Chinese ADIZ to challenge China’s unilateral move. This was followed two days later by Japan and South Korea sending their air force aircraft through the ADIZ without informing the Chinese. The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reacted sharply to the Chinese announcement and called it a dangerous attempt to coerce Japan and demanded that China “revoke any measures that could infringe upon the freedom of flight in international airspace.”<sup>iii</sup> Japan has also obtained ASEAN support against China’s ADIZ at the ASEAN-Japan summit conference held in Tokyo on December 14, 2013. According to a BBC report “Japan and SE Asian leaders have pledged to work together to ensure "freedom of over flight" in the region, in a move seen as a mild rebuke to China”<sup>iv</sup>. While Japan has ASEAN support the American support has not been strong enough. U.S.A. has not asked the Chinese to revoke the ADIZ and has also told its civil airlines to follow Chinese ADIZ rules.

**South Korea** also lodged a strong protest against the Chinese ADIZ, which includes the South Korea claimed Leodo Rock. South Korea has now expanded its ADIZ up to 250 kilometres south of Leodo (refer figure-2) and it now coincides with its Incheon flight information region (FIR) set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in which flight information and alert services are provided. So, now there are three ADIZs in the area overlapping into each other in a region already riddled with territorial disputes. South Korea and Japan as it is do not see eye to eye over their dispute relating to the Dokdo islands administered by South Korea and claimed by Japan.



Figure-2: Map showing overlapping ADIZs of China Japan and South Korea. Map source : <http://korea JoongAngDaily Joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2981721>

**India** has not officially reacted to these developments though the government has issued a NOTAM( Notice to Airmen) for all carriers to comply with the Chinese requirements but it is not clear whether Indian military aircraft passing through that area will comply with the Chinese requirements.<sup>v</sup>

Why has China's ADIZ caused so much confusion and great deal of alarm in the region? To analyse China's actions it will be pertinent to first study what is an ADIZ? An ADIZ is a laterally defined area where the air defence organisation of a nation would like to identify all aircraft operating in it or heading in such a direction that it may enter into its sovereign air space. The main purpose of having an ADIZ is to ensure security of air space by enabling prompt identification of all aircraft flying in these zones so that if there is any unknown aircraft in the area, the air defence system has sufficient time to react and take appropriate

action which may involve scrambling fighter aircraft to intercept the unknown aircraft. In this way the air defence organisation avoids wasteful scrambles by armed fighters. The concept was started by the USAF Air Defence Command, in 1950, during the Cold War, to identify any surprise air attack from the Soviet Union. India has five ADIZs - ADIZ North, West, Central, East and South - which cover the entire country including the island territories of Lakshadweep and Andamans & Nicobar. ADIZs normally cover airspace over land and territorial waters (territorial waters extend up to 12 nautical miles from the coastline as per international law). However, some parts of the ADIZs can also extend over the sea into international waters (India's ADIZs extend, at some places, up to almost 300 km from the coastline). Many countries have ADIZs (Japan, Norway, Pakistan, South Korea, Taiwan, and United Kingdom. USA and Canada maintain some ADIZs jointly) but they do not overlap into other countries territory. The Chinese ADIZ overlaps with Japans and now with South Koreas also (refer figure-2). Another point to note is that an ADIZ is not recognised by international law or any international agreements and any ADIZ extending over international waters does not give that country any sovereign rights in that area. Nations have the right to regulate air traffic in its sovereign airspace only, and countries are not legally bound to comply with other countries' ADIZ requirements in international airspace. The Chinese it seems have not understood this basic concept and have blindly issued an ominous warning in the announcement of their rules for the ADIZ, by stating "China's armed forces will adopt defensive **emergency** measures to respond to aircraft that do not cooperate in the identification or refuse to follow the instructions"<sup>vi</sup>. This announcement led to concerns that aircraft could face interception. No airline pilot would like to see a fully armed fighter interceptor pointing a gun at him and saying "follow me or I shoot". The Chinese spokesman later clarified that the statement on "defensive emergency measures" does not apply to civil aircraft. However, as per China's rules every aircraft transiting through its ADIZ has to file its flight plan with the Chinese authorities.

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**CHINA'S AWACS : HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT**

**SU-35 SALE TO CHINA: THE CHALLENGE FOR INDIA**

While this is surely a requirement for those aircraft heading towards the Chinese mainland it cannot be for aircraft flying parallel to Chinese air space. Civil airliners transiting the ADIZ have started filing their flight plans to the Chinese mainly for their own safety. The problem which will arise is when air force/ military flights of other countries operate in the ADIZ and don't inform the Chinese. In such a situation China will have to send their armed fighter interceptors to investigate the unknown flights and this is where there is real risk of a mishap happening, as happened in 2001 when a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane was operating in international waters, about 100km away from China's Hainan Island. The EP-3 was intercepted by J-8II fighters of the Chinese Navy. The Chinese pilot, perhaps in his eagerness to have closer look, collided with the EP-3 and was killed. The EP-3 was also badly damaged but managed to make an emergency landing at Hainan Island with all its 24 man crew intact. The incident could have escalated into a volatile situation but was averted by the Chinese and U.S. governments.

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To enforce the ADIZ China will have to expend considerable amount of resources in terms of constant radar surveillance and having armed fighters on standby readiness to carry out interceptions. Senkaku Islands are about 330 km from the Chinese coast line and the eastern extreme of the ADIZ is more than 500 km from the coast. Surveillance radars have a maximum pick up range of 400 km at high level. So, PLAAF will have to deploy its scarce AWACS aircraft to supplement ground radar cover in the ADIZ. Therefore, enforcing the ADIZ will not be easy.

The Chinese it seems have created the ADIZ to strengthen their maritime claims on the disputed islands and increase their bargaining power with the Japanese. This could also be the new Chinese President Xi Jinping exerting his authority for regional dominance showing China's growing military clout. China is also aware that large amounts of oil and mineral resources lie under the seabed in the East China Sea and this could bolster their foot hold in the area. Some analysts have also said that China will next declare a South

China Sea ADIZ<sup>vii</sup>. When asked if China is going to create more ADIZs, a Chinese defence ministry spokesman said they will be created “at the right moment after necessary preparations are completed.”

Analysis of this development reveals the following:-

- After initially challenging the Chinese by sending B-52s into the ADIZ, U.S.A. seems to have accepted the Chinese position by asking its civil airlines to follow China’s ADIZ rules. Secondly U.S.A. has not asked China to revoke the ADIZ. Even U.S. Vice President Joe Biden during his visit to China on December 4, 2013, did not ask for China to revoke the ADIZ while Japanese Prime Minister demanded its revocation.
- India and other regional countries need to note that China is likely to aggressively assert its territorial claims with its neighbours. An Indian analyst has also commented that China can, one day, declare an ADIZ over Arunachal Pradesh and India needs to “formulate its strategies taking into consideration the insights of China’s behaviour in East China Sea.<sup>viii</sup>” China has denied this as per a newspaper report but Indian planners need to be aware of such a contingency and be prepared to counter it<sup>ix</sup>. China objected to The President of India’s recent visit to Arunachal Pradesh saying that it is disputed territory. The stapled visas issue has also not yet been resolved with China continuing to give stapled visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh. China is a country which has provided missile and nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan, a known rival of India. In such a situation there is no reason for India to keep quiet on the East China Sea ADIZ issue. India can tactfully express disagreement with Chinese actions, without worrying about China’s response.

India may not be a priority in China’s security calculus but there is no need for us to not understand the long term Chinese threat.

### 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)*

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<sup>i</sup> US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/11/218013.htm>

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- ii US Department of Defense website <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121223>
- iii The Guardian November 25, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/25/japan-shinzo-abe-china-air-zone-disputed-islands>
- iv <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25345156> accessed on December 16, 2013.
- v THE HINDU December 7, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ai-flights-unaffected-by-chinese-air-zone/article5434051.ece>
- vi Announcement of the Aircraft Identification Rules for the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone of the People's Republic of China. Issued by the Ministry of National Defense on November 23.
- vii <http://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/east-asia-beat/sea-12102013211631.html>
- viii Arvind Gupta, "Chinese ADIZ in East China Sea: Posers for India" (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses; IDSA Comment December 2, 2013), accessed on December 18, 2013.
- ix "The Hindu" dated November 28, 2013.
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