

Taiwan's sovereignty challenged by Beijing

Written by Nat Bellocchi 000

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The declaration by China that it is imposing an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) just north of Taiwan has far-reaching consequences and implications for peace and stability in the region, as well as for Taiwan's sovereignty.

Peace and stability are threatened because this is yet another unilateral step by China in its strategy to impose its dictates on surrounding countries.

The area affected is a heavily traveled air route linking Japan, South Korea and Taiwan with the rest of the Asian continent and is therefore a lifeline for these nations and those that lie further south.

China's move would give the country pseudo-legal grounds to inhibit air traffic over international waters and make life difficult for other countries.

This is highly undesirable, and the affected nations would do well to make it clear that these new rules are unacceptable.

The new ADIZ claim also appears to be a move to impose China's ways on Japan in relation to the Diaoyutai Islands (釣台) — known as the Senkakus in Japan — which are under Tokyo's control.

Over the past few years, Beijing has asserted with increasing insistence that the island chain is Chinese territory, although it has not been able to bring any convincing evidence to the table to show they were ever under Chinese control.

By abruptly changing the "status quo" China has given the impression that it has a distinct disregard for international norms and values, and that it is not very interested in a peaceful resolution of differences.

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Indeed, Beijing seems intent to bully its way through at the expense of China's neighbors.

The situation is serious for Taiwan, as the ADIZ overlaps the nation's exclusive economic zone and includes the Diaoyutais, which Taipei also claims as part of its territory.

China's move seems to be part of a calculated strategy of Beijing to bolster its sovereignty claims by incrementally expanding Chinese air and maritime control of areas in the East and South China Seas.

Should Taiwan put its head in the sand and pretend that its sovereignty is not affected?

It most certainly is, and the question is what will Taiwan's next move be? Will Taiwan give a clear indication to China that it does have significant problems with this unilateral move, and that relations between the two countries would be affected if the declaration is not rescinded?

Taiwan would also do well to closely coordinate with other democratic nations with strategic interests in the region, such as the US, Japan and South Korea.

The US has strongly protested the ADIZ through statements by US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and US Secretary of State John Kerry.

In order to show its strong opposition, the US also sent a flight of unarmed B-52 bombers through the zone on Monday.

If Taiwan wants to retain its status as a de facto free and democratic nation, it needs to make it clear that it is on the side of nations that oppose the new rules, and it should disregard the unilateral and unreasonable dictates imposed by the repressive and undemocratic regime in Beijing.

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Nat Bellocchi served as chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan from 1990 to 1995. The views expressed in this article are his own.

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