

CRISIS IN THE EAST CHINA SEA

The East China Sea is aptly named, cradled between mainland China and Japan's Ryukyu Islands to the east with South Korea and Taiwan to the north and south, respectively. This sea is small but has led international news intermittently since Saturday, November 23, 2013, when the People's Republic of China Ministry of National Defense announced the creation of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), which requires all aircraft passing through the zone to identify themselves to Chinese authorities. The announcement included a warning that those who refused to identify themselves may face undefined defensive measures. This outraged Taiwan and South Korea, but especially Japan, whose ADIZ already covers much of the East China Sea.

On Sunday, November 24th, the Chinese reinforced their statement by sending two aerial patrols over the zone. The next day, two unarmed US B-52 aircraft left Guam and traveled into the disputed zone to make the point that the United States government does not acknowledge the unilateral Chinese declaration of territorial rights over the East China Sea. Scheduled prior to China's announcement, combined US and Japanese military drills and exercises off Okinawa with the USS George Washington, also provided a symbolic show of non-compliance. November 2013 ended with posturing on all sides as China

sent its sole aircraft carrier and several fighter jets through the region, the US deployed two spy planes, and Japan sent 10 aircraft, including fighter jets, of their own.

China's announcement has been viewed as a challenge to the United States' presence in the region and strategically part of China's desire to push US military might out past the first chain of islands, leaving China to assert greater authority. While the US military has defied China, commercial airlines have been playing by China's rules to protect their crews and passengers. Airlines such as Delta, United, and American conformed to the notice almost immediately, whereas Japan's airlines continue to fly through the zone without notifying China, at their government's request. Japan fears that if their commercial flights agree to this demand it would legitimize China's increasing territorial ambitions in the

China's control over the air, it would weaken Japan's position on the land and in the water. The United States recognizes Japan's de facto administrative control of the islands and has a longstanding pledge to defend the area from attack under Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty, making China's actions all the more confrontational.

Difficulties between Japan and China go back to a fundamental mutual distrust and misperception. Due to China's tendency to overreact, it is often perceived as a bully. China resents Japan's perceived lack of remorse for their brutal occupation during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) that left at least 20 million Chinese dead and 15 million wounded. With the war more than sixty years in the past, Japanese education skirts over the atrocities committed generations earlier, leaving the Japanese people distanced from their history and unable to appreciate Chinese sentiment.

China, on the other hand, with its top-down government teaches about Japanese atrocities from middle school through college, keeping it raw in the public consciousness and fueling ethnic loathing.

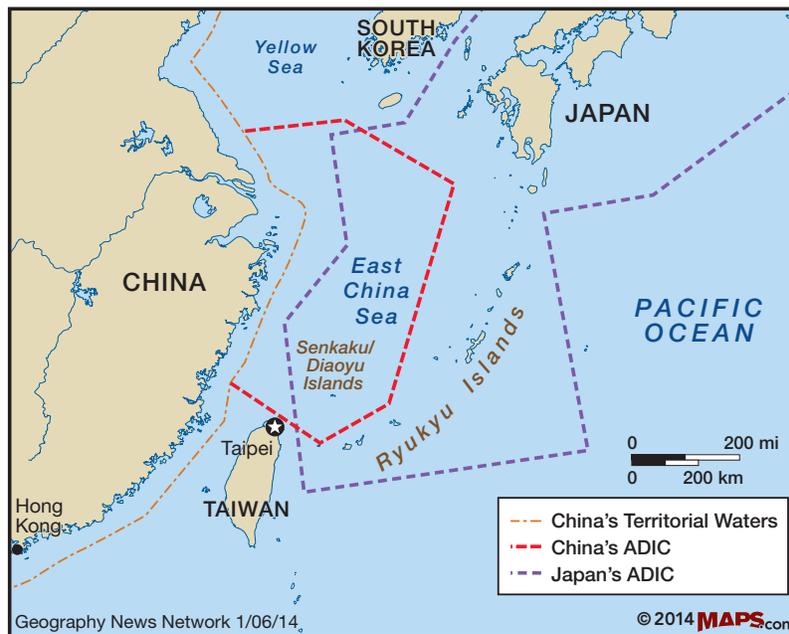
The loathing appears to be mutual as Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe increased the country's military spending to \$52.5 billion in 2013 in response to China's military expansion. Currently, Abe's working to amend the Japanese constitution to exercise the right of collective self

defense, something Japan hasn't had since the end of WWII. On December 7th, Japan's lower house of parliament collectively adopted a resolution urging China to rescind its ADIZ over the East China Sea, which the Chinese rejected outright.

On Sunday, December 8th, South Korea announced it planned to add 25,000 square miles to its ADIZ in the East China Sea, overlapping both Japan and

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region.

Current leadership in both countries appears to be more hard-line than their predecessors; however, tension between China and Japan is not new. Within the contested zone lie a group of islands called the Senkaku Islands by the Japanese and Diaoyu Islands by the Chinese, and both claim sovereignty over the uninhabited islands, oil-rich waters, and important shipping routes. Should Japan acquiesce to

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China's ADIZ's. Japan and China have shown little concern over South Korea's actions as South Korea consulted Japan, China, and the US prior to the announcement and does not require commercial airlines to identify themselves. China's amicability towards South Korea underscores the diplomatic chill between China and Japan.

Historically, criticizing both the US and Japan has provided a good diversionary and uniting tactic for China

when domestic affairs become tense. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, a hotbed of nationalism for the Chinese, is one of several proven distractions from bad loans, growing income disparity, corruption, reforming the hukou home registration system, and environmental degradation. Regardless of the leadership's intentions, President Xi has pledged to avoid Chinese humiliation by foreign powers on the subject of Taiwan, Tibet, etc. President Xi will need to use diversions carefully if the

population now expects him to not back down.

As China's economic dominance in the region continues to grow, calm and open communication with Japan can benefit both countries. Japanese-American relations show that historical conflict can be overcome when both sides look toward the future and its possibilities rather than past grievances.

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QUESTIONS:

1. What peaceful resolution would you suggest for China and Japan regarding the contested islands and the air-space?
2. What could both Chinese and Japanese educational systems do to lessen ethnic tension?
3. Is the role the US plays in the East Asian realm important now? What role should the US play?

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