

Briefing Memo

The Foreign Policy of Xi Jinping's Administration and The Establishment of China's Air Defense Identification Zone

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In November 2013, China suddenly declared that it had set up an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea without any consultation with neighboring countries. This move received harsh international criticism since it requires all airplanes passing through the zone to submit a flight plan, and contains the area which is under dispute.

Why did China declare the setup of ADIZ and why this timing? The declaration followed right after the Periphery Work Meeting which generated expectation from other countries that China might moderate its policy toward neighboring countries for stabilizing relations with it. Then some Japanese media and experts argued there are contradictions and inconsistencies between Xi's foreign policy and the setup of the ADIZ. From this perspective, the important reason for this inconsistency is that weak leadership could not control and coordinate the moves of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

However, such interpretation is highly doubtful. For one thing, it is not conceivable that important policies such as a decision on overall foreign policy direction or the setup of the ADIZ were conducted without permission of the party leadership, and given that Xi Jinping has exercised strong leadership compared to his predecessors, it is hard to imagine that each departments ignored Xi's policy and pursued their interests. Moreover Xi succeeded in ousting Xu Caihou, former vice president of the Central Military Commission, from the party and started the investigation of Zhou Yongkang through an anti-corruption campaign. Thus the weak leadership assumption is not so valid.

The policy making of the ADIZ and PLAF's strategic concept

The argument to set up the ECS ADIZ can be traced at the latest around 2008. At the 11th National People's Congress in March 2008, PLA representative Zhu Qingyi, the Air Force Commander of the Lanzhou Military District, proposed that China needed to enhance national air defense structures and early warning networks (PLA Daily 8 March, 2008), and one source revealed there was discussion about ADIZ at that time. At the 60th Anniversary of PLAAF in November 2009, Xu Qiliang, then PLAAF Commander, mentioned about ADIZ. Xu Qiliang has been very positive about setup of ADIZ, but Hu Jintao didn't take up this idea.

It was only after the 18th Chinese Communist Party Congress in 2012 where Xi Jinping took office that the process toward the setup of ADIZ moved forward. Xu Qiliang became the vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 and it might strengthen a push toward the setup of ADIZ. According to the Yazhou Zhoukan, Air Force Command College made the original plan and submitted it to the Party leadership by May 2013, and started the working process under the authorization of the party leadership. Allegedly, the decision

to setup ADIZ in the East China Sea was presented at the Periphery Diplomacy Meeting in October.

What was the main goal of setting up ADIZ for PLAAF? One of the important factors is its changing strategic concept. PLAAF has shifted its role from “National Air Defense” toward “Simultaneously Preparing for Offense and Defense”, which indicates dynamic air defense for a broader area. The 2013 version of Science of Military Strategy, published by the Academy of Military Science in 2013, notes that as for the PLAAF strategy, it needs to establish “three line control” which means; a) territorial air: an absolutely secured zone, b) from territorial air to 1st Island Chain: a limited control and security cooperation zone in which PLAAF conducts early warning and reconnaissance, long distance interception and limited attack toward an enemy, and cooperates with friendly countries. c) from 1st Island Chain to 2nd Island Chain: a long distance surveillance and limited deterrence zone in which the PLAAF monitors military forces and military bases in the Western Pacific and maintains the required deterrence.

These concepts clearly show that there is strong preference to control surrounding areas and create sanctuary in the PLAAF’s thinking. It resembles that of PLA Navy’s thinking in that they draw a line in the sea and try to control the areas inside the 1st Island Chain. In addition to that, recently China has enhanced its effort to limit actions of neighboring countries around sea areas surrounding China. For instance, the Chinese Navy demanded that South Korea not cross the line of Operational Area in the Yellow Sea. Moreover, at the NPC in 2014, a representative not affiliated with the PLA argued for the establishment of an ADIZ in the South China Sea, and China’s Ministry of Defense has not denied the possibility. The shifting concepts of PLAAF reflect such an overall trend in China’s thinking.

Thus we can summarize that PLAAF has considered setting up ADIZ for more than five years ago and recently their concepts have shifted toward putting more emphasis on controlling neighboring sea and air areas. Moreover, political leadership, especially that of Xi Jinping endorses and adopts such ideas. Therefore, we should analyze Xi’s foreign policy.

Xi Jinping’s Foreign Policy

The most salient characteristic of Xi’s foreign policy is its emphasis on proactivity and initiative. At the Periphery Diplomacy Meeting in 2013, Xi declared that “[We need to] endorse periphery diplomacy in a manner of *fenfayouwei*, and win over the good periphery environment of our country”. *Fenfayouwei* means doing things in a proactive way, but there are arguments among Chinese scholars as to what exactly it means. This phrase relates to Deng Xiaoping’s formula “*Taoguang Yanghui* (bide our time and do little things)”. Some argue that *fenfayouwei* replaces *taoguang yanghui* which means China no longer cares too much about other countries reaction and takes the initiative in conducting foreign policy (Shijie Zhishi, Issue 24, 2013, and Guoji Xianqu Daobao, 14, Jan. 2014), while others argue that it is not the replacement but shifting the emphasis more on proactivity (Shijie Zhishi, Issue 24, 2013).

While there are different views on the extent of change in China’s foreign policy, it is clear from the speeches of political leaders and news from official media that China now stresses proactivity and initiative in its foreign policy. For example, at the press conference at the NPC in 2014, foreign minister Wang Yi argued that “the most vivid feature of current Chinese diplomacy is its proactive advancement”.

Moreover, “to continue economic development, China needs to maintain a peaceful periphery environment”, a

phrase frequently used in the Hu Jintao era, has shifted to more proactive one. While Xi told “[we need to] win over a good periphery environment of our country”, Wang Yi insisted “[China will] create a stable and advantageous external environment” (People’s Daily, Sept. 10, 2013) and Wang Jiarui, the head of the international department of the Chinese Communist Party argued for “stabilizing the periphery, managing the periphery, and shaping the periphery” (People’s Daily, June 13, 2014). Among Chinese researchers, some have advanced more aggressive arguments. For example, Yan Xuetong analyzed that “in the past, we needed a ‘peaceful environment’, now we are moving ahead “to win over advantageous external conditions” (Shijie Zhishi, Issue24, 2013). These arguments indicate that now China has a view to more actively shape the periphery environment in their favor.

Based on such emphasis on proactivity and initiative, China’s current foreign policy mainly consists of three components. That is, US-China relations, periphery diplomacy and core interests.

First, US-China relations are still the most important foreign relations for China, and China has been trying to establish “ a new type of US-China major power relationship”. According to Wang Yi, a new type of US-China major power relationship consists of three principles, namely a) to avoid confrontation and rivalry, b) to build a win-win relationship, and c) to respect each other’s core interests. The most problematic is “to respect each other’s core interests”, because “core interests” in China’s terms include territorial claims and sovereignty, therefore if the US accepts “a new type of major power relationship”, it might indicate that the US would not intervene in China’s territorial or sovereignty problems. Actually, the US has not accepted a new type of major power relationship in China’s terms, but how China perceives it is a different questions.

Second, Xi’s periphery diplomacy may entail ambitions to check the US alliances and create another new international order. It is still unclear that which countries are included in China’s “periphery”, but it doesn’t seem to indicate only geographically neighboring countries, and in many cases includes developing and emerging countries generally. The main goal of periphery diplomacy is to reassure China’s intention to develop peacefully and its main tools to accomplish this is economic leverage. China is touting its plan for a New Silk Road, which envisions deepening economic ties with Central Asia, South East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. China has invested heavily on infrastructure, especially high speed rail ways, sometimes called “high speed rail diplomacy”.

At the same time, China’s periphery diplomacy includes broad efforts to criticize and check the US-led military alliance and US-led international institutions, and create new frameworks or reinvigorate existing non-US-led frameworks. At the Summit meeting of Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) at Shanghai in May 2014, Xi Jinping proposed an “Asian New Security Concept” based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation. Xi said that “it is disadvantageous from the standpoint of protecting regional security to strengthen military alliance against a third country”, “Asian security should be protected by Asian people in the end” and China would make contributions to “building an Asian security environment advantageous for peace, development, cooperation, and a win-win relationship”. In addition, Xi proposed to make CICA “a platform for security dialogue which covers all of Asia”, and to “pursue the creation of a new framework of regional cooperation based upon this foundation”. Establishing an Asian infrastructure investment bank and a BRICS development bank were also parts of a broader effort to build an alternative framework.

Third, Xi gives higher importance to a tougher and more principled style to protect China’s core interests. At the 3rd Study Meeting of the Politburo in Jan. 2013, Xi, on one hand, stressed the importance of peaceful development, while on the other hand, he emphasized that “we cannot abandon our legitimate rights and interests and sacrifice the core interests of the state. We never give up our core interests to any foreign countries under any circumstances or swallow bitter results which impede our sovereignty, safety, and development interests”. Currently China always

juxtaposes protecting core interests with peaceful development. For instance, Wang Yi argued that “to pass through the road of peaceful development, we need to build a strong national defense. Strengthening the national defense can ensure the protection of core interests of our country”.

Such a proactive and tough stance of China toward core interests is, from the view of neighboring countries, linked to its unilateral tough actions. Establishing ADIZ in the East China Sea or the setup of an oil-rig in the South China Sea was consistent with such a foreign policy. Therefore, it is highly possible that these unilateral actions were a reflection of Xi Jinping’s foreign policy trend.

Conclusion

China set up the ADIZ in the East China Sea based on PLAAF’s idea but it was driven by Xi Jinping’s foreign policy which emphasizes proactivity and initiative. It consists of a) a new type of US-China major power relationship, b) advantageously shaping its own environment by Periphery diplomacy, and c) a unilateral tougher stance toward problems concerning its core interests.

It is still unclear whether or not these three factors can co-exist without conflict. US-China relations have deteriorated through the first half of the year 2014, therefore it may create an incentive for China to adjust its foreign policy. Also, we don’t say there is no possibility for China to adjust its toughness. Recent sign of improving relationship with Vietnam may show such a possibility. Of course, there is much continuity in Xi’s policy with Hu Jintao, and we don’t know the extent of change under Xi Jinping yet. Having said that, we need to keep in mind that the strength of Xi’s current leadership is clearly beyond the imagination of many observers in 2012, when the Xi administration started. Therefore it is very important to watch closely to his initiative.

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