

The U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense Policy In Europe and the Asia-Pacific: Strategic Implications for the ROK-U.S. Alliance

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Since the Second World War, Europe has always been the strategic focus of American security policy. As a result of geopolitical, global economic, financial and demographic shifts, however, Asia's strategic relevance has greatly increased in recent years. Considering this change of strategic environment, the Obama administration announced a strategy of rebalancing or pivot to Asia in late 2011.

The narrative of rebalancing strategy, as a symbolic new centerpiece for the administration's foreign and defense policy, has two intertwined but distinct meanings and implications. The first narrative means the shift of strategic direction of American foreign security policy. As East Asia is emerging as a strategic arena of international politics in the 21st century mainly due to rising China and economically vibrant Asia, the U.S. strategic focus cannot help shifting from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. Secondly, faced with the erosion of its relative power, financial austerity and constrained defense budgetary environment, the United States requires military relocation and retrenchment around the world. When it comes to the constrained defense budget and effective management of military power in particular, the United States is likely to step up its calls on its allies and partner countries to take on a greater share of their security burden in terms of rebalancing strategy.

One strategic implication of rebalancing seems to reflect the perspective of neorealist hegemonic retrenchment explicitly or implicitly. According to the re-

trenchment optimists, "declining great powers select from a wide menu of policy options, but these options may be categorized as economizing expenditures, reducing risks, and shifting burdens. Declining states can also reduce risks by pruning their foreign policy liabilities, tempering their foreign policy goals in some geographic areas, and defining particular issues as less critical."¹

From this perspective, the U.S. ballistic missile defense policy toward Europe and the Asia-Pacific region could be seen as a policy initiative that satisfies both of the two meanings of rebalancing strategy, which are the strategic redirection of the defense policy and efficient operations of its military forces. Although the efforts of the American missile defense system construction in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region were promoted before the rebalancing strategy, the U.S. missile defense policy in these regions could

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be interpreted as a component of the rebalancing strategy. Based on its missile defense policy, it is possible for the United States to pursue efficient management and the retrenchment of its military forces in Europe. In addition, the United States will protect the security of its allies and strengthen cooperation with partner states in the Asia-Pacific region.

Therefore, this article reviews the U.S. missile defense policy in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region from the standpoint of rebalancing strategy and examines its strategic implications for the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Rebalancing in Europe: EPAA

Since the end of the Cold War, in the European strategic landscape, mainstream thinking about security has generally focused on the asymmetric and supranational threats rather than the geopolitical national security. Though in early 2014 the crisis in Ukraine reminded the importance of geopolitical security, this strategic environment has not fundamentally changed. In addition, in the wake of 9-11, the United States and its European allies became more aware of the emerging threat of weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons. Consequently, at the Prague summit in November 2002, the Alliance has acknowledged the significance of threats coming from growing ballistic missiles. As a result, the Alliance began to build a ballistic missile defense system that utilizes the U.S. missile defense system. Beginning in 2005, the original initiative for NATO was Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (ALTBMD) program that was “designed to defend just developed allied forces against short-and medium-range (up to 3,000 kilometers) ballistic missile threats.”²

In September 2009, the Obama administration newly introduced the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) as a ballistic missile defense system of NATO and then ALTBMD program was subsequently altered. The EPAA is designed to defend alliance terri-

tory against possible missile attacks from any potential adversaries. The nature and the scope of the EPAA are ultimately to defend all Alliance territories and populations in Europe against ballistic missiles and it seems to stress traditional collective security roles of NATO. At the 2010 Lisbon summit, NATO decided that the Alliance “will develop a missile defense capability to pursue its core task of collective defense” and “the scope of NATO’s current ALTBMD programme’s command, control, and communications capabilities will be expanded beyond the protection of NATO deployed forces to also protect NATO European populations, territory and forces.”³ The reasons why European allies agreed to the EPAA are as follows. First, there was a growing consensus in the late 2000s among European elites that the threat to Europe of ballistic missile was growing, not receding. Second, the United States made it clear to its European allies that Washington would be willing to have the EPAA comprise the lion’s share of NATO’s missile defense program. Third, all of the European allies received a seat at the table of theater missile defense. Finally, many allies have decided that some limited ballistic missile defense coverage is better than no coverage at all.⁴ Beginning at the 2010 Lisbon summit, therefore, “the current cornerstone of the U.S. commitment to NATO military capabilities in Europe is the ballistic missile defense program known as the EPAA.”⁵

With the EPAA in place, it has been possible for the Obama administration to retrench its military forces in Europe in terms of rebalancing strategy. What this means is that the U.S. defense strategy in Europe will gradually change from direct military presence to engagement, “a less committal approach that takes the emphasis away from the idea of a sizeable and permanent presence of U.S. troops on European soil and focuses instead on rotational deployments and the build-up of allied and partner capacity.”⁶ Also the United States will not reverse its strategic focus on the Asia-Pacific in light of the Ukraine crisis. Meanwhile, this requires the European allies of the



U.S. to keep their pledge to aim at spending 2% of GDP on defense at the 2014 Wales summit and to play a greater role in European area military operations without the U.S. in addition to NATO's fundamental mission to collective defense.

Regarding the U.S. defense strategy in Europe, this strategic shift from presence to limited engagement has been reflected on sets of Pentagon documents—National Military Strategy (2011), Strategic Defense Guidance (2012) and the Quadrennial Defense Review (2014). In line with the rebalancing strategy, the permanent military presence of the U.S. has been reduced and the number of troops in Europe has decreased to 65,000 and replaced by a rotational system. In addition, new weapon systems i.e., missile defense programs have also been introduced. Although the White House published the second National Security Strategy to reflect new threats from Russia and the so-called Islamic State in March 2015, the new document continues to stress that European allies should take on greater responsibility for crisis management (including in and out of area) and cooperative security in the context of the U.S. sustainable rebalancing strategy in Europe.

Rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific: APPAA

As a result of geopolitical, economic, and demographic trends, Asia's strategic relevance has greatly increased in 21st international politics. Along with the rising economic power of Asia, rising China in particular has precipitated the Obama administration to shift its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, in late 2011, the Obama administration announced a new comprehensive strategy better known as rebalancing or pivot to the Asia-Pacific region. Considering that America's continued purpose and invariable strategic goals are sustaining and strengthening American leadership in the world, the Asia-Pacific region is the core arena of the U.S. reba-

lancing strategy. For this purpose, the United States must check and balance rising China and at the same time needs to take a strategic interests in North Korea's nuclear capability to keep a more sophisticated and complicated presence in East Asia.

The U.S. missile defense policy in the Asia-Pacific region is derived from the *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, which was published in 2010 by the Department of Defense. According to the report, the United States "will pursue a phased adaptive approach within each region (Europe, the Persian Gulf, and East Asia) that is tailored to the threats unique to that region, including their scale, the scope and pace of their development, and the capabilities available and most suited for development."⁷ Unlike in Europe, there is no official name for the U.S. missile defense policy toward the Asia-Pacific region and it is unclear what the desired end-state of American regional missile defense system will look like. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the United States has strongly pursued establishment of its Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system, widely known as Asia-Pacific Phased Adaptive Approach (APPAA).

In the wake of the increasing threat from ballistic missile in the region and as North Korea's nuclear and missile capability has continuously evolved in particular, the purpose of the APPAA is to defend forward-deployed U.S. forces and strengthen extended deterrence for allied security against North Korea's missile strikes. Therefore, the U.S. missile defense is not intended to alter the balance of nuclear deterrence with the major nuclear-armed state, i.e. Russia and China. American and allied BMD assets in the Asia-Pacific region are, however, "inherently capable of intercepting SRBMs in East Asia that are launched not just from North Korea, but also from China. Future U.S. BMD capabilities in the region may be designed to counter much longer-range ballistic missiles regardless of their country of origin."⁸

The process of implementing APPAA is fundamentally based on the hub-spoke alliance structure of



the U.S. consisting of a couple of its bilateral alliance systems as opposed to the multilateral defense system in Europe. While one major thrust of the rebalancing strategy is to modernize bilateral security alliances and broaden regional partnerships,⁹ on the other hand, the U.S. seems to perceive its BMD system in terms of strengthening regional security and defense cooperation beyond its bilateral alliance relations. The growing need for effective networking of dispersed sensors and interceptors is a critical enabler for regional missile defense. It will be crucial to establish integrated information networking system based on interoperability for the BMD system. Therefore, the United States strongly seeks to establish a more integrated approach based on the mini-lateral alliance system such as U.S.-Japan-South Korea or U.S.-Japan-Australia triangular security cooperation system in order to strengthen the integrated operation of the missile defense system. This is because that robust trilateral missile defense cooperation with major allies of the United States would lay out a path forward for a more integrated approach. For example, “from a technical perspective, the expanded sensor and interceptor coverage of a trilateral C4 network could enhance BMD effectiveness against North Korea by tracking missiles from multiple angles at multiple points in their flight trajectory.”¹⁰ As a result, the United States has gradually expanded many specific weapon systems or elements that comprise the APPAA in concert with contributions from treaty allies.¹¹ Eventually, the United States will be likely to pursue establishment of the regional architecture of its BMD system based on security cooperation among allies, regardless of changes in administration.

Strategic Implications for the ROK-U.S. Alliance

The United States seems to be aware of the use of APPAA in terms of knitting strong bilateral ties into a web of regional security cooperation among its allies.

This networked security and defense cooperation can also be viewed as being in alignment with the goals of the rebalancing strategy. Therefore, the U.S. BMD system will have significant impact on the United States’ relationship with its major allies as well as on the related regional states such as China and North Korea in particular. From Chinese and North Korean perspectives, they are likely to recognize the U.S. BMD as weakening their nuclear capabilities. Both countries may argue that it would undermine the global non-proliferation regime as well as their own deterrence through mutually assured destruction regardless of the true intention of the U.S. In addition, the U.S. BMD would compel them to bolster their own nuclear deterrence.¹²

In relation to U.S. BMD system and comprehensive trilateral security cooperation, there are some subtle differences between the United States, Japan, and South Korea. First of all, the United States has stressed enhanced military cooperation among them in order to establish multiple BMD architecture in the region. For example, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey stated “now is the right time, with the right capabilities in place, to seek to establish a collaborative, trilateral ballistic missile defense architecture incorporating U.S., Japanese and South Korean military assets.”¹³ Despite numerous domestic debates centred on the BMD system, more than any other country in the region, Japan is the United States’ closest collaborator in this arena. Currently, Japan has acquired a variety of weapon systems needed for the construction of the BMD system with backing by and co-developing with the United States, including 4 ships equipped Aegis BMD and SM-3 interceptors, PAC-2, PAC-3 batteries as well as AN/TPY-2 Radar which are U.S.-owned systems hosted. Also Washington and Tokyo have co-developed the next generation SM-3 Block IIA interceptor that will enable defense of larger areas and against more sophisticated threats. In addition, Japan will add the AN/TPY-2 Radar and increase the number of BMD ships to eight in the fu-



ture. In this regard, “the mature U.S.-Japan partnership in BMD has already served as a key driver of improvements to alliance interoperability and the United States and Japan have essentially created a joint command relationship...from the perspective of any possible adversary.”¹⁴

On the other hand, South Korea has been promoting its own missile defense program known as Korean Air and Missile Defense(KAMD) to counter aircraft, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles launched by North Korea, apart from an integrated approach with the alliance dimension. Beginning in early 2008, the KAMD system has been gradually acquiring its advanced BMD capabilities including PAC-2 and PAC-3 batteries. The former is a system purchased from the United States and the latter is a U.S.-owned system hosted. However, Seoul has “declined to integrate its missile defense system into the larger Asian regional network being developed by the United States and Japan.”¹⁵ Unlike the United States and Japan’s strategic position, South Korea as a divided and peninsula state has complicated feelings with respect to the BMD system for various reasons.

In this respect, South Korea’s strategic concerns with the APPAA are as follows. Most importantly, possible integration with the U.S. BMD system may have great impact on South Korea’s concern for security autonomy. Recently, the issue of deploying THAAD on South Korea soil as a component of the APPAA has aroused great controversy in Korean security circles. From a Korean perspective, it is essential to evaluate how THAAD will help promote South Korean security and its unification policy in the future. No doubt, it will enhance military utility to deter North Korea’s nuclear missiles and help solve the problem of defense burden sharing. However it is also true that some Korean experts expect possible constraints on the security autonomy of Korea because of its integrated operations.

The APPAA is also likely to affect the plan to establish South Korean KAMD system itself. Currently,

Seoul and Washington are running an extended deterrence policy committee to deal with North Korea’s nuclear capabilities in the alliance dimension. However, the KAMD system aims at defending the small scope of the Korean peninsula. On the other hand, the U.S. BMD works at the regional level. Despite the differences between South Korea and the United States regarding the policy of the missile defense system, the APPAA can be used to decide the future configuration of the military division of labor for missile defense. In short, the KAMD system may function to deter North Korea’s nuclear capabilities on the regional level, not just the national level in the future. These respects are likely to place a large burden on South Korea’s foreign and security policy, which aims to establish cooperative relationship between South Korea and China as well as between the two Koreas.

In order to mitigate South Korean strategic concern with respect to the APPAA and to coordinate different policy stances, Seoul and Washington should pursue the following comprehensive measures:

- Clearly identify the origin of missile threats to South Korea and develop a well-defined defense plan against North Korea’s WMD plan;
- Continue to promote more frank policy consultations regarding the ROK-U.S. alliance missile defense system against North Korean nuclear capabilities through the extended deterrence policy committee;
- Effectively advance KAMD as soon as possible and elaborate the concept of interoperability with the ROK-U.S. alliance which will contribute to the security of South Korea and the whole region;
- Identify the respective security interests of the two countries regarding the future of Northeast Asia with mutual respect and to take some measures to extend common interests of alliance;



- Properly manage the alliance’s security dilemma that may periodically occur and strengthen the institutional consultation channels. ■

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Notes

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¹⁰ Ian E. Rinehart(2013), p. 17.

¹¹ DoD’s regional BMD effort consists of a number of specific weapon system or elements that compose the BMD system as a whole. They are the following: C2BMC (Command and Control, Battle Management, and Communication), AN/TPY-2 (Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance and Control Model 2), Aegis BMD Weapon System, Aegis Ashore, SM-3 (Standard Missile-3), THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense), PAC-3(Patriot Advanced Capability-3). GAO, *Regional Missile Defense*, GAO-15-32, December 2014, pp. 7-8.

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