TMD, US-JAPAN RELATIONS, AND EAST ASIAN SECURITY(1)

by DUAN Hong

There has been a kind of competition between Japan and the US on ballistic missile defense since the late 1980s, but that cooperation has been greatly strengthened and accelerated during the last few years. This trend has been mainly driven by the US-Japan alliance and the increasing threat that the US perceives from North Korea. However, the US-Japan joint TMD program has already begun to show its teeth by dividing countries into different groups and deepening the suspicions between major powers in this region. It is highly likely that the US-Japan co-operation, especially the joint TMD program, will strengthen the US-Japan military cooperation behind the impression of counter-terrorism and stability, ironically that which TMD is supposed to achieve.

TMD has been a contentious issue between the US and Japan and the potential of the US-Japan alliance to take military actions around Asia. Mainly due to Japan's reluctance to join the US on the joint TMD program, the US-Japan alliance has been more likely to conduct a joint TMD program in the near future. Some people who oppose the joint TMD program argue that the US-Japan alliance would fail to make a joint TMD program that would strengthen the US-Japan military cooperation. The US-Japan joint TMD program will increase the military cooperation between the US and Japan, enhance the military and dual-use technology transfers between the two countries, and as such, make their alliance even closer and stronger. There is also an argument between both the US and Japan that TMD is able to improve military interoperability and intelligence information sharing of the US-Japan alliance by helping integrate Japan's defense system into US-led forces(2).

An effective TMD system will greatly increase the overall capability of the US-Japan alliance and thus, its potential to intervene in regional conflicts. The revision of the US-Japan alliance guidelines in the late 1990s, which emphasizes the need to respond to a wide range of regional contingencies, has become a major reason for the US to provide logistics assistance to the US troops that be involved in “containment in the areas surrounding Japan,” although neither country has made clear the very content of such a “containment” and the area covered by it. The US-Japan alliance as a strategic actor for all powers to watch with care, still is a key player, particularly in the areas surrounding Japan — for example, a conflict on the Korean Peninsula — Japan might be reluctant to join in the US military intervention party because of its vulnerabilities to possible WMD retaliations. A joint TMD program may have a major impact on the Sino-US relationship. Since the publication of the article by Koever in 1999, many experts are still at the verge of seeing this as a one way. Such a joint TMD program, without any intention certainly will raise more suspicions and uncertainties among countries in Asia-Pacific region. Some of them may have to choose to invest in more advanced weapons and military technologies, trying for prepare for the worse. As a consequence, certain kind of arms race in this region may be inevitable in the near term. TMD may increase the military budget even for those countries that are not major military powers in many aspects. As the biggest economic power in East Asia, Japan has been keeping the second largest defense expenditure in the world for years. In addition to having the strongest maritime power, it is equipped with missile defense capabilities. Japan's military power is growing with its advanced technology and thereby, might be regarded as a strategic warning to the other countries. Japan’s aggressive missile defense policy in Asia is capable of hindering the Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations and ultimately ruin the stability of the whole region. Therefore, to increase confidence and trust between countries, to maintain the stability of East Asia region as a whole, the US and Japan may have to find a proper way to ensure that the joint TMD program is an effective and friendly move. As the US-Japan alliance can do a lot more for the sake of the security cooperation regionally and internationally, China and Japan should remain cooperative and work together more closely 

It is argued that one rationale of NMD is for the US to have the freedom to act globally. To know more about this argument, see Keith B. Payne, “The Case for National Missile Defense”, Orbis, Spring 2000.

Note

(1) This paper is based on author’s presentation at the Workshop on “East Asian Regional Security Futures: Theater Missile Defense Implications”, which is jointly sponsored by the Nautilus Institute and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; June 24-25, 2000. The paper reflects only author’s personal views.

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