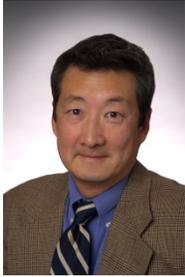


KOREA CHAIR PLATFORM

Korea's Mistake on China's ADIZ Controversy

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The Republic of Korea appropriately protested China's November 23 announcement of the creation of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) through foreign ministry and defense ministry channels last week. But there was some disturbing information that surfaced over the weekend. The ROK defense ministry used already scheduled bilateral talks with China to quietly request that China re-write the ADIZ to remove the overlap with that of Korea.

In one sense, this latter request is understandable. While China's ADIZ has a fat overlap with that of Japan, for the ROK the issue is that China's ADIZ overlaps with a thin sliver of Korea's ADIZ (KADIZ) off the southern island of Jeju, where the Chinese claim of 20-by-115 kilometer of sky encroaches on airspace already patrolled by the ROK Air Force. Included within the Chinese zone is a ROK-controlled submerged rock known as Ieodo in Korean. This rock, known in Chinese as the Suyan Rock, and internationally as the Socotra Rock, has been historically disputed between the ROK and China over its ownership, and consequently whether it belongs in the Korean or Chinese Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The ROK built the Ieodo Ocean Research Center, an unmanned scientific station on the rock in 2003, which lies 149 kilometers south of the Mara Island near Jeju to great objections from the Chinese.

The Chinese ADIZ creates a list of new identification rules – flight plan, radio, transponder, and logo – that governs any foreign aircraft, military or civilian, flying within the ADIZ. These planes must now identify themselves to Beijing, either to the Chinese Foreign Ministry or the



civil aviation administration. Civilian airlines may choose not to identify themselves in advance, as Japanese aircraft have declared in an act of non-recognition of the zone, but this may prompt Chinese interceptions, which could be extremely dangerous.

On the other hand, however, Seoul's proposal to revise Beijing's ADIZ constituted an effort to "de-link" Korea's problems from that of the United States and Japan. If Beijing had agreed to remove Jeodo rock from its ADIZ, would Seoul then have tacitly accepted China's zone? This is entirely the wrong action. By addressing Korea's concerns about the ADIZ only, Seoul's ploy would have essentially abandoned the concerns of Tokyo and Washington's, both of whom have wholly rejected China's claims.

Thankfully, Beijing rejected outright Seoul's proposal, evincing its own determination to hold fast on its new zone. But if China had accepted the idea, would the Park government then have no longer associated itself with Tokyo and Washington's protest? Is South Korea's downward spiraling relationship with Japan generating a more permanent leaning of Korea away from its traditional alliances with Washington and Tokyo to seek accommodations with China? This might have seemed like a clever tactical move to salvage the great relationship that Park Guen-hye has developed with Xi Jinping, but in the long-term it would have been a mistake of colossal proportions. This is because China's route to becoming a hegemon in the region is to do just what Seoul wanted on the ADIZ. That is, China would prefer to cut separate deals with each of the smaller countries around it rather than deal with united opposition from all of them. This so-called "divide and conquer" strategy is historically what enables rising powers to shift the status quo in their favor. It is the strategy that China is trying to pursue in the Southeast Asia as well.

Seoul made the wrong play on China's ADIZ. Beijing's flat rejection of the proposal saved the Koreans from their own poor judgment. Now, the Park government has no choice but to stand with the United States, Australia, and Japan in staunch opposition to the ADIZ. Perhaps this was not Seoul's first choice, but it is the smarter long-term strategic play. Cutting an individual "deal" with China only further isolates the ROK from its allies and sets it up to be dominated by China.

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