

US-Japanese Militarism and China's Air-Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over Disputed Islets. Pretext for Another Pacific War?

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Global Research, December 07, 2013

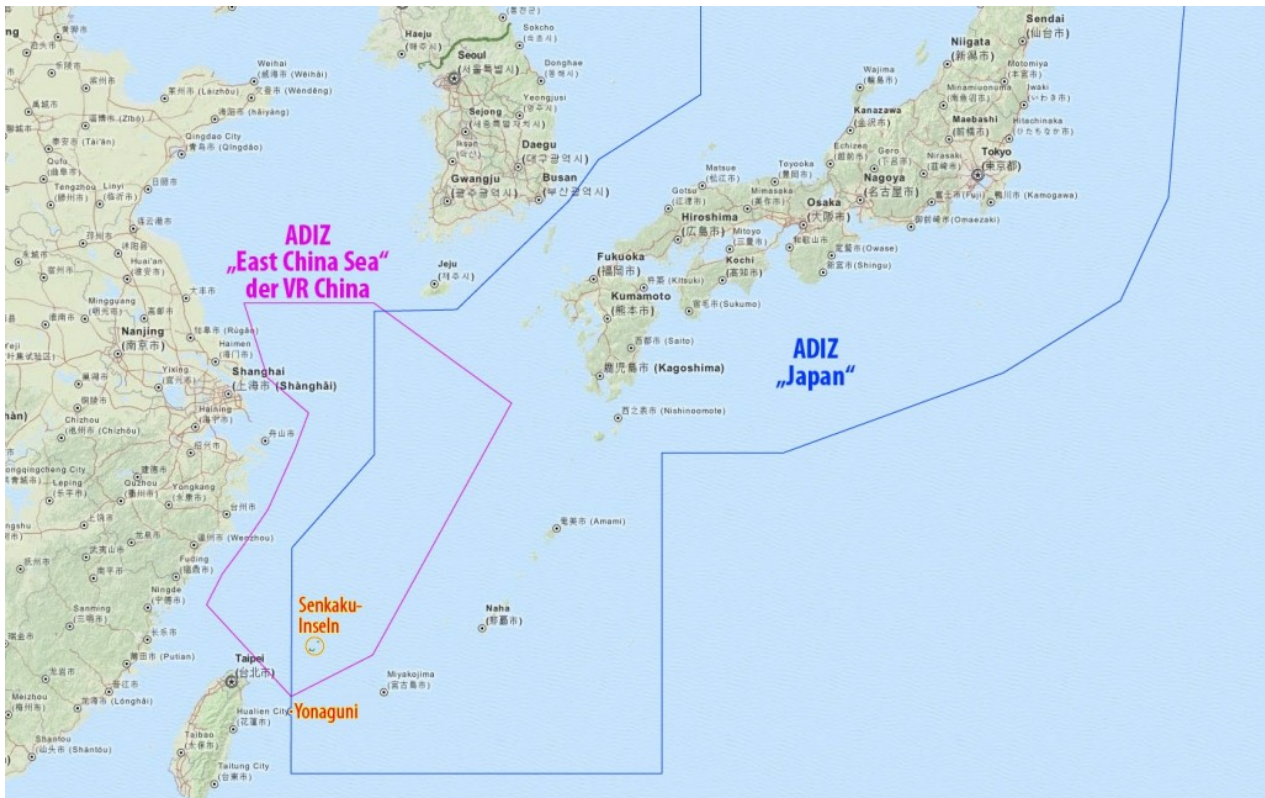
Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The White House refusal to recognize China's new air-defense identification zone (ADIZ) is a knee-jerk reaction that reveals an astounding ignorance of historical, legal and geopolitical issues in Asia and the Pacific. The US-Japan Security Treaty, as a defense agreement to protect the Japanese homeland against foreign invasion, was never intended for settling boundary conflicts, as in the current cases of the Senkaku-Diaoyu islets dispute with China, the Tokushima-Tokdo tussle with South Korea and the Northern Territories-South Kurile claim against Russia. Washington should not poke its long nose into these bilateral matters of limited local concern, just as Japan should never militarily intervene in the U.S. border problems with Mexico.

If anything should cause Washington to desist from war-mongering, it is the Japanese claim that there exists no islets dispute whatsoever. Tokyo maintains the pretense that the Senkaku-Diaoyu issue is just being exploited by Beijing for energy-exploration domination of the seabed and that the controversy will soon blow over like a summer squall. This diplomatic posture is, in reality, contradicted by the dispatch of battle-ready Japanese warships and fighter aircraft to the surrounding waters and airspace.

Japan has drawn its own ADIZ, modeling it after the 1945 airspace map drawn up by the U.S. occupation force. The Japanese claim includes not just those barren rocks but also a vast swath of far inside the continental shelf, which is claimed by China and South Korea. In 2011, Beijing and Seoul filed a joint position paper and complaint with the United Nations against Japanese encroachment across the continental shelf.



Rejecting the World Court

The quickest resolution to the Senkaku-Diaoyu quarrel, along with the overlapping air-defense zones, is to bring a territorial case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the world court that handles international boundary disputes at The Hague. The ICJ requires sovereign parties involved in the dispute to accept the court's jurisdiction and abide by its ruling. Japan's rejection of an ICJ case therefore indicates serious weaknesses in its territorial claims under existing international law.

The U.S. is thus backing a sure loser under the UN Law of the Sea, rendering its support for Japanese control over the Senkaku an untenable and probably illegal act of maritime aggression and territorial expansionism. For a nation that from its very inception has supported freedom of navigation and national sovereignty, Washington's bias toward the Japanese claim runs counter to America's traditional standards of maritime law.

Before proceeding, as someone born on Japanese soil it is difficult not to be arguing instead in Japan's defense against hostile neighboring countries. Protection of one's native land is paramount, especially when considering the fact that Japan has so little acreage compared with its gigantic neighbors. By the same token, for its national honor, Japan should relinquish any territory that might still be illegally held as a vestige of the colonialist policies of the past 120 years. The seizure and renaming of those tiny islets was a disgraceful act of international deception, which harms Japan's postwar policy of legitimate self-defense under international law.

Logic of Air Defense Zones

China's recent move to declare an air-defense zone is not precedent-setting, since the U.S., Japan and South Korea have already imposed their own arbitrary ADIZ boundaries in the East China Sea. Under ADIZ rules, which by the way are not regulated by any international treaty, civilian aircraft are required to notify the relevant national air-traffic authority of its flight plan and aircraft number.

These security measures are especially needed over disputed maritime areas to avert the shoot-down of a civilian aircraft mistaken as a military intruder. The potential for the deliberate downing of a passenger jet was highlighted in the missile that struck KAL007 in 1983, when a Korean Airline jet was flown on a CIA espionage mission over a Soviet air-defense base on the Kamchatka Peninsula, just north of Japan. An air-defense zone is therefore sometimes necessary to ensure the safety of civil aviation and to discourage harmful incidents by intelligence agencies or terrorist hijackers.

There is a darker side to this airspace dispute, which none of the parties are willing to admit. Former Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, during his last year in office, led an ultranationalist team of civil engineers to plan the construction of a helipad, capable of landing light aircraft, on the largest islet Uotsuri. Donations for Tokyo's Olympic bid were allegedly misappropriated in 2012 for the quasi-military project, according the city press.

Ishihara's intervention in the Senkaku-Diaoyu dispute was initiated much earlier, back in 1996 with the construction of a lighthouse on the islets, intended to enable boat landings, by the Japan Youth Federation. This rightist organization was created by a Ginza-based yakuza group whose members are "zai-nichi" or ethnic Koreans, specifically descendants of collaborators with the Japanese colonialist occupation of the Korean Peninsula from 1895 to 1945. The ethnic gangster group provided campaign funds for Tokyo Metropolitan Governor Ishihara in spite of his racist agitation against third-world immigrants from Korea, China and the Philippines.

Manchurian Memories

More worrisome perhaps from the Chinese historical perspective is the potential for covert sabotage of one of Japan's own passenger jets. A violent plane crash, blamed on Beijing, could rally international support for invoking the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty to launch a counterstrike against Beijing. Then notorious precedent for false-flag attacks was set in the 1931 Mukden Incident, when Imperial Army officers bombed the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railroad (Mantetsu). The clandestine operation provided the pretext for an outright military invasion of northeast China . Soon after the plot was exposed in the world press, Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka, former head of the Mantetsu, led the 1933 walk-out from League of Nations, which marked the actual start of World War II.

The legacy of the Manchurian covert operation is also a major chapter in the family history of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose grandfather Nobusuke Kishi became the finance and economy minister of the puppet state of Manchukuo as a direct beneficiary of that false-flag attack. Inside Manchuria , Kishi sponsored the infamous bioweapons Unit 731, which launched mass-murder attacks on populous cities with bubonic plague and Hanta virus. Simultaneously, Kishi served as wartime head of the Munitions Ministry, which developed an atomic bomb program on Konan (Hungnam Island) in northern Korea and inside Fukushima Prefecture .

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is an unrepentant admirer of his grandfather Kishi, often quoting his forebear on the necessity of nuclear weapons for Japan . The naval standoff around the Senkaku-Diaoyu islets, as a provocation campaign, is connected with the continuing nuclear armaments program centered in Fukushima Prefecture, where the military ran uranium and

thorium mines in the late 1930s, under a secret project codenamed BUND-1.

The pall of secrecy is being reinforced by the Liberal Democratic Party, which has just rammed through a state secrets law aimed at suppressing whistleblowers and journalists on grounds of national security in foreign affairs. While the Senkaku-Diaoyu clash serves as a news diversion from the massive radioactive releases from the destroyed Fukushima nuclear plant, the maritime conflict also serves as a rallying point for Abe's calls for "nuclear capability".

The postwar "peace" Constitution, forbidding Japan from war as an instrument of state policy, was drafted with assistance from Americans aiming to prevent a repeat of the wartime horrors. However, a by-now forgotten point that needs reminding is that the United States was a de facto ally of Japanese militarist aggression in Manchuria, where U.S. Army observers and railway engineers with the Harriman-owned Union Pacific Railway were stationed until just before the Pearl Harbor attack..

Statements by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in support of Tokyo's claims on the islets reveal a deep-seated split between the Pentagon's global military agenda and the State Department's traditional support for democracy and sovereignty.

Deceptions in History

Tokyo's claim to the Senkaku group is based on the principle of "terra nullis", a Latin term that means the site was uninhabited and unclaimed until discovery by Japan. On historical record, however, the Diaoyu group was registered as part of Toucheng Township in northeast Taiwan, the closest land mass to those islets (140 kilometers versus 170 km distance from Ishigaki Island, Okinawa Prefecture).

Japanese "discovery" of the islets in January 1895 happened to coincide with the seven-month-long First Sino-Japanese War. That conflict ended in April of that same year with the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, under which diplomats of the defeated Qing Dynasty ceded the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan to Japanese rule.

While that treaty, drafted and signed under coercion, did not specifically mention the Diaoyu group, those islets formed the critical flank for subsequent Japanese naval operations, which began in June against resistance from the newly declared Republic of Formosa. Japanese cruisers and troop carriers had to cruise past the Senkaku islets to attack the offshore Pescadore Islands in the Taiwan Strait and then proceed to the southernmost tip of Taiwan. In short, capture of the Diaoyu was an integral step in Japan's first war against China and in preparation for its military takeover of Taiwan.

Roots of American-Japanese militarism

Taiwan was the victim of aggression from the first joint U.S.-Japan military operations decades prior to the Nine-Power intervention against the Boxer Rebellion, which destroyed Beijing and Tianjin at the turn of the century. The punitive Taiwan Expedition of 1874 was organized by American Civil War veteran Gen. Charles Le Gendre, while the Japanese invasion forces were led by Saigo Tsugumori. These real-life figures inspired the fictional characters for the film "The Last Samurai" with Tom Cruise in the role of Capt. Nathan Algren (modeled after Le Gendre) and Ken Watanabe as Katsumoto (Saigo Takamori, Tsugumori's elder brother).

In contrast to the romantic Orientalism of that Hollywood version of events, the actual historical figures were not traditionalist practitioners of the warrior code known as “bushido.” In fact, Le Gendre and the Saigo brothers were military modernizers and aggressive imperialists responsible for the slaughter of Taiwanese aboriginal people who established the guidelines for Japanese expansionism into Korea and China.

Since the 1879 visit to Japan of retired President and Civil War hero Ulysses Grant and as continued by Theodore Roosevelt during the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War, the United States was firmly allied with its fellow republic, Meiji Japan, against a “backward” East Asia. The American view of republican Japan conveniently ignored the “deep-state” power of a coterie of militarist aristocrats and war industrialists who stood above the law from the 1868 Restoration until the 1945 defeat. The Cold War and the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam led to the revival of the military-industrial complex known as the “zaibatsu”, which is now, at this very moment, proceeding to eliminate the democratic rights of a cowed Japanese public.

The Pacific War of 1941-45 was therefore a rare rupture in the historical cooperation between the hegemonic powers of West and East. The rise of China now threatens to upset this longstanding alliance between Washington and Tokyo, and so their joint military forces are mobilizing at the “strategic pivot” to roll back unwanted challenger. The fulcrum of the pivot, around which the entire Western Pacific now turns, is the Senkaku islets, where American and Japanese naval and air forces have a formidable strategic and tactical advantage over the People’s Liberation Army.

Meiji Japan’s spectacular victories over the navies of Qing-dynasty China and tsarist Russia, along with the capture and colonization of Taiwan and Korea, were made possible by top-of-the-line battleships built at Scottish shipyards with loans from J.P. Morgan bank and with gunnery training from British and American officers. Ever since those days of gunpowder and glory, the domination of continental Asia remains a vital part of the globalist agenda of the financial and political elites in New York, Tokyo and London. The threat of another world war arises from these global centers, and certainly not from a defensive Beijing, Pyongyang or Moscow.

Maritime Resource Rivalry

In its policy paper on the Senkaku non-dispute, Japan’s Foreign Ministry claimed that China never claimed sovereignty over the islets until oil resources were discovered in the vicinity in the late 1970s. The credibility of this claim, however, was overturned by a 2012 revelation from LDP veteran Hiromi Nonaka, an expert on security affairs, in his recollection of the late Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka’s unexpected query to Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai in September 1972.

Aides from the Foreign Ministry were reportedly taken aback by Tanaka’s off-the-cuff question to Premier Zhou about China’s position on the islets dispute. Given the urgency to normalize relations with the US and Japan, while negotiating for an end to the Vietnam War, the Chinese statesman suggested a deferral of the Senkaku negotiations until the unspecified future, according to Nonaka, who was present at that historic summit. Foreign Ministry spokesmen have since claimed that the diplomatic archives contain no record of this exchange, which is certainly not the first or last time that the historical record disappears in Tokyo.

Taiwan left out

Even among diehard supporters of Taiwan independence, Beijing and not Taipei has been recognized as sovereignty holder in the bilateral dispute. As a former LDP parliamentarian, Shintaro Ishihara organized the Blue Wave club of Diet members who supported Taiwan independence. In wake of the Tokyo subway gassing, however, Ishihara resigned from the Liberal Democrats due to media disclosures of his role in founding the Russo-Japan College, which was run by the subway sect Aum Shinrikyo as a front for smuggling weapons of mass destruction from a collapsing Russian economy. His close partner in creating the doomsday sect was the late Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe, father of the present prime minister.

Despite his verbal support for an independent Taiwan, Ishihara never acknowledged that the Senkaku islets or disputed Yonaguni Island were part of Taiwan, and instead focused on opposing mainland China as the sovereign power and sworn enemy. Ishihara's bluster and antics on the islets have united the Chinese worldwide as never before, a backlash with negative ramifications for Japan's economy as well as its diplomacy. The landing by Hong Kong activists on the islets lends even more support for a united Chinese claim on the Diaoyu as a part of Taiwan Province.

A note in passing: Yonaguni, famed for its mysterious underwater "pyramid", is the southernmost island of the Ryukyu chain, and was traditionally controlled by Taipei. In the 1970s, then President Chiang Ching-kuo sent Taiwanese jet fighters on flyovers to assert Taipei's territorial claim over that small inhabited island

Maritime Markers

Today, the barren outcrops are far more important as markers for 200 nautical mile maritime economic zones, under the UN Law of the Sea, than for their land value. The countries of East Asia are vying for fishery resources and more importantly the mineral and petroleum deposits below the seafloor.

Chinese and Korean claims to the East Asian continental shelf add up to about 1 million square kilometers of maritime area, excluding the Paracel and Spratley archipelagos, which are disputed by Southeast Asian nations.

In contrast, Japan's ever-expanding Exclusive Economic Zone comprises 4.5 million square kilometers, a dozen times larger than Japan's landmass. While fixating the news media on the Senkaku-Diaoyu confrontation, Tokyo has quietly laid claim to more than 30 islands and atolls on the far ends of the North Pacific, along with the 200-mile oceanic zone around every reef and outcrop.

The Senkaku islands comprise only about 9 hectares of steep rock jutting out of rough seas. In comparison, the land area lost to the Fukushima nuclear disaster within the exclusion zone amounts to some 3,000 square kilometers. More than 33,000 Senkaku archipelagos could fit inside the radioactive dead zone.

A die-hard supporter of nuclear power, Prime Minister Abe is willing to throw away millions of dollars "defending" a remote fringe of the East China Sea while failing to provide compensation and living expenses, much less alternative land and homes, to 160,000 evacuees from radioactive areas of Fukushima in the Honshu heartland. The current emphasis on national security and nuclear capability are completely out of kilter with the

increasingly harsh conditions faced by the Japanese people.

Winners and Losers

The islets conflict has also permanently harmed Japan's chances of ever recovering from Russia two of the four disputed islands of the South Kurile chain, which are lush with vegetation and once inhabited by Japanese fisher folk, who have lived in exile on Hokkaido since the war's end. Provoking China and South Korea, while alienating Russia, have wrecked any hopes for regaining the Northern Territories.

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The only winner in the islets dispute is the Chinese navy, which by now has overwhelming and unquestioning domestic support for naval modernization and fleet expansion. Tokyo's confrontational attitude has resurrected painful memories of past atrocities and imperialist arrogance during the two modern wars against China. It is just a matter time before an aging and less agile Japan slips badly, and the Chinese forces move in - hopefully for no more than those tiny outcrops.

The strategic pivot policy promises only costly military spending and humiliating setbacks ahead. Japanese policymakers should accept a world court judgment, if only to prevent future losses of legitimate national territory, which is more vulnerable than any military strategist is ready to admit in public. The long-term interests of Japan and the US are better served by a maritime security treaty and resource partnership with China and Russia, not a self-defeating rivalry against these East Asian powers.

If a strategic retreat is not implemented sooner than later, the Senkaku-Diaoyu dispute could rapidly escalate into the last battle of the Pacific War and the first shots fired in World War III. Diplomacy, as the art of compromise, is needed more than ever to prevent the unthinkable.

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