

China's New Map – Asia's New Arms Race

The following is from a 27 November American newsletter called *Military Technology Alert*. It's put out by a company called Agora Financial. I found it when I was looking at things about China. I think it's worth repeating. While it shouldn't happen, there is the potential for a war to break out. Hopefully, cooler heads will prevail but it's worth being aware of what's going on.

"All warfare is based on deception," wrote Sun Tzu in his classic work from the fifth century B.C. *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu advises that "the expert in battle moves the enemy, and is not moved by him." To this end, according to the ancient scholar, "What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy."

You can see Sun Tzu's advice in action right now. The government of China just made a bold move to transform the map of Asia -- I'll give details below. In a Sun Tzu-like move, China is challenging its neighbors, Japan and South Korea, as well as the U.S.

Will the current set of U.S. alliances support and maintain an East Asian defense strategy that has been in place for over half a century? Or will China's new move break up long-standing U.S. alliances and undermine a long-term, U.S.-centered defense strategy?

China's latest move is definitely trouble for the existing order. It will – no doubt! – trigger an arms race in Asia.

First the news.

China's Bold Territorial Grab

Last weekend, China's news agency Xinhua announced that the government of China has formally established the "East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone" (ADIZ) to cover the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. These small, uninhabited islands, just northeast of Taiwan, have been under Japanese control for over 120 years, but are now subject to a territorial dispute between China and Japan.



China redraws the map of East China Sea.

China's new ADIZ establishes rules for aircraft flights in and over the area.

Ominously, China's Ministry of National Defense is the "administrative organ" of the East China Sea ADIZ.

The new Chinese ADIZ overlaps an existing ADIZ that the government of Japan declared in 1965. The new Chinese ADIZ extends to 81 miles from nondisputed Japanese territory, just as Japan's older ADIZ ends 81 miles from nondisputed Chinese territory. Clearly, much deliberation went into this Chinese move.

Up to now, China and Japan have traded sharp letters of protest over the island dispute. At sea, Chinese and Japanese ships have sailed back and forth across the waters near the Diaoyu/Senkaku, showing their respective flags.

But the new Chinese ADIZ goes beyond diplomatic words. It is a powerful, meaningful act of state. In essence, the ADIZ is a unilateral statement by China that "this is ours."

China's Battle Space

Legally, Diaoyu/Senkaku is under dispute between Japan and China. Both nations have presented all manner of historical evidence concerning which ancient fishing boat grounded on which beach in some long-lost time frame.

Of course, China and Japan are both members of the United Nations (U.N.), and ordinarily a territorial matter like this is subject to dispute resolution mechanisms. But now the Chinese have adopted their own way of dealing with the issue -- essentially, engaging in "self-help" by establishing an ADIZ.

Frankly, China's new ADIZ is one of the most politically destabilizing developments in East Asia since the Korean War of 1950-53. That is, the Chinese government is now asserting national sovereignty over the ADIZ. It's an unambiguous diplomatic stand. If you adopt the Chinese position, there's nothing further to discuss.

Furthermore, China just engaged in a remarkable level of military escalation. That is, one of the first things that the Chinese did on the day of the Xinhua ADIZ announcement was fly a military "maritime patrol" within the ADIZ. The Chinese patrol included surveillance aircraft, fighter escorts and an airborne warning and control (AWAC)-type aircraft. In response, Japanese "self-defense" aircraft intercepted the Chinese aircraft during this "patrol." Uh-oh...

When you take it all in, China just converted a war of words with Japan into a full-blown, potential wartime scenario. The new Chinese ADIZ now clearly defines a battle space.

Under traditional international law, Japan could view the Chinese ADIZ declaration as an act of war. At the very least, the Chinese ADIZ is a direct military challenge to Japan.

Legally, there's a troubling precedent here. If Japan -- and/or other Asian nations, the U.S. and/or the U.N. -- does nothing, inactivity lays legal foundations for China to make a similar ADIZ declaration that covers the South China Sea, also subject to Chinese claims and multilateral territorial disputes. But at this stage, a "South China Sea ADIZ" would be in keeping with Chinese efforts to dominate air and sea space adjacent to its coastlines.

China Issues "Rules"

Over the weekend, China's Xinhua agency published so-called "rules of flight" for the new ADIZ, leaving nothing ambiguous or up to interpretation. According to China's Ministry of Defense:

- All aircraft flying in China's East China Sea ADIZ must abide by China's rules.
- All aircraft flying in the Chinese ADIZ must identify themselves and receive approval. This includes filing a flight plan with China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Civil Aviation Administration of China.
- All aircraft flying in the Chinese ADIZ must maintain the two-way radio communications with Chinese controllers and "respond in a timely and accurate manner to inquiries." This includes using a Chinese-approved encoding transponder.
- All aircraft flying in the Chinese ADIZ must clearly mark their nationality and home-nation registration in accordance with Chinese rules.
- Armed forces of the People's Republic of China "will adopt defensive emergency measures to respond to aircraft that do not cooperate in the identification or refuse to follow the instructions."

When you distill these new "China rules" to their essence, it's obvious that China is setting the stage to militarize the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute with Japan, and perhaps other disputes with other neighbors. It's a clear threat of military action if Japan -- or anyone else, for that matter -- violates the new ADIZ.

Immediate Responses

After the China ADIZ announcement, the U.S. State Department quickly issued a terse note. The State Department warned that China's ADIZ and unilateral military claim to airspace over a disputed island chain creates risk of "misunderstanding and miscalculation." In turn, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a sharp rebuke, accusing the U.S. of making "irresponsible remarks."

On Monday of this week, two U.S. Air Force B-52 bombers made an unannounced flight into the "Chinese" ADIZ, including flying over Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. A U.S. spokesman made a point of explaining that the bombers did not seek Chinese permission, nor engage with Chinese air traffic control. In general, a B-52 flight is the "gold standard" for not complying with another nation's territorial airspace claim.

Also, and almost immediately after the Chinese ADIZ announcement, Japan's Foreign Ministry quickly dismissed the Chinese ADIZ. The Japanese stated that the new ADIZ is a unilateral action with "no validity whatsoever." A Japanese government statement condemned China for "profoundly dangerous acts that unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea," and warned of "unintended consequences."

In South Korea, the country's Ministry of Defense noted that some of the new Chinese ADIZ violates areas of South Korean jurisdiction. The South Koreans announced that their aircraft would, in the future, fly over Chinese-claimed areas without informing China's Ministry of Defense.

Looking Ahead and Back

Looking ahead, will the Chinese begin to enforce their new ADIZ? Will they intercept and engage with Japanese or South Korean aircraft? With American aircraft? And how will the U.S., Japan and South Korea coordinate their response? What might happen?

It reminds me of what happened back in 2001. A U.S. Navy reconnaissance aircraft -- a heavy, relatively slow-moving, electronics-laden bird designated EP-3 -- was performing routine intelligence gathering off the coast of southern China. The Navy airplane was flying over international waters.

A Chinese fighter jet intercepted the Navy EP-3 and began aggressive intercepts. At one point, the Chinese jet pulled underneath the Navy airplane and then quickly popped up. The idea was that the Chinese jet would leave turbulent jet engine exhaust directly in front of the American aircraft and give the plane a "bump" -- to use a technical term.

Instead, the Chinese jet collided with the U.S. surveillance plane. The Chinese aircraft plummeted into the sea, killing the pilot. (The Chinese pilot was Lt. Cmdr. Wang Wei, remembered as "Wrong Way" by many Americans.)

The Navy EP-3 almost crashed too, but after some heroic piloting made an emergency landing on Chinese territory at Hainan island. There, the 24-member Navy crew was held for 11 days. As you can imagine, U.S.-China relations were severely strained. Eventually, the Chinese returned the U.S. aircraft to the Navy... in mostly small pieces.

That EP-3 incident was 12 years ago. China was just starting out on its decade-long economic rise, and its military was still relatively modest. The next time Chinese airplanes buzz U.S. aircraft in some newly established ADIZ? Considering developments of the past 10 years, all future bets are off.

The New Asian Arms Race

Expect blowback from China's unilateral ADIZ declaration, and expect that it'll be more than the Chinese likely expected. Sun Tzu or no, this new ADIZ may not weaken East Asian defense alliances and strategies. In fact, the new ADIZ may be the driver to forge a strong regional alliance of states that are collectively wary of Chinese hegemony.

Adding to the mix, a united alliance of East Asian states -- a strong, Asian version of NATO, in a sense -- has the potential to build out coordinated military capabilities that could eventually exceed those of China, with or even without U.S. military participation.

I foresee increased defense budgets for aircraft, ships and systems intended for East Asia among Japan, South Korea and the U.S. I anticipate that Taiwan will use the "new mainland" Chinese ADIZ as justification for more defense spending. Meanwhile, other nations in the Southeast Asia region will doubtless take the matter with complete seriousness. That includes the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Singapore and others.

Overall, in one fell swoop, China's new ADIZ decision injects new defense issues and requirements into spending priorities for a host of nations. The costs will range from the tens of billions into the hundreds of billions of dollars. Really... thanks to China and its ADIZ announcement, money will flow like Niagara into Asian rearmament.

Consider this as well. Even if China were to back down on its ADIZ decision – which is unlikely! – memory runs deep. The ADIZ decision instantly sours all manner of Chinese relations with the U.S., Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and many others in the region.

What's Going on With China?

What's going on in China? Why make a move like this? Apparently, the new leadership cadre want to show muscle to the world. At the same time, the new ADIZ helps current leaders fan the flames of internal Chinese nationalism.

I'm inclined to believe that we'll see more Chinese actions that assert the country's status and power. Why? Well, moves like this play to the strength and decisiveness of the Chinese Communist Party as it tackles the vast economic issues and reform that are coming home to roost.

Still, consider the larger perspective. If the U.S. – and certainly the aggressor of World War II, Japan! – builds an alliance of anti-Chinese Asian states, it would represent a true reversal of the tide of history. And perhaps the Communist big shots and ideologists in Beijing have misread themes of history that they believe predict Chinese dominance in Asia. We'll all likely live long enough to see this play out.

While much of what is written above is one man's opinion, that opinion is based on a number of facts which are laid out in the article.