

**-“Japan as a Base for the Defense of the US homeland: US Navy Missile Defense Operations in the Sea of Japan”  
by Hiromichi Umebayashi**

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I. Introduction

Hiromichi Umebayashi, Founder and President of Peace Depot, a non-profit organization for peace research and education in Japan, writes that US Navy missile defense patrols in the Japan Sea are "a crucial component in exercises to develop the core of the whole integrated system US National Missile Defense system". Moreover, he argues, they mean that "something new has been born within the US-Japan alliance."

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II. Essay by Hiromichi Umebayashi

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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. 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> 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 this Policy Forum, the case of just one of the ships, the *Curtis Wilbur*, is presented in detail.<sup>ii</sup>

#### *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>.

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 CURTIS WILBUR on station and radiating its modified SPY-1D radar over North Korea in dense 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>

#### “BMD Operations Area”

The deck logs of the USS Fitzgerald and the USS John S. McCain were examined and charted in the same way. The logs of all three Arleigh Burke-class Aegis destroyers show they were each deployed in turn for a period to be engaged in BMD surveillance and tracking duty in the Sea of Japan. 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”. 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. One 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. However, it is clear that US missile defense patrol arrangements are at an extremely limited experimental stage, and are a long way from reaching the condition of a permanent station.

#### Analysis of the Present State of Play

However, there are also important political implications for Japan. 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. 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>v</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.

But despite consistent U.S. claims of a perceived a threat from a North Korean long-range missile attack, given the extremely limited real capacities of the North Korean weapons systems and facilities, it is unlikely that this perception is genuine. The real point is that once the threat story has been established, and enormous resources invested by the Bush administration in “defense against the missile threat,” the threat will have to be made persist, and grow even larger. This is an appalling waste of human resources, the only beneficiary of which will have been military industries, and contributing nothing to the real defense of the United States.

Yokosuka's new role as a US homeland defense base

Let me finish by briefly outlining some political – and legal - implications of these technical military developments. 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. For the first time, the US has started to use 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. Such limitation comes from the Peace Constitution of Japan. At the very least a fresh Diet debate is needed. 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.

When Prime Minister Nakasone said during the Cold War that he would make Japan an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” for the United States, he was speaking of Japan as a military base against the Soviet Union. At that time, it was possible to argue that such military activities were a part of the defense of Japan within the terms of the Mutual Security Treaty. Today, on the contrary, in these missile defense operations, Japan is being used as a base purely for the defense of the US homeland. Since Japan directly assists such US military activities through the so-called the sympathy budget (host nation support budget), is this not collective defense prohibited by the Peace Constitution? We should remember that the nature and functions of Yokosuka US Naval Base have now been significantly altered.

### 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.

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

<sup>ii</sup> For full details and charts of the patrols of all three ships, see Umebayashi Hiromichi *Special Report: US Navy Set Missile Defence Operations Area in the Sea of Japan 190 kilometres west of Okushiri*.

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

<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> 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.