US BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSES: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA

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ABSTRACT

US ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems – whether deployed, under development, or only in various planning studies – will shape the timelines associated with each missile defense option. When it comes to the Asian stability consequences of BMD systems, the process is as important as what is decided to do. The Asian debate about BMD is rife with misperceptions and the new administration should do everything it can to clarify the debate and reduce the very real risks. The US has many reasons to deploy BMD, but it should recognize that its deterrence posture will be weakened if the deployment process is not handled carefully, and that the idea that the US can construct a shield that stops missiles from reaching their targets may not be realistic. This analysis highlights why BMD can be dangerous to the security of the entire region, especially in the absence of a broad and comprehensive arms control and nonproliferation regime.

In all political debates there is a tendency to reduce the discussion to black and white terms. A debate among analysts of US/NMD and those who argue against it is no exception. The purpose of this paper is to argue that both sides are wrong and that neither the US nor the Asian regional security community has the luxury of making a sterile “guns or no guns” choice in the current arms race. Rather, the future security of the Asia-Pacific region requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying strategic and political drivers of the arms race. This would involve working with China and South Korea to resolve their common problems and to build confidence in each other’s nonproliferation efforts.

The US and Asia should work together to reduce the risk of an arms race by accelerating the current arms control and nonproliferation process. The challenge is to manage the risk of an arms race, which could lead to an increase in both offensive and defensive capabilities, and to work towards a comprehensive framework for nonproliferation and arms control. This would involve working with China and South Korea to resolve their common problems and to build confidence in each other’s nonproliferation efforts. The US and Asia should work together to reduce the risk of an arms race by accelerating the current arms control and nonproliferation process. The challenge is to manage the risk of an arms race, which could lead to an increase in both offensive and defensive capabilities, and to work towards a comprehensive framework for nonproliferation and arms control. This would involve working with China and South Korea to resolve their common problems and to build confidence in each other’s nonproliferation efforts.

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