Missile proliferation and missile defence in North-East Asia

Gu Guoliang

Missile proliferation in North-East Asia is a growing problem for regional security and stability. The situation is further complicated by missile defence plans in the region. Together these developments have caused great concern among Asian countries as well as the international community.

The missile programme of the DPRK

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) started to pursue a ballistic missile capability in the early 1960s.[1] In the late 1970s, the missile programme became a national priority equal to that of its nuclear programme. In April 1984, the DPRK conducted its first successful test of a Scud-B missile. Throughout the 1990s, the DPRK achieved consistent progress in its missile programme, with the successful tests of a Scud-C missile in June 1990, the Nodong-1 ballistic missile in May 1993 and the first flight test of its two-stage Taepo Dong-1 missile in 1998. As early as 1993, CIA Director James Woolsey, testifying before Congress, expressed US concern over the DPRK's missile development and export activities, and stated that the DPRK's Nodong-1, depending where deployed, could reach US bases and allied capitals in Asia and the Middle East.[2]

In April 1996, the United States and the DPRK met for their first round of bilateral missile talks in Berlin—no agreement was reached. The following year the United States and the DPRK held a second round of talks in New York over the DPRK's production and export of ballistic missiles—again with no significant agreement. The fact that between 1996 and 1998 the United States imposed sanctions on the DPRK for its missile and missile technology transfers did little to improve their relationship. On 16 June 1998, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) commented that the missile issue was related to the sovereignty and existence of the DPRK, and claimed that if America wanted to prevent the DPRK's missile exports, it should lift the economic embargo as early as possible and compensate the DPRK for the losses to be incurred as a result of discontinuing the exports.[3]

On 31 August 1998, the DPRK conducted the first flight test of its two-stage Taepo Dong-1 missile with a range of 1,500–2,000 kilometres. This caused alarm in the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and other countries. Responding to the DPRK's missile test, the US Senate cut funding for heavy fuel oil shipments to the DPRK. Japan suspended food aid and political normalization talks with the DPRK and also suspended US$ 1 billion in financial assistance to the Korean Peninsula Energy

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Gu Guoliang is Deputy Director and Research Fellow of the Institute of American Studies. He is also the Director of the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Development Organization (KEDO) for the construction of the two light-water reactors at Sinpo. On 1 October 1998, the DPRK and the United States held a third round of missile talks. The United States requested the DPRK to restrain its missile programmes and exports in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. The DPRK rejected US demands. In March 1999, during the fourth round of US–DPRK missiles talks, the DPRK offered to suspend its missile exports in exchange for cash compensation from the United States, which the US found unacceptable.

Progress started to be made a few months later. On 25–28 May, US policy coordinator for the DPRK William Perry visited the DPRK and offered a possible package deal to end economic sanctions, provide economic assistance, and establish diplomatic relations with the DPRK in exchange for an end to the DPRK's missile and nuclear programmes.[4] Perry's goal was a complete and verifiable cessation of the DPRK's testing, production and development of missiles. On 7–12 September, during the talks in Berlin, the DPRK agreed to a moratorium on testing any long-range missiles for the duration of high-level talks with the United States.

On 9–12 October 2000, Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok, First Vice Chairman of the National Defence Commission of the DPRK and a Special Envoy of Chairman Kim Jong Il, officially visited the United States. He delivered a letter to President Clinton and held talks with the US Secretaries of State and Defense. According to the "DPRK-US Joint Communiqué" announced on 12 October, "As the first important step both sides declared that any of the two governments entertains no hostile intention toward the other and affirmed the commitment to make all efforts to establish new relations free from past antagonism in the future".[5] The DPRK committed not to launch any long-range missile while the missile talks were ongoing.

On 23 October, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang for talks with Kim Jong Il, Chairman of the National Defence Commission. The two sides "made substantial progress in key areas, including the security matters".[6] Kim Jong Il told Albright that the DPRK's 1998 Taepo Dong rocket launch "was the first satellite launch, and it would be the last".[7]

Following Albright's visit to Pyongyang, the two countries held three days of missile talks in Kuala Lumpur in November. According to the press statement by Robert J. Einhorn, Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation, "the talks were detailed, constructive, and very substantive." They covered the full range of missile issues under consideration by the two countries, including the DPRK's missile-related exports and its indigenous missile programmes. The delegations also explored in depth the idea of providing satellite launch services in exchange for serious missile restraint by the DPRK.[8]

This constructive progress came to a halt when the Bush Administration came to office in 2001. It took a hard line towards the DPRK, publicly accusing it of being part of the "axis of evil". The political atmosphere for bilateral dialogue evaporated and no progress has been made in talks on missile restraint since.

Currently, the DPRK has about 600 Scud missiles with ranges of 300–500km, as well as the Nodong-1, with a range of 1,300km, capable of reaching the ROK and most parts of Japan. The US Department of Defense stated in its 2001 report *Proliferation: Threat and Response* that "North Korea is developing the Taepo Dong 2 (ICBM), which could deliver a several-hundred kilogram payload to Alaska or Hawaii, and a lighter payload to the western half of the United States."[9] According to a recent report, the DPRK is "in the process of deploying" a new intermediate-range ballistic missile, which could fly up to three times as far as previous North Korean missiles, reaching US facilities in Asia.[10] Furthermore, the United States is concerned about the DPRK's missile exports to Middle Eastern countries. Based on these concerns, the Bush Administration has threatened to use force to deal with the DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes. President Bush initiated the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) with a view to intercepting the DPRK's missile exports.

Japan's missile build-up and missile defence programmes

Japan's long-range missile quest alarms its neighbours. The Japanese newspaper *Daily Yomiuri* reported that the draft outline of the new five-year defence programme submitted by the Defense Agency on 3 December 2004 to the Liberal Democratic Party proposed the development of long-range, precision-guided surface-to-surface missiles with a maximum range of 300km, capable of striking enemy targets overseas.[11] The Defense Agency argued that such technology was necessary to defend Japan's remote islands.

Because of the opposition to such technology due to its offence capabilities by New Komeito, the junior partner of the Liberal Democratic Party-led ruling coalition, the proposal was removed from the fiscal 2005–2009 midterm defence build-up plan, but as Fukushiro Nukaga, co-chairman of the ruling coalition's security panel stated, most LDP members on the panel supported the research.[12]

Since the DPRK tested its Taepo Dong-1 missile in 1998, there have been more statements by Japanese officials supporting Japan's pursuance of a policy of pre-emptive strike. They have explicitly stated that it is lawful for Japan to attack enemy bases that possess guided missiles before being attacked itself. The prevailing Japanese opinion is that a re-examination of current military capabilities is necessary due to changing international circumstances. Therefore, this long-range missile quest will most likely re-emerge. It is also significant that Japan's commercial rockets could be converted into ballistic missiles with ranges rivalling Washington's ICBMs.[13]

The enhanced US–Japanese joint development of missile defence has also caused great concern. In the past years, the Bush and the Junichiro Koizumi administrations have hastened cooperation on their missile defence programme. The new National Defence Program Outline and the fiscal 2005–2009 midterm defence build-up programme approved by the Japanese government on 10 December 2004 stipulate a policy to establish a missile defence system. The Japanese government added vital equipment and major units related to the missile defence system, which includes four Aegis-equipped destroyers and three groups of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC3) surface-to-air missiles. The United States has already agreed in principle to Japan's licensed production of US-developed surface-to-air missiles, which will become the core of the joint missile defence system.[14] The Japan Defense Agency plans to begin deploying a ballistic missile defence (BMD) system in 2006 and is going to spend US$ 10 billion over the next seven years to build it.

To facilitate further cooperation between the United States and Japan in the development, production and deployment of the missile defence programme, the new defence guidelines include the relaxation of the arms export ban that Japan has maintained since 1976 in deference to its constitution.[15] Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda announced on 10 December 2004 that Japan would exclude from its ban components related to missile defence when the ongoing joint research moves to the development and production stages. The active pursuance of BMD systems symbolizes a shift in Japan's defence policy in comparison with the previous administration's cautious position towards joint research and development of missile defence programme with the United States.

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These developments have made the people in the region wonder in which direction Japan is heading. The 2004 Defence White Paper calls for the Japanese Self-Defence Force (SDF) to be transformed from its current invasion defence posture to a "more functional force" able to deal with two major threats—terrorist attacks and missile attacks. Encouraged by the United States to play a bigger military role abroad, the White Paper stressed that participation in "international activities"

should be listed as a basic task of the SDF. It shows the Koizumi Administration's ambition to play a military role within and beyond the region. Under his administration, Japan has 1,000 troops in Iraq and neighbouring countries engaged in reconstruction work. In 2001, Koizumi responded to the US "war on terror" by pushing through legislation to allow the navy to provide logistical support to forces in Afghanistan. The Japanese government's decision on 9 December 2004 to extend the mission of the SDF in Iraq for an additional year is another manifestation of Japan's changed perception of its role in the world.

The new defence posture of Japan has alarmed its Asian neighbours, who suffered under Japan's expansionist policies earlier last century. After Japan's revision of its defence programme, a number of commentators from Asian and European countries expressed concern about Japan's intention and its future role in East Asia.

The mysterious missile programme of the ROK

The ROK started its missile and nuclear programme in 1970s. By 1978, the ROK's Agency for Defence Development had succeeded in converting US-supplied Nike Hercules surface-to-air missiles into ballistic missiles with ranges between 150–250km. The development of the ROK's missile programme triggered concern in Washington and brought about the 1979 memorandum, which limited Seoul's missile range to 180km.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the ROK continued to develop and refine indigenous ballistic missiles, testing the Hyon Mu NHK-A several times. Since 1995, the ROK had actively sought to rescind the 1979 memorandum and join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Washington agreed to formally abandon the 1979 agreement in early January 2001. In March 2001, the ROK joined the MTCR; its membership increased the allowable range for ballistic missiles to 300km with a 500kg payload. By the end of 2001, the ROK had test-fired a missile that could reach almost anywhere in the DPRK.

As for missile defence, the ROK has hundreds of US-purchased Nike Hercules surface-to-air missiles with a range of 180km, which have been deployed in the country since 1965 as a key deterrence against air attacks.[16] The ROK has sought to replace the Nike missiles with PAC-3 missiles, and the United States is attempting to persuade the ROK to jointly develop a BMD programme.

The ROK's expansion of its missile range and development of satellite-launching capabilities remain somewhat mysterious. Nevertheless, the recent disclosure of the ROK's secret nuclear research activities has caused concern from its neighbouring countries about the ROK's nuclear and missile programmes.

In August 2004, under the pressure from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the ROK publicly disclosed its past secret nuclear research activities, revealing that it had conducted chemical uranium enrichment from 1979 to 1981, separated small quantities of plutonium in 1982, and experimented with uranium enrichment in 2000.[17] Scientists at the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) in Daejeon refined uranium to an average level of 10.2% and up to the highly enriched level 77%, which is close to weapons grade. The IAEA decided not to bring the issue to the UN Security Council, as it reckoned that the tests were experimental and small-scale and that the ROK had cooperated with the agency in investigating the matter. However, the ROK's unauthorized experiments have dealt a heavy blow to the credibility of the international non-proliferation regime and have alarmed the international community. Uncertainties remain about the ROK's nuclear and missile capabilities and their impact on the Six-Party Talks and the security situation in North-East Asia.

China's concerns about missile proliferation and missile defence

China's security concern is three-fold. First, China is concerned about the DPRK's nuclear and missiles programmes. China supports a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. As China needs a stable environment to concentrate on its economic development, missile proliferation or an arms race in East Asia are not in China's security interest. China is concerned that the DPRK's missile programme may produce a domino effect and provide an excuse for Japan to develop missile and nuclear capabilities. China has played an important part in the Six-Party Talks and has made great efforts to persuade the DPRK to give up its nuclear and missile programmes. China has worked together with the international community to counter the proliferation of missiles in North-East Asia and has supported the general goal of PSI.

Secondly, China is concerned about the development and deployment of the American BMD programme, which may negate the credibility of the small nuclear deterrent force China possesses. China is also greatly concerned about the missile build-up of Japan and its recent enhanced cooperation with the United States on BMD. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue expressed unease about these developments, stating "We are deeply concerned with the great changes of Japan's military defence strategy and its possible impact".[18] China is not convinced that the BMD system is designed only to counter a DPRK missile attack. As one analyst pointed out, "the DPRK's missile programme is in fact primitive and unlikely to pose a threat to the United States anytime soon. Washington has apparently overstated the North's capabilities in the quest for a national missile defence".[19]

Thirdly, China is concerned about US missile sales to Taiwan and its possible joint BMD programme with Taiwan, which may encourage Taiwan separatists move further towards independence. The Pentagon has approved the sale of US$ 520 million worth of weapons to Taiwan, a package that includes 631 missiles for helicopters and jets. The Pentagon endorsed Taiwan's proposed purchase of the missiles and other equipment so as to maintain the so-called military balance in the region. The proposed package also includes 449 Hellfire II air-to-surface missiles for Super Cobra and OH-58D helicopters. Additionally, China does not want Japan to be dragged into a cross-strait conflict because of its joint BMD programme with the United States.

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China's modernization of its national defence has caused some concern in the United States and Japan. The *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China,* released by the US Department of Defense on 28 May 2004, continues to exaggerate China's military power including its missile strength, plays up the deficiency of Taiwan's military power, and raises the alarm about the "China threat". As for Japan, Japan's 2004 White Paper on Defence and the new National Defence Program Outline for the first time explicitly identify China as the major potential threat to Japan's security, stating "China has been modernizing its nuclear and missile forces as well as its naval and air forces. Careful deliberation should go into determining whether the objective of this modernization exceeds the scope necessary for the defence of China, and future developments in this area merit special attention".[20]

The fact is that with the changing international situation, China needs to modernize its outdated national defence capabilities solely for defensive purposes. While the United States possesses the largest nuclear arsenal in the world, takes full advantage of the revolution in military affairs, provides a nuclear umbrella to its allies in North-East Asia and strengthens BMD cooperation, China has to rely on

itself to have a credible minimum nuclear deterrent to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It has made efforts to raise the survivability and mobility of its missiles and develop other countermeasures to maintain the credibility of its small nuclear arsenal and meet the challenge of the BMD programme. As it is clearly stated in China's Defence White Paper, "China maintains a small but effective nuclear counterattacking force in order to deter possible nuclear attacks by other countries."[21] China has neither the intention nor the capability to join the missile arms race.

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China has increasingly recognized the importance of international efforts to counter missile proliferation as it has been exposed to a missile proliferation-prone peripheral environment. Since the early 1990s, China has taken major steps in working together with the international community to fight against missile proliferation and has made great efforts in integrating itself into the international non-proliferation regime including the regimes preventing missile proliferation such as the MTCR.

The Chinese government declared in February 1992 that it would act in line with the guidelines and parameters of the MTCR in its export of missiles and related technologies. In 1994, China committed itself not to export ground-to-ground missiles with capabilities equal to or beyond the range/payload threshold defined by the MTCR—i.e. inherently capable of reaching a range of at least 300km with a payload of at least 500kg. In 2000, China further declared that it had no intention to assist any country in any way in the development of ballistic missiles that could be used to deliver nuclear weapons. In August 2002, the Chinese government promulgated the *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Export Control of Missiles and Missile-Related Items and Technologies*, and the control list.[22]

Since the early 1990s, the United States has conducted a series of talks on missile issues with China. For a number of years, the United States tried to persuade China to join the MTCR, but China criticized the MTCR as an arrangement of a few countries. However, when China had a better understanding of the MTCR and decided to apply for membership in early 2004, with the aspiration to shoulder more responsibility as a major power in countering missile proliferation and to further improve China-US relations, the United States changed its mind and refused to accept China's application, as some US officials held that "there is still a problem concerning China's implementation of its regulation on missile export control."[23] This is in contrast with the position of the European Union. On 9 December 2004, China and the European Union issued a joint declaration on non-proliferation and arms control, which explicitly stated that the EU supports China's entry into the MTCR.[24] The US's changed position has confused China. Some analysts suggest that it is because some force in the United States does not want China to share its missile technology with other members of the MTCR.

Missile defence is not a solution to missile proliferation in North-East Asia

Missile defence can neither effectively defend a country from missile attacks nor prevent terrorist attacks. Missile defence can only result in a spiral of competition of offensive and defensive missiles in North-East Asia. The development of offensive and defensive weapons is interactive. The development of the BMD programme will inevitably stimulate the production and development of offensive ballistic missiles and countermeasures. An arms race in the region has already begun.

As offensive and defensive ballistic missiles have similar technologies, the development or deployment of BMD by the United States and its allies constitutes proliferation of ballistic missiles and their technologies. It will be difficult to effectively persuade or stop other countries such as the DPRK from exporting missiles and missile technologies while the United States is sharing it missile technologies with its allies in North-East Asia and the Middle East.

BMD deployment may damage the effectiveness of deterrence and US security commitments. The willingness of the United States to spend tens of billions of dollars to defend itself against weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threats carried on ballistic missiles reinforces the perception that WMD capabilities are an effective means of deterring US intervention and therefore increases the incentive for insecure states to seek WMD.

The joint development of BMD between the United States and Japan could destabilize the security situation in North-East Asia. As concerns mount over the DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes, Japan is developing new missile defence systems. This has caused further suspicion and concern about the intention and the future military role of Japan, not only from China, but also from other Asian countries. The US BMD programme is also a potential factor that may undermine stability across the Taiwan Strait. China fears that if the United States transfers BMD systems to Taiwan, it will encourage the separatists in Taiwan to move toward independence and make it more difficult for the mainland to strive for peaceful unification. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman warned that the discussion of US-Taiwan anti-missile cooperation and weapons sales would send the wrong signals to Taiwan's independence forces, and urged the US to clearly recognize the damage it could cause on such a sensitive issue.

Missile defence undermines the cooperation of major powers in countering proliferation of ballistic missiles in East Asia. American plans to deploy BMD are viewed with suspicion by both Russia and China, as BMD has the potential to nullify the credibility of both China's and Russia's nuclear arsenals. The strategic goal of the United States in developing and deploying BMD is to achieve an absolute US military superiority in both offensive and defensive capabilities, further widening the existing disparity between the United States and other countries. This will certainly undermine the trust and affect cooperation among the major powers in dealing with the proliferation of ballistic missiles in East Asia.

The Bush Administration's approach to dealing with WMD threats has combined a strong emphasis on deploying BMD with conscious efforts to downgrade the role of multilateral arms control and non-proliferation treaties. Its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, negative attitude towards the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, and rejection of the verification protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention have damaged other parts of the non-proliferation regime such as the NPT and efforts to combat missile proliferation. The selective policy and attitude of the US towards non-proliferation regimes only undermines the credibility of all the existing non-proliferation regimes and makes it difficult to establish a sound, universal non-proliferation regime.

Dialogue is the right approach

Ballistic missile proliferation is a complicated issue facing the international community. The solution lies in political and diplomatic means and a comprehensive approach to address both the symptoms and root causes.

It is of vital importance to remove the incentives for acquisition of ballistic missiles by cultivating a peaceful international environment where countries feel secure and base their relations on mutual trust, mutual benefit and equality. It is essential for the concerned countries of the region to improve their respective political relations (including US–DPRK, DPRK–ROK, US–China, China–Japan, and Japan–DPRK). The United States, Japan and China should hold a strategic dialogue so that each side could have a better understanding of the others' strategic intentions. Without an improvement of political relations, it will be difficult to solve the issue of missile proliferation.

A credible security guarantee and the necessary incentives should be provided to those countries that are prepared to give up their aspirations to acquire ballistic missiles. The DPRK has expressed on

a number of occasions that it is willing to give up its missile programme and stop its missile exports if the United States agrees to offer a security guarantee by signing a non-aggression treaty and to provide economic compensation. If the Bush Administration is prepared to start bilateral missile talks with the DPRK within or outside the framework of the Six-Party Talks, positive results may be produced.

International cooperation, particularly among the major powers, is essential for handling the issue of missile proliferation effectively.

International cooperation, particularly among the major powers, is essential for handling the issue of missile proliferation effectively. Proliferation of ballistic missiles is a global problem and one of the security concerns that all nations will face in the twenty-first century. Therefore, it is not a problem that the United States can solve on its own with its BMD programme. The major countries should have a shared understanding of the common threat constituted by ballistic missile proliferation and make joint efforts in countering that proliferation. Progress in non-proliferation is inconceivable without cooperation and universal participation by the international community.

It is essential to preserve and fortify the integrity and authority of the international arms control and non-proliferation system. While it is important to strengthen the existing non-proliferation regime (including the missile export control regime), it is an urgent task to establish a legally binding, multilateral missile non-proliferation regime with agreed international norms and mechanisms covering missile production, transfer, testing and deployment under the auspices of the United Nations. On 31 October 2001, the Iranian-sponsored resolution A/C.1/56/L.6, entitled "Missiles", was adopted by the United Nations First Committee and by the General Assembly two months later. The resolution emphasized the "need for a comprehensive approach towards missiles, in a balanced and non-discriminatory manner, as a contribution to international peace and security." Following the passage of the resolution, several expert meetings were held, but no significant progress has been made due to the complex nature of the issue. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to continue this effort in the framework of the United Nations. It is also important to set up a forum to discuss how to deal with the issue of missile proliferation in North-East Asia. While the Six-Party Talks might continue to provide a platform for dialogue and play an important role, bilateral missile talks between the DPRK and the United States are key. Dialogue and diplomatic means should replace threat of pre-emptive strike or interception by force.

In conclusion, missile proliferation is a serious and complex problem destabilizing the situation in North-East Asia. Missile defence cannot solve the problem of missile proliferation. However, it *can* stimulate an arms race in the region and undermine strategic stability and non-proliferation endeavours. Missile proliferation can only be effectively handled by peaceful means and through cooperation among all the concerned countries in the region via an international non-proliferation regime under the auspice of the United Nations.

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