

**“US Navy Set Missile Defence Operations Area in the Sea of Japan  
190 Kilometres West of Okushiri:  
Japan as a Base for the Defense of the US Homeland.”  
by Hiromichi Umebayashi**

CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Report by Hiromichi Umebayashi
- III. Nautilus invites your responses

I. Introduction

Hiromichi Umebayashi, Founder and President of Peace Depot, a non-profit organization for peace research and education in Japan, reports that a study using FOIA "has established for the first time the actual patrol patterns of the U.S. Navy Aegis destroyers in the Sea of Japan engaged in missile defense duties." Umebayashi concludes that "the plan is to integrate Aegis ships long-range surveillance and tracking data in the Sea of Japan, the interceptor missile launch control system and the battle management system. Accordingly, the Japan Sea patrols are a crucial component in exercises to develop the core of the whole integrated system US National Missile Defense system."

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II. Report by Hiromichi Umebayashi

-“US Navy Set Missile Defence Operations Area in the Sea of Japan 190 Kilometres West of Okushiri: Japan as a Base for the Defense of the US Homeland.”  
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A survey conducted by Peace Depot has established for the first time the actual patrol patterns of the U.S. Navy Aegis destroyers in the Sea of Japan engaged in missile defense duties. These patrols are not conducted by moving over the whole of the Sea of Japan. Instead a maritime area designated as a “Ballistic Missile Defense Operations Area (BMD Op Area or BMD Station)” has been established, within which the US Navy carries out intensive on-station surveillance and tracking activities. That Operations Area is 190 kilometers west of the Japanese island of Okushiri, off the southwest coast of Hokkaido. But far from being a permanent station, this operations area is clearly still only at an experimental stage. The key source for this research has been the daily deck logs of the Arleigh Burke class Aegis destroyers, USS *Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54), USS *Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), and USS *John S. McCain* (DDG 56), all of which have Yokosuka as their homeport.

## Patrol routes

On October 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 the United States Navy acknowledged it was beginning surveillance and tracking operations in the Sea of Japan in preparation for expected North Korean missile launchings.<sup>i</sup> That same day Associated Press reported that US naval sources confirmed the *Arleigh Burke*-class Aegis destroyer USS *Curtis Wilbur*, home-ported in Yokosuka, Japan, was to be the first to take up such duty, to be followed by the USS *Fitzgerald* and USS *John S. McCain*.<sup>ii</sup>

The author examined the deck logs of the three ships in the Naval Historical Center in Washington DC, and traced the path of their voyages, and thus surveyed the actual patrol patterns in the Japan Sea. In addition to the deck logs, the 2004 Command Histories of the USS *Curtis Wilbur* and USS *Fitzgerald* were also studied. First, let us look at the results of this survey.

### *Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54)

The logs for the USS *Curtis Wilbur* were examined for the five months from September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 to January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005. The *Curtis Wilbur* headed north from Yokosuka on September 27<sup>th</sup>, with the deck log specifying the destination as “the Sea of Japan”. On Sept 30<sup>th</sup> the deck log entry recorded the first mention of missile defense: “00:00; Underway as before in the Sea of Japan in support of BMD.” At 00:01 on October 1<sup>st</sup> the deck log again recorded: “Assumed the watch. Underway as before in the Sea of Japan in support of BMD.” When the ship moved to the Tsushima Straits on October 9<sup>th</sup>, the log used the term “BMD Station” for the first time, where it reads “from BMD station to the Tsushima Straits.” “Station” here is generally a term referring to a specified operations area.<sup>iii</sup>

While the time duration for the ship’s BMD operation is not described specifically in the deck logs, for reasons we will discuss below, it is safe to conclude that *Curtis Wilbur* was on station in the BMD Operations Area for about 10 days from September 29<sup>th</sup> to October 8<sup>th</sup>. (See the calendar in [Table 1](#), and the track recorded on the map in [Chart 1](#)). At first glance, the map of the ship’s voyage in Chart 1 seems to show a backwards and forwards patrol pattern in the Sea of Japan, but this is not the case. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, Typhoon 22 proceeded north-north-east off the Kii Peninsula. In order to avoid the typhoon, the ship moved up and down the Japan Sea.

On October 16<sup>th</sup>, the *Curtis Wilbur* put in to Sasebo, and on October 26<sup>th</sup> returned to Yokosuka. Afterwards, the ship took part in training exercises in the Okinawa Operations Area and the Philippines Operations Area. After again returning to Yokosuka, following 10 days of repairs and maintenance the *Curtis Wilbur* headed for Kagoshima. On December 9<sup>th</sup> it returned to Yokosuka for repairs and maintenance and the Christmas break. Until the end of January 2005 the *Curtis Wilbur* basically remained in Yokosuka.

This understanding of the *Curtis Wilbur*’s part in BMD operations is confirmed by the 2004 Command History of the *Curtis Wilbur*. “October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 found CURIIS WILBUR on station and radiating its modified SPY-1D radar over North Korea in defense of the United States. Through two weeks of this proof of concept patrol CURTIS WILBUR avoided the swipes of both the BMD critics and two typhoons to provide the best possible coverage for this new mission.”<sup>iv</sup>

### *Fitzgerald* (DDG 62)

The logs for the *Fitzgerald* for the five months from October 1<sup>st</sup> to February 28<sup>th</sup> were examined. Records for the following three months were not yet available. Until the *Fitzgerald* departed Yokosuka on November 29<sup>th</sup>, the ship basically remained in Yokosuka. When it left port on the 29<sup>th</sup> its destination was recorded as “BMD station”. The log for December 1<sup>st</sup> records the ship’s destination as “BMD OP AREA (Operations Area)”.<sup>v</sup> Accordingly, at midnight on the same day, the log stated “00:00 Continued the watch. Underway ise [independently] in the Sea of Japan en route to BMD station,” and late on the following night at 23:00 recorded: “Continued the watch. Underway ise in the Sea of Japan. Currently at BMD station.”

In the case of the *Fitzgerald*, the BMD activity seemed to be carried out over a wider range than the operations area that we will specify in the later discussion. It is possible that there is more than one such specified operational area. Including time spent in that broader area, the *Fitzgerald* carried out about nine days of BMD Operations Area activity (see [Chart 2](#)).

On December 17<sup>th</sup>, the *Fitzgerald* put into Pusan, leaving for its home port in Yokosuka on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. The ship basically remained in Yokosuka until February 7<sup>th</sup>. That day it left port for Maizuru on the Sea of Japan coast, and after putting into Maizuru on February 10<sup>th</sup>, headed for the Okinawa Operations Area four days later. On February 18<sup>th</sup>, the *Fitzgerald* sailed from the Okinawa Operations Area for Hong Kong, which it reached on the 21<sup>st</sup>. On February 25<sup>th</sup> it left Hong Kong to return to the Okinawa Operations Area. Although Maizuru is on the Sea of Japan, and there was no BMD surveillance and tracking mission capable U.S. ship deployed in the Sea of Japan when the *Fitzgerald* was at Maizuru, it did not spend additional time in the Sea of Japan, and the ship’s log makes no further mention of the BMD Operations Area.

Again, the description of this period in the *2004 Command History of the Fitzgerald* is consistent with this study’s account of its BMD role. “At the close of November and through 19 December FITZGERALD was the second ship to participate in the national Ballistic Missile Defense Limited Defense Operations (BMD LDO). For weeks FITZGERALD kept vigilant guard and remained undetected while helping refine the navy’s role and experience in BMD LDO.”<sup>vi</sup>

### *John S. McCain* (DDG 56)

The logs for the USS *John S. McCain* were examined for the six months from October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 until March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005.<sup>vii</sup> On October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004, the *McCain* left Yokosuka for exercises in Okinawa and the East China Sea, returning on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. As can be seen from Table 1, in this period, the *McCain* could have taken the place of *Curtis Wilbur* on BMD duty, but did not. This means that currently the US Navy does not have a plan to station some ships permanently or more frequently in the Sea of Japan for BMD patrols.

After returning from the East China Sea, the *McCain* remained in Yokosuka. Then, on January 13<sup>th</sup>, the ship headed for Sasebo. Next day, en route to Sasebo, it confirmed the mission by recording its destination as “BMD station.” Putting into Sasebo on the 16<sup>th</sup>, and leaving on the 17<sup>th</sup>, again its destination was clearly specified as “BMD station”.

Leaving Sasebo, the *McCain* headed straight to the BMD station, but for some reason it redirected to an RAS (Replenishment at Sea) station off Pohang, South Korea, where the ship rendezvoused with a supply ship to take supplies. This explains the irregular cruise track in the Sea of Japan that is seen on the chart of its patrol route ([Chart 3](#)). While the term “BMD Operations Area” does not appear in the *McCain*’s log again, as discussed below, it was engaged in operations in a narrow sea area in the northern part of the Sea of Japan conforming exactly to a “BMD Operations Area” as identified in this study. The period of this engagement was relatively short, just five days. Immediately after, the *McCain* headed for Yokosuka, returning on January 29<sup>th</sup>.

After stopping at Yokosuka for several days, the *McCain* headed for Otaru in Hokkaido, staying there from February 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>. The ship then left Otaru and travelled in the Sea of Japan straight to the South Korean port of Jinhae, arriving there on February 11<sup>th</sup>. It is to be noted that there is no sign either in the log entries or in the derived cruise chart to suggest that the *McCain* was engaged in the BMD surveillance and tracking duty in this deployment. Therefore, the *McCain*’s port call at Otaru is considered to have no direct connection with such duties.

### *Lake Erie* (CG 70)

Just a word here about the Aegis cruiser *Lake Erie*. It is known that this ship has been used to conduct test firing of the Standard-3 (SM3) missile to be used for mid-course missile defense. The *Lake Erie* visited Yokosuka US Naval base on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004, and put into Niigata on October 11<sup>th</sup>.

We might speculate that the ship was deployed in the Sea of Japan on missile defence duties from October 1<sup>st</sup>. But after examining the *Lake Erie*’s logs, the author’s conclusion is that, unlike the three Aegis-class destroyers deployed in the Sea of Japan from the start of October 2004, the *Lake Erie* was not carrying out BMD surveillance and tracking duty. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that its portcall at Niigata was a practice in preparation for future BMD roles in the Sea of Japan, and that it may in some way have involved missile defense joint exercises in the Sea of Japan with *the Curtis Wilbur*, which was on BMD station at the time. According to the US Navy, the immediate purpose for the *Lake Erie*’s deployment was to take part in large-scale exercises in the Okinawa and Philippines regions. In fact it eventually participated in such exercises after leaving Niigata.

### “BMD Operations Area”

The three Arleigh Burke-class Aegis destroyers were each deployed in turn for a period to be engaged in BMD surveillance and tracking duty in the Sea of Japan. The cruise tracks for the three ships are shown in Charts 1-3. The charts were constructed by plotting the latitude and longitude of the ships as recorded three times a day in the logs. The charts clearly show that the three Aegis ships stayed in a defined zone west of Okushiri Island while they were engaged in BMD surveillance and tracking duty. And this area was itself labelled in the logs as “BMD Op Area” or “BMD station.” The cruise tracks within this operations area are shown in detail in [Chart 4](#). This chart was drawn by plotting the positions of the ships in latitude and longitude given in the logs in the same way as in Charts 1-3, but on a larger scale. This area is about 190 kilometers west of

Okushiri, roughly 80 kilometers in radius centered on latitude 40° 05' North and 137° 06' East. The fact that the US Navy has set up a specific "BMD Operations Area" is an important new finding.

The significance of this finding is that while cruising in the Sea of Japan these patrol deployments do not in fact involve patrolling operational activity, but rather surveillance and tracking duty within a designated zone. As will be explained below, this is consistent with the congressional testimony of the head of the Missile Defense Agency.

### Rotation

To make the rotation periods of the three ships clearer, Table 1 sets out the daily itinerary of the three ships in parallel. There was a roughly 45-day period from when the *Curtis Wilbur* left its station in the BMD Operations Area to when the *Fitzgerald* entered the area. The *Command History* of the *Fitzgerald* says that it was the second ship for BMD duty deployment.<sup>viii</sup> It was then about another 45 days until the *McCain* took up station. It is not impossible that other ships besides these three were on station in the BMD Operations Zone during these intervals, but it is highly unlikely. Only a limited number of Aegis-ships have the capability for long range missile surveillance and tracking, and there is no information of other such warships entering Japanese ports. As already noted, even when one of the three ships was available to fill an apparent vacancy at the Op Area, none was assigned to such duty. Accordingly, only three ships were rotationally engaged in missile surveillance and tracking during the period studied, though there is probably not a strict meaning to the 45 day period, and there were long periods without any ships on station at the BMD Op Area.

In short, it is quite clear from our study results that the US missile defense patrol arrangement is at an extremely limited experimental stage. It is a long way from reaching the condition of a permanent station.

### Analysis of the Present State of Play

What then do these survey results tell us concerning the purpose of the ships activities? On March 15, 2005 the Director of the Missile Defense Agency, Lt-Gen. Henry A. Obering III, USAF testified to the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Strategic Forces. Parts of his testimony have an important bearing on the results of this study. After explaining the evolutionary development and spiral testing approach to missile defense, Obering clearly stated that the objective of the initial fielding of the developing missile defense capacity is to defend the United States homeland against a missile attack from North Korea and that the Aegis surveillance and track capabilities are an integral part of this homeland defense capacity: "With the initial fielding last year of the Ground-based Midcourse Defense and Aegis surveillance and track capabilities of this integrated system, we are establishing a limited defensive capability for the United States against a long-range North Korean missile threat."<sup>ix</sup>

The *Command History* of the *Curtis Wilbur* reiterated this statement in more direct military terms when, as cited above, it stated "(Curtis Wilbur radiated) its modified SPY-1D radar over North Korea in defense of the United States."<sup>x</sup> On the other hand, Obering stated, the defense of allied countries and US forces in Japan and South Korea is being

dealt with by “building up our inventory of mobile interceptors.” This refers to the Patriot (PAC-3) missile units being deployed to South Korea and introduced into Japan.

Furthermore, Obering’s testimony suggests that the long-range surveillance and tracking support activities by Aegis ships in the Sea of Japan from October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 were conducted in accordance with specific interceptor launch scenarios based on launching of ground-based interceptors from Fort Greely, Alaska and from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Obering mentioned three elements of ground-based interceptors, Cobra Dane radar, and Aegis ships long-range surveillance and tracking support, and then stated, “These elements have been fully connected to the fire control system,” and “the Aegis ships have been periodically put on station in the Sea of Japan to provide long-range surveillance and tracking data to our battle management system.” This means that the plan is to integrate Aegis ships long-range surveillance and tracking data in the Sea of Japan, the interceptor missile launch control system and the battle management system. Accordingly, rather than being an ongoing surveillance and tracking activity, the current periodic Japan Sea patrols should be regarded as part of a “proof of concept”, and as part of a joint training process integrating maritime surveillance and tracking deployments to the continental U.S. ground-based interceptor missile launch systems. That is to say, the Japan Sea patrols are a crucial component in exercises to develop the core of the whole integrated system US National Missile Defense system.

When you consider such an objective, we can understand why that particular area of the Japan Sea was selected as the “BMD Operations Area”. This zone, 190 km west of the island of Okushiri, is positioned under the Great Circle path a Taepodong missile must traverse to reach Hawaii or Los Angeles (see [Chart 5](#)). Again, this makes sense of periodic rotation for surveillance and tracking duty rather than permanent station.

### Yokosuka’s role as a US homeland defense base

Amidst all this technical detail, the larger point to recognize here is that something new has been born within the US-Japan alliance. All three Aegis vessels were homeported at Yokosuka when they conducted their missile defence patrols. The United States is using a US base in Japan directly for US homeland defense that is discrete from the defense of Japan. Such an activity is not permitted under the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, which limits the activities of the US Forces in Japan to defending Japan and to maintaining international peace and security in Far East by Articles 5 and 6 of the Treaty.<sup>xi</sup> Such limitation comes from the Peace Constitution of Japan.

At the very least a fresh Diet debate is needed to face the changing character of the alliance, and to focus attention on these uses of US bases in Japan in violation of the provisions of the Mutual Security Treaty. We should sound the tocsin because recently politicians and mass media figures in Japan seem to have forgotten that military activities should be controlled strictly under the rule of law, and always under Japanese civilian control.

### Postscript:

The deck logs of all three ships up to mid-April 2005 subsequently became available for study. According to those logs, none of the three visited the Sea of Japan, and none mentioned the BMD Op Area. This means that at least for eighty days there was no



BMD-related deployment to the Sea of Japan. This long hiatus is consistent with findings in this study, and further suggests that as a result of system integration experiments meeting difficulty, the Japan Sea patrol was paused.

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### III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: [bscott@nautilus.org](mailto:bscott@nautilus.org). Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

Related materials:

#### **Excerpts from Congressional testimony by the Director of the Missile Defense Agency**

Lt-Gen. Henry A. Obering III, USAF, March 15, 2005

<http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/sr/2006/0642AObering.pdf>

#### **Deck Logs from the *USS Curtis Wilbur*, *USS Fitzgerald*, and *USS John S. McCain***

<http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/sr/2006/0642CDeckLogs.pdf>

#### **2004 Command History for *USS Curtis Wilbur***

<http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/sr/2006/0642DCurtisWilbur.pdf>

#### **2004 Command History for *USS Fitzgerald***

<http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/sr/2006/0642EFitzgerald.pdf>

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<sup>i</sup> Secretary of the Navy Gordon England, US DOD News Transcript, October 1, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> "U.S. Ship Patrols Sea of Japan," CBSNEWS.COM Tokyo, October 1, 2004

<sup>iii</sup> "BMD station" is often entered as "MODLOC" [modular location]. While this word is also a frequent entry in the logs, it is used not just for BMD-related matters but more widely to refer to a constantly used maritime operation area.

<sup>iv</sup> *Command History for 2004*, *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54), 20 Mar 05

<sup>v</sup> These two terms refer to the same thing.

<sup>vi</sup> *Command History for 2004*, *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), April 21, 2005

<sup>vii</sup> Records for April and after were not yet available.

<sup>viii</sup> *Command History for 2004*, *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62).

<sup>ix</sup> Congressional testimony by the Director of the Missile Defense Agency, Lt-Gen. Henry A. Obering III, USAF. House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces. March 15, 2005 See Attachment for further details.

<sup>x</sup> *Command History for 2004*, *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54), op. cit.

<sup>xi</sup> The relevant parts of these articles in the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security of 1960 are as follows :

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Article V Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes. . .

Article VI For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan. . .