NMD, TMD, Arms Control

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NMD, TM, Arms Control by Guo Liang

After the end of the Cold War, the United States became the only superpower in the world. While the international situation as a whole is relaxing, the United States, which possesses the world’s most powerful nuclear and conventional forces, is claiming that it is now facing more serious and challenging threats from multinational coalitions that pose a direct threat to the interests of the United States. The United States has vigorously promoted the idea of arms control, and others, the United States made a decision in 1992 to accelerate its development of both National Missile Defense (NMD) and Theater Missile Defense (TMD) systems to defend the entire United States territory, its forward deployed troops, and its allies against missile attacks. This reflects the changing US arms control and nonproliferation policies' strategic orientation towards global and regional arms control and nonproliferation. The major objectives of US arms control and nonproliferation efforts are to achieve an absolute US military superiority in both offensive and defensive capabilities, further enlarging the existing disparity between the United States and other countries. This will allow the US to arm and undermine the trust among the major powers. Russia, China, and the United States’ European allies have expressed their opposition against and concern about US development of NMD. China and other Asian countries have also shown their concern about the effects of US NMD development on the Asia-Pacific region. In the United States, the issues of NMD and TMD have brought about heated debates on whether the idea of arms control is outdated and whether arms control will have a future. The US development of NMD and TMD also reflects a growing tendency in the United States toward unilateralism. The Republican-dominated congress and some right-wing forces place more emphasis on unilateralism and undertake intervention than on traditional arms control treaties and international nonproliferation cooperation. The failure of the US Congress to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) last October, and the US attempt to modify and even threaten to abandon the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty to pave the way for its NMD and TMD programs reflect this tendency toward unilateralism. US advocates believe that the United States can now have both the financial and technological capability to protect itself from the North Korean tests and also to have the ability to defend against threats from so-called "states of concern." Therefore, the proponents want to replace offensive deterrence with defensive deterrence and believe that NMD and TMD are the right answers.

In the past ten years or so, through common efforts of the international community, a series of important progressive steps have been made in promoting the nonproliferation process. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was concluded in 1993 and entered into force in 1997. The Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) was extended indefinitely in 1995 and the CTBT was concluded in 1996. After 1996, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva began to prepare for the negotiation of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). Based on the aforementioned achievements, the international community should have further promoted the nonproliferation process and decreased the threat from weapons of mass destruction, but the US NMD and TMD programs have been opposed and may even hinder these past achievements. The US development of NMD and TMD will upset the existing global and regional strategic balance and impede or even reverse the nuclear disarmament process. Over the past years, the United States has been pressing China, Russia, and other countries under the threat of arms control negotiations, concluded the ABM Treaty, the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Short-Range Missiles (INF), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) I and II. These agreements, in the meantime, have improved the United States’ relations with China, Russia, and other countries. They also lay the basis for future nuclear disarmament. The US development of NMD and the upper-tier TMD systems violate the goals and the basic provisions of the ABM treaty, and thus undermine the trust and create a new security dilemma between the US and Russia. The US deployment of NMD and TMD is a direct threat to Russian missile defense system and anti-ballistic missile systems and their components. US and Russian leaders have stated several times that Russia opposes any modification to the ABM treaty and have warned that if the United States abandons the ABM treaty, Russia will withdraw from all nuclear arms control treaties negotiated with the United States. Russian military leaders have claimed that Russia will develop new strategic nuclear weapons if the US deploys NMD and TMD. This will damage the US-Soviet strategic balance and undermine the existing arms control framework. The US development of NMD will also weaken and neutralize the credibility of the limited nuclear arsenals possessed by the United Kingdom, France, and China. It will also undermine their strategic deterrence and combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In 1998, the United States put forward the idea of a regional missile defense system, and the process of preparing the deployment of NMD and TMD will be obstructed, delayed, and maybe even reversed. The United States' European allies have expressed their opposition against and concern about US development of NMD. President Chirac of France warned that the US NMD program would endanger the efforts made by the international community in controlling nuclear proliferation. German Chancellor Schroeder noted that the NMD program would lead to a new round of arms racing and have a negative impact on the stability of NATO. The European countries fear that this program will jeopardize the implementation of the existing arms control agreements between the United States and Russia and disrupt peace with Europe.

The US development and deployment of a TMD system in Asia will upset the regional military balance and undermine stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The TMD system is not only a part of the US arms control and nonproliferation policy but also a part of its forward deployment strategy. Joint TMD development between the United States and Japan also constitutes proliferation of missile technologies in the region. The deployment of TMD could only worsen the security situation in Northeast Asia. That is why South Korea has refused the offer of joint TMD development with the United States, and Taiwan has demurred for the same reason. South Korea, which has developed nuclear weapons, will certainly lead to an arms race and undermine the trust among the major powers. It has soured US-China relations and China-Japan relations in particular. It has also undermined the cooperation among those countries in the field of arms control and nonproliferation.

In recent years, the United States has cooperated well in the field of arms control and nonproliferation. China and the United States, both signatories of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), are dedicated to ensuring the effective implementation of the conventions. In the joint US-China statement made during President Jiang’s visit to the United States in 1997, both countries agreed to cooperate on the execution of the CWC and enhance government supervision over the exports of chemical weapons. The China-Japan, China-Russia, China-US, China-Europe, China-Africa, China-OA, China-South Korea, China-Western Europe, and China-Southeast Asia cooperation in the field of arms control and nonproliferation has contributed to the improvement of China-US relations as well as to world peace and stability. Nevertheless, the US development of NMD and TMD has caused serious concern for China. From time to time, US officials explain to China that the US NMD system is not directed against China. But according to Walter B. Slocombe, US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, “nuclear misfue design is designed to counter a few tens of reentry vehicles.” If instead of several missiles from the so-called “states of concern.” Therefore, China’s very limited number of strategic missiles will be captured by the US NMD system. Furthermore, if George Bush Jr. is elected the next US president and if the United States is going to pursue a more ambitious, “thick” NMD program, China’s strategic interest will certainly be undermined. Whether or not US NMD is directed against China’s limited deterrence capability will show whether the US is directed China as a partner or an adversary. This will be a test for US policy towards China. As Ambassador Sha Zhukang, Director-General of the Department of Arms Control and Disarmament of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, has stated several times, China will not sit idly by and let its fundamental national interest be harmed.

Joint US development of TMD has increased the distrust between China and Japan. The intentions of both the United States and Japan has also become a serious concern for China. China suspects that the joint development of TMD may further strengthen the US-Japanese military alliance, which is directed against China. The cooperation also changed the passive role of Japan from a more active role in joint TMD development to its rightful position as a major military power on the Asian mainland. After North Korea’s satellite test in August 1998, some politicians in Japan called for a change to Japan’s military strategy from an “exclusive defense” to a “preemptive strategy” to prevent nuclear terrorism and other threats from so-called “states of concern.” Japan’s defense minister and Japanese prime minister have called for Japan’s military strategy to be adjusted to a more military road. After North Korea’s satellite test in August 1998, some politicians in Japan called for a change to Japan’s military strategy from an “exclusive defense” to a “preemptive strategy” to prevent nuclear terrorism and other threats from so-called “states of concern.” Japan’s defense minister and Japanese prime minister have called for Japan’s military strategy to be adjusted to a more military road. After North Korea’s satellite test in August 1998, some politicians in Japan called for a change to Japan’s military strategy from an “exclusive defense” to a “preemptive strategy” to prevent nuclear terrorism and other threats from so-called “states of concern.” Japan’s defense minister and Japanese prime minister have called for Japan’s military strategy to be adjusted to a more military road. After North Korea’s satellite test in August 1998, some politicians in Japan called for a change to Japan’s military strategy from an “exclusive defense” to a “preemptive strategy” to prevent nuclear terrorism and other threats from so-called “states of concern.” Japan’s defense minister and Japanese prime minister have called for Japan’s military strategy to be adjusted to a more military road.