

Get your **FP ALL ACCESS** digital subscription: **Just \$4.99/month** News You Need **ACT NOW****AMBITIOUS. ENGAGED. EVERYWHERE.**  
**International Relations Online****SCHOOL of INTERNATIONAL SERVICE**  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC**LEARN MORE >>**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2013

FOLLOW   

## Imitation Is the Securest Form of Flattery

Why China's powerful, new national defense posture looks so much like America's.

BY ISAAC STONE FISH | NOVEMBER 26, 2013



A high-ranking Chinese diplomat once compared China and the United States to neighbors. If China's house keeps growing, he said, the United States might have to move. On Nov. 23, China's Ministry of Defense **released** a map showing part of its **Air Defense Identification Zone** (ADIZ), a contested area in the East China Sea that includes the Diaoyu -- an island chain which Japan administers and calls the Senkakus -- in which Beijing is **stating a right** to monitor; and possibly take military action against aircraft who enter. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe **called** China's announcement "dangerous." The United States responded more directly: on Nov. 25, it **flew** two U.S. B-52 bombers over the Senkaku Island chain, without informing Beijing.

China's publication of the zone is undeniably a provocation (so, too, the U.S. response). But it is also, in Chinese eyes at least, in line with international norms of airspace and transparency. The United States has a **clearly defined** ADIZ; the website of the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration warns of "use of force" in the "case of non-compliance." (Secretary of State John Kerry **said** in a Nov. 23 statement that the United States "does not apply its ADIZ procedures to foreign aircraft not intending to enter U.S. national airspace.") On Nov. 25, Yang Yujun, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense, **responded** to a question about the U.S. government "concern" about China's decision. "Since the 1950s the United States and more than 20 other countries," including Japan, have set up ADIZs, he said. For the United States to oppose this is "utterly unreasonable."

Since taking office in November 2012, Xi has instituted a number of policies that demonstrate a solidification of control of the Communist Party and a streamlining of China's bureaucracy. But, in doing so he's liberally borrowing from the U.S. government's institutional hierarchy and best practices, implementing a series of institutional changes that could be called American reform with Chinese characteristics. And for those concerned about a rising China challenging the United States, this is worrisome indeed.

Perhaps the clearest example came in early November, when Chinese officials announced Beijing would form an organization that will **improve** "systems and strategies to ensure national security," and is widely considered to be **inspired** by the U.S. National Security Council (NSC). Upon first announcing the news, Beijing **called** the organization the State Security Committee in English, but in Chinese used the same word as they use for America's NSC, a body which advises the president on foreign policy and national security issues. Later, it began **appearing** in English as the National Security Committee.

Over the last few weeks, dozens of articles have **appeared** in the Chinese press about the NSC. One **promises** to unlock the secret of the "200-strong troop of top aides" that make up the body, another **asks** "How powerful is it, really?" while another **charts** "lessons from the body's rise and fall." Christopher K. Johnson, a former CIA China analyst now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said, "They want us to remain humble and modest, so they're not too keen to tell us this is an exact copy. But that's what I heard."

The reform came after an important Communist Party meeting, known as the Third Plenum, held Nov. 9-12 in Beijing, after which officials announced the state will be **loosening** the one-child policy and abolishing its forced labor camps. But party leaders at the meeting also discussed restructuring the military regions, according to Johnson and Dan Blumenthal, the director of Asian studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Currently, China's military is divided into seven geographic regions, from Guangzhou in the prosperous southeast to Lanzhou in the unstable northwest. This was a useful system once, when China's biggest threat came from domestic instability or a land war with Russia, but today it's an inefficient way to project power. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has "spent an enormous amount of time since the First Gulf War, since the war in Afghanistan," studying the U.S. military, says Johnson. The PLA, he says, is trying to shift to a U.S. model of more emphasis on individual service arms. Discussions about military restructuring, much like plans to **form** an NSC, predate the current administration. But Xi appears to wield greater control than his predecessor Hu Jintao, and has proved able to roll out these kind of changes. The goal, as Xi's slogan **goes**, is to "fight and win battles."

And there's new military might behind these potential military reforms as well. China has a new long-range bomber that can likely **carry** cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads, its aerospace firms are **developing** dozens of drones, and a second or even third aircraft carrier may be **in the works**. In October, China released photographs and information about its first generation of nuclear submarines -- like the ADIZ announcement, it's an exercise in **demonstrating** its military might. But it's not necessarily a bad thing. This effort is "all about transparency, and being better about its mi-to-mil relationship with the United States," says Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, director of Asia-Pacific Programs at the United States Institute of Peace. The United States has worked to be more transparent about its military intentions with regards to China -- and it looks like China has returned the favor.

There are other changes as well that might reflect serious study at the highest levels of U.S. policy. Beijing is "accelerating efforts to set up Chinese versions of US federal circuit courts and the Federal Bureau of Investigation," according to a recent **article** by Wang Xiangwei, the editor of the Hong Kong-based newspaper the *South China Morning Post*. And on Nov. 25, Meng Jianzhu, China's domestic security chief, **published** a lengthy article in which he quoted former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis and called for more judicial openness. There's even Xi's introduction, in November 2012, of the **Chinese Dream** -- "realizing a prosperous and strong country, the rejuvenation of the nation and the well-being of the people" -- a slogan clearly modeled on the U.S. version.

For years, Beijing's elite officials have been debating how to learn from other great powers. In 2006, for example, the **release** of the 12-part documentary series "The Rise of the Great Nations," about how countries like Portugal, Russia, and the United States built their empires, stirred wide debate on how China should act as it rises. The conclusion Xi seems to have drawn is that the United States is China's best model. "Selectively ignoring international norms or bypassing international institutions when they don't suit you -- it's a sense that they're a great power and can act more like how they perceive the United States, says Kleine-Ahlbrandt. "They're looking at how great powers instrumentalize the system."

That's not to say there is anything particularly American about Xi himself. Sure, he tremendously **enjoyed** *Saving Private Ryan*, according to a Wikileaks cable, and **stumped like a country politician around** Iowa on a Feb. 2012 trip to the United States. But, like his predecessors, Xi has shown little fondness for the American ideals of democracy and human rights. He doesn't appear to speak English, unlike his predecessor Jiang Zemin, who was fond of **quoting** the Gettysburg Address (albeit with a heavy accent.) And unlike Deng Xiaoping, who **donned** a cowboy hat during a 1979 visit to the United States, Xi's last visit was less about photo ops than demonstrating China's new strength. Before a June 2013 summit with Barack Obama, Xi **told** U.S. National Security Advisor Tom Donilon that it's time to explore "a new type of great power relationship" -- one that implies equality between the two countries.

Whether the United States is willing to allow that kind of parity, as the B-52 bomber overflight shows, is another thing.

[Like](#) 285 people like this. [Sign Up](#) to see what your friends like.

Save big when you **subscribe to FP**.

JEWEL SAMAD/AFP/Getty Images

Isaac Stone Fish is an associate editor at **Foreign Policy**.

## 0 COMMENTS

Powered by **livefyre**

**SIGN IN WITH** **TWITTER** **FACEBOOK** **LIVEFYRE**

+ Follow conversation

**POST TO**  **TWITTER**  **FACEBOOK**  **POST COMMENT AS**

Conversation on FP.com

**FOLLOW US ON TWITTER | VISIT US ON FACEBOOK | FOLLOW US ON RSS | SUBSCRIBE TO FOREIGN POLICY**

**ABOUT FP | MEET THE STAFF | FOREIGN EDITIONS | REPRINT PERMISSIONS | ADVERTISING | WRITERS' GUIDELINES | PRESS ROOM | WORK AT FP**

**SERVICES: SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES | ACADEMIC PROGRAM | FP ARCHIVE | REPRINT PERMISSIONS | FP REPORTS AND MERCHANDISE | SPECIAL REPORTS | BUY BACK ISSUES**

**PRIVACY POLICY | DISCLAIMER | CONTACT US**



11 DUPONT CIRCLE NW, SUITE 600 | WASHINGTON, DC 20036 | PHONE: 202-728-7300 | FAX: 202-728-7342  
FOREIGN POLICY IS PUBLISHED BY THE FP GROUP, A DIVISION OF THE WASHINGTON POST COMPANY  
ALL CONTENTS ©2013 THE SLATE GROUP, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.