NAUTILUS INSTITUTE
FOR SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

THE BMD ISSUE IN NORTHEAST ASIA: STRATEGIC RELATIONS AND JAPAN'S OPTION

Recommended Citation

Hideshi Takesada, "THE BMD ISSUE IN NORTHEAST ASIA: STRATEGIC RELATIONS AND JAPAN'S OPTION", nuke policy, March 05, 2001, https://nautilus.org/nuke-policy/the-bmd-issue-in-northeast-asia-strategic-relations-and-japans-option-2/

the nautilus institute
"Partnership for Peace: Building Long-term Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia"
The Second Collaborative Workshop on East Asia Regional Security Futures

复旦大学美国研究中心
Center for American Studies
FUDAN UNIVERSITY

THE BMD ISSUE IN NORTHEAST ASIA:
STRATEGIC RELATIONS AND JAPAN'S OPTIONby Hideshi Takesada

ABSTRACT
The ballistic missile defense (BMD) issue is attracting attention in Northeast Asia. Why is BMD necessary? Is BMD worth spending so much money on? These are some of the questions asked so far. This paper aims to provide some answers to these questions by addressing additional questions such as: how have DPRK and Chinese deployment and development of ballistic missiles proceeded? I will focus especially on the backdrop to which Pyongyang has developed ballistic missiles. This paper also discusses what implications the DPRK's missile development has for Japan in relation to the regime's intension and how Japan and the ROK have perceived and dealt with the US-led missile defense initiative. Last of all, this paper will point to the reasons for China's opposition to the US-led missile defense plan and conclude by spelling out what Japan should do to deal with ballistic missile threat in the (Northeast Asian) region.

GROWING MISSILE THREATS
Missile development has proceeded in some parts of Northeast Asia during the 1990s. China has developed short-range missiles and mid-range Dong Fe 31 missiles for the last three years.(1) China would be a great missile power by the early 21 century. China's ballistic missiles can now target major cities in Asia. Japan is concerned that China has not yet joined any missile arms control and disarmament regimes.
China's top priority has been to unify Taiwan with the mainland, and China has placed ballistic missiles as its central force to achieve that goal. Therefore, it is unlikely that China will abandon its development and deployment of ballistic missiles. Even if Japan promised to China to remain as an on-looker to the Taiwan issue, China would not stop its missile development because ballistic missiles are China's main weapons for threatening Taiwan and other countries in the region anyway. Therefore, as long as China's missiles can target Japan, these missiles would continue to be Japan's security concern.
North Korea became interested in missile development in the 1960s. The Scud B missile that the former Soviet Union supplied to Egypt was transferred to North Korea and has become a Scud C missile. Since the late 1980's, North Korea has successfully upgraded missiles every 5 years. Scud B and C missiles have already been deployed. A Taepodong 1 missile has already been test-launched. North Korea's Scud C missile technology has been transferred to Iraq and Nodong missiles have also been exported to Iraq. The Nodong's effective range is 1,300 km and covers major military facilities and cities in Japan, including the US base in Okinawa.(2) Nodong missiles are not aimed at the South or the US. They are directed to Japan. Japan does not share the threat of Nodong missiles with South Korea and the US.(3)
Then, are these North Korean missiles only "paper tigers"? Can we say that these are not actually credible threats and would not be used? Is Japan being overly concerned about these threats and spending unnecessary defense costs? North Korea has earned yearly at least US$ 300 million or at most US$ 1 billion from selling Nodong missiles to the Middle East. This indicates that North Korea's missile technology is now good enough to gain foreign currency. North Korea is still highly militarized. North Korea still encourages its military industry. North Korea survives its economic predicament by foreign currency earned from missile exports. As North Korea's missiles can hit Japan, North Korea's missiles are a threat to Japan. Kim Jong-il says that the military is the source of power.(4)
Given that the People's Army is now shifting its focus to ballistic missiles, Kim Jong-il's "source of power" lies in these ballistic missiles. As long as Kim Jong-il remains as the leader of North Korea and the People's Army, ballistic missiles will continue to exist.
However, it is important to note that Taepodong missiles are different from Nodong missiles. Taepodong missiles can target Washington. It is necessary to wonder if Pyongyang is ready to inflict war with Washington by deploying Taepodong missiles. North Korea's objective is to drive the US military out of South Korea and unify the Korean Peninsula in its favor. The North's final goal is not to fight war with the US. North Korea has gone through the Korean War, witnessed the Gulf War and the Kosovo conflict. North Korea knows how powerful the US is. North Korea knows that its option is now to reconcile and cooperate with the US to get the US out of the South. What Pyongyang has meant since the 1970's by "autonomous peaceful unification" is to avoid war and improve relations with the US, to peacefully drive the US military out of the region, and to achieve a peaceful unification with Seoul through dialogues. If the US continued to ask North Korea to abandon developing Taepodong missiles, North Korea might say yes.
However, the more serious problem is other missiles. North Korea can threaten Japan and US forces in Japan by launching Nodong missiles. By resorting to Scud missiles and 13,000 conventional artillery pieces, North Korea can destroy South Korean military facilities and US forces in the South. These missiles are not for total war. North Korea does not have a military to win the unification. However, North Korea has enough military capabilities to attack Japan, South Korea and US forces in Japan and South Korea. This indicates that North Korea can make Japan, the US and South Korea avoid any option that would entrap them into war with the North.
It is possible for North Korea to win negotiations by threats. The 1994 Agreed Framework confirms this. The agreement was actually "postponing solutions to the North nuclear issue." North Korea's "winning negotiations by threats" strategy was also successful in the inter-Korean summit meeting in June 2000. Both Koreas agreed on "self-reliant/autonomous solutions to the Korean Peninsula issue among the Koreans" at the summit meeting. What this means is that while the North Korean Workers' Party's goal of "Juche indoctrination of the Korean Peninsula" has remained unchanged, a self-reliant unification was confirmed between the North and the South. The agreement indicates that both Koreas have now begun to proceed toward the form of unification that is the most agreeable to both sides. Under this circumstance, could Japan, the US, and South Korea still hold common ground if North Korea threatened that pushing North Korea to abandon its missile development would lead to a military conflict on the peninsula?
Nodong missiles are also sold to Middle East countries for their fight against Israel. The export gives the North a means to earn foreign currency. Taepodong's target range is more than 3,000 km, and they could reach Europe. This is why there is no market for Taepodong missiles in the Middle East. Middle Eastern countries would not want to make Europeans unnecessarily nervous. As for Scud B missiles, they cannot reach Israel from the Middle East. They cannot reach Japan from North Korea either. Their target range is only between 280km and 300km.(5) Given marketability, target range, the distance between the Middle East and Tel Aviv, and the distance between North Korea and Japan, North Korea is likely to refine Nodong missiles and strive for mass production of the missiles.
North Korea's ballistic missiles are also aimed to ensure North Korea's self-reliance and to avoid North Korea's overdependence on China and Russia in terms of weapons supply. These ballistic missiles are also cheap means for North to catch up with military modernization. Thus, North Korea's ballistic missiles are multi-purpose, and the country is unlikely to abandon its missile development.

WHAT DO THE NORTH'S MISSILES MEAN TO JAPAN?
Some views hold that North Korea would not attack Japan because North Korea wants to welcome foreign investments and promote the inter-Korean dialogue. I wonder.
First, there have been few friendly and trade relations between Japan and North Korea. North Korea is far more likely than China and Russia to plunge into attacking Japan. To many Japanese, at least, North Korea has fewer reservations than others may think in terms of launching missiles to Japan. The way the North Korean Rodong Shinmun criticizes Japan, in fact, is one of the reasons why Japanese perceive North Korea as a threat.(6)
Second, Nodong missiles are sufficiently capable of striking Japan. Some argue that the missile's CEP is inferior to that of advanced countries. However, the worse performance of the DPRK's missile does not necessarily ensure Japan's security. If the missile lacks precision, then it may mistakenly hit the center of Tokyo, which was not originally Pyongyang's target. Thus, the DPRK's imprecise missiles could be even more threatening (to Japan).
Third, when it comes to defending against DPRK missiles, Seoul and Washington are the only reliable partners for Japan to depend on. Certainly Japan would strengthen its ties with the US and the ROK in times of DPRK missile launches. However, can these three countries really reach agreement regarding preventive diplomacy, when crises are not assessed as imminent? For example, when North Korea test-launched a Taepodong missile over Japan, the US thought that it would be unnecessary for Japan to introduce its own intelligence satellites in response to such a small scale of crisis. The US thought that Japan was overreacting to the missile launch. The US even though that Japan's overreaction was due to Japan's lack of confidence in the US nuclear umbrella.
Fourth, can Japan always coordinate with the ROK in unity at an earlier stage of preventive diplomacy? When economic sanctions emerged as an option against the DPRK's nuclear suspicions, the ROK thought it would be the last country to impose such sanctions on the North.(7) If only Japan is targeted by the DPRK, there is no guaranteeing that South Korea fully cooperates with Japan. If the crisis became so serious as to undermine the ROK's own security, Japan, the ROK and the US would cooperate with one another. But what is important is whether they can cooperate before that stage.
North Korean missiles threaten Japan when many factors converge. When Japanese-DPRK relations are tense, when Japanese-ROK relations are strained, when US-ROK relations are frictional, and when US-DPRK talks are deadlocked, the possibility of Japan being attacked becomes higher. When North Korean spy ships infiltrated into Japanese waters, when the ROK was unable to provide aid to the DPRK due to the economic crisis, and when the Bush Administration and the Kim Dae-jung Administration disagree over the sunshine policy, are examples of when such a possibility would arise.
The Japanese public opinion and the "we feeling" between the North and the South may constrain Japan in the process of preventive diplomacy, deterrence, crisis management, and damage control. The "we feeling" may make South Korea think that Japan is using the North missile threat to justify remilitarization.(8)
Fifth, one can say that because Kim Jong-il is rational, he would not threaten Japan with his missiles. It is true that Kim Jong-il has recently been emphasizing "new thinking," and this may support the view that Kim is a rational leader. (9) Kim Jong-il actually visited computer and automobile factories in China in January. The recent performance of Kim Jong-il looks like that of the late ROK President Pak Jong-hee, who strived for economic development while avoiding military conflicts with the North.(10) However, if Kim Jong-il is really rational, does he realize the difference of threat perceptions among Japan, the US, and the ROK? He knows how to use the South's "we feeling." He also knows how to drive the US forces out of the South. He is cool-headed. He is rational. He even knows how to keep China on its side by emphasizing the possibility of Japan's remilitarization.(11)

BMD, JAPAN, AND THE ROK
In the 1990s, the DPRK's nuclear issue strengthened policy coordination among Japan, the US, and the ROK.(12) However, there have also been differences among these three countries. Japan is concerned about Nodong missiles, while the US is worried about Taepodong missiles. The ROK is more apprehensive about DPRK firearms than ballistic missiles. These are slight, but important differences.
Japan began to study BMD, but the ROK has not decided to join the US-led project. However, the ROK has paved the way for national production of 300km range missiles after negotiations with the US. The ROK decided to have its own deterrent. The DPRK has mysteriously been silent about this, but that may be because the DPRK is expecting the differences among Japan, the US, and the ROK to further diverge.
Japan has been seeking since the 1990s policy cooperation with the US and the ROK, strengthening Japan-US relations, Japan-ROK defense cooperation, and dialogues with the DPRK. Discussions of defense issues became active in the 1990s because of the DPRK military issue. Japanese are more cool-headed toward China's missile threat than the DPRK's. The DPRK's missile issue was originally not so serious in Japan. This is obvious in the past defense whitepapers. However, the situation has significantly changed. The reasons include that the DPRK nuclear suspicions are not completely gone, that a Taepodong missile passed over Japan, and that the DPRK spy ships shocked Japan. Japan strengthened defense cooperation with the US, and in December, Japan emphasized the importance of intelligence satellites and referred to the spy ship infiltration in the Cabinet-approved defense mid-term review.
Those who support BMD in Japan hold that BMD helps strengthen Japanese-US relations. They also argue that BMD gives Japan a deterrent. BMD could also contribute to technological innovations. There are more benefits than costs. BMD is the only measure against incoming ballistic missiles. BMD is defensive, not offensive. Therefore, it serves to Japan's policy of defense-oriented defense. Pros are based on these reasons.
Cons, on the other hand, hold that there are more costs than benefits. BMD would (further) provoke both China and North Korea and undermine detente diplomacy. BMD is technologically still uncertain. The most successful BMD could still miss incoming missiles. BMD would create a huge financial burden on the defense budget and would no doubt force the reduction in funding in other programs critical to the JSDF. Those against BMD in Japan base their argument on these reasons.
To South Korea, the BMD issue has a different meaning. South Korea has held a stance that is different from that held by the US and Japan. South Korea has not officially participated in the US-led BMD initiative. The reasons are as follows.
First, South Korea has already been in the face of the North's overwhelming military threat. The North's firearms have been the South's problem long before the North biological and chemical weapons emerged. Thus, North Korea's missile threat is not so serious to South Korea. Because Seoul is too close to the 38 parallel line, a DPRK missile would hit Seoul in a few minutes.
Second, given that South Korea is still in the process of recovery from the 1997 economic crisis, BMD would be too expensive. South Korea cannot include BMD development in its budget.
Third, South Korea does not want to provoke China. Historically speaking, South Koreans are attached to Chinese, and this was obvious in the 1992 establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Participation in the US-led BMD program with Japan would be meaningless to South Korea if it were to rub China the wrong way.
Fourth, in South Korea, there is a view regarding Japan's post-Cold War defense increase that Japan intends to become a military hegemon in this region. From this viewpoint, South Korea's participation in the BMD initiative would eventually facilitate Japan's militarization.
Fifth, Kim Dae-jung does not want to provoke the North as long as he is conducting the sunshine policy. To many South Koreans who feel that inter-Korean detent is underway, the North's and China's missiles seem to be less likely to attack the South.
Seoul decided not to take part in BMD. This decision has not directly influenced Japan's stance on BMD. Japan has the problem of exercising the collective self-defense right. Joint research among Japan, the US, and the ROK has many difficulties. From the very beginning, Japan's stance has been that joint research should be undertaken between Japan and the US, and there is no evidence that the ROK's decision has affected Japan's stance. Japan began to research BMD solely for the national security reasons.
The ROK has never argued that Japan's research on BMD would destabilize this region. This is because Japan and the ROK have actively cooperated in the security area since 1990's. For example, Japan and the ROK have exchanged views and Track II experts. The two countries also conducted a naval exercise, although only at a limited level, and have strived for mutual confidence building. Particularly, the visit to Japan by ROK President Kim Dae-jung in 1998 facilitated Japan-ROK defense exchange and common defense perceptions.
Then, why did South Korea want to develop 300km range missiles?(13) Below are the major reasons.
First, the missile development is compatible with the sunshine policy because the policy allows not only "dialogue" but "deterrence" as well.
Second, the missile development gives South Korea a way out of dependence on US in defense.
Third, because the sunshine policy has been successful, the North's opposition would not be so harsh.
Fourth, the missile development is cheaper than BMD, technologically feasible, and workable in times of crises.
Fifth, BMD provokes China, but the 300km range would not stimulate China.
Sixth, the South Korean military holds that given that the North's military threat is still present, the South's own missiles are necessary.(14)
To the South, the on-going policy of "deterrence and dialogue" poses no dilemma in terms of developing its own missiles.

CHINA'S AND NORTH KOREA'S OPPOSITION
China, North Korea, and Russia are becoming more and more opposed to the US-led theater missile defense (TMD) initiative. Especially, China is against TMD for the following reasons.
First, TMD shakes China's nuclear deterrence strategy.
Second, China claims that it would not first-strike non-nuclear weapons states. (So, Japan would remain safe.)
Third, TMD could lead to Japan's nuclear armament.
However, China has modernized its strategic nuclear weapons long before TMD became an issue. Furthermore, although China says that TMD is targeted at China, China's launch of a DF 15 in the Taiwan Strait in March 1996 paradoxically justified the need for TMD.(15)
China also says that China is concerned that only Asians can stabilize Asia and that TMD would undermine the cross-strait relations. How should Japan respond to these arguments? In Japan, many people are still unable to think of Japan's security from a regional perspective. To say that BMD has nothing to do with the Taiwan issue means to say that BMD is directed to the Korean Peninsula. If Japan said, "TMD has nothing to do with Taiwan," then the Korean Peninsula would be the only reason for Japan's participation in BMD. The DPRK would react to this by saying, "Japan's TMD is directed to our missiles." Thus, if Japan denied the Taiwan factor, the Korean Peninsula would be the only reason for Japan's TMD introduction. This would pose to Japan an even bigger political issue. If Japan said that BMD is targeted at the DPRK, then this would undermine the detent atmosphere on the peninsula. This would also make it harder for Japanese-DPRK normalization talks to proceed. Referring to a specific region or nation in justifying Japan's security-seeking behavior would inevitably cause political conflicts between Japan and its neighbors. This is not what Japan wants.
The DPRK criticizes Japan's BMD by saying that it would trigger arms races and that it would facilitate Japan's militarization.(16) The DPRK's criticism has become harsher only after summit diplomacy between China and the DPRK became more active. In the near future, China, the DPRK, and Russia would become more rapidly closer in opposing the US-led BMD.

CONCLUSION
The recent political and strategic situation around ballistic missiles in this region can be summarized as follows.
First, the DPRK's nuclear suspicions still remain unsolved and the regime still exports its missiles to the Middle East. The missile export is likely to continue because the DPRK's sale of missiles development contributes to stabilizing the domestic political system.
Second, efforts were made under the US-led Perry process to deal with the DPRK's missile development and deployment, but since the June 2000 inter-Korean summit meeting, the inter-Korean dialogue has been given more importance than the US-DPRK talks.
Third, China, the DPRK, and Russia are more and more united concerning to the US-led BMD.
Fourth, Japan and the ROK opinions slightly diverge on the US role. Japan, the US, and the ROK still agree to maintain their policy coordination, but the ROK is becoming more and more emphatic on the inter-Korean dialogue, while the US still sees the US-DPKR talks as the axis of detente on the peninsula. It is true that the sunshine policy and the US engagement policy are basically common, but the differences seem to be becoming more visible under the George W. Bush Administration.
Fifth, both Russia and the ROK are becoming more active in improving relations with the DPRK and seeking a greater role. Both are using the BMD issue to expand their respective role in the region.
Then, what is Japan's role? There are three things Japan can do diplomatically. Japan can strengthen policy coordination with the US and the ROK. Japan can strengthen relations with the US. Japan also can propose a new four-party peace talk, including both Koreas, the US, and Japan, to discuss the BMD issue. It is not unreasonable for Japan, the US, the ROK, and the DPRK to sit at the same table because they all are parties to the DPRK's missile issue. Japan, the US, and the ROK share the principle of "deterrence and dialogue" and have developed a common policy toward the DPRK. Food aid and the light-water reactor project represent the dialogue side of the principle and their common policy approach. China, on the other hand, has supplied food aid to the DPRK because the DPRK's missile is not a threat to China. Therefore, China cannot be party to this new framework of four party talks. However, if the framework began to include the issue of confidence building in the region, China and Russia could join the talks. If the new framework were to discuss the missile issue and food aid, the DPRK's participation would not be so difficult. This makes the proposal a real possibility.
Japan can do many things militarily as well. Japan should take introducing a BMD more seriously. BMD is not perfect, but it still can shoot down some incoming missiles. Japan can argue against anti-BMD reasoning. There has been no logical argument in Japan that the development of BMD be stopped. On the other hand, some view holds that Japan should develop cruise missiles.(17) This view assumes that the policy of deterrence and dialogue would be maintained. This view seems to be modeled on the ROK's policy of deterrence and dialogue.
Intelligence is also dispensable. The decision to introduce Japan's own intelligence satellites was a right one. Japan's involvement in studying BMDs reflects how Japan sees the regional missile proliferation and how Japanese perceive threats.
It is more important to discuss the source of threats rather than to discuss the consequences of BMDs.

Endnotes
(1) China has deployed DF11 and DF 15 short-range ballistic missiles near the Taiwan Strait. The Sankei Shimbun reported that the number of the missiles would reach 700 by 2005. See Sankei Shimbun, February 26, 2001.
(2) Nodong missiles have already been deployed. Their target range is 1,300km. See Defense Agency, Defense Whitepaper 1999, p. 31. For an analysis that the DPRK's missile development has proceeded more rapidly than western observers had predicted, see Boueinenkan 2000. For the history of the DPRK's development of weapons of mass destruction, see Yonhap News, August 3, 1999.
(3) The US and the ROK are less concerned about the DPRK's Nodong perhaps because its target range would not threaten their security.
(4) Kim Jong-il often told those close to him, including Hwang Jan-yop, that the military is the source of power. See Hwang Jan-yop, Kim Jong-il Eno Sensenfukoku (Tokyo, Japan: Bungeishunju, 1999).
(5) See Boueinenkan 2000.
(6) The DPRK's Rodong Shinmun criticizes Japan almost everyday.
(7) During the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula from 1993 to 1994, the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, along with the US, maintained sanctions approach toward the DPRK, but the ROK remained cautious through out the crisis.
(8) The "we feeling" emerges in the ROK whenever the North and the South refer to the days of Japan's colonization of the peninsula.
(9) Rodong Shinmun introduced "new thinking" and "new viewpoints" as Kim Jong-il's words. See Rodong Shinmun, January 4, 2001.
(10) It is well-known that Kim Jong-il is interested in Pak Jong-hee. Kim Jong-il is also interested in high technologies. See http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/frame.htm, On line Asia Times, http://www.atimes.com/koreas/koreas.html
(11) China and the DPRK often coincide to criticize Japan for "remilitarization."
(12) This policy coordination is known as the Trilateral Policy Coordination Group (TCOG). The group has been effective to engage with the DPRK.
(13) The ROK has concentrated on negotiations with the US on this issue for the past four years from the viewpoint of "achieving the ROK's own defense." There have been few references to the ROK's intention on this issue. I interviewed ROK security experts.
(14) The ROK still sees the DPRK as the primary enemy. See the ROK Ministry of Defense, Defense Whitepaper 2000, December 2000.
(15) For the reason for China's opposition to BMD, see Chinese People's Daily, March 15,2001, http://j.peopledaily.com.co./2001/03/15/jp20010315 3494.html
(16) For the reason for the DPRK's opposition to BMD, see Central News Agency, February 11, 2001, http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/frame.htm. The article titled "Anti-US NMD Signature Campaign in S. Korea" cites an ROK non-governmental organization's anti-US NMD movement. On February 22, 2001, the DPRK also criticized US NMD as "a severe destruction of the peace" and demanded that the program be abandoned. The Japanese version of China's People's Daily cites the DPRK's argument against US NMD, and especially after Kim Jong-il's visit to China, the DPRK's opposition to the program has been more visible. China's People's Daily also has a special report on ABM and NMD. See People's Daily, February 25, 2001. http://j.people.ne.jp/zhuanti - 15.html
Russia also criticized the US forces in the ROK by saying that the cost of maintaining the forces is enormously expensive. The DPRK media also cited this. See http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/frame.htm Thus, the DPRK, China, and Russia have been strengthening their opposition to the US though their national press almost simultaneously.
(17) One Diet member from the Democratic Party argues that Japan should have cruise missiles as a deterrent against the DPRK's missile attack.

View this online at: https://nautilus.org/nuke-policy/the-bmd-issue-in-northeast-asia-strategic-relations-and-japans-option-2/

Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org