

China's Proclamation of its Air Defense Identification Zone and South Korea :

② The Perspective from U.S.-China Relations

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Interviewees

Dong Ryul Lee
Sang Hyun Lee

The East Asia Institute (EAI) recently conducted a series of Smart Q&A interviews about the controversy surrounding China's announcement of its Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). On December 10, EAI conducted an [interview](#) with Professor Min Gyo Koo of Seoul National University to analyze possible emerging conflicts arising from the ADIZ from an international legal perspective. On December 12, Dong Ryul Lee, a professor at Dongduk Women's University, and Sang Hyun Lee, director of the Security Studies Program at the Sejong Institute, were invited to evaluate the current situation surrounding the ADIZ from the perspective of U.S.-China relations and to provide regional policy recommendations to South Korea.

The Difference in Opinion between the United States and China over the ADIZ and its Background

"China: ① For the purpose of actively defending its expanding core interests in the ocean ② Endeavoring to manage stable relations with neighboring states while constructing an environment for the constant growth of national power."

"U.S.: ① Through its Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) strategy, China is testing the will of the U.S. ② If the U.S. backs down in the early phase, then further concessions on more issues are likely in the future."

Q1. How can the official positions of the U.S. and China over ADIZ be summarized?

Dong Ryul Lee: From the perspective of China, it was done to secure Chinese sovereignty and the security of its territorial airspace. Second, it follows international law and international practice. Therefore, China hopes the proclamation will be respected by the U.S. and neighboring countries. China especially emphasizes international law and practice being aware that, in 2010, the U.S. raised the key issue of "freedom of navigation" related to the South China Sea dispute, and China was confronted with criticism from the international community.

Lee Sang Hyun: The U.S. announced that China's unilateral ADIZ proclamation cannot be accepted. Broadly speaking, the U.S. voiced concern that China's unilateral declaration of the ADIZ was not appropriate for a "responsible stakeholder." Today, because China, along with the U.S., has emerged as a significant player in the international order, the U.S. has consistently demanded that China must act in accordance with international norms and regulations. The unilateral announcement of the ADIZ itself was not a problem in the context of international law. However, the U.S. became apprehensive because China's proclaimed zone overlaps the ADIZs of South Ko-

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rea and Japan without any prior consultation, and China used strong language in the announcement which implied the ability to take military action. This course of action does not appear to be that of a responsible stakeholder, and the U.S. is concerned that China, not yet recognized as a sufficiently responsible player in the international community, is increasing instability in the region by being aggressive.

Q2. What is the background rationale for China, which has maintained the principle of a “New Pattern of Great Power Relations,” in promulgating the ADIZ in such a “unilateral” and “provocative” way?

Dong Ryul Lee: There is a great deal of controversy over the background of China’s ADIZ proclamation since China abruptly raised the issue at unexpected time. Some observers interpret that in order to surmount the power instability and enhance the legitimacy of regime, the Xi Jinping administration has initiated an unyielding foreign policy and the ADIZ measure was derived from that. However, it is difficult to find supporting evidence for this interpretation. Rather, China has a tradition of attempting to firmly control external circumstances at the time of internal instability because it has often experienced a systemic crisis when confronted by domestic political instability and outside threats. For instance, during the Great Leap Forward in 1958 and the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, China endeavored to maintain stable relations with its neighbors. Prior to the October 25 announcement of the ADIZ, at a conference on the diplomacy of neighboring countries (周边外交工作座谈会) attended by all seven members of standing committee of the Politburo, the Chinese leadership accentuated the importance of peaceful relations with surrounding countries in order to realize the “Chinese dream” (中国梦), also known as “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

China’s promulgation of the ADIZ clearly indicates the two main directions of this policy. First, since 2010, China has stressed the importance of protecting its core interests. Now, one of China’s core interests, in conjunction with an increase in its national power, is to gradually expand its influence in the field of maritime diplomacy. The creation of the ADIZ can be seen as a menacing move by surrounding countries, but if one considers that China’s core interests are enlarging, there is a defensive aspect to the Chinese action. However, compared to China’s reactive and defensive actions in the past, it is worth paying close attention to the present situation which is demonstrating anticipative and proactive progress. Also, there is the possibility that China could take preemptive action on matters related to its core interests. Second, China is making simultaneous efforts to maintain stable relations with the U.S. and its neighbors during its rise. In the matter of the ADIZ, China has selected a progressive method in which it anticipates a problem and has committed to a course of action. It will then thoroughly observe its neighbors’ responses before it reacts in order to finally manage the situation.

Q3. What is the background of the strong reaction by the United States against China’s proclamation of the ADIZ, when it mobilized strategic bombers in the early stages of the situation?

Sang Hyun Lee: The U.S., rather than considering the ADIZ issue an isolated event, worries that the announcement portends more aggressive moves by China in the future. Currently, China is operating an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy in which it interrupts the strategic projection of U.S. power in the Western Pacific region. The U.S. reasons that, while pursuing this strategy, China is testing the will of the U.S. with individual cases as seen with the ADIZ. If the ADIZ issue is only the first of more attempts at “driving the U.S. out of Asia”, then the U.S. will be concerned that China may increasingly demand more concessions if it appears that the U.S. is backing away from the situation. With the present regional instability, the U.S. must adequately counteract China or it might negatively affect the will of U.S. allies in the region. Therefore, the U.S. decision to launch reconnaissance planes, fighters, and bombers over the contested area can be understood in this context. In this current era of U.S.-China relations, although the idea of achievable coexistence is widespread, the pursuit of strategic advantages by both sides remains a zero-sum game.

U.S.-China Relations in 2014 and an Outlook for East Asia's Future State of Affairs

"The chance of a direct conflict between the U.S. and China is low, although with the current tensions, the possibility of an accidental clash or miscalculation has been increased."

"If Japan chooses a path of unilateral aggression, there is the likelihood for a China-Japan collision to ignite a U.S.-China conflict."

"The keys to change the situation in East Asia in the long-term are in the hands of the U.S."

Q4. Taking into account the strategic maneuvering surrounding the ADIZ issue between the two countries, what are the prospects for U.S.-China relations?

Sang Hyun Lee: The current tension between the U.S. and China over the ADIZ proclamation will remain for awhile. While competition in military, diplomatic, and economic matters will continue, the situation is becoming more complex in regard to the encounter between the Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy of the U.S. and the "aggressive rise" of China. Furthermore, there are additional issues in the region that could lead to conflict, such as the Japanese right of collective self-defense, the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute, the Six-Party Talks, missile defense, and so on. Ultimately, the bottom line is: to what extent will the U.S. and China manage the crisis? Even though the chance of a direct conflict is low for the meantime, it is necessary to note that uncertainty can escalate during tense situations, which then increases the probability of a miscalculation and accidental clash that ratchets up regional insecurity.

Dong Ryul Lee: China's promulgation of ADIZ could become a significant turning point for long-term U.S.-China relations. China has been apprehensive about expanding its national core interests as it emerges for fear of provoking the U.S. However, as the U.S. was not able to effectively react to the ADIZ proclamation, it showed the Chinese that the U.S. may not respond as aggressively to Chinese actions as they had previously thought. As a result, China has gained confidence that it can act in its own interest with less fear in the future. China will progress from merely managing the situation to gradually expanding its core national interests along with its economic rise to, finally, avoiding a direct conflict with the U.S.

Q5. Which regional issues should be given special attention in the future?

Sang Hyun Lee: In the medium- to short-term, the core variable for the development phase of U.S.-China relations is Japan. The leverage that Japan has enjoyed in the waters of the East China Sea has been recently offset by China's attempts to increase its maritime defense perimeter. China's ADIZ proclamation could be interpreted as an attempt to gain a similar balance in the realm of air space after the relative success of its maritime strategy. Therefore, Japan's future actions could become an independent variable in the stable U.S.-China relationship as Japan increasingly views China as a serious threat.

Dong Ryul Lee: I agree. Essentially, the reason for China's proclamation of the ADIZ was the suspicion that the U.S.-Japan Alliance is attempting to block China's emergence by approving Japan's pursuit of the right of collective self-defense. Japan, taking this into account, recognizes China as a more severe menace while simultaneously discrediting U.S. influence to a certain degree. Japan has the capability to aggravate the situation by acting on its own in the future. If Japan pursues such a path, there is a high chance for China to respond more actively, heightening the conflict between China and Japan.

Sang Hyun Lee: In this context, the most concerning issue is the Senkaku-Diaoyu islands dispute. Japan has frequently asserted that the islands are Japanese territory and subject to the U.S.-Japan security treaty, opening up the possibility for a China-Japan conflict to develop into a U.S.-China conflict. It is unclear whether this conflict would escalate or be managed properly. But with the

current increased uncertainty, it depends on the willingness of the related parties to aggressively manage the crisis. If the U.S. decided to escalate the issue, the situation would likely enter a negative spiral. However, choosing strong action would lead to a lose-lose situation that is best avoided. Hence, a careful approach on this matter is more likely.

Q6. If the competition for strategic advantage in East Asia between the United States and China is a zero-sum game, isn't confrontation unavoidable in the long run?

Dong Ryul Lee: In spite of the rise of China, the U.S. still holds the key to changes in the state of East Asian affairs. As President Xi Jinping has said, the core of the New World Order (新型大国关系) lies in the co-prosperity(共榮) of the U.S. and China. Co-prosperity is possible if the two countries exhibit mutual respect toward each other's core interests, because the Pacific Ocean is large enough to accommodate the needs of both countries. If, however, U.S. rebalancing moves in the direction of containing China, then it might be impossible to break away from a head-on confrontation. But peaceful coexistence is possible if they respect each other's mutual gains. Considering the numerous rises and falls of dynasties in China's history, the current Chinese leaders have contemplated how to maintain stable country as much as how to rise as a powerful country. China is more likely to continue to seek a way to coexist with the U.S. rather than strive for hegemony. This is why China has closely observed U.S. responses while taking aggressive, preemptive measures. Therefore, the reaction of the U.S. to China's move will be a key turning point that determines the situation within the region.

Sang Hyun Lee: I agree. The long-term future of East Asia depends on if the U.S. can prove its firm resolution to complete its "pivot to Asia" strategy. Currently, due to the Syrian Crisis and domestic problems over "Obamacare," the U.S. has not been able to push ahead on strengthening its influence in the Asia-Pacific region in accordance with its officially-announced strategic goal. The U.S. could then fail to make an appropriate response to an aggressive action from China, which would not inspire confidence in its regional allies.

Policy Recommendations for South Korea

"Bold leadership is needed. South Korea should strengthen its diplomatic position in the midst of the rivalry among the U.S., China, and Japan"

"A more strategic and flexible foreign policy than the current one is needed. South Korea should make a move according to a strategic blueprint that is prepared beforehand and endeavor to improve its relationship with Japan."

Q7. How do you assess the announcement of the expansion of the Korean Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ) by the South Korean government?

Sang Hyun Lee: South Korea's move to expand the KADIZ with respect to China's proclamation of the CADIZ was appropriate. Dodging this issue was not an option because the territorial airspace over Jeodo island was threatened.

Dong Ryul Lee: One can assess it in that way. Yet, it is worth noting that other international variables influenced the Korean government's success in expanding the KADIZ without causing a conflict, not just the action of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan's opposition to the CADIZ was much stronger than Korea's objection, which trumped the less sensitive issue of South Korea's extension of its KADIZ. We need to be mindful that the current phenomenon in which South Korea's actions are becoming more of a dependent, rather than an independent, variable in regional affairs is not advantageous to the country.

Q8. What are your policy recommendations for the Park Geun-hye administration regarding foreign policy and security during her second year in office?

Sang Hyun Lee: The recent Park administration's key foreign policy objectives - such as the Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative, responsible middle power, and the Eurasia Initiative - have received overall passable reviews. Yet in Park's second year in office, she must seek practical achievements rather than simply outline foreign policy principles. Until now, the government's description of its policy objectives has not been followed up with a concrete action plan.

The risk of conflict between the regional great powers is increasing, which limits South Korea's latitude. Nevertheless, it presents a situation where the regional powers might be more inclined to listen to an audacious proposal by South Korea. The Lee Myung-bak administration created "Global Korea," which showed vigorous action on the international stage. If the Park administration could bring a similarly creative measure to the table in order to build regional order, then South Korea would be able to strengthen its diplomatic leverage.

It is necessary to also improve the relationship with Japan in order to share in strategic benefits. Until last summer, the U.S. public, along with the South Korean populace, felt that Japan was hindering security cooperation between South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. based on historical issues. These days, the situation has changed. An increasing number of voices have criticized the Park administration. The concept of "federated defense" has been widely and actively discussed recently among policy researchers in the United States. It proposes that countries which share a security interest should cooperate and secure a combined national defense. It is doubtful that reinforcing cooperation within the regional alliance is an urgent issue for the U.S. during the budget hardship brought on by sequestration. However, it is still worrisome that South Korea could possibly be viewed by the U.S. as preventing any closer cooperation in East Asia due to historical issues, because this could weaken South Korea's leverage in the long term.

Dong Ryul Lee: I agree. South Korea's diplomacy has to be more strategic and flexible at this time. It is hard to overcome the problems in the region with a diplomatic strategy based on inconsistent logic, responding to each situation independently and not forming a coherent strategy. There must be a strategic blueprint to protect South Korea's national interests with a long-term view. According to the result of a recent poll in Japan, the majority of the Japanese public believes that South Korea is now more inclined to relate to China than Japan. It is important to acknowledge that South Korea could become the scapegoat for a conflict between China and Japan or China and the U.S. It is vital to lay out the strategic groundwork that will mitigate this possibility.

About the Interviewees

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Dong Ryul Lee is currently a professor of Chinese studies at Dongduk Women's University and chairman of the China Research Panel at the East Asia Institute. He received his Ph.D. in politics from the Peking University Graduate School of International Relations.

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