TMD And East Asian Security

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The theater missile defense (TMD) that the US and Japan are jointly developing has become the issue with the most significant negative impact on security in the Asia-Pacific region. It has caused serious problems between major power relations in East Asia, such as those between the US, Japan, Russia, and China. The major powers take missile defense as a serious strategic issue and worry that such a system will destroy the current strategic balance between major powers in the region. Russia and China also argue that TMD would change the military balance in the region and give the US and Japan a new superiority. TMD deployment could also cause a new round of offensive and defensive arms race in Asia. It has become a controversial issue in bilateral security talks among those major powers and a hot issue in the multilateral arenas such as the United Nations and ARF. It has also become an obstacle for further arms control and disarmament agreements as well as bilateral and multilateral security cooperation.

To be sure, the TMD system that the United States and Japan are going to build in East Asia has and will continue to have different impacts on different nations in the region. The system could not have great impact on the security policies and structures in Southeast Asia, but it will have a significant impact on Northeast Asia and on major powers and their relations in the region. The military and strategic balance could be reshaped in East Asia because of the development of missile defense in the region.

I. TMD, Major Power Relations and Strategic Balance in East Asia

TMD is a major issue to all the major powers in East Asia (the United States, Japan, Russia, China). The major powers have taken serious positions toward theater missile defense even though the system is still in the process of development.

TMD has caused some restructuring of major power relations in East Asia. Relations between the US and Japan have become closer in the post-Cold War era, first by "the guideline of security cooperation," and now by the joint development of TMD. After a period of indecisiveness, the Japanese government decided to join the United States in developing a theater missile defense system in 1998, and have allocated money for the program every year. Japan is one of the few countries in the world to support the US missile defense program. Other US allies such as France, Italy, Germany, and the Republic of Korea, all oppose the development of a missile defense system.

Russia and China have found a common language on the regional strategic issue of missile defense - the first time since the end of the Cold War, if not since the 1960s. The former allies have once again come closer on strategic-security issues in Asia and the world. Russia and China issued a joint Press Communiqué on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in December 1999. And on July 18, 2000, during the Sino-Russian summit in Beijing before the G-8 meeting in Okinawa, Chinese President Jiang Zemin and visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a joint statement on the anti-ballistic missile plan. The Statement said: "A non-strategic missile defense program and international cooperation in such areas, which is not prohibited by ABM, should not undermine security interests of other countries, nor lead to the establishment of any closed military or political bloc, or threaten global and regional stability and security. China and Russia are deeply concerned that a certain country in the Asia-Pacific region might deploy any such non-strategic missile defense system, and steadfastly oppose this." (1)

Some of the other nations in Asia have joined Russia and China in opposing the NMD and TMD systems. In July 2000, the foreign ministers of the "Shanghai Five" - Russia, China, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan - issued a joint communiqué in Dushanbe calling for strict compliance with the Anti- Ballistic Missile treaty. The parties indicated that the establishment of a bloc and confining missile defense system would destroy the peace and stability in the Asian Pacific region.(2)

Therefore, TMD could cause a restructuring of the regional strategic system in East Asia. The US and Japan could strengthen their alliance by jointly developing the system. Russia and China could go further in their "strategic coordination" by basing it on their common position against the US missile defense system. Major powers in East Asia could regroup themselves according to their views on TMD, with US-Japan on one side and Russia-China on the other. The specific outcome could be that Russia and China will go further in their policy and weaponry cooperation, including conventional arms and missiles. The US-Japan security alliance will expand into a strategic offensive and defensive structure and Japan will not only have an American "nuclear umbrella" but also a "missile umbrella." The joint development and future deployment of TMD could also require Japan to change its law and policy, such as the law against exporting military technology.

In sum, TMD in Asia will deepen the divisions between Russia and China on one side and the US and Japan on the other. It will also greatly influence the countries' security policies, strategic doctrines, military postures, and military capabilities.

II. TMD and Regional Military Balance

The development and future deployment of a missile defense system in Asia will enhance American and Japanese military superiority over Russia and China.

First, it will increase American strategic superiority over Russia and China in the Asia-Pacific region. Strategic forces in Asia refers to nuclear weapons and delivery systems which are capable of reaching the Asia-Pacific region. Currently, US and Russia have similar strategic offensive weapons which can hit areas in Asia. Russia may still enjoy quantitative superiority because Russia has more nuclear warheads, but much of Russia's strategic delivery systems - such as nuclear submarines, surface ships, aircraft, and even missiles - cannot fulfill their functions (as indicated by the recent Kursk accident). Therefore, the United States already has more effective strategic weapons against Asia than Russia at this time.

In terms of quality, American superiority is much more absolute. Besides nuclear warheads, long range missiles, strategic aircraft, and nuclear submarines, the US has more and better conventional weapons which are able to fulfill strategic missions in Asia than Russia. The weapons which can

carry a strategic strike over any target in East Asia are B-117, B-2, F-16, and F-15. Everyday, America seems to have more and better strategic weapons in the Asia- Pacific region than any other power.

Missile defense will enhance this real American superiority in Asia over Russia and China because America will not only enjoy offensive superiority but also a defensive one. America will not only have more and better offensive weapons which can hit Russia and China, but also the capability to knock down a certain number of incoming Russian or Chinese missiles. This will, in turn, reduce the number and capability of Russian and Chinese strategic forces which would have the same effect as increasing the quantity and capability of American strategic offensive forces.

Japan is now and has in the past been at a disadvantage when faced with Russia's strategic and conventional forces and China's strategic forces. However, missile defense of Japan can change the picture of military balance between Japan and other major powers in Asia. When Japan obtains missile defense capability, Japan will have some strategic capacity to counter Russian and Chinese strategic forces. At the same time, Japan will continue to enjoy some conventional military superiority, at least over Chinese military forces. Japan can already send more and better naval ships or combat aircraft to anywhere in East Asia than the Chinese can. A US-Japan missile defense will only further reduce China's strategic and missile capabilities.

In sum, missile defense will enhance the de facto American superiority in offensive strategic forces and allow them to gain a defensive superiority over Russia and China. At that point, America will enjoy a comprehensive strategic superiority. Japan will increase its military capability and TMD will cause instability to the military balance in the Asia-Pacific region.

III. TMD and Possible New Arms Race in East Asia

To be certain, if the countries involved or affected by TMD do not make an agreement on missile defense, a new round of arms race will begin in Asia.

Arms race in offense

The quickest and easiest way to counter the missile defense system is to increase the offensive capability. Russia may not be able to increase its offensive power in the near future because of its economic situations, but if the Russian economy recovers and gets back on track (many Russian experts believe this will happen by the time 2010), then the country would be able to do something to counter American missile defense system. Russians are now debating how to use their limited military resource. One school emphasizes the strategic forces while the other stresses conventional forces. If the first school's idea gets support from President Putin, Russia will do something to counter a missile defense even before its economic situation gets better.

China is and will continue to be in a much better position to deal with US-Japan missile defense due to its booming economy. Now and for the next few decades this century, the rise of China's economic power will make the country capable of spending more resources to build up its strategic forces. However, the number of Chinese long range missiles which can hit the US may not increase dramatically due to the costliness. However, China is capable of doubling its present 20 or so long range strategic missiles within a decade. As for short and medium range missiles, which can reach Japan and US forces in East Asia and the western Pacific, China can increase those numbers dramatically and quickly.

Arms race in defense

When Russia and China conclude that they cannot persuade the Americans and Japanese not to develop and deploy TMD systems, Russia and China will then develop their own missile defense system in order to keep or reach strategic balance in both the offensive and defense terms. Their missile defense system may not be as good as America's due to the technological gap between them, but, given that the Soviets and Chinese have narrowed their gap with Americans in offensive forces in the 1960s and 1970s, one should be confident that others are also technologically capable of developing and deploying some sort of missile defense system.

The joint development of a missile defense system could be dangerous. Japan could end up with a joint TMD system with the United States, or may have its own missile defense capability. Because of the technological development, Japan could not only have a missile defense system, it could also have a missile offensive capability. Japan has been developing its satellite and rocket systems for years. After it gains a missile defensive capability, the country could find itself desiring a strategic offensive force as well.

Arms race between conventional forces of US, Japan, Russia and China

Because missile defense creates tension and suspicion between major militaries, they will do whatever they can do in strengthening all areas of their military forces. In order to keep military balance during a time of deteriorating strategic balance, the Chinese, and possibly others, will try to increase their conventional forces to keep the overall military balance. There will be more and better aircraft, naval ships, and submarines in East Asia in the 21st century.

Arms race between two Koreas

The welcomed summit and improvement in inter-Korean relations between the two Koreas so far have not changed the picture of the military arena. The United States and South Korea still maintain an alert attitude and military posture ready for a worst case scenario. North Korea has not changed its position in developing necessary forces and weaponry to defend itself. The American and Japanese deployment of a missile defense system in Asia will encourage North Korea to do something to counter such kind of forces. Missile defense may complicate the missile talks between North Korea and the United States, and the non-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Arms race across Taiwan Strait

The stated purpose for developing and deploying missile defense in Asia by the US and Japan is to counter "the Chinese missile build up" across the Taiwan Strait. Missile superiority is the only area that Mainland China has to deter Taiwan's independence tendency, but a US-Japan missile defense system will neutralize such a Chinese capability. Mainland China would, therefore, have to increase the number of missiles targeted at Taiwan in order to maintain the same deterrence. The outcome would be much more missile defense weapons and missiles across the Taiwan Strait.

Arms race in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is not directly involved in or affected by the US-Japan missile defense system. However, when there is a missile defense force and a greater deployment of missiles in East Asia and the West Pacific, Southeast Asians will find themselves threatened by those systems and missiles. Therefore, they may feel compelled to do something militarily to counter the new developments in the region. The outcome will be more arms in Southeast Asia as well.

IV. TMD and Regional Security Cooperation

TMD has already become a serous issue in East Asia. It has become a controversial issue and even

an obstacle in both bilateral and multilateral security relations in the region.

TMD and bilateral security cooperation

Over the past years, TMD has become a controversial issue in security talks between the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and other countries such as Australia. The issue has been raised and discussed in almost every bilateral talk on political security between those governments and militaries. The years of recent security dialogue and consultation between those countries have made little progress on the issue. Each time Russia and China have gotten together to talk, they have found more and more in common to oppose the system. Meanwhile, talks between China and the US and China and Japan have gotten nowhere in their disputes about TMD.

TMD has not only become a controversial issue in bilateral relations between major powers in Asia, it has also become a major obstacle for further security cooperation among them. Because of their differences on missile defense, the US and Russia cannot make progress on further cuts to their strategic forces. US and China cannot move forward in their arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation talks. Sino-US talks regarding the MTCR (Missile Technology Control Regime) are actually dead because of the differences on related missile defense issue. Many ideas and possibilities for greater security cooperation between China, US, and Japan are made impossible under the shadow of TMD. Security dialogue agendas and cooperation are instead occupied by controversial discussions on the singular issue of TMD.

Multilateral security cooperation

Missile defense is also a controversial issue in the context of multilateral security cooperation. Russia and China have spent a lot of energy getting the UN resolution on ABM passed last October. TMD has also been a hot topic in the recent ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) meetings. Without compromise on TMD, some countries find it impossible to move ahead with security cooperation. When TMD is really deployed, it will become an even more serious issue in bilateral and multilateral security dialogues. Missile defense causes a new difficulty and becomes a shadow for further security dialogue and cooperation in the Asia- Pacific region.

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1. Joint Statement on ABM, China Daily, July 19, 2000, p.4.
2. Hu Qihua, "FMs meet, highlight regional security," China Daily, July 5, 2000, p.2.

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