

CHAPTER 10

Maritime Security Challenges Preoccupy Beijing

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Maritime security has been identified by Beijing as its most serious security challenge for a long time to come. Its gravity can be measured by the PLA prediction that China's future military action would be most likely naval warfare in the West Pacific, caused by territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas (ESCSs). The recent escalation of diplomatic tension in Asia due to China's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) declaration on 23 November 2013 reveals the potential danger of a military standoff if ADIZ is enforced with vigor in contested areas of maritime domains.

In my papers presented to NIDS conferences over the last two years, I argued that China's deeply-seated security worries were keenly related to the US pivot that had squeezed China's strategic space in Asia. As an outcome I analyzed a number of security challenges Beijing regarded as critical to its security-making. The following lists some of them: 1) increasingly more visible coalition-building by countries with concerns of China's rise; 2) prospects of the PLA being dragged into multiple battlefields simultaneously due to territorial disputes; 3) worsening territorial disputes that trigger standoffs that hurt China more than other claimants; 4) the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) guidance for enhancing the military elements of US hedging strategy against China's military rise; and 5) the North Korea hazard that was worsened by the unsettled political succession. These are strategic challenges China has had to cope with on a daily basis over the last few years.

This year I will analyze three new security threats troubling Beijing's new leaders: 1) the US island chain strategy and deployment that poses mounting threats to China's maritime security; 2) PLAN vulnerability in protecting China's vital sea-lane of communications (SLOC); and 3) backlash against China's ADIZ. All these exert strategic ramifications on the regional security order that undergoes structural reshaping. Compared with the issues I raised in previous years, these are relatively narrowly focused and appear not as strategic. Yet they have no less impact on the defense sector in the region.

US Island-Chain Strategy against Chinese Naval Expansion

In military terms Beijing is increasingly worried about strengthened US military deployment along the two island-chains in the West Pacific that can be used to blockade Chinese SLOCs.¹ In July 2013 Herbert Carlisle, chief of the US Pacific Air Force Command, revealed a plan to enhance US forward presence in the Indo-Pacific region as part of the US Asia pivot. It included reopening of suspended military bases, such as Saipan; more regular troop visits to allies and partners to secure semi-permanent basing facilities; and quickened transfers of strategic and tactical capabilities to places close to Asian hot spots. In addition to US marine deployment in Darwin, the US Air Force will send jets to Changi air base in Singapore, Korat air base in Thailand, Trivandrum in India, and possibly bases at Kubi Point and Puerto Princesa in the Philippines and airfields in Indonesia and Malaysia.² PLA commanders see these efforts in light of America translating the geographically convenient islands-chains into naval containment belts against China's commercial SLOCs and westward and southward PLAN movements.³ Indeed they depicted this offensive Pivot as rekindling a Cold-War islands-chains strategy and mentality against China.⁴ This sense was substantiated by Carlisle's allusion that "Back in the late, great days of the Cold War, we had a thing called *Checkered Flag*: We rotated almost every CONUS (Continental United States) unit to Europe, we're turning to that in the Pacific."⁵

The Perceived US Islands-Chain Strategy against China

China perceives that militarizing the island-chains through enhancing old bases and creating new ones represents true "strings of pearls" in US military planning. Once connected together the "strings" constitute oceanic frontiers to check PLAN expansion in a horizontal S-Shape line of encirclement from Alaska to West Africa. Indeed this islands-chain strategy incrementally erodes PLAN space of maneuvering beyond its normal areas of activity and puts Chinese SLOC safety at greater risks. It confirms a long-time PLA concern that the forward basing chains along the islands

¹ The chain starts from Japan to Liuqu islands to Taiwan to the Philippines. It is strategically backed up by the second islands chain from Japan's Ogasawa-gunto islands to the Ito-retto islands to the Mariana Islands.

² John Reed, "US deploying jets around Asia to keep China surrounded," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 29 July 2013.

³ Senior colonel Li Li's comments to *New Defense Watch*, the CCTV Military Channel (7), 31 August 2013.

⁴ Li Jie and Liu Weixing, "论岛屿锁链的战略地位及其影响" (The strategic status of the islands chains and their impact), *Journal of the PLA National Defence University*, no. 12, 2000, p. 24.

⁵ John Reed, "US deploying jets around Asia to keep China surrounded," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 29 July 2013.

chains make worse a natural geographic constraint on combat PLAN reach.⁶

Yet constructing an encirclement chain around China is rooted in US perception of Chinese naval challenge to its maritime dominance. US sea power requires a robust constellation of bases to support power projection and Asia pivot.⁷ Rekindling an islands-chain strategy is partially a US response to the PLAN's visible increase in sails through narrow passes in the West Pacific. To Beijing it is an offensive move to consolidate US naval superiority against inevitable PLAN expeditionary missions in the region and beyond. And it translates the Pentagon's ASB doctrinal guidance into war planning.⁸ ASB is conceptualized as an effective way to maintain an US military edge against the PLA, but its effectiveness depends on new posturing, new basing facilities, and new troop deployment. Matching forward deployment with geographic convenience is indeed a cost-effective way to hedge against China's naval power projection in the region.

Therefore the islands-chain strategy is designed to operationalize the island-chain concept into combat readiness. This concept was the brainchild of Secretary Dulles in 1951 but its implementation against China has not been tangible until recently. Objectively the PLAN has until recently confined its major activities within its adjacent waters (500 kilometers from the coast) due to its slow growth in war-fighting capability. "Breaking" the first islands-chain was not its immediate strategic objective in PLA transformation in the 20th century. The PLA design to undo any islands-chain blockade was more in the form of air and missile strikes than naval intrusion. This reality did not raise any urgency for the US to substantiate the islands-chain defense line.

Geographically, therefore there are natural faulty spots in the two islands-chains as employable lines of blockade against China. For instance, PLA analysts have lately talked about the third-islands chain radiating from Hawaii. However, it is more like dots than a line. The second islands-chain is quite short with few islands turned into military assets. The first islands chain is an effective line of offense, defense, and blockade. However, it is marked with broken and vulnerable sections. Consequently

⁶ Major general Jin Yinan, "国家的统一与国家的可持续发展"(National reunification and national sustainable development), *Journal of the PLA National Defence University*, no. 12, 2000, p. 24.

⁷ Erickson, Andrew (2013), *Rebalancing U.S. Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific*.

⁸ Andrew Krepinovich, *Why AirSea Battle*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2010.

PLA planners see the islands chains containing both strategic merits and perils.⁹ When the geographic features are translated into viable combat guidance, its usefulness cannot be ideally realized if those “short plates in a basket” are not fixed.

Constructive Measures of the US and Its Allies

Restructuring basing arrangements concretely materializes the US military Pivot embedded in an Indo-Pacific notion that brings South Asia into the geostrategic network against China.¹⁰ Generally speaking, it is about thickening the first islands-chain defense with new basing facilities along crucial waterways and stretching it southeastward to link with the Indian Ocean; strengthening the second islands-chain in the north, and extending it southward to connect Australia; and arranging necessary joints between the first and the second, and the second and the third islands chains to create more strategic depth for the first and second island chains. PLA strategists see this as new battle-field construction by the US and its allies to deal with the scenario where the PLAN is able to break the first island chain and engage them in major naval warfare between the first and second island chains. The purpose is still to contain Chinese naval expansion in the West Pacific.¹¹

In the first islands-chain the US and its allies have taken a number of measures to address vulnerable points, including strengthening US presence in the weakest link in the first line of defense, e.g., the Philippines. Primarily this is done under the troop visit agreement that facilitates US military return to the Subic Bay. The Filipino navy will build a new pier and harbor at its naval base in Palawan. Basing facilities are also proposed in the Mindanao Island.¹² These form a subic-centered strategic triangle sustaining not only the US pivot but also endangering Chinese SLOCs through the SCS. Now, frequent visits of US nuclear submarines and carrier groups, semi-permanent deployment of US marines, and regular US surveillance flights in SCS regions have put China under constant pressure in its routine patrols in the dispute areas. For instance, compared with Japanese controlled waterways, the Bushi Strait is a relatively easy but crucial corridor for the PLAN South Sea Fleet (PLANSSF) to reach the West Pacific. The Taiwan side of the Strait

⁹ Li Jie and Liu Weixing, “论岛屿锁链的战略地位及其影响,” p. 25.

¹⁰ Michael McDevitt, “America’s New Security Strategy and its Military Dimension,” *Global Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2012.

¹¹ Senior colonel Li Li

¹² *Kyodo News*, 20 November 2013. For instance, another X-Band Radar station may be created, although such a station may be more used to detect North Korean missile launches than against the PLAN activities.

presents less threat with the KMT in power and the weak Filipino navy poses no realistic challenge to the effort. Therefore the PLA is watching closely how US troop visits will strengthen this weak spot.¹³

Another seemingly soft spot in the first-islands-chain defense line is Japan's southwestern islands that connect Taiwan. The Japanese Cold-War posture prioritized the northern tip in the chain with the USSR as the targeted adversary to the effect that the islands beyond Okinawa were deprived of necessary defense assets. In the wake of Senkakus/Diaoyus (S/D) standoffs, routine Chinese patrols in the ECS and increasingly more regular PLA "passing through" activities in the West Pacific, Tokyo has endeavored to enhance SDF basing arrangements in the southwest direction, partially out of its own security needs and partially for matching the US islands chain strategy. Among these efforts are six intelligence/signal imagery stations in Japan's main islands and a new X-Band radar station in Kyoto to monitor North Korean and PLA activities. Southwest offshore islands are designated as hosts for SDF troop relocation to quicken reaction for an S/D crisis. For instance, air force and naval facilities such as radar stations in Yonaguni Jima, Naha Jima, or Ishigaki Island can help control strategic waterways south of Miyako Jima. The likely deployment of marine corps and supporting equipment, such as Global Eagles and MV-22s, will effectively rectify potential "void points" in Japan's section of the first island chain.¹⁴ Simultaneously, improved SDF rapid response capabilities against an ECS scenario weaken PLA combat effectiveness in times of confrontation, much to the worry of PLA strategists. For example, PLAN experts point out that since there are very few water-ways from the Tsugaru Strait in the north to the Miyako Jima in the south, enhanced SDF surveillance facilities, e.g., new P-8As, around the choke passes increase vulnerability of PLA strategic nuclear submarines entering vast expanses of waters in the Pacific for launching SLBMs.¹⁵ Specifically, the Miyako Strait can cut southern access for surface combatants of the PLANSSF to join warships of the Eastern/Northern Sea fleets in the West Pacific. The SDF has deployed Type-88 surface-to-ship missiles in islands of both sides of the Strait, accidentally in line with the RAND advice to conceal Chinese SLOCs by

¹³ Comments by senior colonel Fang Bing, the National Defense University. *Two Taiwan Strait Watch* (海峡两岸), CCTV-4, 19 November 2013.

¹⁴ Editorial of *Nikkei Daily*, 21 May 2013, quoted by Sun Xiuping "日监视部队欲进驻与那国岛" (Japanese monitoring troops to enter Yonaguni Jima), *Global Times*, 23 May 2013.

¹⁵ Interview with PLA expert Song Xinzhì (宋心知), *Military Decoding*, Beijing TV Station, 18 October 2013.

land-based anti-ship missiles. This will force the PLA to use long-range precision strikes to neutralize them to clear way for its naval vessels in times of crisis.¹⁶

The first-islands chain phases out below the Philippines in its narrow definition. Strategically this incomplete line may disrupt the US blockade of China in war. US efforts to strengthen this chain line since Pivot has expanded the previously narrow purview of the chain further to the Indian Ocean that has greatly enriched Pentagon's new island-chain strategy. Permanent deployment of Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore can conceal the Malacca Strait in a Sino-US crisis that may amount to choke China's economic life-line. The proposed routine US naval visits to Camranh Bay in Vietnam would help restrict PLAN movement in the SCS if the Spratly dispute evolves into confrontation. Further east PLA analysts are wary about the talk of the US renting a strategically positioned island from India to enhance its air strike power for SLOC operations in the Indian Ocean.¹⁷ This would match the US air base in Diego Garcia, capable of handling strategic bombers such as the B-52.

The islands chain strategy in regard to the second-island chain is more ambitious. The reopening of the Saipan Airport for US strategic bombers will be a significant reinforcement of the Guam military base. Guam and Saipan can then form a greater Guam military region as the core of the second-islands-chain line of defense vis-à-vis PLAN projection of power. Here the division of labor is more fine-tuned: Guam is home for forward US naval deployment in the West Pacific and Saipan extends the Guam base by hosting strategic and tactical US air force. Strategic bombers, F-22s and drones are crucial for offensive US campaigns in the region and in defense constitute an impenetrable fire-wall shielding Hawaii. More importantly, the value of Guam and Saipan Islands lies in it retrenching the fist for better punches: their distance from continental Asia protects them from the enemy's direct attack but its long punches can still reach the enemy.

The construction of an intelligence/signal imagery station in Iwo Jima is an effective measure to strengthen the second islands chain line of defense against PLAN westward movement. It will be crucial to check PLAN activities through tackling a weak spot in the chain strategy. Once completed in 2017 it can provide valuable early

¹⁶ Fang Bing, CCTV-4, 19 November 2013.

¹⁷ *Military decoding*, Beijing TV, 30 August 2013.

warning against PLA missile launches, air force flights and warship movements.¹⁸

Another prospect of the second islands chain defense is its southward extension to Australia's northwest waters, where dense Chinese ships sail in the southern route. 2,500 marines in Darwin are not just symbolic. As expeditionary units they can serve as a crack force for rapid reactions in SCS situations.¹⁹ Moreover, the institutionalized visits by US carrier groups and strategic bombers to Perth or Brisbane will enhance operationality of the second islands chain.²⁰ The Indo-Pacific concept that forms a component of ASB guidance in regard to SLOC warfare will be also further substantiated, as the added forces and basing facilities conveniently put the crucial joints of the two oceans under tighter allied control. The combat zones in the SCS and in the Indian Ocean are thus geo-strategically linked.²¹

Militarizing islands-chain is a true "string of pearls" strategy with well-defined objectives and substantial supporting measures. Although an on-going project, once completed, the various chains get connected and form a huge S-shape "snake" starting from Alaska, through the South and West Pacific, the Malacca Strait to the Indian Ocean and ending in Africa.²² A big financial gap exists between a functioning islands-chain strategy and required capability in the wake of US sequestration. Yet US allies/partners can collectively help narrow the gap. Thus the US islands-chain endeavor is cost-effective when the needs are inflated but means are structurally short.²³ Pentagon may not create new bases but re-use those already there. Geographic advantages and the allied help present the US an economical way to make up the balance.

Blocking Chinese SLOCs and Naval Power Projection

An operational US islands-chain strategy poses a serious threat to China's SLOC

¹⁸ Senior colonel Meng Xiangqing's comments in *News in Focus Today*, CCTV-4, 21 September 2013.

¹⁹ Rear admiral Yin Zuo's comments in *Deep Analysis of World Affairs* (深度国际), 26 November 2012.

²⁰ CSIS Report *Strategic US Military Posture in the Asia-Pacific Region*, cited in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August 2012.

²¹ On SLOC warfare in the Indian-Pacific region in the ASB guidance, see Andrew Krepinevich, *Why AirSea Battle*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2010.

²² Senior colonel Fang Bing's comments in Cross the Taiwan Strait, CCTV-4, 8 October 2013.

²³ For instance, using land-based anti-ship missile to conceal Chinese SLOCs is only one of the methods that US allies can help, as suggested by RAND. It is only a supplement to other methods that the US is most capable, such as submarine warfare and air superiority. Comments by senior colonel Du Wenlong, *New Defense Observer* (防务新时空), Shanghai Satellite TV, 9 December 2013.

safety, which is a precondition for its economic rise and more practically, determines its socio-political stability. For instance, when consumers do not have gasoline to refuel their cars, the issue becomes highly charged with political significance. This challenge of energy security can be regime threatening. The impact is profound.

The first islands chain geographically semi-conceals China's maritime domain, especially in the section of the ECS, which shields the Chinese east coast with a very thin defense shelter. So it is difficult for the PLA to prevent direct precision bombardment against the Chinese industrial heartland from within the first islands chain (500 km from the coast). This geographic feature makes the ECS at once the front and last line of defense of east China. One of the purposes of the Chinese ADIZ is to allow the PLA more early warning time so that military facilities can be better mobilized to deal with an unexpected crisis. The extraordinarily long north-south coastal feature combined with the shallow east-west defense depth stakes the survival of PLAN on major sea battles, and they cannot maneuver effectively, as PLA ships can be easily concealed from their home bases, cut off in the Taiwan Strait, and then exposed to enemy's direct attacks. The first Sino-Japanese sea battle in 1894 well proved this natural Chinese naval vulnerability, embedded in the tyranny of the islands-chains. For instance, 60% of China's seaborne trade and 80% of its oil import go through the narrow passes in the Indo-Pacific to ports all over the world.²⁴ This serves as a second Chinese security worry in meeting the mounting maritime security challenges. More concretely, China's vulnerable SLOCs require the PLAN to project power along international waterways so that its commercial shipment can be protected in times of crisis but China's maritime geography simply provides ideal conditions for its adversaries to blockade the PLAN in projecting power, both from the near seas and more so globally.

In meeting the challenge, the PLAN has to extend its geo-strategic space of maritime defense through power projection beyond the first islands chain. This generates two unique patterns of PLAN evolution. First, due to China's semi-confined coast, the navy must embed power projection in land-based aerospace and missile assets. This means that its effective defense of the near seas depends more on the support from other PLA services in obtaining sea control within the first islands chain

²⁴ “航海纪实，第五集：南海航线” (SCS travel diary Part 5 The SCS SLOCs), CCTV-4 28 November 2013.

through acquiring “comprehensive capability to win sizeable tactical campaigns,”²⁵ and sea denial beyond the first islands chain with expeditionary task groups. This is a Chinese ASB version conducted in two developmental stages: a solid defensive line within the first islands chain in the near future, and a more offensive maneuvering beyond it once the PLA achieves air control power to assist naval campaigns in the *near seas*, i.e., with a few aircraft carriers around 2030.²⁶

Second, given superior US naval power in controlling the narrow passes in the West Pacific and China’s geographic disadvantages, the PLAN either has to be extraordinarily offensive, able to enlarge its defense depth to neutralize the threats of a direct attack from a close range, or remain generally defensive in force posture in the near seas, taking shelter of the PLA’s strong land-based aerospace and missile power.

The first choice is ambitious and enormously demanding financially and technologically. It drives the PLAN in continuous eastward and southward expansion, which encounters Japan’s westward naval activity for SLOC protection of 1,000 n.m. and alarms the US about freedom of navigation. The PLAN has to be powerful enough to overwhelm a possible allied challenge based on their superior air and naval power.²⁷

The second choice for the PLAN is to be safer in weapons development and less ostensible in regional and global politics. China’s aerospace and missile power has extended combat range to cover at least 1,000 n.m. beyond its coast. In September 2013 the PLAN Air Force dispatched two H-6Gs to fly over international airspace above the Miyakojima waterway, a rare move of PLA sub-strategic bombers beyond the national borders. The PLA’s claim that this was routine combat training signaled that it targeted the second islands chains as its potential battlefield. H-6Gs are nuclear capable and equipped with supersonic YJ-12 anti-ship missiles and long-range precision LACMs. H-6Gs can be a carrier killer (strike beyond the defense range of carrier battle groups (CBG)).²⁸ Reporters depicted the move as reflecting

²⁵ Su, Yinrong (苏银荣2004) “海军战役应贯彻小集群机动作战的指导思想” (Naval campaigns should be conducted under the guidance of small cluster and mobile operations), *Journal of PLA National Defence University*, No. 3, p. 31.

²⁶ Major general Xu Guangyu comments in *Global Zero Distance*, Guangdong TV, 17 August 2013.

²⁷ For instance, in addition to two natural island chains which impede Chinese naval movement, the US carrier groups can be regarded as moving naval containment chains against the PLAN’s combat manoeuvring.

²⁸ Senior colonel Fan Bing’s comments in *Military Decoding*, Beijing TV, 17 September 2013.

Chinese attempts to capture Japan's offshore islets.²⁹ This overstated the Chinese intention, as Beijing has no plan to capture any islands under Japan's control.³⁰ But to the PLA the move was indeed significant in that it was the first combat training of PLA strategic bombers around the first islands chain. It familiarizes the naval air wing with the geographic environment and combat situation in a relatively weak section of the allied defense. The bombers are also trained to provide air cover for Carrier Liaoning to conduct trial navigations in the West Pacific in the future.³¹

The PLA missile force can also pose serious threats to the enemy's forward deployment in the West Pacific. For instance, once operational, the DF-21B anti-ship missiles can strike targets of value within the second islands chain.³² Together with the navy they can establish effective battle lines over 1,000 km from the Chinese coast in way of sea denial for the purpose of enlarging the naval defense depth. This can be achieved without CBG. For instance, H-6Gs can launch Changjian cruise missiles to hit Hawaii.

The two options of building the PLAN as an expeditionary force or a coastal force with the capability of extended power projection reflects Beijing's on-going strategic debate on naval development with significant implications on China's overall national defense policy. The former option has an orientation of defensive offense that requires sizeable expeditionary fleets to expand combat posturing against a potential American blockade as far as possible. If the PLAN's combat reach is sufficiently outward, it can shield China's east coast more effectively, although with a huge budgetary cost, e.g., in forming very expensive carrier-centric expeditionary fleets.

The second choice may be more realistic and less risky. A less ambitious maritime defense line radiating from home waters makes the PLAN a regional navy with less demanding capabilities, force structure, C4ISR architecture, and overseas logistic

²⁹ 产经新闻 11 September 2013.

³⁰ The PLA National Defense University has a series of simulation exercises on capture and defense S/D islands and come to a conclusion that even if the islands can be taken with relative ease, it is not defensible if sea control and air control is not established. This is where the PLA is short of capabilities. Executive general chief of staff General Qi Jianguo reiterated in 2013 Shangri-la Dialogue that China would follow Deng Xiaoping's guiding principle of S/D dispute management, namely leaving it to the next generations to resolve.

³¹ Fan Bing, Beijing TV, 17 September 2013.

³² Ashley Tellis, (eds.), *Strategic Asia-2012-2013: China's Military Challenge*, Seattle: National Bureau of Asia Research, 2012.

supply. Specifically this means that CBGs are not essential, thus saving money for other more cost-effective weapons systems, such as nuclear attack submarines that poses more asymmetric threats to China's enemies in deep oceans.³³ Facing land-based air and missile assets, US fleets would pay an expensive price fighting in the proximity of the Chinese coast.

Beijing's carrier decision may have allowed the first choice to be the guide for naval transformation, although it is less deprived from an ambition to become a top naval power than dictated by tyranny of geography. CBGs require powerful escort warships, often composed of two nuclear attack submarines, a few area air defense destroyers, a number of sea-control destroyers and frigates for ASW and other combat needs, and a replenishment ship. And once a state has one carrier in the arsenal, the logic of combat requirement would dictate it to have at least one or two backups. Now the PLAN has decided to have two follow-ups for Carrier Liaoning that are a similar design, although a bit larger in terms of displacement. This plan is not as expensive as having nuclear-powered ones, although it is still a very ambitious expansion.

In the early 1990s, PLA generals sought alternative continental pass-ways to avoid the West Pacific choke points so that damage from the US blockade to China's SLOCs along its eastern flank could be offset. This was a passive countermeasure to deal with the blockade challenges. However, this indicates that since the PLAN's formative years, anti-blockade operations have been a PLA reference target for war.³⁴ The Navy's eagerness to acquire CBGs reflects Beijing's more assertive approach toward countering the blockade challenge by investing more on naval expeditionary capabilities. In terms of hardware development, the PLAN has since the mid-1990s initiated two impressive rounds of adding capital ships into the service. 2013 was the year of great capability enhancement for the PLAN, 23 committed or on sea trial, including 18 056 light frigates, 6 054 stealth frigates, 2 052C *Aegis* destroyers, 1 071 amphibious ship (LHA 20,000 tons), 2 094 strategic submarines, 1 submarine rescue ship, 2 conventional submarine with AIP and 2 large supply ships.³⁵ In December it

³³ Lyle Goldstein and William Murray, "Undersea Dragons: China's Maturing Submarine Force," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2004, pp. 161-196.

³⁴ You Ji, "The Evolution of China's Maritime Combat Doctrines and Models," *IDSS Working Paper*, no. 22, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, the Singapore Nanyang Technological University, May 2002.

³⁵ *New in focus today*, CCTV-4, 5 January 2014.

successfully tested Jiuliang-2, a SLBM with a range of over 8,000 km just days after the two tests of DF-41 with a range of 12,000 km. The ultimate total force strength of the PLAN was projected as approaching one-third of that of the US navy.³⁶

In terms of combat training the air force and the navy has routinized the “passing-through” into the second islands chain. The frequency was two or three sails a year a decade ago, but now is one or two a month. Since 2010 the PLA has arranged 30 errands of over 100 naval platforms to go through the first islands chain. And the nature of the missions has also changed. Firstly, it is no longer just sailing through, but more combat oriented. Secondly, the gravity of naval maneuvering has shifted to the areas in-between the first and second islands chains, as China’s space of interests expands. Thirdly, the scale of war games has substantially enlarged. For the first time in PLAN history, all of its three fleets staged a joint exercise in the second islands chain in October 2013.³⁷ This prepared for the *Laoning* CBG to enter the zone in 2014. The flight of the PLA drones into the Japanese ADIZ in September 2013 was a new endeavor in this regard and could create a new pattern of Chinese challenges to Japan’s ADIZ.³⁸ PLA strategists are worried about Prime Minister Abe’s approval to down PLA drones around S/D. They saw it as a lowering of the threshold of military confrontation and as a disproportional act against UVAs. Then, the PLA had no choice but to retaliate.³⁹ Under this pressure it has not arranged another flight.

In addition the PLA list of targeted narrow passes in the West Pacific has been broadened. In July 2013, five PLA major combatants sailed through the Soya-Kaikyo Strait in combat gear. This was the first time the PLAN entered the North Pacific for combat training, through key waterways along Japan’s industrial areas. Beijing’s scholars regarded this passage as high-profile demonstration of the PLAN’s expeditionary capability.⁴⁰ And the trend will continue as Chinese naval power rises. For instance, Chinese CBGs will sail through Tsushima Channel in the south and conduct joint naval exercise with the Russians in the Japanese backyard in the north.

³⁶ Rear admiral Yang Yi, “中国海军发展必须大幅超越日本” (Chinese navy must surpass Japan’s), *Global Times*, 1 August 2013.

³⁷ Comments by Du Wenlong in *News in Focus*, CCTV-4, 20 October 2013.

³⁸ Shawn Brimley and Ben Fitzgerald, “The Drone war comes to Asia,” *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 17 September 2013.

³⁹ Du Wenlong in *News in Focus*, CCTV-4, 21 October 2013.

⁴⁰ “The breaking point in the first islands chain as PLAN ships sailed through the Soya-Kaikyo Strait,” Daily Affairs, *The Phoenix TV*, 14 July 2013.

The temperature has visibly risen from the Northern Islands all the way down to Bashi Strait. The PLAN's more regular eastward movement and Japan's westward movement to protect its crucial SLOCs 1,000 n.m. enhance the potential of a clash in the years to come.⁴¹ Now the situation is worsened by ADIZ clashes.

Chinese Air Defense Identification Zone: A New Source of Tension

China's ADIZ announcement triggered waves of criticism from the US and its allies. They rightly see it as a game changer in the regional security realm and generating lasting impact on major power relations in the region. Potentially this ADIZ setting may generate the strategic effect of power realignment against Beijing similar to PLA missile tests in 1996. This is China's temporary top security worry before the ADIZ fallout settles down. From Beijing's perspective however, drawing an ADIZ is not only the right of a sovereign state violating no international law, but also addresses an unfair Cold War ADIZ legacy against China. It simply followed the practice of 20-plus countries in this regard.

Why a Chinese ADIZ?

The ADIZ was a PLA initiative to enhance China's air defense along its sensitive east coast where GDP gravity and numerous military facilities are located. It may fill a loophole in air defense against potentially hostile air strikes from close-by. The ADIZ obliges the PLA to monitor all aircraft within an extended amount of distance so that an amount of early warning time is obtained. The ADIZ battle with the US and its allies will continue. The PLA will not back down from its firm stance on patrolling the ADIZ space and will almost certainly declare a SCS ADIZ in due time, as confirmed by the PLA's ADIZ announcement. In the meantime, the US will not scale down aero-activities in open air space within the Chinese ADIZ. Now the ADIZ has become a new conflict zone in the regional maritime dispute.

The PLAN proposed to set an ECS ADIZ in the early 1990s. According to rear admiral Yin Zhuo (尹卓), a member of the feasibility study team then, the US

⁴¹ Most of Chinese Japan specialists believe that the possibility of Japan's use of force in the international arena is quite low. Yet, as pointed out by Yang Bojiang, a Japan scholar in Beijing, since first-line commanders have been granted more authority in dealing with emergencies and Japanese naval ships keep very close distance with Chinese ones when the latter come to the first and second islands chain areas, chances of incidental clashes are mounting. *New Military Observations*, CCTV-7 (the military channel), 20 October 2013.

fielded over 500 sorties of military aircraft a year in proximity of Chinese air space. Its protracted reconnaissance activities from Qingdao in the north to the Hainan Island in the south posed serious potential threats to Chinese national security.⁴² Additionally modern combat aircraft has become stealthy and faster. Last but not the least, since China's opening up to the world, thousands of civil aviation flights transit the EAC to enter Chinese air space each day.⁴³ These factors drove the PLA to contemplate the ADIZ.

The PLA's 20-year delay in ADIZ establishment is primarily due to lack of necessary capabilities to enforce ADIZ rules, i.e., no AWACs and few modern aircraft. An ADIZ decision was held up simply because if there was no capability to enforce it, there was no point to declare it in the first place. Concern of US response was another important factor to shelve the idea up to now. Beijing worried that the ADIZ imposition may increase the occurrence of an accidental Sino-US military standoff as in the cases of the EP-3 collision in 2001.

On the other hand, the EP-3 and USS *Impeccable* incidents rekindled PLA interest in setting up an ADIZ as an effective means to handle US spy activities close to its coastal bases, which have aggressively been closer over time, e.g., within 50 kilometers from the Chinese coastline. The pivot to Asia has enhanced forward US deployment. Allied war drills are more frequent in sensitive areas in the ECS and involve hundreds of combat aircraft. To the PLA, an ADIZ need has become more pressing.

PLAAF commander Xu Qiliang (now vice CMC chair) ordered to study an ADIZ in 2009, as a countermeasure.⁴⁴ By then the problem of capability deficits had been largely overcome. The PLAAF Command Academy conducted the study with the help of the PLA Academy of Military Science. The renewed ADIZ effort was first of all based on detailed PLA capability assessment in favor of an ADIZ establishment. For instance, by 2014 the PLAAF has a dozen AWACs deployed in the Nanjing Military Region (MR) facing the ECS. Their surveillance range can reach Okinawa.

⁴² Yin Zhuo (尹卓)'s comments in "Chinese EDIZ in the ECS," 长江新闻号 (The Flagship of News of Hubei TV) 10 March 2014. Since the 2000s the number of such US sorties have gradually dropped to the level of 300 annually.

⁴³ According to Yin Zhuo, when the naval air wing proposed the ADIZ in the 1990s, one of the reasons was the opening of Sino-RoK air route that could be manipulated by the hostile military purposes.

⁴⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, 28 November 2013.

The YLC-2 and YLC-4 phased array radar systems are forward deployed with limited capability of detecting stealth aircraft. The PLAAF's combat aircraft can enforce ADIZ areas up to 600 km.⁴⁵ Additionally, China has launched 25 remote-sensing satellites in the last decade, which can detect relatively small flying objects.⁴⁶ Together they can scan the declared ADIZ region around the clock.

The CMC successfully pursued the new commander-in-chief Xi Jinping to approve the ADIZ imposition in the name of national security.⁴⁷ Xi told Biden that the ADIZ announcement was the result of a lengthy serious study, and not a prompt decision.⁴⁸ In a way this case demonstrates vividly the different leadership styles of Hu and Xi in making controversial and strategic military decisions.

What Is the Chinese ADIZ About?

China's ADIZ initiative can be roughly defined in both narrow and broad terms. The former expresses its declared meaning, namely increasing early warning time for homeland air defense, a military measure of relatively low strategic importance. The latter conveys a revisionist attempt against the US-centric Cold-War ADIZ legacy as part of the security order in Asia. An strong US reaction is understandable vis-à-vis China's act to alter the status quo.

The immediate aim of the Chinese ADIZ is largely tactical: countering US aerial-spy activities near the PLA's coastal bases. Such activity violates China's core interests, as it is aimed to pick up vital PLA electronic and signal intelligence. To the PLA the matter is not freedom of flight but war without smoke, or action of electronic warfare.⁴⁹ For instance, the US EP-3s regularly approach the PLAN's Zhoushan strategic base in the ECS to gather the telecommunication signals of the warships and combat aircraft in-and-out the base. Their radar signatures and electronic data will be intercepted. Japan's P-3Cs often fly above the crucial waterways of PLAN submarines in the ECS. They drop sonar systems to obtain the submarines' sound

⁴⁵ Yin Zhuo's comments on ADIZ enforcement, *环球视线* (Global News Watch), CCTV-4, 11 December 2013.

⁴⁶ *Gaofen-1* (high-resolution satellite-1) for instance became operational in December 2013.

⁴⁷ "Xi Jinping gave the ultimate order to move on the Japanese," *Asian Weekly*, 29 November 2013.

⁴⁸ Comments by Major Chai Lidan of the PLA Air Force Command Academy in Beijing, *Daily Affairs of the Chinese World*, Phoenix TV, 25 November 2013. The Voice of America, 4 December 2013.

⁴⁹ Major general Qian Lihua's talk to a closed door conference on the Taiwan relations and regional security, organized by the Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, Taipei, 19 December 2013.

signatures as they sail through, which is essential data for successful ASW.⁵⁰

The painful lesson of the EP-3 incident was that the PLA had no better way to deal with the situation in China's adjacent airspace than citing the EEZ concept as bases for complaint.⁵¹ Yet the US never recognizes EEZ legality and its insistence on freedom of aviation in open air space is hard to rebuke legally. The PLA can do little except for scrambling airplanes to shadow US planes under the EEZ claims. A Chinese ADIZ is thus deemed to be a viable way to justify edging US spy planes away from militarily sensitive areas near Chinese air space. It could provide a sub-legal guidance for PLA aircraft to engage their US counterparts, according to US ADIZ practice.⁵²

According to senior colonel Meng Xiangqing, an ADIZ coverage of 500 kilometers from the Chinese coast would allow extra 10-plus minutes for the PLA to get ready against a hostile air-intrusion, which is crucial in contemporary information-based high-tech warfare.⁵³ It gives the PLA larger surveillance depth from the air.

Rules of Engagement

The PLA ADIZ push was deprived more from a battle-field calculus than from an assessment of its geo-strategic consequences. Or possibly it may have evaluated ADIZ backlashes but concluded that preventing US spy activities near its bases was more important. This may be a reason for Beijing to underestimate strong regional reaction, given its impact on the US-centric ADIZ status quo and amidst rising Sino-Japanese territorial dispute in the ECS.

The ECS is narrow. If one state draws an ADIZ, inevitably it overlaps others' and creates cases of potential standoffs, especially when the disputed islands are located in the ADIZ. Yet China's ADIZ is more about creating a mechanism of crisis control, not one of sovereignty imposition. When the PLAN started the ADIZ study in the

⁵⁰ Lyle Goldstein and William Murray, "Undersea Dragons: China's Maturing Submarine Force," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Spring 2004, pp. 161-196.

⁵¹ Jane Perlez, "American and Chinese Navy Ships Nearly Collided in SCS," *New York Times*, 14 December 2013.

⁵² Comments by Major Chai Lidan of the PLA Air Force Command Academy in Beijing, *Daily Affairs of the Chinese World*, Phoenix TV, 25 November 2013.

⁵³ Senior colonel Meng Xiangqing (孟祥青)'s comments in "Chinese EDIZ in the ECS," 长江新闻号 (The Flagship of News of Hubei TV) 10 March 2014.

1990s and General Xu ordered a renewal of that study in 2009, the S/D dispute was not a pressing issue. Surely S/D is relevant vis-à-vis Japan's coverage of the S/D in its ADIZ. China's inclusion of it is more of a political and diplomatic gesture largely for domestic consumption. Beijing had no plan to capture the S/D before the ADIZ declaration, nor does it after. It is conscious that it would lose more if the ADIZ triggers a war involving top powers.

Here the real test is whether Beijing enforces the ADIZ in the S/D area. According to Chinese official view, this is unlikely, as it was not an ADIZ design in the first place.⁵⁴ One of Xi's rules to manage the S/D dispute is that no PLA planes will be allowed into the area, a proportional response to Japan's S/D nationalization.⁵⁵ ADIZ enforcement will escalate the dispute to a military level. Beijing is very cautious about this prospect. So far there has been no PLA ADIZ enforcement in the S/D area. To an extent, the fundamental status quo there has not been upset with the ADIZ imposition, at least not for now.

As mentioned earlier, a broad ADIZ definition is China's challenge to the US-centric ADIZ status quo in the West Pacific. Yet this is only vaguely hidden in China's prescriptions in the ADIZ document, worded "emergency defensive measures." This is a crucial issue of rules of engagement that may cause a standoff if the PLA enforces the ADIZ vigorously. Beijing is trying to strike a proper balance between protecting national security and the avoidance of a confrontation. What came out of the Xi-Biden meeting seems to be some tacit understanding that US spy planes would continue to come close to Chinese air space and PLA aircraft would continue to shadow and accompany them, even at a close range, but with no forceful expulsion. This Xi/Biden "agree to disagree" allows continued US freedom of flight in the open airspace near Chinese borders.

PLA analysts explained why no aircraft was scrambled on 26 November 2013 to shadow US B-52s inside the declared ADIZ, by saying that the aircraft was adequately monitored by PLA land-based long-range radar systems.⁵⁶ To the PLA this is not satisfactory, but acceptable under the circumstances of US military superiority and

⁵⁴ "How to monitor ADIZ, Japan's aircraft can be monitored through radar," *Global Times*, 26 November 2013.

⁵⁵ You Ji, "Decipher Beijing's Maritime Security Policy and Strategy in Managing Sovereignty Disputes in the China Seas," *Policy Brief*, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University of Singapore, October 2013.

⁵⁶ "How to monitor ADIZ, Japan's aircraft can be monitored through radar," *Global Times*, 26 November 2013.

determination to stay close to Chinese air space. Radar surveillance was enough, as the B-52 carried no weapons and was far away from Chinese airspace. PLA aircraft would be dispatched to follow the intruders otherwise.

So radar surveillance is the standard method for enforcing ADIZ. According to the PLA spokesman, the PLA identified and followed 800 sorties of unknown aircraft in the first month of the ADIZ announcement. It dispatched aircraft to check only 87 of them, or one-tenth of the total monitored. The majority was done through radar surveillance.⁵⁷ The SDF confirmed that it was within Chinese capability to electronically monitor SDF flights around the S/D region.⁵⁸ This surveillance of physics reduces chances of standoffs by military aircraft in the overlapping areas.⁵⁹ Generally the PLA rules of engagement can be specified with the following scenarios. If the foreign planes enter the ADIZ briefly with a long distance from Chinese air space, no action is necessary, as the distance and brevity inside the zone convey no hostile intent.

- If foreign planes are inside the zone for an extended period of time but show no hostile intent, e.g., no weapons carried or maintaining a decent distance from the Chinese borders, the PLA aircraft will only keep radio contact or stage accompanying flights with a general vicinity.
- If foreign aircraft demonstrates hostile intent and its penetration into the zone is deep, PLA aircraft would continue to warn them through radio contact, try to edge them an amount of distance away from Chinese air space but generally take no aggressive acts, as these planes are in the international air space.

In this way the ADIZ is understood as a zone patrolled mainly through electronic signals and radar surveillance, not physical aircraft engagement. The ADIZ is no no-flight zone. As such, Beijing has not changed the status quo in a substantial way.⁶⁰ Following this principle, the B-52 entry into the zone was regarded as a challenge to China's ADIZ but not to its defense security. It was provocative but not dangerous. This pattern of PLA response heralds a pattern of reaction for future

⁵⁷ *Xinhua News Agency*, 3 January 2014.

⁵⁸ *Sankei Shimbun*, 5 December 2013.

⁵⁹ Comments by senior colonel Du Wenlong, *Deep Analysis of World Affairs* (深度国际), 8 December 2013.

⁶⁰ Senior colonel Du Wenlong, 8 December 2013.

ADIZ enforcement.

The ADIZ is a source of security worries of Asian states in territorial tension. Although the required over-flight report through the zone on route to China is standard ADIZ practice, the unspecified “emergency defensive measures” can be a security concern to other states, even if it may not be a cause of war. For instance, PLA aircraft entry into Japan’s ADIZ rose to 137 times in the last two months of 2013, double that of the previous two months.⁶¹

As long as the sentence of “emergency defensive measures” is there, the US would worry that PLAAF aircraft would expel US spy planes away from their current operational zones near Chinese airspace with the possibility of repeating the EP-3 clash. And as long as China’s ADIZ overlaps Japan’s with the S/D included, Tokyo has to factor in the scenario of the PLA eventually enforcing the ADIZ for sovereignty claims. These concerns cannot be removed by China’s current no-enforcement rules in the S/D. Moreover, Japan is more worried about the Chinese ADIZ rendering its medium-line principle ineffective.⁶²

Geo-Strategic Implications

In addition to domestic and international backlashes mentioned earlier, a few more can be identified.

- US position—the Senkakus under protection of Article Five in US-Japanese Mutual Security Treaty—was reiterated in a formal DoD document in written form. Although US official alluded to this commitment many times before, it was rare for an open expression to be issued in explicit vocabulary. This is certainly not in Beijing’s interests.
- The ADIZ has put Washington in an uncomfortable situation where it needs Tokyo to pivot but is reluctant to confront the China militarily in helping Japan. If the ADIZ is vigorously enforced in the ECS, the US will have to firm its support of Japan because a weak US response will let Tokyo question the reliability of the US alliance. Then it will develop its own capabilities to deal

⁶¹ *Jane Defense Weekly*, 14 January 2014.

⁶² Japan’s chief of general staff (岩崎茂) expressed his concern on the medium line. He pointed out about 10 sorties of PLAAF aircraft were spotted around the line on the daily basis. 2 December 2013.

with the China challenge. Either way the US global leadership is under threat.

- The ADIZ has unnecessarily caused collateral damage in Sino-RoK and Sino-Australian relations, which have been visibly warmed up since late 2012. It will take some time for them to be repaired.
- ASEAN states may have also become vigilant about China's next move in declaring a SCS ADIZ.⁶³ Beijing has made extraordinary efforts to improve Sino-ASEAN relations lately with high profile visits by Xi and Li Keqian to Southeast Asia in 2013. It requires a lot of charming diplomacy and economic aid for Beijing to ease the discomfort of its neighbors about ADIZ ideas.
- Beijing is now facing a catch-22 situation: vigorous ADIZ enforcement could cause irreversible diplomatic damage, i.e., in Sino-US relations, which is the cornerstone of China's overall foreign policy; but expedient ADIZ implementation may create a credibility issue at home where mounting nationalism narrows the leadership policy choices.

The list of problems goes on. However, the most negative after-effect of ADIZ imposition is that the US and its allies and partners may have come to a new assessment of what China may do in regard to the existing world and regional security order, as it increases military clout. The US pivot will accelerate in forms of troop redeployment and allied cooperation.

Conclusion

2013 was a hard year for China in terms of domestic and international challenges. This paper has listed three tactical challenges to Beijing's maritime security pursuits: the US islands chains strategy that forms a horizontal S-shape belt from the West Pacific to West Africa to conceal PLAN blue-water expansion; the enhanced US-centered efforts to project potential sea blockade against Chinese commercial and naval SLOCs; and negative response to Beijing's ADIZ in the ECS. Broadly speaking these challenges are mainly about China's security in the West Pacific and naval race in the region. They are relatively narrowly focused, not as strategic as the issues I analyzed in my papers for the previous NIDS workshops. However they have tremendous impact on Asia's defense sector and particularly on Japan's

⁶³ Dylan Loh Ming Hui, "China's ADIZ over East China Sea: Implications for ASEAN," *RSIS Strategic Comments*, No. 232/2013, 19 December 2013.

national security.

To PLAN commanders the US Island-Chain Strategy poses a fatal threat to China's critical SLOCs, which can impact its economic lifeline. Furthermore, facing geographic constraints and prospects of a naval blockade, Beijing is developing a carrier-embedded expeditionary navy capable of breaking islands chains. Its catch-up mentality and strategy vis-à-vis the US will stimulate an already visible arms race in the region.

The unexpected ADIZ imposition will produce far-reaching strategic impact on regional status quo in the years ahead. While China sees it simply as a copy of US and Japanese ADIZ practices, and addressing the unfair status quo, many of its neighbors get worried over this move and the strategic ambition behind it. This endeavor will exert long-term security consequences. Despite China's ADIZ rationality in regard to its long-term maritime interests, it appeared to be a premature decision, given the backlashes it has generated. It was taken at a wrong time, as there is no urgent need to have it right now. Yet with a careful and expedient implementation, the Chinese ADIZ may not escalate tension in the ECS in the short run, as observers fear. If this is indeed the case, the US-centric status quo in regional security order will not be seriously upset in the foreseeable future. Yet the ADIZ serves a notice to the region that the status quo has to be changed in due time.

So far, Beijing's gamble has not gone terribly wrong despite a heavy price it has entailed. Seoul has approved RoK airlines to report their flight plans to China, a sign of reduced state resistance to ADIZ. Australia has started moves to improve bilateral ties. More strategically, Washington has moderated its initial opposition to China's ADIZ. US Air Force chief Mark Welsh opined that it was a too big ask to China to withdraw ADIZ when all major powers already had their own ADIZ. He hoped that the ADIZ would serve as a platform for communications between parties involved, not as a new source of conflict.⁶⁴ Secretary Hagel and Joint Chief of Staff Dempsey also expressed conciliatory remarks in different occasions. They criticized the way Beijing announced ADIZ (without prior consultation) and its demand for all foreign aircraft entering the zone to report as against the general ADIZ protocols. Yet the

⁶⁴ Mark Welsh's speech to American Enterprise Institute on 11 December 2013.

focus has gradually shifted from the ADIZ *per se* to its technicalities, much as the PLA expected. Yet imposition of a SCS ADIZ may harden US opposition again.