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Heightened tensions over China's air defence zone

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In a further sign of the dangers being fuelled by the Obama administration's provocative pivot to Asia, China on Saturday declared an "air defence identification zone" (ADIZ) in the East China Sea. The new zone overlaps a similar Japanese ADIZ and includes one of the region's flashpoints—the Senkaku islands (known as Diaoyu in China), which are claimed by both countries.

The US and Japan said they would ignore China's ADIZ, setting the stage for risky encounters between military aircraft that could lead to a clash, either through miscalculation or a refusal by US and Japanese warplanes to obey Chinese orders. US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel declared that the Chinese announcement "will not in any way change how the United States conducts military operations in the region." He also reiterated the Obama administration's official stance that the US would automatically support Japan in the event of a war with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Most international media outlets blame "an aggressive China" for seeking to "change the status quo" and threaten regional stability. In reality, China is responding to a series of provocations created by Washington's encouragement of Japan to re-militarise and assert its territorial ambitions.

Ever since 2010, when the Japanese Coast Guard arrested a Chinese fishing boat captain in the waters off the disputed islands, provoking a major diplomatic row, the Obama administration has backed Tokyo in this longstanding maritime dispute. The turning point came in September 2012, when Japan's former Democrat government unilaterally "nationalised" the Senkakus, leading to an ongoing standoff with China. In response, Beijing took a hard-line stance, sending maritime surveillance ships, planes and drones to the area to challenge Japanese control.

Tensions dramatically escalated after the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came to power last December. Abe stood on a platform of Japanese remilitarisation, vowing to create a "strong nation" with a "strong military." Since taking office, the Abe government has boosted defence spending and integrated Japan into the US military build-up against China.

These preparations were on display in October during foreign and defence ministerial meetings between the US and Japan in Tokyo. Amid concerns among Asian governments about the US commitment to the "pivot," Washington used the joint statement produced at the meeting to unveil an extensive US military build-up in Japan, including the deployment of long-range Global Hawk surveillance drones and F-35B vertical take-off stealth fighters, as well as augmented anti-ballistic missile systems.

Moreover, Washington is openly pushing for a reinterpretation of the Japanese constitution to allow Tokyo's military to operate more closely with its US counterparts in the event of war and to launch "pre-emptive strikes"—that is, carry out its own wars of aggression. Abe himself has called for an ambitious military expansion, including the establishment of a marine force, for rapid force deployment to "southwestern emergencies," i.e., conflict with China.

The implications for China were evident during a two-week, large-scale Japanese military exercise that concluded last week in the Okinawa region. Involving 34,000 troops and 350 warplanes, the drills centred on the use of anti-ship missiles to simulate an attack on Chinese warships in the region, as well as the use of amphibious landings to seize key islands. Such tactics are all part of the Pentagon's AirSea Battle strategy, which involves a devastating air and missile attack on China, supplemented by a naval blockade.

China has announced its East China Sea ADIZ in a bid to counter the US and Japanese military preparations. In the first instance, the zone is designed to try to restrict access to US military aircraft that have for decades flown close to the Chinese coastline and sensitive military bases to gather vital intelligence. More broadly, it is based on calculations in Chinese security circles that Beijing can no longer back away from the ever-increasing military pressure from the US and its allies.

An editorial today in China's nationalist *Global Times* declared that the country had to be prepared militarily for war with the US, as well as with Japan. "We are convinced that the

People's Liberation Army must have taken into account the worst situation when a military mishap breaks out. If Washington attempts to interfere in this Sino-Japanese territorial row, China is willing to keep it company to the end," it stated.

At the same time, like the Abe government in Japan, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership is whipping up nationalist sentiment in a bid to divert growing social tensions at home. The already immense gulf between rich and poor in China will only deepen as a result of the far-reaching plans for pro-market restructuring announced at the CCP Central Committee plenum earlier this month. The fears in Beijing's ruling circles of social unrest are underscored by the fact that domestic security spending has outpaced military spending since 2009.

The Chinese military build-up will not halt the danger of an attack by the US and its allies. Facing a deepening financial and economic crisis, US imperialism regards the "pivot" and military containment as the only way to counter China's emergence as a potential challenger to US dominance in Asia. Moreover, the American ruling class is increasingly tempted to use its present huge military superiority over China to achieve this objective—before China's military modernisation changes the balance of forces.

This accelerating arms race holds great dangers for the working class in China, Japan, the US and around the world. The nationalism being stirred up by all governments is a trap that workers must reject. Chinese workers have no interest in killing Japanese or American workers. After the horrors of World War II, the vast majority of Japanese workers are hostile to the revival of Japanese militarism.

The only means to halt the danger of imperialist conflict is a unified struggle by the international working class against the outmoded capitalist profit system, which is the real cause of war and militarism. This means the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist rule in each country and the establishment of a planned global socialist economy that ends the division of the world into competing nation-states.