**China Alters Its Strategy in Diplomatic Crisis With Japan**

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[**http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia**](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

BEIJING — After allowing anti-Japanese demonstrations that threatened to spin out of control, [China](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/china/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) has reined them in and turned instead to hard-edged diplomacy over disputed islands in the East China Sea to lessen any potential damage the conflict might have inflicted on the nation’s softening economy and a delicate leadership transition.

[Graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

[**Territorial Disputes Involving Japan**](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

With relations between the two Asian powers at a low point, China decided to go ahead with a scaled-back reception here on Thursday night to honor the 40th anniversary of the resumption of their diplomatic ties on Sept. 29, 1972. A member of the Politburo’s Standing Committee, Jia Qinglin, attended with several other Chinese officials.

But Beijing sent a not-so-subtle message to Tokyo by not granting clearance to the plane that would have brought in an important Japanese guest, the chairman of Toyota. Other Japanese attended the event, though, and at the United Nations in New York, the two sides met in private and sparred in public.

Around the disputed islands in the East China Sea, called the Diaoyu by the Chinese and the Senkaku by the Japanese, a large flotilla of Chinese patrol boats was being monitored Friday by about half of [Japan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/japan/index.html?inline=nyt-geo)’s fleet of coast guard cutters, the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun reported.

The protests in more than 80 cities, including in urban centers where Japanese car dealerships and electronics plants were damaged, suggested that the Chinese leadership approved the outpouring of nationalism in part as insulation against criticism of the party itself during the transition of power that formally is scheduled to take place at the 18th Communist Party Congress, now set to begin on Nov. 8. But the protests threatened to turn against the Chinese government itself, diplomats and analysts said.

Even though China has overtaken Japan as the biggest economy in Asia, Beijing’s handling of the dispute, precipitated by the Japanese government’s decision to buy three of the islands from their private Japanese owners, highlighted the interdependence of the Chinese and Japanese economies, and the limitations on what the leadership could allow.

Notions of punishing Tokyo economically for buying the islands, whose status was left unclear after [World War II](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/w/world_war_ii_/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier), are unrealistic, said Hu Shuli, editor in chief of Caixin Media and one of China’s chief economic journalists. So many Chinese workers are employed at Japanese-owned companies, she said, that any escalation of tensions leading to a boycott of Japanese goods could lead to huge job losses.

This would be disastrous in an already shaky Chinese economy, Ms. Hu wrote in the Chinese magazine Century Weekly.

At a time when overall foreign investment in China is shrinking, Japan’s investment in China rose by 16 percent last year, Ms. Hu noted. The Japan External Trade Organization reported $12.6 billion of Japanese investment in China last year, compared with $14.7 billion in the United States.

Not just China, but all of Asia, could face a serious economic downturn if Japanese investments in China were threatened, said Piao Guangji, a researcher at the China Academy of Social Sciences.

Exactly how the anti-Japanese protests were organized, and by whom, remained murky.

A rough chronology showed that immediately after the Japanese government announced it had bought the islands, protests began in Beijing and other cities. The protests then spread, reaching a peak on the anniversary of the Sept. 18, 1931, [Mukden Incident,](http://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/Mukden_incident) which led to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. After that, the protests were shut down.

It appeared that permission for the weeklong protests had been discussed at very high levels, said one foreign diplomat who had followed the events closely.

Analysts said the protests might have been used as a weapon by one party faction against another as part of the internal machinations over who would win positions on the Standing Committee, but precisely how those possibilities played out, if at all, was not clear.

Bold color photographs on the front pages of state-run newspapers, particularly of the protests outside the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, were evidence that senior leaders approved of the demonstrations, and suggested that, in some respects, they were even organized by the government, diplomats said.

Photographs of protests are rarely seen in the state-run news media, they noted. By running them, the government sent a message to the Chinese people that joining the demonstrations was acceptable, said a foreign diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity in keeping with protocol.

Municipal workers in Beijing who normally guard local neighborhoods were called by their superiors at 4 a.m. on the day of one of the protests, directed to board buses that took them to the protest site outside the Japanese Embassy and provided with box lunches, one of the workers said. Their job was to provide security, alongside the police.

As the demonstrations grew in intensity, there were increasing signs that they might get out of control. Several protesters in Beijing carried signs saying “Diaoyu belongs to China, Bo belongs to the people.” That was a reference to Bo Xilai, the disgraced former Communist Party boss of the western city of Chongqing, who had developed a populist following before he fell from power this year after his wife was accused of murdering a British business associate.

Those signs were quietly removed from the hands of the protesters by plainclothes security men stationed around the crowd, said a person who watched one of the protests outside the Japanese Embassy.

A few placards bearing portraits of the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong stood out among the Chinese flags carried by most of the demonstrators. A protester in the southern city of Shenzhen was heard on television shouting, “Down with Communism!”

The end of the protests, however, did not mean the end of the fury against Japan.

At a meeting in Beijing this month, Western academics were taken aback by the depth of hostility toward Japan among Chinese foreign policy experts.

There was talk of “conflict” to teach Japan a lesson, said John DeLury, an assistant professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies in Seoul, for making what the Chinese see as an unacceptable grab of territory that historically has belonged to them.

With the new leadership in Beijing set to assume full control soon, even as Japan may turn to a conservative Liberal Democratic government under the more hawkish Shinzo Abe in elections next year, a reduction in tensions looks remote, said Ren Xiao, a former Chinese diplomat who served at the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo.

“I think it will be less likely for the new Chinese leadership to make concessions,” said Mr. Ren, now a professor of international politics at Fudan University in Shanghai. “The same goes for a possible Liberal Democratic Party government in Japan. That’s why I am very worried about the Sino-Japanese relationship.”

## China and Japan

### Could Asia really go to war over these?

# The bickering over islands is a serious threat to the region’s peace and prosperity

Sep 22nd 2012 | from the print edition



THE countries of Asia do not exactly see the world in a grain of sand, but they have identified grave threats to the national interest in the tiny outcrops and shoals scattered off their coasts. The summer has seen a succession of maritime disputes involving China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines. This week there were more anti-Japanese riots in cities across China because of a dispute over a group of uninhabited islands known to the Japanese as the Senkakus and to the Chinese as the Diaoyus. Toyota and Honda closed down their factories. Amid heated rhetoric on both sides, one Chinese newspaper has helpfully suggested skipping the pointless diplomacy and moving straight to the main course by serving up Japan with an atom bomb.

That, thank goodness, is grotesque hyperbole: the government in Beijing is belatedly trying to play down the dispute, aware of the economic interests in keeping the peace. Which all sounds very rational, until you consider history—especially the parallel between China’s rise and that of imperial Germany over a century ago. Back then nobody in Europe had an economic interest in conflict; but Germany felt that the world was too slow to accommodate its growing power, and crude, irrational passions like nationalism took hold. China is re-emerging after what it sees as 150 years of humiliation, surrounded by anxious neighbours, many of them allied to America. In that context, disputes about clumps of rock could become as significant as the assassination of an archduke.

**One mountain, two tigers**

Optimists point out that the latest scuffle is mainly a piece of political theatre—the product of elections in Japan and a leadership transition in China. The Senkakus row has boiled over now because the Japanese government is buying some of the islands from a private Japanese owner. The aim was to keep them out of the mischievous hands of Tokyo’s China-bashing governor, who wanted to buy them himself. China, though, was affronted. It strengthened its own claim and repeatedly sent patrol boats to encroach on Japanese waters. That bolstered the leadership’s image, just before Xi Jinping takes over.

More generally, argue the optimists, Asia is too busy making money to have time for making war. China is now Japan’s biggest trading partner. Chinese tourists flock to Tokyo to snap up bags and designer dresses on display in the shop windows on Omotesando. China is not interested in territorial expansion. Anyway, the Chinese government has enough problems at home: why would it look for trouble abroad?

Asia does indeed have reasons to keep relations good, and this latest squabble will probably die down, just as others have in the past. But each time an island row flares up, attitudes harden and trust erodes. Two years ago, when Japan arrested the skipper of a Chinese fishing boat for ramming a vessel just off the islands, it detected retaliation when China blocked the sale of rare earths essential to Japanese industry.

Growing nationalism in Asia, especially China, aggravates the threat (see [article](http://www.economist.com/node/21563301%22%20%5Ct%20%22_self)). Whatever the legality of Japan’s claim to the islands, its roots lie in brutal empire-building. The media of all countries play on prejudice that has often been inculcated in schools. Having helped create nationalism and exploited it when it suited them, China’s leaders now face vitriolic criticism if they do not fight their country’s corner. A recent poll suggested that just over half of China’s citizens thought the next few years would see a “military dispute” with Japan.

The islands matter, therefore, less because of fishing, oil or gas than as counters in the high-stakes game for Asia’s future. Every incident, however small, risks setting a precedent. Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines fear that if they make concessions, China will sense weakness and prepare the next demand. China fears that if it fails to press its case, America and others will conclude that they are free to scheme against it.

**Co-operation and deterrence**

Asia’s inability to deal with the islands raises doubts about how it would cope with a genuine crisis, on the Korean peninsula, say, or across the Strait of Taiwan. China’s growing taste for throwing its weight around feeds deep-seated insecurities about the way it will behave as a dominant power. And the tendency for the slightest tiff to escalate into a full-blown row presents problems for America, which both aims to reassure China that it welcomes its rise, and also uses the threat of military force to guarantee that the Pacific is worthy of the name.

Some of the solutions will take a generation. Asian politicians have to start defanging the nationalist serpents they have nursed; honest textbooks would help a lot. For decades to come, China’s rise will be the main focus of American foreign policy. Barack Obama’s “pivot” towards Asia is a useful start in showing America’s commitment to its allies. But China needs reassuring that, rather than seeking to contain it as Britain did 19th-century Germany, America wants a responsible China to realise its potential as a world power. A crudely political WTO complaint will add to Chinese worries (see [article](http://www.economist.com/node/21563310%22%20%5Ct%20%22_self)).

Given the tensions over the islands (and Asia’s irreconcilable versions of history), three immediate safeguards are needed. One is to limit the scope for mishaps to escalate into crises. A collision at sea would be less awkward if a code of conduct set out how vessels should behave and what to do after an accident. Governments would find it easier to work together in emergencies if they routinely worked together in regional bodies. Yet, Asia’s many talking shops lack clout because no country has been ready to cede authority to them.

A second safeguard is to rediscover ways to shelve disputes over sovereignty, without prejudice. The incoming President Xi should look at the success of his predecessor, Hu Jintao, who put the “Taiwan issue” to one side. With the Senkakus (which Taiwan also claims), both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping were happy to leave sovereignty to a later generation to decide. That makes even more sense if the islands’ resources are worth something: even state-owned companies would hesitate to put their oil platforms at risk of a military strike. Once sovereignty claims have been shelved, countries can start to share out the resources—or better still, declare the islands and their waters a marine nature reserve.

But not everything can be solved by co-operation, and so the third safeguard is to bolster deterrence. With the Senkakus, America has been unambiguous: although it takes no position on sovereignty, they are administered by Japan and hence fall under its protection. This has enhanced stability, because America will use its diplomatic prestige to stop the dispute escalating and China knows it cannot invade. Mr Obama’s commitment to other Asian islands, however, is unclear.

The role of China is even more central. Its leaders insist that its growing power represents no threat to its neighbours. They also claim to understand history. A century ago in Europe, years of peace and globalisation tempted leaders into thinking that they could afford to play with nationalist fires without the risk of conflagration. After this summer, Mr Xi and his neighbours need to grasp how much damage the islands are in fact causing. Asia needs to escape from a descent into corrosive mistrust. What better way for China to show that it is sincere about its peaceful rise than to take the lead?


Chinese navy missile destroyer DDG-112 Harbin fires a shell during the Russia-China joint naval exercise in the Yellow Sea of the Pacific Ocean, April 26, 2012. (photo: Wu Dengfeng/Xinhua)



# The Next War?

By Michael Klare, TomDispatch

22 January 13

on't look now, but conditions are deteriorating in the western Pacific. Things are turning ugly, with consequences that could prove deadly and spell catastrophe for the global economy.

In Washington, it is widely assumed that a showdown with Iran over its nuclear ambitions will be the first major crisis to [engulf](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/whitehouse/obama-picks-chuck-hagel-as-next-defense-secretary-setting-up-likely-confirmation-fight/2013/01/07/2dc9e916-58a4-11e2-b8b2-0d18a64c8dfa_print.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) the next secretary of defense - whether it be former Senator Chuck Hagel, as President Obama desires, or someone else if he fails to win Senate confirmation. With few signs of an imminent breakthrough in talks aimed at peacefully resolving the Iranian nuclear issue, many analysts believe that military action - if not by Israel, than by the United States - could be on this year's agenda.

Lurking just behind the Iranian imbroglio, however, is a potential crisis of far greater magnitude, and potentially far more imminent than most of us imagine. China's determination to assert control over disputed islands in the potentially energy-rich waters of the East and South China Seas, in the face of stiffening resistance from Japan and the Philippines along with greater regional assertiveness by the United States, spells trouble not just regionally, but potentially globally.

**Islands, Islands, Everywhere**

The possibility of an Iranian crisis remains in the spotlight because of the obvious risk of disorder in the Greater Middle East and its threat to global oil production and [shipping](http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175496/tomgram%3A_michael_klare%2C_no_exit_in_the_persian_gulf/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). A crisis in the East or South China Seas (essentially, western extensions of the Pacific Ocean) would, however, pose a [greater peril](http://www.cfr.org/east-asia/armed-clash-south-china-sea/p27883%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) because of the possibility of a U.S.-China military confrontation and the threat to Asian economic stability.

The United States is [bound by treaty](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/type%2CREGIONALREPORT%2C%2C%2C5089162c2%2C0.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) to come to the assistance of Japan or the Philippines if either country is attacked by a third party, so any armed clash between Chinese and Japanese or Filipino forces could trigger American military intervention. With so much of the world's trade focused on Asia, and the American, Chinese, and Japanese economies tied so closely together in ways too essential to ignore, a clash of almost any sort in these vital waterways might paralyze international commerce and trigger a global recession (or worse).

All of this should be painfully obvious and so rule out such a possibility - and yet the likelihood of such a clash occurring has been on the rise in recent months, as China and its neighbors continue to [ratchet up](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) the bellicosity of their statements and bolster their military forces in the contested areas. Washington's continuing statements about its ongoing plans for a "pivot" to, or "rebalancing" of, its forces in the Pacific have only [fueled](http://thediplomat.com/2012/12/05/americas-pivot-has-no-clothes/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) Chinese intransigence and intensified a rising sense of crisis in the region. Leaders on all sides continue to affirm their country's inviolable rights to the contested islands and vow to use any means necessary to resist encroachment by rival claimants. In the meantime, China has [increased](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) the frequency and scale of its naval maneuvers in waters claimed by Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, further enflaming tensions in the region.

Ostensibly, these disputes revolve around the question of who owns a constellation of largely uninhabited atolls and islets claimed by a variety of nations. In the [East China Sea](http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=ECS" \t "_blank), the islands in contention are called the Diaoyus by China and the Senkakus by Japan. At present, they are administered by Japan, but both countries claim sovereignty over them. In the [South China Sea](http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=SCS" \t "_blank), several island groups are in contention, including the Spratly chain and the Paracel Islands (known in China as the Nansha and Xisha Islands, respectively). China claims all of these islets, while Vietnam claims some of the Spratlys and Paracels. Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines also claim some of the Spratlys.

Far more is, of course, at stake than just the ownership of a few uninhabited islets. The seabeds surrounding them are believed to sit atop [vast reserves](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/world/asia/china-vietnam-and-india-fight-over-energy-exploration-in-south-china-sea.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) of oil and natural gas. Ownership of the islands would naturally confer ownership of the reserves - something all of these countries desperately desire. Powerful forces of nationalism are also at work: with rising popular fervor, the Chinese [believe](http://www.economist.com/node/21560893%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) that the islands are part of their national territory and any other claims represent a direct assault on China's sovereign rights; the fact that Japan - China's brutal invader and occupier during World War II - is a rival claimant to some of them only adds a powerful tinge of victimhood to Chinese nationalism and intransigence on the issue. By the same token, the Japanese, Vietnamese, and Filipinos, already [feeling threatened](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/22/world/asia/dispute-over-islands-reflect-japanese-fear-of-chinas-rise.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) by China's growing wealth and power, believe no less firmly that not bending on the island disputes is an essential expression of their nationhood.

Long ongoing, these disputes have escalated recently. In May 2011, for instance, the Vietnamese [reported](http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-06-09/vietnam-says-chinese-boat-harassed-survey-ship-china-disputes.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) that Chinese warships were harassing oil-exploration vessels operated by the state-owned energy company PetroVietnam in the South China Sea. In two instances, Vietnamese authorities claimed, cables attached to underwater survey equipment were purposely slashed. In April 2012, armed Chinese marine surveillance ships [blocked](http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/standoff-south-china-sea%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) efforts by Filipino vessels to inspect Chinese boats suspected of illegally fishing off Scarborough Shoal, an islet in the South China Sea claimed by both countries.

The East China Sea has similarly witnessed tense encounters of late. Last September, for example, Japanese authorities [arrested](http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/16/world/asia/china-japan-islands-arrests/index.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) 14 Chinese citizens who had attempted to land on one of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands to press their country's claims, provoking widespread [anti-Japanese protests](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/world/asia/china-warns-japan-over-island-dispute.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) across China and a series of naval show-of-force operations by both sides in the disputed waters.

Regional diplomacy, that classic way of settling disputes in a peaceful manner, has been under growing strain recently thanks to these maritime disputes and the accompanying military encounters. In July 2012, at the annual meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asian leaders were [unable to agree](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/southeastasia/view/1213369/1/.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) on a final communiqué, no matter how anodyne - the first time that had happened in the organization's 46-year history. Reportedly, consensus on a final document was thwarted when Cambodia, a close ally of China's, refused to endorse compromise language on a proposed "code of conduct" for resolving disputes in the South China Sea. Two months later, when Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Beijing in an attempt to promote negotiations on the disputes, she was [reviled](http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/04/world/asia/china-clinton-visit/index.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) in the Chinese press, while officials there refused to cede any ground at all.

As 2012 ended and the New Year began, the situation only deteriorated. On December 1st, officials in Hainan Province, which administers the Chinese-claimed islands in the South China Sea, [announced](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/world/asia/alarm-as-china-issues-rules-for-disputed-sea.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) a new policy for 2013: Chinese warships would now be empowered to stop, search, or simply repel foreign ships that entered the claimed waters and were suspected of conducting illegal activities ranging, assumedly, from fishing to oil drilling. This move coincided with an increase in the size and frequency of Chinese naval deployments in the disputed areas.

On December 13th, the Japanese military [scrambled](http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/japan-scrambles-jets-against-china-military-planes%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) F-15 fighter jets when a Chinese marine surveillance plane flew into airspace near the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Another worrisome incident occurred on January 8th, when four Chinese surveillance ships [entered](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/world/asia/japan-summons-chinas-envoy-after-ships-near-islands.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) Japanese-controlled waters around those islands for 13 hours. Two days later, Japanese fighter jets were again scrambled when a Chinese surveillance plane returned to the islands. Chinese fighters then came in pursuit, the [first time](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/19/world/asia/china-japan-island-dispute-escalates-to-air.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) supersonic jets from both sides flew over the disputed area. The Chinese clearly have little intention of backing down, having indicated that they will [increase](http://www.latimes.com/news/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-japanese-chinese-islands-20130111%2C0%2C3191692.story%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) their air and naval deployments in the area, just as the Japanese are doing.

**Powder Keg in the Pacific**

While war clouds gather in the Pacific sky, the question remains: Why, pray tell, is this happening now?

Several factors seem to be conspiring to heighten the risk of confrontation, including leadership changes in China and Japan, and a geopolitical reassessment by the United States.

In China, a new leadership team is placing renewed emphasis on military strength and on what might be called national assertiveness. At the 18th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held last November in Beijing, Xi Jinping was named both party head and chairman of the *[Central Military Commission](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/Leadership/index.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)*, making him, in effect, the nation's foremost civilian and military official. Since then, Xi has made several heavily publicized visits to assorted Chinese military units, all clearly intended to demonstrate the Communist Party's determination, under his leadership, to boost the capabilities and prestige of the country's army, navy, and air force. He has already linked this drive to his belief that his country should play a more vigorous and assertive role in the region and the world.

In a speech to soldiers in the city of Huizhou, for example, Xi [spoke of](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/world/asia/chinas-xi-jinping-acts-to-bolster-military.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) his "dream" of national rejuvenation: "This dream can be said to be a dream of a strong nation; and for the military, it is the dream of a strong military." Significantly, he used the trip to visit the Haikou, a destroyer assigned to the fleet responsible for patrolling the disputed waters of the South China Sea. As he spoke, a Chinese surveillance plane entered disputed air space over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, prompting Japan to scramble those F-15 fighter jets.

In Japan, too, a new leadership team is placing renewed emphasis on military strength and national assertiveness. On December 16th, arch-nationalist Shinzo Abe returned to power as the nation's prime minister. Although he *[campaigned](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/27/world/asia/shinzo-abe-selected-as-japans-prime-minister.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)* largely on economic issues, promising to revive the country's lagging economy, Abe has made no secret of his intent to bolster the Japanese military and assume a tougher stance on the East China Sea dispute.

In his first few weeks in office, Abe has already announced plans to [increase military spending](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/08/world/asia/with-eye-on-china-japan-weighs-raising-military-spending.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and review an official apology made by a former government official to women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II. These steps are sure to please Japan's rightists, but certain to inflame anti-Japanese sentiment in China, Korea, and other countries it once occupied.

Equally worrisome, Abe promptly [negotiated](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/11/world/asia/japan-and-philippines-to-bolster-maritime-cooperation.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) an agreement with the Philippines for greater cooperation on enhanced "maritime security" in the western Pacific, a move intended to counter growing Chinese assertiveness in the region. Inevitably, this will spark a harsh Chinese response - and because the United States has mutual defense treaties with both countries, it will also increase the risk of U.S. involvement in future engagements at sea.

In the United States, senior officials are debating implementation of the "*[Pacific pivot](http://www.tomdispatch.com/archive/175476/michael_klare_a_new_cold_war_in_asia%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)*" announced by President Obama in a *[speech](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)* before the Australian Parliament a little over a year ago. In it, he promised that additional U.S. forces would be deployed in the region, even if that meant cutbacks elsewhere. "My guidance is clear," he declared. "As we plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region." While Obama never quite said that his approach was intended to constrain the rise of China, few observers doubt that a *[policy of "containment"](http://www.alternet.org/world/how-us-pivot-towards-asia-exacerbating-tensions-china%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)* has returned to the Pacific.

Indeed, the U.S. military has taken the first steps in this direction, announcing, for example, that by 2017 all three U.S. stealth planes, the F-22, F-35, and B-2, would be [deployed](http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/12/pentagon-preps-stealth-force/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) to bases relatively near China and that by 2020 [60%](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-06-01/world/35459231_1_asia-pacific-secretary-leon-e-panetta-pacific-assets%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) of U.S. naval forces will be stationed in the Pacific (compared to 50% today). However, the nation's budget woes have led many analysts to question whether the Pentagon is actually capable of fully implementing the military part of any Asian pivot strategy in a meaningful way. A study conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) at the behest of Congress, released last summer, [concluded](http://csis.org/publication/pacom-force-posture-review%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) that the Department of Defense "has not adequately articulated the strategy behind its force posture planning [in the Asia-Pacific] nor aligned the strategy with resources in a way that reflects current budget realities."

This, in turn, has fueled a drive by military hawks to press the administration to spend more on Pacific-oriented forces and to play a more vigorous role in countering China's "bullying" behavior in the East and South China Seas. "[America's Asian allies] are waiting to see whether America will live up to its uncomfortable but necessary role as the true guarantor of stability in East Asia, or whether the region will again be dominated by belligerence and intimidation," former Secretary of the Navy and former Senator James Webb wrote in the Wall Street Journal. Although the administration has responded to such taunts by reaffirming its pledge to bolster its forces in the Pacific, this has failed to halt the calls for an even tougher posture by Washington. Obama has already been chided for failing to provide sufficient backing to Israel in its struggle with Iran over nuclear weapons, and it is safe to assume that he will face even greater pressure to assist America's allies in Asia were they to be threatened by Chinese forces.

Add these three developments together, and you have the makings of a powder keg - potentially at least as explosive and dangerous to the global economy as any confrontation with Iran. Right now, given the rising tensions, the first close encounter of the worst kind, in which, say, shots were unexpectedly fired and lives lost, or a ship or plane went down, might be the equivalent of lighting a fuse in a crowded, over-armed room. Such an incident could occur almost any time. The Japanese press has [reported](http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21569740-risks-clash-between-china-and-japan-are-risingand-consequences-could-be%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) that government officials there are ready to authorize fighter pilots to fire warning shots ig Chinese aircraft penetrate the airspace over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. A Chinese general has said that such an act would count as the start of "actual combat." That the irrationality of such an event will be apparent to anyone who considers the deeply tangled economic relations among all these powers may prove no impediment to the situation - as at the beginning of World War I - simply spinning out of everyone's control.

Can such a crisis be averted? Yes, if the leaders of China, Japan, and the United States, the key countries involved, take steps to defuse the belligerent and ultra-nationalistic pronouncements now holding sway and begin talking with one another about practical steps to resolve the disputes. Similarly, an emotional and unexpected gesture - Prime Minister Abe, for instance, pulling a Nixon and paying a surprise goodwill visit to China - might carry the day and change the atmosphere. Should these minor disputes in the Pacific get out of hand, however, not just those directly involved but the whole planet will look with sadness and horror on the failure of everyone involved.

# WP

# China wages a quiet war of maps with its neighbors

![http://www.washingtonpost.com/rf/image_606w/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2013/02/13/Others/Images/2013-02-13/116013851[1]1360798031.jpg]()

VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES - This picture taken by Vietnam News Agency and released on June 14, 2011 shows Phan Vinh Island in the Spratly archipelago.

### By [William Wan](http://www.washingtonpost.com/william-wan/2011/03/02/ABlzvmP_page.html), Friday, February 15, 6:45 AM

BEIJING — Bitter maritime disputes between China and its neighbors have recently sent fighter jets scrambling, ignited violent protests, and seen angry fishermen thrown in jail. But beneath all the bellicose rhetoric and threatening posture, China also has been waging a quiet campaign, using ancient documents, academic research, maps and technical data to bolster its territorial claims.

The frenetic pace of such research — and the official appetite for it — comes after decades of relative quiet in the field and has focused heavily on the two hottest debates: China’s quarrel with six other nations over a potentially [oil-rich patch of the South China](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-09-17/world/35275622_1_south-china-sea-rig-juancho-sabban) Sea and its [tense feud with Japan](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-05/opinions/36757731_1_senkakus-diaoyu-islands-china-and-japan) over a small sprinkling of land called the Diaoyu Islands by the Chinese and the Senkaku Islands by the Japanese.



INTERACTIVE: Island disputes in Asia



TIMELINE: Key moments in the territorial disputes and intermittent skirmishes in the South China Sea.

For some Chinese academics, the now-heavy demand for such work marks a near reversal of what they experienced early in their careers. In past decades, some say, territorial disputes were often considered too sensitive a topic because China was leery of disrupting its relations with its neighbors.

“The government always emphasized the stability of bilateral relationships in the past, so doing public research on the Diaoyu Islands, for example, was not practical,” said one Chinese professor. “You couldn’t write a thesis on it . . . there would be nowhere to publish such articles publicly.”

Even now, the topic remains sensitive. The professor spoke on the condition of anonymity because, he said, others have been punished in the past for speaking too openly on such matters.

But after an especially [bitter dust-up in 2010](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/20/AR2010092000130.html) between China and Japan, some Chinese scholars say, officials worried that the limited research had hurt China’s ability to make strong territorial claims, leaving it at a disadvantage with others, such as Japan, whose research community faced fewer constraints.

China’s attention to maps and other documents has intensified since — bringing with it spats of a new kind. The most recent began shortly after Christmas when a [Japanese publication posted](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201212280079) what it claimed was a 1950 Chinese government document unearthed in China’s own archives calling the disputed islands by their Japanese name, implying that Beijing then regarded the islands as Japanese.

China’s embassy in Japan [sidestepped the question](http://japandailypress.com/china-disputes-its-own-paper-saying-senkakus-were-part-of-ryukyu-0220749) of the document’s authenticity, saying that “even if the document exists, it won’t change the consistent position of the Chinese government.” The embassy later dismissed the whole thing as a “Japanese attempt to support their wrong stance with an anonymous reference document.”

But just weeks afterward, with little explanation, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs shut down access to a large portion of its archival documents. A staffer at the archive said last week that the closure was “due to an upgrading of the system” but was unable to say when the work would be complete.

**Bitter wrangling over small islands**

The bitter feud between China and Japan over a handful of rocky outcroppings may seem frivolous. But the fight carries great weight domestically for both countries — and huge [implications for the United States](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-09-16/world/35494846_1_senkaku-islands-diaoyu-china-and-japan).

f the military bluster and threats continue, U.S. diplomats and experts fear, it could lead to a military miscalculation and, in the worst case, an actual war that could draw in the United States, as an treaty-bound ally of Japan.

China’s increasingly aggressive posture on such claims is driven by a heady mixture of nationalism and strategic and economic interests. In a sign of just how important such claims have become, it has been widely reported in foreign media — though not confirmed by the government — that China’s new top leader, Xi Jinping, was personally put in charge of a task force responsible for the Diaoyu Islands claim in September, shortly before he was formally named to lead the ruling Communist Party.

That same month, tensions shot up after Japan announced it was buying the disputed islands from private Japanese owners for nearly $30 million. [The move prompted riots in China,](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chinese-government-both-encourages-and-reins-in-anti-japan-protests-analysts-say/2012/09/17/53144ff0-00d8-11e2-b260-32f4a8db9b7e_story.html) and trade between the two Asian powers suffered. Diplomatic relations sputtered. And Chinese and Japanese ships clashed on the seas, ramming and spraying each other with water cannons.

In the five months since, there has been a flurry of official interest in China’s documentary backing for its territorial claims.

Several seminars and conferences were convened by government-affiliated think tanks. At one high-profile gathering in Shanghai, scholars concluded with a five-point consensus “to pool together our wisdom” and “to safeguard the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands and to oppose Japan’s violation.”

China’s State Council issued a [5,200-word white paper](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/25/c_131872082.htm) that laid out, point by exhaustive point, China’s case.

This fall, key historical documents, atlases and journals were assembled into [an exhibit](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90882/7951533.html) at China’s National Library. The library’s official statement included a sneering reference to the “sheer historical lie” of Japan’s claims, and the displays included records from imperial envoys stretching back to the Ming dynasty in the 1300s.

**Academic credibility**

Maps — ancient and modern — have been a particular area of focus, with the government’s scientific and academic subsidiaries pumping out atlases, three-dimensional graphs and sketches of both disputed areas. [New passports](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/11/26/heres-the-chinese-passport-map-thats-infuriating-much-of-asia/) were outfitted with maps that include a dotted area that pointedly marks China’s claimed portions [of the South China Sea](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/special/south-china-sea-timeline/index.html). Even [weather reports](http://cctv.weather.com.cn/detail.php?city=%E9%92%93%E9%B1%BC%E5%B2%9B&submit=%E6%9F%A5%E8%AF%A2) on state-run television have been amended to add forecasts for disputed areas.

Some international scholars, however, question how much credibility the recent burst of historical studies and technical data adds to China’s claims — especially given the fact that most think tanks and universities in China remain firmly in the grip of the Communist Party and its government.

“If you look at the academic documents and arguments, especially on the Chinese side, the conclusions across the board look like one unified piece of concrete,” said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, head of government and international studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. “It’s concerning on an academic level to talk to people without a shred of doubt affecting their mind. It suggests a lack of ability to seriously evaluate the other side’s arguments. The whole truth is often more complicated.”

Chinese scholars defend their work as sound, even as some are trying to build credibility by relying less on Chinese documents and instead finding foreign materials to support China’s claims.

“We are not lacking in domestic evidence,” said Li Guoqiang, an expert on disputed territories at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. “But it would be even more convincing to the international community if we can use the evidence of our opponents.”

Most acknowledge that their research alone isn’t likely to solve such intractable territorial disputes. But they argue that it does provide a safe arena for conflict in an era of mounting tensions. In this month’s latest, Japanese officials said a Chinese naval vessel had threatened a Japanese warship by locking a [weapons-guiding radar](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-05/world/36753118_1_uninhabited-islands-senkaku-china-and-japan) on it.

With the way the region is heating up, even academics working to support China’s claims wonder where the conflict might ultimately lead.

“I worry about the Sino-Japanese relationship, especially this year,” said Zhou Yongsheng, an expert at China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing. “If [Japan] keeps following their current policies, the situation will deteriorate even worse. And China is very assertive to take countermeasures if necessary. It could get unpredictable and out of control.”

**NYT**

**China Claims Air Rights Over Disputed Islands**

**By CHRIS BUCKLEY**

**Published: November 23, 2013**

HONG KONG — The Chinese government on Saturday claimed the right to identify, monitor and possibly take military action against aircraft that enter a newly declared “air defense identification zone,” which covers sea and islands also claimed by Japan and threatens to escalate an already tense dispute over some of the maritime territory.

The move appeared to be another step in China’s efforts to intensify pressure on Japan over the Japanese-controlled islands in the East China Sea that are at the heart of the dispute.

The declaration, from a Ministry of National Defense spokesman, Col. Yang Yujun, accompanied the ministry’s [release of a map](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/HomePicture/2013-11/23/content_4476177.htm), geographic coordinates and [rules](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-11/23/content_4476138.htm) in Chinese and English that said “China’s armed forces will take defensive emergency measures to respond to aircraft that do not cooperate in identification or refuse to follow orders.”

“The objective is to defend national sovereignty and territorial and air security, as well as to maintain orderly aviation,” Colonel Yang said in comments issued on the ministry’s website.

Later Saturday, China’s air force said it had sent its first planes, including fighter jets, to enforce the rules. Soon afterward, Japan scrambled its own fighter jets, Reuters reported, citing Japan’s Defense Ministry. A ministry spokesman said two Chinese reconnaissance planes had flown within about 25 miles of what Japan considers its airspace, Reuters said.

The Chinese announcement followed months of increasing tension over the uninhabited islands as China appeared to be taking moves to establish its claim to them, including more frequent ship patrols in the area. Those patrols have led to cat-and-mouse games between Chinese and Japanese ships near the islands, known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China.

But trying to control the airspace over the islands could prove particularly problematic. Japan considers that airspace its own and has scrambled fighter jets in the past to try to ensure that Chinese aircraft did not enter. As the potential for a miscalculation that leads to conflict has increased, the United States has become worried that as an ally of Japan, it could be dragged into any conflict with China.

Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States was “deeply concerned” about China’s announcement. “Escalatory action will only increase tensions in the region and create risks of an incident,” Mr. Kerry said in a statement. He urged China “to exercise caution and restraint.”

The Japanese Foreign Ministry said the government had lodged a “serious protest” with China. An official there, speaking on the condition of anonymity as is ministry practice, said the head of Asian affairs had called the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo on Saturday to warn that the move could escalate tensions and was “extremely dangerous as it could trigger unpredictable events.”

Colonel Yang said that the declaration of the air zone was not aimed at any particular country, and that it would not impede the freedom of commercial flight over the East China Sea. But his words left little doubt that the move could be used against the Japanese government and military aircraft.

The longstanding dispute between Beijing and Tokyo over the islands [flared last year](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/world/asia/islands-dispute-tests-resolve-of-china-and-japan.html), before Xi Jinping assumed leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in November. The spark was a decision by the Japanese government to buy some of the islands from a Japanese citizen. Japan said the move was to keep the islands out of the hands of a nationalist politician who might increase tensions, but China saw the purchase as Japan’s effort to strengthen its hold on the islands.

The new Chinese rules left unclear how frequently and thoroughly China intends to enforce them. But Chinese state-run news media widely reported the announcement, which could kindle public expectations that the government will take steps to back up its words.

Military experts have said that even if Japan and China seek to avoid outright confrontation over the islands, there is the risk that an unplanned episode could spiral into a wider military conflict.

**NYT**

**U.S. Flies B-52s Into China’s Expanded Air Defense Zone**

**By** [**THOM SHANKER**](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/s/thom_shanker/index.html)

**Published: November 26, 2013** [**45 Comments**](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/27/world/asia/us-flies-b-52s-into-chinas-expanded-air-defense-zone.html?hp#commentsContainer)

WASHINGTON — Two long-range American bombers have conducted what Pentagon officials described Tuesday as a routine training mission through international airspace recently claimed by China as its “air defense identification zone.”

The Chinese government said Saturday that it has the right to identify, monitor and possibly take military action against aircraft that enter the area, which includes sea and islands also claimed by Japan. The claim threatens to escalate an already tense dispute over some of the maritime territory.

American officials said the pair of B-52s carried out a mission that had been planned long in advance of the Chinese announcement last weekend, and that the United States military would continue to assert its right to fly through what it regards as international airspace.

Pentagon officials said the two bombers made a round-trip flight from Guam, passing through a zone that covers sea and islands that are the subject of a sovereignty dispute between Japan and China.

Officials said there had been no Chinese response to the bomber run.

The Obama administration has become increasingly worried by the tense standoff over the islands that could drag the United States into a conflict. By treaty, the United States is obligated to defend Japan if it is attacked.

The islands, called the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China, are currently administered by the Japanese, who consider the airspace above the islands to be theirs as well.

On Tuesday, Josh Earnest, a deputy White House spokesman, reiterated the administration view that the Chinese announcement was “unnecessarily inflammatory” and has a “destabilizing impact on the region.”

Within hours of the Chinese announcement last weekend that it had declared what Beijing termed an “East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone,” Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel issued a statement expressing deep concern over the action.

“We view this development as a destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo in the region,” Mr. Hagel said. “This unilateral action increases the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculations.”

Mr. Hagel noted that “this announcement by the People’s Republic of China will not in any way change how the United States conducts military operations in the region.”

Pentagon officials said the training sortie by the two B-52s could be seen as underscoring that commitment to preserving traditional rules of international airspace.

Mr. Hagel’s statement said the United States had conveyed “concerns to China through diplomatic and military channels, and we are in close consultation with our allies and partners in the region, including Japan.”

His statement concluded by noting that the United States is “steadfast in our commitments to our allies and partners. The United States reaffirms its longstanding policy that Article V of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands.”

The move by China appeared to be another step in its efforts to intensify pressure on Japan over the Japanese-controlled islands in the East China Sea that are at the heart of the dispute.

The declaration, from a Ministry of National Defense spokesman, Col. Yang Yujun, accompanied the ministry’s [release of a map](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/HomePicture/2013-11/23/content_4476177.htm), geographic coordinates and [rules](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-11/23/content_4476138.htm) in Chinese and English that said “China’s armed forces will take defensive emergency measures to respond to aircraft that do not cooperate in identification or refuse to follow orders.”

“The objective is to defend national sovereignty and territorial and air security, as well as to maintain orderly aviation,” Colonel Yang said in comments issued on the ministry’s website.

After the announcement Saturday, several Japanese commercial airlines began filing flight plans to China, according to the Japanese government. On Tuesday, Japan’s Transportation Ministry asked them to stop, and a group representing the two largest Japanese airlines, Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airlines, issued a statement later Tuesday saying that it would heed the request.

The group, the Scheduled Airlines Association of Japan, said it had “determined that there was no concern about the safety of flights even if flight plans were not submitted to China.”

Japan’s foreign minister, Fumio Kishida, said the government was in close communication with the airlines.

“I believe it is important for the public and private sectors to cooperate in showing our firm resolve to China,” Mr. Kishida said.

# China Claims Air Rights Over Disputed Islands

###### By CHRIS BUCKLEY

###### Published: November 23, 2013

HONG KONG — The Chinese government on Saturday claimed the right to identify, monitor and possibly take military action against aircraft that enter a newly declared “air defense identification zone,” which covers sea and islands also claimed by Japan and threatens to escalate an already tense dispute over some of the maritime territory.

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Later Saturday, China’s air force said it had sent its first planes, including fighter jets, to enforce the rules. Soon afterward, Japan scrambled its own fighter jets, Reuters reported, citing Japan’s Defense Ministry. A ministry spokesman said two Chinese reconnaissance planes had flown within about 25 miles of what Japan considers its airspace, Reuters said.

The Chinese announcement followed months of increasing tension over the uninhabited islands as China appeared to be taking moves to establish its claim to them, including more frequent ship patrols in the area. Those patrols have led to cat-and-mouse games between Chinese and Japanese ships near the islands, known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China.

But trying to control the airspace over the islands could prove particularly problematic. Japan considers that airspace its own and has scrambled fighter jets in the past to try to ensure that Chinese aircraft did not enter. As the potential for a miscalculation that leads to conflict has increased, the United States has become worried that as an ally of Japan, it could be dragged into any conflict with China.

Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States was “deeply concerned” about China’s announcement. “Escalatory action will only increase tensions in the region and create risks of an incident,” Mr. Kerry said in a statement. He urged China “to exercise caution and restraint.”

The Japanese Foreign Ministry said the government had lodged a “serious protest” with China. An official there, speaking on the condition of anonymity as is ministry practice, said the head of Asian affairs had called the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo on Saturday to warn that the move could escalate tensions and was “extremely dangerous as it could trigger unpredictable events.”

Colonel Yang said that the declaration of the air zone was not aimed at any particular country, and that it would not impede the freedom of commercial flight over the East China Sea. But his words left little doubt that the move could be used against the Japanese government and military aircraft.

The longstanding dispute between Beijing and Tokyo over the islands [flared last year](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/world/asia/islands-dispute-tests-resolve-of-china-and-japan.html), before Xi Jinping assumed leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in November. The spark was a decision by the Japanese government to buy some of the islands from a Japanese citizen. Japan said the move was to keep the islands out of the hands of a nationalist politician who might increase tensions, but China saw the purchase as Japan’s effort to strengthen its hold on the islands.

The new Chinese rules left unclear how frequently and thoroughly China intends to enforce them. But Chinese state-run news media widely reported the announcement, which could kindle public expectations that the government will take steps to back up its words.

Military experts have said that even if Japan and China seek to avoid outright confrontation over the islands, there is the risk that an unplanned episode could spiral into a wider military conflict.

###### Editorial

# China’s Coercive Play

###### By [THE EDITORIAL BOARD](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/opinion/editorialboard.html)

###### Published: November 25, 2013 [119 Comments](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/26/opinion/chinas-coercive-play.html?hp&rref=opinion#commentsContainer)

China’s decision to impose a new air defense zone over a wide swath of the East China Sea is at odds with its claim to want a peaceful resolution to territorial disputes over a group of islands there. The announcement is a highly provocative move that has increased tensions and could make direct conflict with Japan more likely.

On [Saturday](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/world/asia/china-warns-of-action-against-aircraft-over-disputed-seas.html), China declared the zone around the islands, called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China, and asserted the right to require aircraft entering the space to identify themselves and possibly to take military action against those that do not. The uninhabited islands, some no more than piles of rocks, are administered by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan.

For more than a year, China and Japan, the world’s second- and third-largest economies, have been increasingly confrontational over the issue. Japan’s hypernationalist government led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has most often been the provocateur, but China has contributed to the instability by deploying Chinese coast guard ships and aircraft to the area to challenge Japan’s claims. The air defense zone goes even further in contesting Japan’s control by aggressively asserting China’s reach in the region. It significantly complicates efforts by the United States to develop a relationship with China under President Xi Jinping.

Asian airlines quickly fell in line and said they would inform China of their flight plans before entering the disputed airspace. But the unilateral power grab rightly angered Tokyo and Washington. On Saturday, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, as part of a rapid American response, made it clear that the announcement “will not in any way change how the United States conducts military operations in the region” and reaffirmed America’s treaty obligation to aid Japan if it were attacked. On Monday, Mr. Abe [vowed](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/26/world/asia/japan-answers-chinas-warnings-over-islands-airspace.html?ref=worl) to defend his nation’s airspace.

Given China’s unilateral decision, with its threat of possible military action, the United States needed to stand up for its ally Japan, for the principle of freedom of navigation of the seas and skies, and for other Asian nations that also have territorial disputes with China in the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

Although America recognizes Japan as the administrator of the islands, it takes no position on claims to the islands in general and has urged all claimants to peacefully resolve their disputes.

But Mr. Abe has pursued a disturbingly nationalistic foreign policy dominated by overheated words and an aggressive posture toward China that can be dangerous, for Japan and the United States. The Obama administration must find a way to defend Japan’s interest without emboldening the Abe government to take foolish risks that would increase tensions with China. Along with its predecessors, the administration has not always been clear or consistent in its messages and that needs to change.

But it is China’s behavior that is most disturbing right now, especially since officials have left open the possibility of more air defense zones in the future. The United States has urged China to exercise caution and restraint and should be increasingly active in helping the two nations find a path away from confrontation. It is unclear if China really intends to respond militarily to Japanese or other planes flying through the zone, but the chance of miscalculation or error grows as the dispute escalates.

China’s action casts a black cloud over Vice President Joseph Biden Jr.’s trip to China next month. It also raises new questions about what President Xi meant when he said earlier this year that he hoped to work out a “new type of great-power relationship” with President Obama.

NYT

# Japan Answers China’s Warnings Over Islands’ Airspace

###### By [MARTIN FACKLER](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/f/martin_fackler/index.html)

###### Published: November 25, 2013

TOKYO — Matching China’s stern language with warnings of his own, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan vowed on Monday to defend his nation’s airspace after China [declared an air defense zone](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/25/world/asia/japan-rejects-chinas-claim-to-air-rights-over-disputed-islands.html) over a disputed group of islands in the East China Sea.

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| http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/misc/spacer.gif | The New York Times |

Speaking in Parliament, Mr. Abe called China’s move an unacceptable effort to change the status quo with threats of force. He described it as a dangerous ratcheting up of tensions in the standoff over the uninhabited islands, which are administered by Japan but also claimed by China.

“We are determined to defend our country’s air and sea space,” Mr. Abe said. “The measures by the Chinese side have no validity whatsoever for Japan.”

China and Japan have been locked in an escalating war of words and nerves over the islands for more than a year. China’s declaration on Saturday that it would identify and possibly take military action against aircraft flying near the islands follows a long period of frequent dispatches of Chinese coast guard ships and aircraft to the area to challenge Japan’s control.

Mr. Abe’s effort to draw a line in the sand reflects his promises to lead his nation in standing up to China, which has eclipsed Japan as Asia’s top economic power. Since [taking office in December](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/27/world/asia/shinzo-abe-selected-as-japans-prime-minister.html), Mr. Abe, an outspoken conservative, has raised defense spending for the first time in a decade, and has increased military ties with the United States.

Japan has repeatedly signaled to China since Saturday that it has no intention of yielding control of airspace over the islands, known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China. On Monday, the Japanese vice foreign minister, Akitaka Saiki, summoned China’s ambassador to Japan, Cheng Yonghua, to demand that China repeal the air defense zone, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Mr. Cheng replied that the Chinese air zone was not aimed at a specific country and would not affect civilian air traffic, according to Kyodo News. In Beijing, a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman said that Japan had “no right to make irresponsible remarks,” because Japan has maintained a similar air defense zone over the islands, the state-run news agency Xinhua reported.

As the standoff has escalated, Japan has also sought to bind itself more closely to the United States, which has been the guarantor of Japanese security since the end of World War II. On Monday, the top Japanese government spokesman and chief cabinet secretary, Yoshihide Suga, said that Japan would work with the United States to urge China to allow aircraft to continue flying freely near the islands, which lie between Okinawa and Taiwan.

# NYT China Explains Handling of B-52 Flight as Tensions Escalate

###### By [JANE PERLEZ](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/jane_perlez/index.html)

###### Published: November 27, 2013

BEIJING — Responding to the flight of two unarmed American B-52 bombers through China’s new air defense zone over the East China Sea, the Chinese government said Wednesday it had monitored the planes but had decided not to take action despite the American refusal to identify the aircraft.

At a briefing in Beijing, the Foreign Ministry said the quiet reaction to what was a clear test by the United States of the new zone was “in accordance” with the rules announced by the Chinese Defense Ministry. China’s response to foreign aircraft in the new zone would depend on “how big the threat” was, the spokesman said.

Japan’s main civilian airlines also disregarded the new defense zone Wednesday, flying through the airspace claimed by China without notifying the Beijing authorities.

Tensions in the region have escalated since Beijing published a map of a new “air defense identification zone” on Saturday that overlapped with an air defense zone of its archrival, Japan, increasing the possibility of an encounter between Japanese and Chinese aircraft and heightening the dispute over islands in the East China Sea that both countries claim.

The Chinese declaration brought the United States, a treaty ally of Japan, directly into the dispute when Washington dispatched the B-52 bombers to the area overnight Monday.

The abrupt declaration by China of its air defense zone unnerved Asian countries and was criticized by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan as a “dangerous attempt” to change the status quo in the East China Sea by coercion.

China said it would require foreign aircraft flying through the zone to identify themselves or face possible military interception. The Pentagon said the B-52 bombers, which took off from Guam, were on a long-planned exercise, but Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said that Washington had no intention of changing its procedures by notifying China of United States Air Force flights through the zone.

The Chinese Ministry of Defense, which released the coordinates of the new zone, said Wednesday that it had monitored the flight path of the two B-52 bombers and noted that they flew about 125 miles east of the Diaoyu Islands from 11 a.m. to 1:22 p.m. on Tuesday. The disputed islands in the East China Sea are known as the Diaoyu by China and as the Senkaku by Japan.

“China has the ability to implement effective management and control of the airspace,” the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

A senior Chinese analyst, Shi Yinhong, who sometimes advises the Chinese government, acknowledged that the new air zone had worsened the already poisonous relations between China and Japan and represented a test of wills between Washington and Beijing.

The Chinese action comes on the eve of a visit by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to China, Japan and South Korea, a trip that was supposed to be dominated by economic issues but that will now probably be consumed by the fallout from the new air defense zone.

The relations among the three Asian countries — including tensions between the United States’ two main allies in the region, Japan and South Korea — were fraught even before Mr. Biden’s arrival.

But most of all, Mr. Biden will now be faced with the reality of Beijing’s determination to show what kind of major power relationship it wants with the United States, namely one in which China is regarded as an equal.

“China is engaged with Japan in a very intense confrontation, and the situation is very bad,” said Mr. Shi, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing. “The risk of escalating to a major conflict is increased.”

But Mr. Shi defended the new air zone as an expression of China’s determination to be regarded as a great power.

“This is the first time since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 that it has expanded its strategic space beyond offshore waters,” he said.

That expansion of China’s strategic area provoked the United States to fly the two B-52 bombers through the new air zone without warning Beijing, he said.

“That’s why Washington made such a harsh and firm reaction,” he said. “This represents America saying ‘no’ to China’s aspiration in the western Pacific.”

Mr. Shi said it was possible that President Xi Jinping, who has taken charge of China’s foreign policy in his first year in power and assumed a far more forceful posture than his predecessors, had underestimated the American reaction.

 “I believe Xi and his associates must have predicted the substance of the American reaction, whether they underestimated the details, I’m not sure,” he said.

On Chinese social media, users unleashed a barrage of nationalist commentary, congratulating the government for a tough stand against Japan and warning that Beijing should live up to the promise of the new air defense zone in confronting Japan.

“If the Chinese military doesn’t do anything about aircraft that don’t obey the commands to identify themselves in the zone, it will face international ridicule,” wrote Ni Fangliu, a historian and investigative journalist with more than two million followers on his Tencent microblog.

The People’s Liberation Army Daily, the official newspaper of China’s military, said in a commentary published before the Chinese government acknowledged the B-52 flights that the zone required strong warning and defensive capabilities, otherwise its creation would be just “armchair strategy.”

Asked at the Foreign Ministry briefing whether China’s decision not to respond to the flight of the B-52 bombers rendered China a “paper tiger,” the spokesman, Qin Gang, deflected the question.

“The word paper tiger has its special meaning. You should look it up, about why Chairman Mao Zedong spoke of the phrase ‘paper tiger,'” he said. “Here, I would like to emphasize that the Chinese government has enough determination and capability to defend national sovereignty.”

South Korea, which has recently developed friendlier relations with China, said it could not accept the new defense zone. The coordinates announced by China overlap with South Korea’s air defense identification zone in some respects. Yoo Jeh-seung, the deputy defense minister for policy of South Korea, said Seoul would not recognize China’s declaration.

China, adding heft to its growing air and sea presence, dispatched its only aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, on Tuesday for a training exercise in the South China Sea on its first lengthy sea voyage. In order to reach the South China Sea, the Chinese news media said, the carrier might sail close to the Okinawa Islands of Japan.

###### Listening Post

# NYT

# Airspace Claim Forces Obama to Flesh Out China Strategy

###### By [MARK LANDLER](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/mark_landler/index.html)

###### Published: November 27, 2013 [9 Comments](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/28/world/asia/airspace-claim-forces-us-to-flesh-out-china-strategy.html?hp#postcomment)

WASHINGTON — While foreign-policy experts and risk analysts were riveted by the nuclear talks with Iran last weekend, the next major geopolitical crisis erupted a world away, over a clump of desolate islands in the choppy waters between Japan and China.

Enlarge This Image



###### Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

President Obama and Chinese president, Xi Jinping, in Russsia in September.

###### Multimedia

[Graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

###### [Territorial Disputes Involving Japan](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

With the United States dispatching two B-52’s to reinforce its protest over China’s attempt to control the airspace over the islands, it served as a timely reminder that President Obama wants to turn America’s gaze eastward, away from the preoccupations of the Middle East.

Mr. Obama’s shift — once known as a pivot, now re-branded as a rebalance — has always seemed more rhetorical than real. But when Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. travels to China, Japan and South Korea next week, the administration will have another chance to flesh out the policy.

“What isn’t clear to me is whether they see this as a Japan-China problem that needs to be managed or as part of a longer-term test of wills with Beijing,” said Michael J. Green, an Asia adviser in the George W. Bush administration who is now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

If it is the latter, Mr. Green said, the United States needs to project military power in the region, build up the defensive capacities of allies like Japan and the Philippines, and align the countries that ring China’s coastal waters to present a united front against Beijing’s aggression.

The trouble, he added, is that “the administration is very worried about appearing to contain China.”

The cause of all this trouble are the flyspeck Senkaku Islands, which Japan administers but that China, enticed that they may sit atop rich mineral reserves, now claims, calling them the Diaoyu Islands.

The dispute has mushroomed into a dangerous standoff between the world’s second- and third-largest economies — one that rekindles old resentments over the World War II conduct of imperial Japan and pits a conservative Japanese leader, Shinzo Abe, against a Chinese president, Xi Jinping, who is riding a nationalist tide in his country.

With so much at stake, Mr. Biden’s advisers say the dispute will intrude on every meeting he has in the region. That could come at a cost to an agenda that includes promoting a trans-Pacific trade deal and discussing how to deal with the nuclear threat in North Korea. Mr. Biden must also decide how to handle the bitter animosity between Mr. Abe and South Korea’s president, Park Geun-hye.

“There’s an emerging pattern of behavior that is unsettling to China’s neighbors,” a senior administration official said on Wednesday, previewing Mr. Biden’s message. At the same, he added, “The vice president of the United States is not traveling to Beijing to deliver a démarche,” a diplomatic term of art for a slap on the wrist.

The delicate balancing act in Mr. Obama’s Asia policy, between cooperating with and containing China, is evident in the administration’s mixed messages over the last two weeks. Speaking before Beijing’s latest provocation, the national security adviser, Susan E. Rice, said the United States was seeking “a new model of major power relations.”

“That means,” she said in her maiden speech on Asia, “managing inevitable competition while forging deeper cooperation on issues where our interests converge.”

Referring to the territorial disputes between China and its neighbors — which flare up not just with Japan in the East China Sea but in the South China Sea, with the Philippines and Vietnam — Ms. Rice urged “all parties to reject coercion and aggression and to pursue their claims in accordance with international law and norms.”

To some critics, that smacked of moral equivalence: the coercion and aggression has been overwhelmingly on the part of China against its smaller neighbors. But on Saturday, when Beijing announced an “air defense identification zone” over a wide swath of air space above the islands, the United States jumped off the fence.

Secretary of State John Kerry immediately condemned what he called an “escalatory action” by China and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said the United States would not alter any military operations because of it, a promise he kept this week by dispatching the unarmed bombers from Guam on a routine mission off the coast of China.

Administration officials said it was important to push back against China’s dubious assertion of jurisdiction over international air space. The Chinese policy requires foreign planes flying through the zone to identify themselves and file a flight plan, even if they are not flying into Chinese air space.

The symbolism of B-52’s flying, with no advance warning, through China’s zone spares Mr. Biden from having to play the tough guy. But experts said he needed to leave no doubt in talks with President Xi that the United States thinks the Chinese move was ill-advised.

“It will have the Chinese scrambling aircraft time after time, especially if the Japanese play games with it,” said Kenneth G. Lieberthal, a China adviser during the Clinton administration.

Mr. Biden has cultivated an unusually personal relationship with Mr. Xi. The two traveled together in China and the United States, when Mr. Xi was vice president. That may make Mr. Biden more alert to the domestic political pressures the Chinese leader faces, as he embarks on risky economic reforms after a recent Communist Party congress.

“Chinese social media, official and semiofficial media are all playing up this dispute,” said Cheng Li, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. “The U.S. has failed to understand how much weight the sovereignty issue carries with Asian countries.”

The tensions are likely to increase. The Chinese Navy has put its only aircraft carrier out to sea, on a course toward the South China Sea. In the East China Sea, an American carrier group is joining Japanese warships for long-planned naval exercises.

With so much firepower in such hotly contested waters, experts said there was a real danger of miscalculation by either side. Mr. Biden, who will begin his trip in Tokyo, is expected to urge Mr. Abe to show restraint as well.

The good news for all concerned, China experts said, is that Mr. Xi is much less interested in military adventurism than in overhauling China’s economy. “The chances of a real war are still low,” Mr. Li said. “But sometimes incidents will push leaders into a corner.”

The Economist

# The East China Sea

### Regional turbulence

Nov 27th 2013, 17:55 by The Economist | BEIJING AND TOKYO



IT CAME out of a clear blue sky. On November 23rd China declared a huge swathe of the airspace above the East China Sea henceforth to be part of a new Chinese “Air Defence Identification Zone”, or ADIZ: all aircraft intending to enter the zone had to file flight plans with the Chinese authorities, maintain radio communications and follow whatever instructions Chinese controllers chose to issue. Otherwise, China warned ominously, they risked it taking “defensive emergency measures”.

Japan’s two main airlines, whose commercial flights traverse this newly designated area dozens of times a day, rushed to comply with the new rules. But then it was America’s turn to surprise, when the Pentagon let slip that two of its B-52 bombers had flown into the zone, over the Senkaku islands, on November 26th on what it claimed was part of regular exercises in the area. The planes had followed “normal procedures”, a spokesman said, which included “not filing flight plans, not radioing ahead and not registering our [radio] frequencies”. Suddenly, the prospect loomed of a stand-off between the world’s superpower and Asia’s emerging great power.

China insists it is doing nothing unusual in establishing an air-defence zone. America, Canada and Japan, among others, have had them since the early days of the cold war, when countries were anxious to defend themselves in good time against Soviet warplanes and nuclear missiles. Yet the United States, for one, only insists that aircraft identify themselves if they intend to enter American airspace; planes simply passing through the zone (which extends well beyond territorial limits) do not have to. China, on the other hand, insists that all aircraft in the new ADIZ abide by its new rules.

More provocatively, China’s ADIZ covers the uninhabited Senkaku islands, which China calls the Diaoyu. Japan has held these since the late 19th century, but since the 1970s they have been claimed by China. In September 2012 the Japanese government bought from their private owner three of the five islands it did not already own. China claimed the move was an anti-China conspiracy, and set out to undermine Japan’s control of the islands, first by using incursions of surveillance vessels, and later patrol aircraft, to which Japan’s Self-Defence Forces have responded by scrambling fighter jets. Recently, an unmanned Chinese drone flew over the islands. When Japan threatened to shoot down the next drone that came its way, a Chinese general insisted that would be an act of war.



The latest move represents a significant ratcheting-up of China’s challenge to Japanese control of the Senkakus. The new zone increases the risk of military escalation, accidental or otherwise. In future China may think that the zone forms the basis to take action against Japanese aircraft operating in the zone. Not only does the ADIZ cover Japanese-held territory, it also overlaps significantly with Japan’s own air-defence zone (see map). Meanwhile, running uncomfortably close to both Taiwan (which also claims the Senkakus) and South Korea, it has alarmed those neighbours too. An adviser to Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister, calls it a “whole new game” and the biggest challenge in memory to freedom of movement in or above the East China Sea. Japan lodged a strong protest, which was rebuffed. Australia, South Korea and Taiwan have also expressed concerns. Chuck Hagel, America’s defence secretary, said China’s move was a “destabilising attempt to alter the status quo in the region”.

The decision to respond with an overflight of the B-52s, an official in Tokyo insists, was a joint understanding with Japan. China, meanwhile, says that it monitored the (unarmed) bombers, but claimed that they flew only along the “eastern edge” of its zone. The claim may be a way of saving face at home. Yet nothing suggests China is having second thoughts about its new ADIZ. Shi Yinhong of Renmin University in Beijing says it marks China’s first action since the Communist Party came to power in 1949 that “substantially expands its strategic space” on the western rim of the Pacific. Countries in South-East Asia with whom China has maritime disputes, notably the Philippines and Vietnam, wonder whether China will now impose an ADIZ over the South China Sea in a bid to turn it into a Chinese lake too.

For now, China’s move throws into question the depth of President Xi Jinping’s desire for a “new type of great power relationship” with America. Barack Obama seemed to get on well with Mr Xi when they met for a two-day personal summit in June, but he cannot have envisaged having to dispatch two bombers as a warning six months later. Some better sense of how the two countries intend to handle matters will come with a visit to China in early December by the vice-president, Joe Biden.

Mr Shi acknowledges that the zone has raised tensions, but predicts that Washington and Tokyo will badly want to avoid “too much risk of conflict”—ie, America and Japan will back off and accept the new situation. But that seems wishful thinking—as does a growing view among Chinese policymakers that fear of conflict with China will push America to weaken its long-held commitment to underwrite Japan’s security. In this view, America will push Japan into an accommodation with China, first, by acknowledging the existence of a territorial dispute.

Yet on the contrary, a more assertive America and Japan is now more likely. Bonnie Glaser of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think-tank, notes that flights such as the one taken by the B-52s this week are only the latest act in a long history of America’s proving the freedom of navigation in international skies and waters. (And it seems to have reassured the Japanese commercial airlines, which after lobbying by their government, announced that they would not be following Chinese rules in future.) In Tokyo, defence guidelines, to be released at the end of the year, appear likely to articulate a new policy of patrolling the seas and skies around the Senkaku islands around the clock, rather than intermittently, as now. The stakes have just got a whole lot higher.

NYT

# China Scrambles Jets for First Time in New Air Zone

###### By [JANE PERLEZ](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/jane_perlez/index.html)

###### Published: November 29, 2013 [218 Comments](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/30/world/asia/china-scrambles-jets-for-first-time-in-new-air-zone.html?hp&_r=0#commentsContainer)

BEIJING — China scrambled jets on Friday and identified two American surveillance planes and 10 Japanese aircraft in its newly declared air defense zone, the Chinese state news media said. The scrambling of the jets to find foreign aircraft was the first move announced by China showing that it was enforcing the zone, which it established last weekend.



###### The New York Times

###### Multimedia

[Graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

###### [Territorial Disputes Involving Japan](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

[Graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/11/27/world/asia/overlapping-airspace-claims.html?ref=asia)

###### [Overlapping Airspace Claims in the East China Sea](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/11/27/world/asia/overlapping-airspace-claims.html?ref=asia)

Although there was no indication that China’s air force showed any hostile intent, the move ratcheted up tensions in a long-simmering dispute between Japan and China that could lead to a military miscalculation some fear could spiral out of control. The United States, which is bound by treaty to defend Japan if it is attacked, directly entered the fray this week by sending unarmed B-52s into the contested airspace, defying Chinese demands that all aircraft notify the Chinese that they were coming in advance or face possible military action.

The dispute between China and Japan centers on uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. The new air defense zone includes airspace above the islands. Analysts believe that China’s intent in declaring control was not to force a conflict, but to try to build a case that it has as much claim to the islands as Japan, which has long administered them.

But China may have miscalculated in making the move, experts say, perhaps not expecting such a strong pushback from the United States and Japan.

In Washington, administration officials confirmed that American planes had continued what they called routine training and surveillance flights in the disputed airspace. The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, declined to provide specifics of the American flights on Friday, suggesting that they were classified reconnaissance missions.

The Chinese account in Xinhua, the state-run news agency, said the 10 Japanese aircraft included the F-15 jet fighter and surveillance aircraft, though it did not say how many planes of each type were used.

An American surveillance plane was involved in a major diplomatic incident between China and the United States in 2001 when it collided with a Chinese jet fighter over the South China Sea. The Chinese pilot was killed, and the American plane made an emergency landing on Hainan Island in southern China, an accident that badly damaged relations.

Although American officials acknowledged the risks of such accidents, they also said the Chinese air force in recent years has routinely sent its jets aloft to identify and occasionally shadow American military missions in Asian airspace.

On Friday, asked for clarification on China’s intentions regarding the new air zone, the spokesman at the Foreign Ministry, Qin Gang, said, “The Air Defense Identification Zone does not equal territorial airspace, and is not an expansion of a country’s territorial airspace.”

The spokesman also said, “Aircraft of all countries, including commercial aircraft, carrying out normal flight according to international law will not be affected.”

Many countries, including the United States and Japan, have air defense zones, but the coordinates of the Chinese zone overlap with parts of the Japanese zone, setting up what defense experts have called a dangerous situation in the airspace above the disputed islands.

Mr. Qin, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, brushed aside questions about Japanese criticism of China’s air defense identification zone, or A.D.I.Z.

“Would the Japanese side tell other countries, does it have an A.D.I.Z.?” Mr. Qin said. “Has it negotiated with other countries while it established and enlarged its A.D.I.Z.? How large is its A.D.I.Z.?”

An American expert on such zones said Japanese aircraft would not be deterred from flying in the airspace above the disputed islands, known as the Diaoyu in China and the Senkaku in Japan.

The expert, Peter Dutton, the director of the China Maritime Studies Institute at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., said that because Japan regards the airspace above the islands as its own, the country would continue air patrols.

“Japan must continue to enforce its sovereignty or they could lose it to Chinese pressure,” Mr. Dutton said.

# NYT

# Airlines Urged by U.S. to Give Notice to China

###### By [PETER BAKER](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/peter_baker/index.html) and [JANE PERLEZ](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/jane_perlez/index.html)

###### Published: November 29, 2013 [259 Comments](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/30/world/asia/china-scrambles-jets-for-first-time-in-new-air-zone.html?hp&_r=0#commentsContainer)

WASHINGTON — Even as China scrambled fighter jets to enforce its newly declared air defense zone, the Obama administration said on Friday that it was advising American commercial airlines to comply with China’s demands to be notified in advance of flights through the area.



###### The New York Times

###### Multimedia

[Graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

###### [Territorial Disputes Involving Japan](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/20/world/asia/Territorial-Disputes-Involving-Japan.html?ref=asia)

[Graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/11/27/world/asia/overlapping-airspace-claims.html?ref=asia)

###### [Overlapping Airspace Claims in the East China Sea](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/11/27/world/asia/overlapping-airspace-claims.html?ref=asia)

While the United States continued to defy China by sending military planes into the zone unannounced, administration officials said they had made the decision to urge civilian planes to adhere to Beijing’s new rules in part because they worried about an unintended confrontation.

Although the officials made clear that the administration rejects China’s unilateral declaration of control of the airspace over a large area of the East China Sea, the guidance to the airlines could be interpreted in the region as a concession in the battle of wills with China.

“The U.S. government generally expects that U.S. carriers operating internationally will operate consistent with” notice requirements “issued by foreign countries,” the State Department said in [a statement](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/11/218139.htm), adding that that “does not indicate U.S. government acceptance of China’s requirements.”

The decision contrasted with that of Japan’s government this week, when it asked several Japanese airlines, which were voluntarily following China’s rules, to stop, apparently out of fear that complying with the rules would add legitimacy to Chinese claims to islands that sit below the now contested airspace. China’s newly declared zone, experts say, is intended mainly to whittle away at Japan’s hold on the islands, which it has long administered.

On Saturday, a Japanese Foreign Ministry official said, “We will not comment on what other countries are doing with regard to filing flight plans.” It was not immediately clear if the Obama administration had notified Japan, a close ally, of its decision.

An official at Japan’s Transport Ministry said it had no immediate change to its advice to Japanese airlines.

The American decision drew criticism from some quarters. Stephen Yates, a former Asia adviser to Dick Cheney when he was vice president, said it was “a bad move” that would undercut allies in the region that take a different stance.

But Strobe Talbott, a former deputy secretary of state under Bill Clinton and now president of the Brookings Institution, said it was important to avoid an accident while drawing a firm line. “The principal option is to be extremely clear that disputes” over territory “must be resolved through diplomacy and not unilateral action,” he said.

American officials said they began having talks with airlines on Wednesday and characterized the guidance Friday as simply following established international air protocols independent of any political deliberations. The American announcement came on the same day that Chinese state news media said that China sent jets aloft and that they identified two American surveillance planes and 10 Japanese aircraft in the air defense zone the country declared last weekend.

Although there was no indication that China’s air force showed any hostile intent, the move raised tensions. The Chinese had also sent jets on patrol into the contested airspace the day before, but Xinhua, the state-run news agency, indicated that the planes on Friday were scrambled specifically to respond to foreign jets in the area.

Earlier in the week, the United States sent unarmed B-52s into the area, and they proceeded unimpeded. China then appeared to back down somewhat from its initial declaration that planes must file advance flight plans or face possible military action.

The administration’s decision on Friday underscored the delicate position President Obama finds himself in, drawn into a geopolitical dispute that will test how far he is willing to go to contain China’s rising regional ambitions.

China’s move thrust the United States into the middle of the already prickly territorial clash between Beijing and Tokyo, a position the administration had avoided for months even while reiterating that the mutual defense treaty with Japan covers the islands. After the Chinese declaration last weekend, American officials feared that, if left unchallenged, the Chinese action would lead to ever greater claims elsewhere in the Pacific region.

But with planes flying so fast and in such proximity, the administration’s worries grew that an accident or an unintended confrontation could spiral out of control. A midair collision between a Chinese fighter jet and an American spy plane off the coast of China in 2001 killed the fighter pilot and forced the spy plane to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island, setting off a diplomatic episode until Beijing released the American crew and sent the plane back, broken into parts.

 “The challenge here, as with April 2001, is when you have an unexpected crisis, things escalate very, very quickly without any plans for de-escalation,” said Jon M. Huntsman Jr., Mr. Obama’s first ambassador to China. “That’s one of the big challenges we have in the U.S.-China relationship.”

One of the biggest challenges for Mr. Obama will be navigating the complicated personalities of leaders in Tokyo and Beijing. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, a strong nationalist, has vowed to stand firm against any Chinese encroachments, while President Xi Jinping of China has recently taken over as leader and has promised to advance a strong foreign policy meant to win his country more recognition as an international power.

The two countries have been at odds for years over the uninhabited islands known as Diaoyu by the Chinese and Senkaku by the Japanese. The United States does not take a position on the dispute.

Although administration officials believe China’s actions are mainly meant to give it an advantage in its struggle with Japan over the islands, experts on Asia say they also fit China’s larger goal of establishing itself as the dominant power in the region, displacing the United States.

Administration officials said they decided to proceed with routine military training and surveillance flights so as not to legitimize China’s assertion of control over the airspace or encourage it to establish a similar air zone over the South China Sea, where it has other territorial disputes. China had said it expected to set up other air defense zones, and experts said they expected one to cover that sea.

“We don’t want this to be the first in what would be a series of assertive moves,” said an administration official, who insisted on anonymity to discuss a delicate diplomatic matter. “The whole area’s fraught.”

Mr. Obama is sending Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to the region next week, when he will meet with Mr. Xi and Mr. Abe as well as South Korea’s leader. Although the trip was previously scheduled, it will put Mr. Biden in the center of the dispute, and aides said he would deliver a message of caution to both sides to avoid escalation.

Many countries, including the United States and Japan, have air defense zones, but the coordinates of the Chinese zone overlap those of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Peter Dutton, the director of the China Maritime Studies Institute at the United States Naval War College, said the new air zone also gives China a legal structure to intercept American surveillance flights in international airspace, which have long irritated Beijing. “It is clear that the Chinese do not seek regional stability on any level,” he said. “They intend to be disruptive in order to remake the Asian regional system in accordance with their preferences.”

###### News Analysis

# NYT

# In the East China Sea, a Far Bigger Test of Power Looms

###### By [DAVID E. SANGER](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/s/david_e_sanger/index.html)

###### Published: December 1, 2013

WASHINGTON — In an era when the Obama administration has been focused on new forms of conflict — as countries use cyberweapons and drones to extend their power — the dangerous contest suddenly erupting over a pile of rocks in the East China Sea seems almost a throwback to the Cold War.



Suddenly, naval assets and air patrols are the currency of a shadow conflict between Washington and Beijing that the Obama administration increasingly fears could escalate and that American officials have said could derail their complex plan to manage [China](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/china/index.html?inline=nyt-geo)’s rise without overtly trying to contain it. As in the Cold War, [the immediate territorial dispute](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/28/world/asia/airspace-claim-forces-us-to-flesh-out-china-strategy.html) seems to be an excuse for a far larger question of who will exercise influence over a vast region.

The result is that, as [the Chinese grow more determined to assert their territorial claims](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/30/world/asia/china-scrambles-jets-for-first-time-in-new-air-zone.html) over a string of islands once important mainly to fishermen, America’s allies are also pouring military assets into the region — potentially escalating the once obscure dispute into a broader test of power in the Pacific.

Now a maritime outpost that had modest strategic significance is taking on enormous symbolic import. South Korea, which has broader concerns about China’s regional power, is building a new naval base for 20 warships, including submarines, arguing that it has to protect vital shipping lanes in the East China Sea for its exports — including many electronics headed to China.

The Japanese, after largely depending on American bases on Okinawa to back up their own limited patrols in the area, plan to build a new army base by 2016 on a small, inhabited island near the disputed islands, known as the Senkaku in [Japan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/japan/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) and the Diaoyu in China.

The Japanese are also planning to deploy more F-15s and radar planes to Okinawa and a new helicopter carrier, and, for the first time, have considered buying unarmed American drones to patrol the area, part of a three-year-long shift in military strategy to focus on their southern islands and on China. That is part of a fundamental change in the national mind-set toward a Japan that is more willing and able to defend itself than anytime since World War II, in part because of doubts about America’s own commitment to the region.

As Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. left on Sunday for a trip that will take him to the capitals of all three major contestants — Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing — the administration’s public message is that all sides need to cool down and keep nationalistic talk from making a tense situation worse.

Mr. Biden will encounter countries that are now re-examining how civilian and military officials interact: Over the past few weeks, for very separate reasons, Japan and China have each approved the creation of a national security council. For Japan, it is an effort to strengthen the hand of the prime minister in times of crises, a concept the Japanese body politic long resisted because of the legacies of World War II.

For China, it appears to be an effort by President [Xi Jinping](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/x/xi_jinping/index.html?inline=nyt-per) to exercise a degree of control over all sources of national power that his immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao, never fully mastered. Interestingly, as China sent its aircraft carrier to another potential trouble spot, the South China Sea, its path avoided the disputed islands, perhaps a sign that the Chinese realize they may have overplayed their hand.

Still, in private, American officials say they are worried that a small incident — a collision like the one between an American intelligence plane and the Chinese air force a dozen years ago off Hainan Island — could rapidly worsen the situation.

On ABC’s “This Week” on Sunday, Tom Donilon, who was Mr. Obama’s national security adviser until earlier this year and a principal architect of the administration’s approach to China, said a similar “risk of miscalculation” is what “we need to be very concerned about going forward here.” A senior administration official said Mr. Biden’s message would be that the United States will “seek crisis management mechanisms and confidence-building measures to lower tensions and reduce risk of escalation or miscalculation.”

But one of Mr. Obama’s current advisers said, “It’s pretty clear this isn’t really about the islands.” Declining to speak on the record about a sensitive strategic issue, the official added that it was about a desire by some in China, including the People’s Liberation Army and perhaps the new political leadership, “to assert themselves in ways that until recently they didn’t have the military capability to make real.”

The adviser added: “They say it’s in response to our efforts to contain them, but our analysis is that it’s really their effort to push our presence further out into the Pacific.”

In fact, on his last trip to Asia as secretary of defense, Robert M. Gates said in January 2011 that he believed the long-term goal of the Chinese was to push the United States to “the second island chain,” farther out in the Pacific, keeping American air and naval assets ever farther from the region around China’s coast. Two years later, Obama officials will not utter that view in public, but it is a running theme in American intelligence assessments about the Chinese military, tempered by evidence that some Chinese officials worry about blowback if they overreach.

That has been a repeated cycle in Mr. Obama’s relations with the Chinese. In 2010, a series of episodes, touched off by American arms sales to Taiwan and the ramming of a Japanese coast guard ship in the Senkakus by an inebriated Chinese sea captain, led China to cut off military-to-military relations between Beijing and Washington and the sale of rare-earth metals, used for electronics, to the Japanese.

Both proved temporary, and by the end of the year some senior Chinese officials, led by the state councilor, Dai Bingguo, warned that China’s actions were driving countries in the region into American hands. “Some say China wants to replace the United States and dominate the world,” Mr. Dai wrote in an article that Mr. Donilon frequently cited. “That is simply a myth.”

But Mr. Dai is gone from power, and the Obama administration is now trying to figure out how to interpret each new Chinese action under Mr. Xi, of which the recent “air defense identification zone” was considered the most calculated and, perhaps, the most muscular. Many countries claim such zones; China knew it was claiming it over disputed territory.

Mr. Obama’s immediate response was to send two unarmed B-52 bombers on what the Pentagon called “routine” runs over the territory; they were routine, but the timing and symbolism were lost on no one. Now the White House faces the more complex task of its longer-term response. To make the promise of his “Asian pivot” real, the president will have to convince Congress, and allies in the region, that he means to devote more military, diplomatic and economic attention there — not to contain China, he insists, but to preserve and extend America’s longtime role as a keeper of the peace in the Pacific.

That will be challenging at a time of Pentagon budget cuts, a national mood to focus on problems at home and a national security apparatus focused on Iran, Syria and the future of the Middle East.