

PUTTING AIR DEFENSE IDENTIFICATION ZONES ON THE RADAR

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Key Points

- Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZs) recently became contentious when China announced an ADIZ over the East China Sea. Currently, much of the research, information and commentary on ADIZs are outdated or incorrect. There are common misconceptions about the number of countries currently operating ADIZs, the specific procedures involved and the political and security implications of ADIZs.
- The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) should establish a set of best practices and a template for implementing and operating an ADIZ. This template would outline the purpose of ADIZs, emphasizing their capacity for reducing uncertainty, building confidence and reducing the risks of inadvertent conflict.
- In cases where ADIZs overlap, countries should look to the existing India-Pakistan agreement on the prevention of air space violations as a guide for cooperative agreements.
- Countries should engage in ongoing dialogue about how to effectively manage and administer ADIZs, especially in East Asia.

Introduction

In November 2013, much to the surprise and alarm of the international community, China announced the creation of its “first” ADIZ in the East China Sea (People’s Republic of China 2013). There is growing concern that China will implement a second on the South China Sea, an unstable area riddled with maritime and territorial disputes.

The announcement prompted an effort by journalists, policy makers and scholars to understand and explain the political and security implications of China’s ADIZ. A common concern was that China appeared to be using its ADIZ as a means of asserting sovereignty over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Much of the subsequent analysis and commentary misrepresented the actual global state of play with respect to ADIZs, as well as their purposes and functions. The result was a great deal of unnecessary criticism and tension. A better understanding of ADIZs is required to prevent similar disputes in the future. But even better than an improved understanding of the current state of play would be a uniform global regime with consistent and transparent practices so that aviation safety and maritime or territorial disputes do not compromise each other in the future.

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Figure 1: Overlapping ADIZs in the East China Sea



Source: Image compiled from various countries' Aeronautical Information Publications (AIPs).

Background

An ADIZ is defined in the 1944 Chicago Convention of International Civil Aviation as “a special designated airspace of defined dimensions within which aircraft are required to comply with special identification and/or reporting procedures additional to those related to the provision of air traffic service” (Chicago Convention 1944, Annex 15, Section 1.1). Originally implemented in the postwar/Cold War period, ADIZs functioned to facilitate the early identification of inbound aircraft and reduce the frequency and inherent risks of airborne interceptions. The United States was the first country to adopt an ADIZ, in 1950. It then facilitated implementation of ADIZs in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Iceland. A number of other countries adopted their own ADIZs, but some, such as Iceland's and Norway's, were dismantled following the Cold War. ADIZs were not a matter of international concern until China's 2013 announcement of an East China Sea ADIZ.

Despite the Chicago Convention's tacit authorization of ADIZs, there is no international regulation or guidance for implementing or operating them. They are neither explicitly prohibited nor permitted under international law. As a result, practices are inconsistent. Inconsistencies have led to misunderstandings and, as China's ADIZ demonstrated, have the potential to inflame international tensions.

Current Context

Much of the research and information available on ADIZs is outdated or incorrect. There are common misconceptions about the number of countries currently operating ADIZs, the specific

Table 1: Operational ADIZs

	Country	Source	Established	Follow or extend beyond territorial borders	Which flights? (*=exceptions)	For flights transiting ADIZ/ flights entering sovereign airspace?	Notification Requirements	Interception Procedures	
Europe	Finland	AIP & JEP	Information not available	Information not available	All aircraft*	All flights	1 hour prior to entry	Information not available	
Middle East	Iran	AIP	Information not available	Follow	All aircraft	ADIZ is entirely in sovereign airspace	10 minutes prior to entry	“Subject to interception”	
	Turkey	JEP	Information not available	Specified region within Turkey	All aircraft	ADIZ is entirely in sovereign airspace	Information not available	Information not available	
Asia	China	AIP & JEP	Nov. 2013	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft	All flights	Information not available	Detailed in AIP	
	India	AIP & JEP	50+ years ago, revised in 2006	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft*	All flights	10 minutes prior to entry; if flight is delayed 45+ minutes, aircraft must get another ADC	Detailed in AIP	
	Japan	JEP	Est. by US after WWII and Korea	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft	Flight plans not necessary for aircraft only transiting ADIZ	Information not available	Detailed in AIP	
	Korea	AIP & JEP	1951	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft	Information not available	15-30 minutes prior to entry	Not disclosed	
	Myanmar	AIP	Information not available	Information not available	All aircraft	All flights	30 minutes prior to entry	Aircraft liable to interception (details not included)	
	Pakistan	JEP	Information not available	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft*	All flights	15 minutes prior to entry	Information not available	
	Philippines	JEP	Information not available	Information not available	All aircraft	All flights	15 minutes prior to entry	Not detailed	
	Sri Lanka	JEP	Information not available	Information not available	All aircraft*	All flights	15 minutes prior to entry; if flight is delayed 60+ minutes, aircraft must get another ADC	Aircraft is liable to interception (details not included)	
	Taiwan	AIP & JEP	Est. by US after WWII and Korea	Information not available	All aircraft	Information not available	Information not available	Detailed in AIP	
	Thailand	AIP & JEP	Information not available	Information not available	All aircraft	All flights	10 minutes prior to entry	Detailed in AIP	
	North America	Canada	AIP & JEP	Information not available	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft	All flights	Information not available	Information not available
		United States	AIP & JEP	1950	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft*	All flights **	15 minutes prior to entry	Aircraft liable to interception (details not included)
	Pacific	Australia	AIP & JEP	Information not available	Beyond sovereign territory	All aircraft*	Information not available	60 minutes prior to entry	Detailed in AIP

Source: Information compiled from various countries’ AIPs.

procedures of each country's ADIZ, as well as their legal or political implications.

Information on an ADIZ may be found in the operating country's AIP. However, much of this information is difficult to access. Countries generally store their AIPs differently. Not all are available electronically, and some countries even charge a fee. The closest thing to a single repository is the Jeppesen Pilot Manuals,¹ which provide comprehensive aeronautical navigation data. From these it is possible to identify the 16 countries that currently operate ADIZs.

China's East China Sea ADIZ overlaps with those of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea and includes airspace over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. For this reason, Japan interpreted China's move as an assertion of sovereignty and a step in a larger plan to incrementally assert control over the East China Sea.

Not only was China criticized for attempting to use its ADIZ as a tool for asserting sovereignty (something no ADIZ can accomplish under international law), it was also hotly criticized for demanding that even aircraft engaged in innocent transit of its ADIZ without entering sovereign Chinese airspace give advance notice of their intentions and identify themselves to Chinese authorities. Among those countries criticizing China on this head was the United States. In fact, several other countries enforce this requirement, including the United States itself (US Department of Transportation 2013; 2014). However, the specific requirements and procedures China sought to impose were vague or unclear in certain respects, resulting in confusion and justified concern.

The recent politicization of ADIZs is worrying for two reasons. First, it threatens to undermine their utility as confidence-building mechanisms. While originally conceived and framed as tools for *national* security, ADIZs have in fact proven capable of enhancing *regional* security by promoting aviation safety, enhancing transparency and reducing uncertainty. The politicization of ADIZs threatens to turn them into fields of competition and things to be challenged, in particular where they overlap. Put another way, the politicization of ADIZs threatens to increase, rather than decrease, the dangers of inadvertent conflict in the skies.

Second, framing ADIZs as tools for sovereignty assertion can only increase political tensions in contested areas. Of particular concern here is the South China Sea, which would be a logical next step for Beijing not only because of its expansive and contested maritime and territorial claims, but also because China has many sensitive military installations in the region (particularly the Yulin nuclear submarine base on Hainan Island). The announcement of a second Chinese ADIZ in the

South China Sea would greatly alarm and dramatically raise the stakes with rival claimants such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, as well as other interested parties, of which the United States and Japan are the most prominent.

A uniform global regime on ADIZs specifying best practices would help depoliticize them and reduce the dangers associated with passive noncompliance, deliberate challenges, unnecessary or overly frequent scrambles, simultaneous interceptions, collisions and outright hostile actions — dangers well illustrated by recent surprise encounters between Russian and North American Treaty Organization aircraft, the dramatic spike in Japanese scrambles and, most dramatically, the 1983 shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007 and the 2001 Hainan Island EP-3 incident.

Recommendations

In light of widespread misinformation and confusion regarding the status and operation of ADIZs today, we recommend the following steps would help depoliticize ADIZs, increase transparency, build confidence, reduce the risk of inadvertent crisis and ultimately promote trust.

The ICAO should establish a template for ADIZ best practices. This template should clearly specify the purposes of an ADIZ:

- allowing for the timely identification of aircraft to reduce the risk of surprise attack;
- promoting regional security by routinizing and making transparent air defense identification and interception procedures;
- reducing the frequency of unnecessary scrambles (thereby reducing costs, wear-and-tear and crew fatigue of the kind that erodes tactical situational judgment);
- reducing uncertainty; enhancing transparency; and
- building confidence.

The template should also clarify that an ADIZ does not have maritime or territorial sovereignty implications. It should suggest (minimally) or mandate (maximally) procedures for managing ADIZ overlaps, perhaps using the current India-Pakistan agreement as a model.

The ICAO should create a single, publicly accessible repository for all ADIZ-related information to promote transparency. This information should be accessible at no cost, and should include reporting and updating requirements.

¹ Jeppesen, a subsidiary of Boeing, consolidates information in AIPs for pilots and airlines.

The international community should engage in quiet, informal dialogue about how to effectively manage and administer ADIZs, especially in East Asia, where zones overlap. These talks should centre on depoliticizing the current understanding of ADIZs and rebuilding confidence between countries in the region. Conversations may also lead to more formal agreements in this regard in the future.

Conclusion

When properly understood, ADIZs can, in fact, serve as public goods promoting aviation safety and regional security, but if politicized and treated as tools or chessboards for sovereignty assertion, they jeopardize, rather than promote, regional and national security.

Under good regulation, and when seen in a non-political light, ADIZs are more to be welcomed than feared.

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