CASE 5: EAST CHINA SEA AIR DEFENSE IDENTIFICATION ZONE (2013)

Figure 3.10. Overlapping ADIZs in the East China Sea

Not pictured: Philippine ADIZ.

Overview

On November 23, 2013, Beijing announced its first air defense identification zone (ADIZ) to better monitor and control international airspace in much of the East China Sea. The United States, Japan, and other regional states quickly criticized the decision, particularly for its perceived coercive intent; the application of rules to foreign aircraft transiting the zone but not entering Chinese national airspace; inclusion of airspace above disputed territory; overlap with the existing ADIZs of other states; and threats of “emergency defensive measures” against noncompliance. U.S. criticism also focused on a lack of prior consultation, although Beijing did inform at least some officials in Seoul and Tokyo ahead of time. Due to the announcement and concerns about its enforcement, the United States, Japan, and South Korea all deployed military aircraft to transit the China’s East China Sea ADIZ without prior submission of flight plans. South Korea also significantly expanded its own zone after Beijing refused to redraw it. On the other hand, most countries ultimately chose to accommodate China’s requirements for commercial airlines. The region nevertheless expressed fear about China establishing additional ADIZs, in particular in the South China Sea. Facing strong if uneven criticism, Beijing seemed to backpedal diplomatically. It also appeared to exhibit difficulty in effectively monitoring its existing zone.
BOX 3.5. Background on Air Defense Identification Zones

The U.S. government defines an air defense identification zone as a designated “area of airspace over land or water, extending upward from the surface, within which the ready identification, the location, and the control of aircraft are required in the interest of national security.” Countries typically establish ADIZs to help their aviation authorities distinguish between foreign civil and military aircraft and to give their armed forces adequate early warning about possibly hostile aircraft. These zones are usually located off the shores of coastal nations. They are often geographically expansive. ADIZs are distinct from Flight Information Regions, by which the International Civil Aviation Organization regulates commercial air traffic through international agreement. In contrast, an ADIZ is usually established for self-defense.

No codified body of international law governs the establishment of air traffic procedures within ADIZs. The 1944 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation permits states to forbid the entry of aircraft into their territorial airspace; it says nothing about a right to regulate activities in international airspace. The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is likewise silent on the regulation of nonsovereign airspace. Instead, ADIZs are a matter of customary international law arising from state practice—namely that of the United States. In 1948, the U.S. Air Force unilaterally established several “active defense areas” or “defense zones” in offshore areas around the continental United States to address the risk of a Soviet surprise attack. It later redesignated these zones as the world’s first ADIZs. Five zones were eventually established around North America. Washington also drew national ADIZs for South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines. Between 1969 and 1972, Tokyo codified and expanded its U.S.-drawn zone to cover territories returned in the 1971 Okinawa reversion, including the Senkaku Islands. Today, more than 20 countries from India to North Korea have official or “unofficial” ADIZs.

As a result, there is little international consensus on ADIZ rules and norms. According to a U.S. Navy handbook, Washington requires identification from aircraft approaching U.S. national airspace on the basis of the “right of a nation to establish reasonable conditions of entry into its territory.” Conversely, the United States insists it does not recognize “the right of a coastal nation to apply its ADIZ procedures to foreign aircraft not intending to enter national airspace,” especially military aircraft. Many (maybe most) states dispute this interpretation. The written ADIZ guidelines of at least Australia, Canada, Japan, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan all require aircraft flying through their zones to file flight plans regardless of destination. China and a minority of other countries have also long sought to regulate foreign military activities near their coasts but beyond their territorial airspace, whereas the United States asserts the right to “fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows.” U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, for example, often conduct missions with their radio transponders turned off.

On paper and in practice, however, even U.S. ADIZ regulations are ambiguous or inconsistent about applicability to state versus civil aircraft and for nature of destination. U.S. authorities ask Russia to submit flight plans before its bombers cross the Alaska ADIZ. Moreover, not officially “applying an ADIZ” to foreign military aircraft does not mean coastal states then refrain from monitoring or scrambling fighters to intercept and escort them. Finally, there is no consensus on how to handle
overlapping ADIZs or the inclusion of contested territory (Figure 3.10). The ADIZs of Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and (now) China all cover disputed territory, in many cases land features effectively controlled by other states.

### Timeline

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Incident Details

Phase I: China Considers Declaring ADIZ

China first considered creating an ADIZ in 2001 after a well-known midair collision between a Chinese fighter jet and a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft. The following year, a senior People’s Liberation Army official alerted participants at an international conference to the possibility of China eventually establishing an ADIZ. The PLA Air Force eventually submitted its first ADIZ proposal to China’s National People’s Congress in advance of the 2008 Olympic Games. This recommendation covered both the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Discussions about Chinese ADIZs also appeared in a Chinese military journal the same year.1

In May 2010, Chinese and Japanese officials held an important, quasi-official meeting on the possibility of Chinese ADIZs at the China Institute of International Studies, a government think tank affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yingfan led the Chinese delegation. He was accompanied by officials from the PLA Naval Military Studies Research Institute, Academy of Military Science, National Defense University, National University of Defense Technology, and other military institutions. A former Japanese deputy chief cabinet secretary, Nobuo Ishihara, led the more informal mission from Tokyo. Ishihara was joined most prominently by Satoshi Arai, a special adviser to Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and the national strategy and economics minister under Hatoyama’s successor, Naoto Kan. The team also included several former Japanese administrative vice ministers. Current Japanese foreign and defense ministry bureaucrats participated as “observers.”2

At this meeting, China informed the Japanese delegation that it had actually “already” established an ADIZ—only Beijing had not yet gone public with it. A PLA Navy commodore presented a map depicting an ADIZ in the East China Sea. Its borders were “nearly identical” to those China eventually declared in November 2013. Chinese leaders noted that these ADIZ boundaries roughly paralleled those of China’s claimed exclusive economic zone and extended continental shelf. This suggested that Beijing was using the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as a guide. The Chinese naval officer also noted that the new ADIZ would overlap with roughly 100 nautical miles of Japan’s own ADIZ and include the Senkaku Islands. Acknowledging the friction this could add to the Sino-Japanese territorial dispute, the Chinese officer recommended that the two countries’ air


forces quickly establish rules of behavior for air-to-air encounters to prevent accidents in the overlapping airspace. Another Chinese official asked the Japanese delegation, “What shall we do about China’s and Japan’s overlapping ADIZ?”

The Japanese delegation did not accept China’s proposition. They reportedly worried that acknowledging a Chinese ADIZ above the Senkakus would jeopardize Tokyo’s diplomatic position; since 2010, Japan had officially refused to recognize the existence of a territorial dispute over the islands. As a result, a Japanese ministry of defense official replied, “China has not announced this ADIZ to the international community, so it is impossible to say where our air defense zones overlap. As such, I cannot make any further comment.” The Japanese officials did not explicitly condemn China’s plans. They relayed China’s intentions back to Tokyo following this meeting. Neither China nor Japan publicly revealed the existence of this meeting in the years leading up to November 2013. It is unknown whether Japan informed the United States about this conference or its decision to rebuff China’s offer to discuss confidence-building measures.

Japan made a small revision to its own ADIZ a few days after the meeting in Beijing. Tokyo notified Taiwan that it had decided to expand the western edge of Japan’s East China Sea ADIZ by 14 nautical miles. This created a small overlap with Taiwan’s own ADIZ. Drawn by the United States after World War II, the original boundary line between the two countries’ zones had left two thirds of Yonaguni Island—Japan’s westernmost territory—within Taiwan’s ADIZ rather than Japan’s. The decision to redraw the Japanese ADIZ in May 2010 was widely seen as part of broader plans to fortify Yonaguni and the rest of the Ryukyu Islands to counter China’s growing maritime capabilities. However, Tokyo had only redrawn its ADIZ boundaries once before in 1972, so the close proximity to China’s ADIZ briefing is notable. Taiwan’s foreign ministry rejected Japan’s ADIZ expansion later that month. It cited sovereignty concerns and, in particular, frustrations with the consultation process. Japanese diplomats notified their Taiwanese counterparts again before officially announcing the revision in June, which elicited “extreme regret” from Taipei. A Japanese official stated that Taiwan had been informed as a “courtesy,” but “given international norms that ADIZ demarcation is at the discretion of each country, it was natural for Japan not to seek prior approval from Taiwan.”

Phase II: Finalizes Plan, Consults South Korea

The PLA Air Force Command College submitted a draft proposal for an East China Sea ADIZ in May 2013. At President Xi Jinping’s directive, the proposal was approved in August by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the State Council, and the Central Military Commission. The same month, the PLA publicly indicated that it was considering an ADIZ. According to a 2014 Japanese press report, Tokyo was somehow already aware at this time that China’s ADIZ

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4. Ibid.
preparations had entered their final stage. A leaked PLA document later indicated other states’ push for "marine boundaries disadvantageous to our country” and China’s need to control its “maritime resources” partly motivated the ADIZ.7

In large part, China’s desire to achieve maritime parity with Tokyo also drove its ADIZ announcement. Prior to 2013, Chinese diplomats had complained for years about a U.S.-Japan “double standard” when it comes to ADIZ procedures. The Japanese ministry of defense releases quarterly statistics that paint an alarming picture of China’s growing military activities in areas “surrounding Japan’s airspace.” As scholars have spotlighted, however, a close look at this data shows that Tokyo has long been scrambling fighter jets against unarmed Chinese reconnaissance aircraft flying routine missions deep in international airspace. Japan has also occasionally launched fighters to intercept commercial aircraft in response to alleged ADIZ violations. Many analysts believe Japan’s 2012 nationalization of the Senkaku Islands spurred Chinese leaders to look for ways to save face, punish Tokyo, and test its resolve as well.8

Reports suggest that the proposed zone extended roughly 200 nautical miles to the limit of China’s claimed exclusive economic zone. A minimalist option was also put on the table in case a larger ADIZ was “considered unfeasible.” This alternative aligned the eastern boundary of the Chinese ADIZ with Japan’s proposed East China Sea median line. Ultimately, Beijing drew its ADIZ’s eastern tip only 70 nm from the Japanese island of Kyushu—about the same distance as the nearest point of Japan’s much older ADIZ to the Chinese coast. This border fell between China’s exclusive economic zone and larger extended continental shelf claims in the East China Sea. Chinese leaders also added one of the more controversial features of China’s ADIZ—the requirement that foreign aircraft transiting the zone file a flight plan with Chinese authorities even if not intending to enter Chinese territorial airspace—on top of the PLA Air Force draft. The original plan reportedly did not include this element.9

In early November, international media carried reports that China would soon declare an ADIZ that would overlap Japan’s own.10 Several days before the announcement, Beijing then notified Seoul “through a diplomatic channel.” Chinese diplomats informed their counterparts that China’s zone would slightly overlap South Korea’s own ADIZ, as well as cover the airspace above Socotra

Rock—a submerged reef in the Yellow Sea that is occupied by South Korea but legally subject to a continental shelf dispute between China, Japan, and South Korea. At that time, Socotra and its controversial research station were actually covered by only Japan’s ADIZ. Seoul expressed “regret” at Beijing’s decision but also a desire to “continue consultations with the Chinese side to prevent the issue from undermining [Korea’s] national interest.” For their part, Chinese diplomats conveyed a “willingness to discuss the issue in a friendly manner.”

China may or may not have informed Taiwan in advance, as well. China’s ADIZ would soon significantly overlap Taiwan’s own. Although Defense Minister Yen Ming later stated that Beijing “did not consult with us beforehand,” Taipei’s muted reaction in the weeks after China’s announcement raised eyebrows across the region and in Washington. The Chinese foreign ministry later indicated it had notified “relevant countries” of the ADIZ decision prior to the November 23 announcement. Press reports suggest that U.S. officials received less than one hour’s formal notice before China’s announcement. It would be surprising if the United States did not learn about the ADIZ beforehand through other channels. Nevertheless, the National Security Council senior director for Asia at the time, Evan Medeiros, stated after leaving office in 2016 that the United States “did not foresee” China’s East China Sea declaration.

**Phase III: Beijing Establishes East China Sea ADIZ**

On November 23, 2013, the Ministry of National Defense officially declared the establishment of a Chinese air defense identification zone in the East China Sea. The ministry issued a rare type of statement typically reserved only for major government actions, equivalent to a direct statement from the Chinese general secretary, president, or premier. The press release was concise, announcing the ADIZ’s establishment and marking the geographic boundaries from the outer limit of China’s territorial sea to six coordinate points. It justified the decision on the basis of China’s 1995 Law on Civil Aviation, 1997 Law on National Defense, and 2001 Basic Rules on Flight.

The Ministry of National Defense also issued a second ministerial statement. This document identified the Chinese defense ministry as the primary state organ authorized to administer the

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13. The present authors have been unable to locate the original statement. Tim Kelly and Phil Stewart, “Defying China, U.S. Bombers and Japanese Planes Fly through New Air Zone,” *Reuters*, November 27, 2013.
15. The six coordinate points are 33°11’N, 121°47’E; 33°11’N, 125°00’E; 31°00’N, 128°20’E; 25°38’N, 125°00’E; 24°45’N, 123°00’E; and 26°44’N, 120°58’E. “Statement by the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Establishing the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone,” *Xinhua*, November 23, 2013. See also Paul H. B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, *China’s Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2013), 31–32; Swaine, “Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea,” 2.
ADIZ and explain its procedures. It then outlined “aircraft identification rules” applicable to “aircraft flying in the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone” effective immediately. These regulations required that aircraft must

1. report their flight plans to the [foreign ministry] or the Civil Aviation Administration of China . . .
2. maintain the two-way radio communications, and respond in a timely and accurate manner . . .
3. keep the [secondary radar] transponder working throughout the entire course . . .
4. clearly mark their nationalities and the logo of their registration identification in accordance with related international treaties.

At the bottom of this list was a vague warning that “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.”

Later the same day, Chinese spokesperson Senior Colonel Yang Yujun presented official comments on the announcement. As “a maritime nation,” Yang stated, China established an ADIZ to better “guard against potential air threats” and help “defend” its sovereign airspace. Enforcement would allow China to “identify, monitor, control, and dispose of entering aircraft.” Noting the proximity of the ADIZ’s eastern tip to the Japanese main island of Kyushu, Yang explained that strategic depth was needed to ensure enough “early warning time” to scramble Chinese jets and “ascertain the purpose and attributes” of approaching foreign “combat aircraft” before they reached the mainland. Thus, the size of the zone was simply a “necessary measure in China’s exercise of self-defense rights” and targeted no particular nation. At the same time, however, Yang observed that Japan’s own ADIZ was just as close to the Chinese coast. The ministry’s carefully prepared statements reflected a recognition that the ADIZ might be controversial. Interviews with some Chinese experts, on the other hand, have led to the conclusion that defense officials did not “thoroughly consult” the foreign ministry before publishing its ADIZ rules and disseminating further commentary.

An official map of China’s East China Sea ADIZ was released the same day. The new zone created large overlaps with those of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. It also enclosed the disputed Senkaku Islands and Socotra Rock. Beijing’s creation of an ADIZ covering disputed territories—especially those de facto administered by other states—was provocative but not unprecedented. Every ADIZ in East Asia includes contested land features. Taiwan’s contains a swathe of mainland China, and South Korea’s envelops a third of the North Korean landmass. In the Sea of Japan, Seoul’s ADIZ covers the Liancourt Rocks, a group of islets South Korea administers but Japan claims as well. In the South China Sea, the Philippines’ zone appears to include Scarborough Shoal (controlled by China since 2012). Vietnam’s ADIZ also extends above the Chinese-occupied

Paracel Islands. As noted, Japan’s zone contains both the Senkakus and Socotra Rock. In practice, draping an ADIZ over disputed territory is rarely a prelude to a land grab. For instance, the Republic of Korea’s air force does not cross the Demilitarized Zone to police North Korean airspace. Taiwanese and Chinese fighter jets likewise abide by an informal agreement not to violate a median line dividing the Taiwan Strait.

In every public statement, Beijing’s emphasized the view that its ADIZ was consistent with “common international practices.” Senior Colonel Yang noted that over 20 countries, including Japan and the United States, had established one or more ADIZs since the 1950s. This was in accordance, the Chinese defense ministry argued, with the inherent right of self-defense enshrined in the UN Charter. China would “take timely measures to deal with air threats and unidentified flying objects from the sea,” but the ADIZ would not affect “the normal flight of international flights in the zone,” nor would it “change the legal nature of relevant airspace.” China, the spokesperson underscored, had “always respected other countries’ rights of free flight in accordance with international laws.” He finished by mentioning that China would establish additional ADIZs “at an appropriate time after completing preparations.” The Ministry of National Defense later justified its new procedures by stating, “There is no unified international rule as to how to ask other countries to report flight plans to the ADIZ demarcators.”

U.S. and Japanese commentators voiced concerns that China was seeking to turn the East China Sea into some kind of no-fly zone for foreign military aircraft. Foreign leaders worried that China would use its ADIZ to challenge intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities within the zone. A November 26 article by a Chinese defense official reinforced this concern, noting that “freedom of flight in accordance with international laws is not affected, therefore the zone will not affect any normal flight. However, this will not apply to provocative flyover and surveillance activities.” Further heightening concerns, Chinese officials disclosed on the day of the ADIZ announcement that large scouting aircraft, early warning aircraft, and fighter jets had


been deployed on the country’s first-ever official “ADIZ patrol.” A government spokesperson said the mission was meant to demonstrate that “Chinese armed forces are capable of effective control over the zone.” Japan scrambled two F-15 fighters to intercept the air patrol.25

Despite the alarm China’s announcement incited, there is little evidence that air intercepts of U.S., Japanese, or other countries’ military aircraft in the East China Sea have become more aggressive since November 2013.26 From 2010 to 2013, the frequency of Japan Air Self-Defense Force scrambles against Chinese aircraft in Japan’s ADIZ had increased significantly year-on-year. This trend continued after 2013 but at a smaller rate of increase than the previous two years.27 Nevertheless, U.S. military commanders testify that the vast majority of military-to-military encounters in the ADIZ are still conducted “professionally” at a safe distance.28

A related fear was China’s unspecified “defensive emergency measures.” Observers immediately wondered where the PLA would use force if foreign military or even civilian aircraft disobeyed Chinese directives or warnings. A military officer, Major General Qiao Liang, reinforced this impression when he told state television that China had the right to shoot down such aircraft in the ADIZ. Yet a second Chinese officer argued the same day that the PLA was authorized to strike foreign aircraft only if they intruded into Chinese territorial airspace and only after repeated warnings.29 Responding to these nonauthoritative comments on November 28, the Ministry of National Defense flatly denied that China was claiming the right to shoot down aircraft in its new ADIZ. On December 3, it further rejected the notion that Beijing sought to impose a “no-fly zone.”30 Major General Qiao later stated there had been a “misunderstanding” about his comments. To date, China has not threatened or used force against any commercial aircraft for traversing the ADIZ without filing flight plans. Initial reports notwithstanding, Beijing did not turn back

27. Japanese MOD, “China’s Activities Surrounding Japan’s Airspace.”
a Lao Airlines flight for this reason in July 2015; instead, the aircraft was attempting to enter Chinese territorial airspace without prior notice. Moreover, rather than intercept the flight, in that case Chinese aviation authorities simply contacted the pilot.31

**Phase IV: U.S. and Others Oppose with Military Flythroughs**

Regional responses to China’s ADIZ varied substantially. The United States, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan offered the most robust responses, each of which is discussed at length below. Other governments also commented on the Chinese decision. In the days after the announcement, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade summoned the Chinese ambassador and criticized the style of the announcement. Philippine foreign secretary Albert del Rosario called the ADIZ an attempt to “transform an entire air zone into China’s domestic airspace” that “compromises the national security of affected states.” European Union high representative Catherine Ashton likewise said the development “heightens the risk of escalation and contributes to raising tensions in the region.”32 These responses helped shape the regional and international debate. Nevertheless, the most relevant responses came from those directly affected by the new ADIZ: the United States and its allies and partners in Northeast Asia.

**U.S. Reaction.** The United States quickly issued protests over the announcement. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel expressed deep concern over China’s “unilateral action.” He framed it as a “destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo in the region” that would only increase “the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculations.” U.S. military operations in the region, Hagel asserted, would not be affected. The applicability of Article V of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty to the Senkaku Islands was also reaffirmed. Secretary of State John Kerry echoed these concerns, labeling China’s action as “escalatory.” Kerry also reiterated the U.S. commitment to “freedom of overflight and other internationally lawful uses of sea and airspace.” In particular, he voiced Washington’s position of not supporting “efforts by any state to apply its ADIZ procedures to foreign aircraft not intending to enter its national airspace.” Secretary Kerry urged China to “exercise caution and restraint” and not “implement its threat to take action against aircraft that do not identify themselves or obey orders from Beijing.” The State Department, Department of Defense, and White House all lodged complaints with China through diplomatic channels.33

U.S. concerns focused on the style in which China announced its ADIZ regulations as well as their actual content. Evan Medeiros later stated in 2014 that the administration saw the announcement as “a provocative and escalatory act.” He acknowledged China’s “right to establish an ADIZ” but

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called the way it was created “dangerous.” Medeiros asserted that the zone was announced “unilaterally and without prior consultation with other parties.” He also noted how “it was done over disputed territory.” In Washington’s assessment, China was using the ADIZ to advance its sovereignty claims by gradually undermining Japanese administrative control over the Senkakus. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey likewise argued that “it wasn’t the declaration of the ADIZ that actually was destabilizing.” Rather, it was how “it was done so unilaterally and so immediately without any consultation.”

The U.S. Navy kicked off its 2013 Annual Exercise with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in the East China Sea on November 25. Planned long in advance, the exercise took place east of China’s ADIZ in waters off Okinawa and Kyushu. Commenting on the joint exercise, the Seventh Fleet commander, Vice Admiral Robert Thomas, emphasized the importance of conducting “operations in international airspace as we always have” when challenged with “an extreme claim” like China’s ADIZ.

On November 26, two U.S. Air Force B-52 bombers flew through China’s East China Sea ADIZ. A Pentagon spokesperson described the flights as part of a previously scheduled training exercise. Defense Department officials, however, noted that it was intended as “a demonstration of long-established international rights to freedom of navigation and transit through international airspace.” The bombers took off from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. They then reportedly crossed into the ADIZ in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands, where they loitered for “about an hour.” Another Pentagon official said the flight was conducted without filing flight plans, radioing ahead, or registering frequencies with Chinese aviation authorities. The mission was “uneventful”; the crew reported “no contact, no reaction from China.”

Simultaneously, the PLA Navy held an exercise that some interpreted as a distant yet still restrained show of force. China’s only aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, departed its home port in Qingdao, Shandong Province on November 26 accompanied by four other warships. It steered clear of the disputed Senkaku Islands as it traveled down the east coast of China. Neither did it cross the median line when it transited the Taiwan Strait before arriving in the South China Sea for what the PLA Navy called normal “scientific research, tests, and military drills.” A week later, the USS Cowpens and a Chinese amphibious transport narrowly avoided collision when the PLA Navy ship confronted the U.S. guided missile cruiser as it was surveilling the Liaoning.

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The Chinese Ministry of National Defense issued a statement on the U.S. B-52 flight on November 27. Chinese forces were said to have “monitored the entire process, carried out identification in a timely manner, and ascertained the type of aircraft,” thus demonstrating China’s capability to exercise effective control over this airspace. Interestingly, the ministry argued the B-52 flight never actually entered the ADIZ. Instead, they allegedly flew “south to north along the eastern border of the [ADIZ] from 11:00 am to 1:22 pm Tuesday, about 200 km to the east of the [Senkaku/Diaoyu] Islands.” This would put the bombers near the Miyako Islands—well outside of China’s East China Sea ADIZ. Assuming this account is false, it was probably an attempt to mollify domestic hardliners, or perhaps to mask an operational inability to track or intercept the mission.38 Chinese officials also reported that two U.S. reconnaissance aircraft staged a second flight through China’s ADIZ on November 29, perhaps in conjunction with a deployment of 10 Japan Air Self-Defense Force aircraft.39

Despite its protests, the United States ultimately accommodated China’s filing requirement for civilian aircraft. On November 29, the State Department issued relevant guidance for U.S. commercial airlines. The press release reiterated the U.S. government’s nonrecognition of China’s air zone. However, it also expressed a general expectation that “U.S. carriers operating internationally will operate consistent with NOTAMs (Notices to Airmen) issued by foreign countries.”40 This decision followed talks between U.S. officials and airline representatives. By encouraging commercial airliners to file flight plans without explicitly endorsing the Chinese defense ministry’s requirements, the U.S. administration hoped to balance geopolitics with the safety concerns of civil aviation. Following the press release, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs voiced “appreciation” for the United States’ “constructive attitude.” In contrast to Japan—which Beijing claimed “deliberately politicizes the relevant issue” with “malicious hype”—Chinese officials welcomed Washington’s decision as embodying a commitment to “uphold . . . aviation order and security in the airspace above the East China Sea together with China.”41

On December 3, the U.S. House of Representatives issued a resolution declaring the United States’ nonrecognition of China’s ADIZ.42 Vice President Joe Biden met with Japanese prime minister

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Shinzo Abe the same day. Prime Minister Abe stated in a joint press conference that the two leaders had “confirmed that we should not tolerate the attempt by China to change status quo unilaterally by force.” He also said their military operations in the region “will not change” and warned against China taking actions “that could threaten the safety of civil aircraft.” Biden mostly echoed Abe’s comments, rebuking Beijing for its “attempt to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea.” Yet Biden also underscored the need for both China and Japan to pursue crisis management mechanisms to reduce the risk of escalation. The media interpreted the White House’s subtle shift in tone as reflecting a decision to focus “less on rolling back the defense zone than on neutralizing its impact.” Abe, though taking a harder line, did not want “the world to see any light” between Tokyo and Washington over the issue.43

Biden then met with Chinese president Xi Jinping in Beijing on December 4. Biden explained Washington’s position and expectation that Beijing would “take steps . . . to lower tensions . . . avoid enforcement actions that could lead to crisis . . . [and] establish channels of communication with Japan.” He stopped short, however, of publicly or privately demanding that China cancel its ADIZ. Biden and Xi discussed the air defense zone issue twice “at some length” over the course of a five-and-a-half-hour session.44 Biden next stopped in Seoul on December 6, reportedly in an effort to help repair South Korea-Japan ties. Biden, President Park Geun-Hye, and Prime Minister Chung Hungwon made no mention of the ADIZ issue in their joint press conferences. News had broken the previous week that Seoul was considering a southern expansion of its own ADIZ in order to cover Socotra Rock and other maritime features. According to Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, Biden said privately that he “appreciated” Park’s explanation but would not comment on whether Washington approved of her decision.45

Japanese Reaction. Japan’s response to the Chinese announcement was more critical than that of the United States. On November 25, Prime Minister Abe insisted, “We will take steps against an attempt to change the status quo by use of force as we are determined to defend the country’s sea and airspace.” He vowed that China’s regulations would have “no effect” on Japanese military or commercial flights in the East China Sea. Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida spoke before a Diet committee to urge China to “exercise self-restraint,” and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga


reiterated Japan’s claims to sovereignty over and de facto administrative control of the Senkaku Islands.46

Vice Foreign Minister Akitaka Saiki also summoned the Chinese ambassador to lodge a “stern protest.” Saiki went as far as to order China to rescind its ADIZ; the ambassador replied that Japan should “retract such an unreasonable demand.” Echoing Beijing’s May 2010 proposal, he alternatively recommended that the two neighbors “take care to take measures” to prevent incidents in the overlapping airspace. Similarly, a Chinese defense ministry spokesperson rejected Japan’s “absolutely groundless and unacceptable” criticism and demanded it cease making such “irresponsible remarks.” As noted previously, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force had meanwhile been scrambled into their overlapping ADIZs to intercept China’s ADIZ patrol. Speaking afterward, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera swore that Tokyo would “take appropriate action” in response to any intrusions of Japanese territory.47

Japanese airlines had begun filing flight plans with Chinese authorities by this time. On November 26, Tokyo then compelled All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines—the country’s two biggest carriers—to stop and effectively ignore China’s ADIZ. Japan is the only known country to not eventually accept these civil identification requirements. On December 4, the Chinese foreign ministry declared triumphantly that 55 airlines from 19 countries had already begun reporting flight plans to Beijing in accordance with the guidelines. Chinese experts warned that Tokyo’s recalcitrance was putting “the security of its citizens at stake.”48

On November 29, the Chinese defense ministry claimed it had closely monitored what appeared to be an assertion of freedom of overflight by U.S. and Japanese forces. According to a spokesperson, China scrambled Su-30 and J-11 fighter jets in an “emergency response to verify” a total of 10 Japanese aircraft, which included an early warning and control aircraft and an F-15 fighter jet. Two U.S. reconnaissance aircraft were also reported. Beijing did not specify whether the U.S. and Japanese deployments were conducted jointly. A U.S. defense spokesperson seemed to confirm the presence of routine U.S. surveillance flights in the area at the time. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said Japan had sent patrol aircraft into the East China Sea for “surveillance activities.” In contrast to China’s description, however, Defense Minister Onodera maintained that there had been “no abnormal situations” like Chinese aircraft approaching Japanese aircraft. His remarks were echoed by other officials. They claimed that Chinese aircraft, if they had indeed been scrambled, had not “come within visibility of our planes.”49

47. Ibid.
Japan also appealed to the international community to oppose China’s air defense zone. The Japanese Lower House passed a resolution on December 6 calling on China to withdraw its ADIZ—a stance voiced repeatedly by Japanese officials. On November 30, Japanese diplomats asked the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to address the issue, which Tokyo claimed “threaten[ed] the order and safety of international civil aviation.” Japan’s proposal received the backing of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, along with a fierce rejection from China. On December 14, a Japan-ASEAN summit in Tokyo issued a joint statement calling for “cooperation in ensuring the freedom of overflight and civil aviation safety in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law.”\(^50\) Japanese military and civil aircraft have continued to operate in China’s ADIZ without prior notice ever since.

**South Korean Reaction.** Seoul’s opposition to the East China Sea ADIZ was initially more restrained. On November 25, its foreign ministry summoned Chinese diplomats to protest the announcement. The South Korean defense ministry also stated that its aircraft would not notify Beijing before transiting the zone. However, this never reached the level of strident, high-profile, public criticism voiced by U.S. and Japanese officials. Seoul agreed to discuss the two countries’ overlapping ADIZs on November 28 at the third Korea-China Vice Ministerial-Level Strategic Dialogue. At the meeting, Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se raised concerns that the ADIZ had made “tricky regional situations even more difficult to deal with.” He also suggested they consider new crisis management mechanisms. Vice Defense Minister Baek Seung-joo specifically requested that his Chinese counterparts redraw the borders of their ADIZ so as not to overlap South Korea’s own zone or Socotra Rock. Baek’s request was rebuffed. Reportedly, the Chinese delegation instead tried to reassure Korean officials that the zone was aimed at Japan, not South Korea.\(^51\)

Disillusioned with its diplomatic approach, South Korea then began taking a harder line. The defense ministry publicly stated that Seoul “cannot accept Beijing’s unilateral declaration of the air zone.” It warned that Korean leaders were considering expanding the country’s own ADIZ southward and would consult with Japan and the United States. The air force then deployed a reconnaissance aircraft through China’s ADIZ without notifying Beijing; the PLA stated that it monitored the flight but did not take any countermeasures. On December 1, President Park gathered her top security officials to “explore ways to protect national interests,” including expanding the South Korean ADIZ. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport quickly ordered commercial airliners not to submit flight plans to China for just traversing the ADIZ. The Korean navy also conducted a sea and air drill near Socotra Rock on December 3.\(^52\)

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Seoul then announced a 186-mile expansion of the Korea Air Defense Identification Zone on December 8. This was its first expansion in 62 years. The enlarged ADIZ now overlapped major sections of the Chinese and Japanese ADIZs. The Ministry of National Defense explained that the new boundaries paralleled those of its internationally recognized Flight Information Region and would have no effect on commercial flights. A senior official revealed Seoul had already informed China, Japan, and the United States prior to the announcement. He emphasized that South Korea’s “top priority is to prevent accidental military clashes in the area.” The military also announced that it would increase its operational presence. Another Korea patrol aircraft flew through the overlapping region without notification the following day. At the same time, however, Seoul put forward a proposal to hold a trilateral meeting with Beijing and Tokyo to discuss how to handle their overlapping ADIZs, especially around Socotra Rock.

Even after Korea significantly expanded its own ADIZ, Beijing’s diplomatic approach to Seoul remained moderate. The Chinese foreign ministry expressed “regret” over the expansion and said it had immediately voiced “concerns” with South Korean diplomats. China called on its neighbor to act “safely and cautiously.” On the other hand, the ministry underscored that there was no “territorial dispute” between the two countries over Socotra Rock. The Chinese side noted that since the fully submerged reef is part of a disputed continental shelf, resolution would only come through “maritime negotiations.”

Japan indicated its acceptance of South Korea’s decision on December 9. Tokyo confirmed that Seoul had notified Japanese leaders in advance. Prime Minister Abe and Defense Minister Onodera reportedly gave Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga a mandate to construct a “thorough system of communication” between the two capitals over the issue. Suga told the press that Tokyo did not “think [the expansion] is going to be a problem at the moment.” He was careful to point out that Korea’s ADIZ did not envelop Japanese-administered territory. The U.S. State Department also embraced the decision. A spokesperson noted that Washington appreciated South Korea’s “commitment to implement this adjustment of its ADIZ in a manner consistent with international practice and respect for the freedom of overflight and other internationally lawful uses of international airspace.” The State Department also suggested that Korea’s expansion was less provocative because it consulted its neighbors beforehand and avoided “confusion for, or threats to, civilian airlines.”

South Korean and Japanese forces held a joint exercise in the East China Sea on December 13. The drill was reportedly planned long in advance, but it happened to take place in waters near Socotra Rock. Seoul and Tokyo each deployed a destroyer and helicopter to participate. A

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Japanese spokesperson said the drill was not “in reaction” to China’s ADIZ announcement. At the same time, he informed the press that neither government submitted flight plans or notified Chinese authorities beforehand. Meanwhile, South Korea’s Asiana Airlines and Korean Air announced they had begun submitting flight plans to China for flights transiting China’s East China Sea ADIZ irrespective of destination. South Korea’s transportation minister, Suh Seoung-hwan, said the airlines had been given “individual authority” to decide for themselves whether to comply with China’s filing requirement. The decision was said to be in no way reflective of a policy change regarding Seoul’s nonrecognition for China’s ADIZ.57

**Taiwanese Reaction.** Although Taiwan opposed China’s ADIZ announcement, its reaction was milder than that of the United States, Japan, and South Korea. On November 23, Taipei expressed grave concern and declared that Beijing’s new air defense zone would not affect its sovereignty claims over the Senkaku Islands. Taiwan’s leaders said its military would take appropriate actions in response to contingencies. Yet Taiwan also suggested that peaceful dialogue like President Ma Ying-jeou’s 2012 East China Sea Peace Initiative could help resolve disputes. Taiwanese commercial carriers were immediately ordered to obey Beijing’s identification requirements. This decision, it said, was in line with internationally recognized practices rather than a recognition of China’s East China Sea ADIZ. Seizing on this accommodationist position, the opposition Democratic Progressive Party quickly issued a resolution demanding the administration take a harder line.58

**Phase V: Potential for Additional Chinese ADIZs**

The world’s attention quickly turned to whether Beijing would establish additional ADIZs. During a visit to the Philippines in December 2013, John Kerry not only criticized China’s East China Sea ADIZ but also warned against “similar unilateral actions elsewhere in the region, and particularly over the South China Sea.”59 The Japanese press then suggested in late January 2014 that the PLA Air Force Command College had finished planning a new South China Sea ADIZ. This zone would cover at least the airspace over the Paracel Islands, which China administers but Vietnam and Taiwan also claim. Options reportedly were prepared for a much vaster ADIZ covering the entire South China Sea. It would encompass all of China’s so-called Nine-Dash Line. Due to the geographic complexity of the region and operational difficulty to enforcing such a zone, a Chinese defense source allegedly said Beijing was still “mulling when will be the best time to announce”

further ADIZs. Responding to this report, a U.S. national security council official publicly threatened to increase U.S. “presence and military posture in the region” if China were to establish another ADIZ.

Not long after, the same Japanese newspaper ran a second article once again citing anonymous Chinese insiders. Although Beijing had finished “preparations” for establishing a South China Sea ADIZ, it was reportedly holding back because of strong U.S. and ASEAN opposition. The Chinese foreign ministry, however, dismissed all of these reports. A government spokesperson explained that Beijing “has yet to feel any air security threat from the ASEAN countries and is optimistic about its relations with the neighboring countries and the general situation in the South China Sea region.” Nevertheless, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia had all publicly voiced opposition to a South China Sea ADIZ by February, especially one that covered disputed offshore islands. Later on, in May 2015 at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, PLA Deputy Chief of Staff Admiral Sun Jianguo again stated that whether China established an ADIZ in the South China Sea would be based on an assessment of its air and maritime threat environment.

Many observers have argued that the East China Sea ADIZ announcement led to a hardening of views in Washington and greater willingness to side with Japan in its maritime disputes with China. During an April 2014 state visit to Tokyo, President Obama strengthened U.S. declaratory policy toward the Senkakus issue by becoming the first sitting U.S. president to affirm that the islands are covered by the U.S.-Japan security treaty. He also echoed former secretary of state Hillary Clinton’s remarks that U.S. treaty obligations would not be affected by Chinese actions to challenge Japanese administration of the islands. This action was seen as a response to not only the Chinese ADIZ announcement, but also its increasing maritime activity in the region.

Conclusions

First, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the United States or its allies and partners to actually prevent China from declaring an ADIZ. Beijing’s announcement was an administrative step that did not involve any physical action that external actors could directly oppose. This is similar to codifying new fishing bans or proclaiming new domestic laws for disputed features, which is separate from their actual enforcement. The most promising form of pressure on Beijing in this case likely would have been diplomatic. Beijing did not seem to anticipate that many states would perceive its action as so threatening and destabilizing. China might have modified or abandoned the ADIZ announcement if international opposition had been coordinated in advance.

Second, regional capitals appeared unwilling to mobilize a broad coalition to oppose the ADIZ. Beijing was able to exploit divisions by targeting certain states and reassuring others. The fact that China enjoys the legal right to establish ADIZs, as well as the precedents set by the United States and others, reduces the likelihood of successful deterrence. China’s rapid construction of three airfields in the Spratly Islands has already enhanced its ability to enforce a prospective future ADIZ in the South China Sea. Moreover, China designed its East China Sea ADIZ partly as a response to Japan’s 2012 nationalization of the Senkaku Islands. If Chinese leaders establish additional ADIZs, they are likely to portray them as defensive, legitimate reactions to worsening security threats.

Third, although deterring China from establishing an ADIZ may be difficult, shaping what China does with it is much more feasible. After the East China Sea ADIZ announcement, civilian airlines expressed a clear preference for obeying China’s identification and flight plan regulations due to safety and insurance concerns. Many regional militaries, however, moved quickly to deter Beijing from what they feared might be an attempt to restrict freedom of overflight in international airspace. On the other hand, there is little evidence that China hoped to impose any kind of no-fly zone, as such an escalation would have risked a major conflict with its neighbors and the United States. Both before and since the ADIZ announcement, China has conducted the vast majority of its air-to-air intercepts in the East China Sea professionally. Additionally, the PLA appeared to exhibit operational difficulties in monitoring and intercepting foreign military flights in its new ADIZ. This capability will undoubtedly improve over time.

Finally, the United States and others (except South Korea) have not expressed an interest in engaging China over the establishment of and rules within ADIZs, apparently out of a fear of weakening deterrence and accommodating revisionism. Even in the East China Sea where China’s and Japan’s zones cover multiple disputed territories and overlap with those of every other country in the region, no government has undertaken a serious initiative for agreements or confidence-building measures specifically addressing the issue. At the same time, officials have little confidence that a policy of public opposition and nonrecognition will succeed in deterring a Chinese South China Sea ADIZ over the medium term. This not only precludes a more robust dialogue that could contribute to peace and stability through greater consultations and strategic reassurance, but may also unnecessarily harm the credibility of the United States and its allies.