

Tokyo's Temperance

The current debate on U.S. NMD has, without a doubt, placed Japan in a deep quandary as it struggles to articulate its position while valuing its alliance with the United States. For Japan, NMD can no longer be ignored on the grounds that it is merely an “internal American debate,” characterized simply as a clash of “Democrats versus Republicans.” Nor can it be neglected based on the argument that it is only a Russian-U.S. bilateral issue. If the United States proceeds with its own NMD deployment while disregarding the international implications of such an action, there is a danger that Japan could also face a backlash from Russia and, especially, China. The NMD issue needs to be addressed in the context of its ramifications for Japan’s long-term security interests. Furthermore, Japan must accept the hard reality that the current U.S. NMD debate warrants a serious domestic Japanese discussion of its implications for the U.S.-Japan alliance management process, as the United States could pursue an NMD policy that would be adverse to Japanese interests. Under a worst-case scenario, Japan’s own missile defense program could be compromised as a result of the currently planned U.S. NMD system.

Three Security Shocks for Japan

To fully understand Japanese NMD perspectives, one must consider three “security shocks” that Japan experienced in the latter part of the 1990s. These shocks have had a psychological impact on the Japanese, which is sure to tangibly influence the direction of the Japanese debate on the U.S. NMD strategy.

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The first of these shocks was the Chinese missile tests over the Taiwan Strait in 1995 and 1996. China executed unarmed launches of its DF-15 missile during military exercises near Taiwan. This incident led Japan to doubt China's commitment to a no-first-use policy, while acutely heightening Japan's perception of China's missile threat. To make matters worse, a recent intelligence report revealed that the total number of coastal-deployed M-9s and shorter-range M-11s has been increased to 150-200 missiles and will reach 600 by 2005, should the current deployment trend continue.¹ The incident has manifestly affected the Japanese security psyche, as it prompted Japan to join the West in criticizing China for its missile diplomacy and added to Japan's motivation to formulate new Japan-U.S. defense guidelines.

The second shock was the North Korean test launch of the Taep'odong 1, which provided direct impetus for both the U.S. NMD and Japan's theater missile defense (TMD) initiatives. Besides the fact that the missile was lobbed over Japanese territory, the decisive factor behind the joint U.S.-Japanese signing of the 1999 TMD Memorandum of Understanding was the rude awakening that North Korea's program, which now included a multi-stage missile, progressed farther than either the United States or Japan had imagined.

The third shock was a chain of events that rocked the foundations of the global nonproliferation regime: nuclear testing by India and then Pakistan in 1998, and the U.S. Senate's decision not to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the fall of 1999. As the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack, nonnuclearization and nuclear disarmament are very powerful themes for the Japanese, which explains Japan's desire to play a larger diplomatic role in the global nonproliferation regime such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or CTBT. These recent events were thus a blow to Japan, and international confidence in the existing nonproliferation regime eroded as a result. Japan was particularly shocked by the U.S. Congress's rejection of CTBT ratification, giving credence to Japanese suspicions that the United States is no longer willing to sustain its commitment to allied cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation and that it is only interested in its own security.

Five Key Japanese Interests

The discussion on U.S. NMD thus far in Japan has neither been adequately broad nor candid, and views expressed on NMD have been minimal, with only a few individuals venturing to address the issue. Missile defense is a highly divisive issue in Japan, even on governmental and bureaucratic levels. While most Japanese affiliated with, or close to, the government are

pro-TMD, there is a clear lack of consensus among them on the U.S. NMD. Views vary even within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Foreign ministry officials affiliated with arms control and disarmament agendas are likely to express perspectives and positions that differ significantly from those iterated by their counterparts working in the security policy field, for instance. On the one hand, there are those who express a high level of concern that the U.S. NMD could undermine the current Russo-U.S. strategic equilibrium, while, on the other, there are those who contend that that balance will not be greatly affected even by an abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The Japan Defense Agency is similarly divided, reflecting the diverse concerns and interests of its various divisions and service branches.

In the Diet as well, missile defense has only been discussed briefly and then only in terms of the defense budget, implications for a regional arms race, and its legal limitations. Government responses to questions on TMD have also been provided at only a cursory level. The Diet has not, as one foreign ministry official pointed out, yet attempted to engage in any extensive discussion that addresses deterrence and security simultaneously, which explains its historic lack of a “decoupling” debate.

At present, there are roughly five key areas of interest when NMD is discussed within a Japanese context: (1) Its effect on extended deterrence and fear of a “Fortress America”; (2) differing perceptions of North Korea; (3) the connection with TMD; (4) Russian and Chinese reactions; and (5) the aim of long-term missile defense architecture. Let’s look at each of these points in more detail.

Japan could face a backlash from Russia and, especially, China.

EFFECT ON EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND FEAR OF A FORTRESS AMERICA

How will NMD affect U.S. extended deterrence? This question, as critical as it is, has been inadequately addressed by the Japanese security community. While there are those who argue fervently that NMD would strengthen the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, there are others who express concern that it could bring about a decoupling in Asia.

An example of the former opinion can be seen in a piece carried in a recent edition of the *Sankei Shimbun*, which was printed in response to the Defense Department’s Annual Report 2000. It positively appraised the U.S. effort to develop an NMD system to counter “uncertain” threats and argued that Japan should also look in the same direction.² Some military experts are also beginning to contend that U.S. allies, including Japan, should closely

follow the U.S. debate on NMD and support its position in the international arena. They state emphatically that NMD is certain to strengthen the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent, which is good reason for its allies to give the issue close attention.³

Such explicit views on NMD are, however, few and far between, with a discussion on NMD being close to nonexistent in Japan. It is highly likely, though, that this discussion will be innervated and expanded as a decision to deploy NMD draws nearer. Without a doubt, the debate will be shaped by the psychological impact of these shocks touched upon earlier.

Suspicious exist that the United States is only interested in its own security.

The current missile defense debate also gives rise to a critical question concerning U.S. and Japanese differences over “who will protect whom from whom?” To date, no agreement sufficient to close this perception gap has been reached in the U.S.-Japan relationship. For example, the crux of the U.S. missile defense discussion is focused on how to protect

Americans and U.S. troops from ballistic missile threats. There is, however, very little talk about the ramifications of U.S. NMD on the U.S.-Japan alliance, particularly with regard to U.S. extended deterrence over Japan.

It is true that Under Secretary for Defense Walter Slocombe recently described the U.S. missile defense as a system that “further complement[s] deterrence by enhancing the United States’ ability to fulfill its global security commitments” to its allies by rendering useless any ballistic missiles equipped with weapons of mass destruction (WMD), thereby “reinforcing” America’s commitment to its allies.⁴ Yet, this statement by itself falls far short of an explanation of the linkage between missile defenses and U.S. extended deterrence. Many Japanese are simply unconvinced. Some worry that U.S. NMD plans are the foundation for a Fortress America, a unilateralist defense posture that may lead to complacency and, ultimately, disregard for its allies’ security interests.

Poised behind a magnificent shield erected to protect itself and only itself, how will the United States respond on the eve of a missile attack on one of its allies—say, Japan? Will the United States actually execute its nuclear retaliation option to protect a foreign country? Will a unilaterally defensive fortress end up threatening the very roots of the U.S.-Japan alliance? The dialogue until now has permitted an ambiguous answer to questions concerning U.S. “extended deterrence” policy; the current NMD debate, however, highlights a need to clarify the nature of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

Beyond technological and financial aspects, there are other issues posed by

the deployment of missile defense systems. For example, one of the selling points of missile defense for Japan is its ability to help integrate Japan into the U.S. command system, thereby increasing U.S.-Japan military interoperability and bilateral intelligence information sharing. Nevertheless, Japan, at this point, feels uncertain about these prospects, not being firmly convinced that such a rosy scenario will come to fruition. This presents a new dilemma for U.S. allies in an RMA (revolution in military affairs) era—many are unsure whether U.S. RMA initiatives will have a unifying or a dismantling effect on the system of post-Cold War alliances.

DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF NORTH KOREA

As noted earlier, Japanese debate over the U.S. NMD deployment is far from being advanced, let alone settled. True, it was the same Taep'odong shock that prompted Japan to opt for TMD while causing the United States to rush toward NMD in defense of its mainland. This has, in fact, been a reason for some Japanese to rejoice, believing that the United States and Japan now share—for the first time in many years after the end of the Cold War—a common, concrete security threat. Others, however, question America's rush to NMD, believing that the current U.S. NMD debate reflects an exaggerated level of U.S. apprehension over the prospect of its vulnerability to North Korean missiles. They fear that the Japanese may perceive a more acute North Korean missile threat than the United States recognizes. Although these people exhibit, to a certain extent, an understanding of the U.S. drive to deploy NMD deployment in response to North Korea, they question the U.S. justification for prioritizing NMD over TMD.

CONNECTION WITH TMD

As many Japanese experts point out, the relationship between NMD and TMD has yet to be adequately articulated. This has been the source of confusion in recent discussions on the two missile defense systems.

For example, due partially to the U.S. decision to dramatically increase funding for NMD, there is a growing concern in Japan over the complementarity between TMD and NMD and attendant role sharing between Japan and the United States. As research moves ahead, plans for TMD and NMD, previously discussed separately, are becoming increasingly intertwined, or so it would appear. Could this lead to a cutthroat battle over who gets the bigger piece of the pie? Some worry that Japan's TMD could be compromised as a result of the priority being given by the United States to NMD development, and that this, in turn, could result in Japan having to

bear a greater financial burden for missile defense. Some Japanese express concern that missile defense is being used as a pretext by the U.S. military establishment to acquire larger budget allocations than would otherwise be granted, and argue that this is leading to a chronic lack of U.S. interdepartmental policy coordination over TMD.

Whether the United States and Japan signed the TMD agreement without first conducting a sufficient policy dialogue on relevant issues, such as the notion that TMD is part of a Japanese hedging strategy, is something that has been discussed only within an extremely small circle of security professionals—the so-called security “high priests.” Discussions on TMD have been minimal within the Diet, which explains the lack of solid support from the public. The foundation of support for Japan’s TMD option, fragile to begin with, has thus eroded further.

RUSSIAN AND CHINESE REACTIONS

While Japan is attracted by the potential unifying effect of U.S. missile defense systems, it realizes that closer collusion with the United States could complicate its relations with Russia and, even more so, with China. The following incident illustrates the extent of this dilemma. As the United Nations (UN) First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) began discussing arms control in October 1999, China, Russia, and Belarus jointly introduced a resolution related to U.S. missile defense, one that demanded strict compliance with the 1972 ABM Treaty. Faced with voting on this UN resolution that registered strong Chinese and Russian opposition to U.S. missile defense plans, Japan chose not to side with its ally but to abstain.

Underscoring Japan’s quandary is the need to address the NMD issue both in the context of its own foreign and defense policies and simultaneously heeding Russian and Chinese concerns over NMD and their implications for Russo- and Sino-Japanese relations.

If the United States fails to reach an agreement with Russia over amendments to the ABM Treaty and decides to unilaterally deploy a massive NMD system, both Russo- and Sino-U.S. relations will surely deteriorate. This will give Russia and China a free hand to move toward an uncontrolled arms race. Subsequently, it would give India an excuse to do the same with, inevitably, Pakistan following suit.

Such a spillover effect would most certainly not be in Japan’s security interests. If the problem can be contained among the three powers, it will probably not pose a problem for Japan. Chances are, however, that a unilateral move by the United States would trigger a deteriorating of both Russo- and Sino-Japanese relations as well. To put it mildly, this would not be in

Japan's diplomatic or security interests. The worst scenario for Japan would be a massive backlash against its own missile defense system, caused by a U.S. decision on NMD deployment that disregards the security interests of other players, both allied and nonallied.

The question of how to address China in the overall context of the missile defense debate is a particularly contentious one in Japan, as the Japanese perception of China is markedly divided (although the threat perceived over Chinese missiles has become generally more acute since 1996). Some Japanese are becoming uneasy about the direction in which China's regional security strategy is headed and are worried that the Sino-Japanese perception gap on regional security may have become too wide to rectify.⁵ Others note the lack of legally binding treaties that could act to cap Chinese military expansion. Still others see China as being saddled with too many domestic problems to be able to move forward aggressively with a military modernization agenda.

A danger lies in such differences and fluctuations in Japanese perceptions of China, as they may exert an overly strong influence on Japan's view of NMD. For example, some Japanese, especially those close to Japan's defense establishment, view China as the "next Soviet Union" and accordingly support the idea of using the U.S. NMD to contain it, much like the Strategic Defense Initiative was advocated to corner the USSR in the 1980s.

Some worry that Japan's TMD could be compromised.

AIMS OF LONG-TERM MISSILE DEFENSE ARCHITECTURE

As noted earlier, what worries China most in this missile defense scenario is the Taiwan factor. They fear that sooner or later Taiwan will also be integrated into a U.S.-led command and control system, which will enable a de facto military alliance between the United States and Taiwan. Additionally, many Chinese are concerned about the prospects of Japan being included in such a U.S.-led RMA architecture, as they worry that a shared control over TMD could mean a fundamental change in the nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance and, consequently, an alteration in Japan's military posture. Such sentiment is reflected in certain Chinese statements that it would be best for China if TMD would be under the sole control of the United States rather than a shared control.⁶

The Chinese preoccupation over a "seamless" international system should not be taken lightly as it is actually a crucial question for Japan as well. This leads to the question, "What will be the ultimate purpose of the

U.S. NMD?” Is it the U.S. intention to expand the defense system into a global command and control system, in which each TMD will function as a regional terminal? If so, what will this mean for Japan’s own defense and foreign policy and its alliance with the United States? Will such a “globally-seamless” command and control system be compatible with Japan’s recent moves toward acquiring its own intelligence satellites? At present, such discussions have yet to take place, either in Japan or in the United States—as

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the United States, in particular, is busily going about constructing a Fortress America exclusively for the benefit of Americans.

Although U.S. NMD is a long-term goal, it is not prudent to put off or neglect these questions. The United States ought to be willing to treat the NMD issue in truly comprehensive terms, a component of which should be to address the questions of the system’s ramifications on Japan and other allies.

In addition, some in the United States oppose the development of a ground-based NMD system, opting instead for a boost-phase NMD (involving land-based, naval, or airborne boost-phase interceptors) that could hit a theater ballistic missile during its booster phase from hundreds of kilometers away.⁷ If the technological and legal challenges⁸ could be overcome and such a system was developed, it could potentially be deployed in U.S. bases on Japanese soil in order to counter the North Korean missile threat, posing a serious problem for Japan both constitutionally and politically. Nonetheless, discussions on such issues are nonexistent in Japan, underscoring the lack of frank discussion among Japanese and U.S. security leaders. The psychological and political inertia resulting from the long-standing taboo to openly discuss the U.S. nuclear presence in Japan has unfortunately been passed along to the current missile defense debate. Hence, no Japanese in their right mind dares to address the issue directly, for it touches upon one of the most sensitive spots of the U.S.-Japan alliance: the chronic lack of real security policy consultation.

These five concerns, elaborated above, illustrate an obvious lack of policy coordination on missile defense between the United States and Japan, and a clear need for the two parties to begin a comprehensive discussion on the NMD issue. Both parties need to come to grips with the serious ramifications for the U.S.-Japan alliance if the NMD issue is not addressed on a comprehensive basis, transcending the current framework of an internal American debate and a bilateral U.S.-Russia dialogue.

Conclusion

Given recent international events, it would behoove Japan to pay closer attention to the ongoing debate over U.S. NMD, particularly given its potential to affect Japan's security, defense, and foreign policies. As the juxtaposing of NMD and TMD becomes increasingly opaque, Japan has ample reason to involve itself in this discussion from as holistic a perspective as possible.

Similarly, there is a clear need for the United States to hammer out a balanced policy that resolves conflicting foreign policy and defense objectives pertaining to NMD deployment. Most reactions to date from U.S. allies as well as from Russia and China have been against NMD deployment, especially if it means withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. While some of these reactions could be dismissed as rhetorical, it would be a serious mistake for the United States to proceed without regard for the serious security concerns of other states.

This is not to denote that the United States should refrain from deploying NMD altogether. The U.S. NMD option as an "insurance" against emerging ballistic missile threats, particularly those posed by the rogue states, is legitimate in light of its national security concerns—as has been the logic behind Japan's rationale to opt for its own missile defense (referred to by Japanese defense officials as "Japan's NMD"). Considering that Japan too has moved forward with its own missile defense research largely as a response to regional missile proliferation and that no effective global or regional missile control regimes exist as of yet, the U.S. move toward NMD is not entirely inconceivable. The question is not whether the United States should opt for NMD but how the United States can defend itself from emerging ballistic missile threats without disregarding security concerns of others, allied and nonallied alike.

The U.S. NMD debate has become far too politicized, particularly in light of the fact that no realistic technological assessment has yet been made of the system. The current debate lacks a holistic approach to include such factors as nonproliferation, arms control, disarmament, alliances, and multilateral negotiating frameworks as well as the Russia-U.S. strategic equilibrium. Without this systematic approach, some Japanese are beginning to question the credibility of the U.S. commitment to TMD. If the current NMD discussion is allowed to proceed unchecked, it may unnecessarily complicate America's strategic calculations and its relations with other powers, not just Russia and China, but even its ally—Japan.

Notes

1. "U.S. Missile Defence: Strategy, Technology and Politics," IISS Strategic Comments 5, no. 3 (April 1999).
2. "The U.S. Defense Report: Japan Headed in the Same Direction" (in Japanese), *Sankei Shimbun*, February 10, 2000.
3. Interviews with Japan Defense Agency officials, March, 2000.
4. Remarks by Under Secretary of Defense Walter B. Slocombe to the CSIS Statesmen's Forum, November 5, 1999.
5. Hideshi Takesada, "If Even TMD Cannot Be Introduced, Japan Will Remain 'Naked' When Faced with Coming Asian Crises (in Japanese)," *Sapio*, January 13, 1999, 37.
6. Interviews in China, November 1999; see also Thomas Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (spring 1999): 75.
7. For further detailed discussions on boost-phase interception systems, see Dean Wilkening, "Amending the ABM Treaty," *Survival* 42, no. 1 (spring 2000); Theodore Postol, "Hitting Them Where It Works," *Foreign Policy* (winter 1999-2000): 132-133.
8. For example, on the technological side, an ABL-equipped Boeing 747 aircraft would have to be in the proximity of the launch sites to be able to knock out enemy ballistic missiles on launch, which means that it would be ineffective for missiles deployed deep in the interior. On the legal side, all three boost-phase interception systems would violate the ABM Treaty.