NMD, TMD, Arms Control

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NMD, TMD, Arms Control by GU GuoliangAfter 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 multiple, unpredicted sources. Using the grossly exaggerated threat posed by the so-called rogue states (or the states of concern) described by the Rumsfeld Commission report and others, the United States made a decision in 1999 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 and the US tendency towards unilaterialism. US development of NMD and TMD has a major negative impact on nuclear disarmament and international nonproliferation efforts. It has affected the relations of the major powers, US-China relations, and US-Japan relations in particular. US NMD and TMD development has also undermined their cooperation in the field of arms control and nonproliferation.1. US NMD and TMD programs run counter to the objectives of arms control, challenge traditional arms control theories, and cast doubt on the future of international arms control regimes.

The objectives and functions of arms control are to slow global and regional arms races, minimize the disparities between heavily and lightly armed states (thus removing an important source of instability), and promote trust and better understanding among nations.(1) However, the strategic goal of the United States in developing and deploying NMD and TMD is to achieve an absolute US military superiority in both offensive and defensive capabilities, further enlarging the huge existing disparity between the United States and other countries. This will certainly lead to an arms race and undermine the trust among the major powers. Russia, China, and even 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 TMD 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 out- dated and whether arms control will have a future. The proponents of NMD and TMD advocate that traditional arms control theories, which embrace a mutually assured destruction approach to deterrence and strategic stability, no longer fit the post- Cold War security situation. They argue that deterrence is no longer a viable threat-reduction strategy, and that deterrence may fail in the face of multiple and unpredicted threats from so- called "states of concern."(2) Therefore, the proponents want to replace offensive deterrence with defensive deterrence and believe that NMD and TMD are the right answers.

US development of NMD and TMD also reflects a growing tendency in the United States toward unilaterialism. The Republican dominated congress and some right-wing forces place more emphasis on US military build-up and unilateral military intervention than international 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 unilaterialism. US advocates believe that the United States can now have both the financial and technological capabilities to develop and deploy NMD and TMD without having to care about the reactions from Russia or other countries because they cannot afford to have an arms race with the United States. They argue that international arms control treaties cannot be effectively verified and can only pose a threat to US maintenance of its military superiority. Because the US arms control and nonproliferation policy is in disarray, many scholars both inside and outside of the United States have real concerns about the future of international arms control.

2. US development of NMD and TMD programs has resulted in a seriously negative impact on nuclear disarmament and international nonproliferation efforts.

In the past ten years or so, through common efforts of the international community, a series of important progressive steps has 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 Cutoff 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 weakened and may even negate these past achievements.

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 and the Soviet Union (Russia), through arduous negotiations, concluded the ABM Treaty, the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) I, and START II. These treaties constitute the cornerstone of the strategic balance between the United States and the Soviet Union (Russia). They also lay the basis for further nuclear disarmament. The US development of NMD and the upper-tier TMD systems violate the goals and the basic provisions of the ABM treaty, which prohibits the establishment of a territorial anti-missile system and the development, testing, and deployment of sea-based, air-based, space-based or land-based mobile anti-missile systems and their components. 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 offensive strategic weapons if the United States deploys NMD. This will trigger a new round of arms race between the United States and Russia.

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 interests. The maintenance of a strategic balance among the major powers is the precondition for nuclear disarmament. If the balance is undermined, the nuclear disarmament process 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 preventing nuclear proliferation. German Chancellor Schroeder noted that the NMD program would lead to a new round of global arms racing and have a negative impact on the unity of NATO. The European countries fear that this program will suspend the implementation of the existing arms control agreements between the United States and Russia and decouple US security 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 NMD system, it is also a forward deployed US NMD system. 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, but has instead pursued a "sunshine policy" towards North Korea, which successfully resulted in a historic summit between the two leaders. The joint development of TMD between the United States and Japan has caused suspicion and concern about the intention of Japan, not only from China, but also from other Asian countries. An arms race in the Asia-Pacific region has already begun.

The non-nuclear states always link the progress in nuclear disarmament with nonproliferation. The understanding reached at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference is that the nuclear states should negotiate in earnest on effective nuclear disarmament measures in accordance with the provisions of Article VI of the NPT. If the nuclear disarmament process is at a standstill as a result of US development of NMD and TMD, it may push the nuclear nonproliferation regime to the brink of collapse. Since the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998, the international community has shown an increasing concern about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The US rejection of CTBT ratification and its attempt to modify the ABM treaty have weakened the credibility of the United States as a leader in the field of arms control and nonproliferation. Since the existing arms control and nonproliferation agreements are being questioned, it is improbable that any new arms control and nonproliferation agreements will be reached. That is why the negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament are now at a stalemate. Furthermore, this stagnant situation may encourage some "threshold" countries to follow the footsteps of India and Pakistan. If that happens, all the efforts and achievements made by the international community over the years will be negated and the world will be even more insecure. 3. US development of NMD and TMD has soured the relations among the major powers. It has soured US-China relations and China- Japan relations in particular. It has also undermined the cooperation among these countries in the field of arms control and nonproliferation.

In recent years, China and the United States have 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 China-US 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 chemicals. During President Clinton's visit to China in 1998, a joint statement reiterated that both countries would seriously and comprehensively fulfill their respective responsibilities in accordance with the BWC. China and the United States, both being signatories of NPT and CTBT, are also cooperating in nuclear disarmament and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear capable ballistic missiles. China and the United States also cooperate effectively in the issue of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and dealing with the security in South Asia. In response to India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests, leaders from both countries conducted talks through a hotline and made a joint statement urging India and Pakistan to stop nuclear tests and sign the CTBT. Both countries also expressed their support for the negotiation of the FMCT. China and the United States have tried to establish confidence-building mechanisms, and enhance military-to-military exchanges and arms control dialogues at different levels. The cooperation between the two countries in all the areas 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, "National missile defense is designed to counter a few tens of reentry vehicles"(3) 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 deterrent capability will show whether the United States is treating 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 and let its fundamental national interest be harmed.

Joint US -Japan 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 and turned Japan into a more active participant in its alliance with the United States. The joint TMD development may encourage the rightwing forces in Japan to embark on a militarist 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 contain aggression in the region. This reminded the people in Asia of what happened several decades ago. Furthermore, the joint TMD development may also involve Japan in any military conflict across the Taiwan Strait, since Japan still maintains an ambiguous explanation for the so-called "surrounding areas." Under such circumstance and owing to the mutual suspicion and distrust, China and Japan will have difficulty in expanding dialogue and cooperation in the field of arms control and nonproliferation.

The possible inclusion of Taiwan in a US TMD system is a most serious issue. Both the American Omnibus Appropriation Act and the 1999 Fiscal Year Department of Defense Authorization Act support the inclusion of Taiwan into the TMD system. If the United States transfers TMD systems to Taiwan, it will encourage the separatists in Taiwan to move closer towards independence and make it more difficult for the mainland to strive for peaceful unification. It will enable Taiwan to directly threaten the air- space security over the Taiwan Strait and China's mainland. It will also upgrade the US-Taiwan relationship to one of paramilitary alliance and undermine the very foundation of the three China-US joint communiques. If the United States includes Taiwan in its TMD system, the security of Taiwan will not be enhanced. Instead, the situation in the Taiwan Strait will become more unstable. China will not tolerate the infringement on its territorial integrity and let Taiwan gain independence. In sum, if the United States insists on developing and deploying NMD and TMD without properly addressing China's security concern, China-US relations will be seriously hurt and it will not be possible for the two countries to continue cooperation in the field of arms control of nonproliferation.

Conclusion

US NMD and TMD programs will not bring real security to the United States and its allies but only impede international arms control and nonproliferation efforts and result in instability and insecurity in the world. As the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction becomes an increasingly important security concern for the international community (and the United States in particular), one country, no matter how powerful it is, just cannot achieve absolute security without considering the security of other countries and cooperating with them. The right approach to maintaining international peace and security is for the international community to maintain and strengthen international arms control and nonproliferation regimes and make joint efforts and cooperate with each other to deal with the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Notes

(1) Jozef Goldblat: Arms Control: A Guide to Negotiations and Agreements, p5.

(2) Kerry Kartchner: The Objectives of Arms Control, American Defense Policy, p423-429.

(3) Walter B. Slocombe, The Administration's Approach, The Washington Quarterly, Summer 2000.

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