
**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE**

No consensus has thus far emerged in favor of the development or deployment of a full-fledged BMD system in Japan (taken to include both upper- and lower-tier components and an integrated BM/C3 infrastructure). This lack of consensus reflects a variety of factors: BMD's unproven feasibility; its potentially huge cost; the significant strategic implications; the apparently limited technology gains; the absence of a clear and persistent public recognition of a missile threat to Japan and of any informed and detailed public or even elite discussion on BMD issues; and the lack of strong support from any senior Japanese leader or politician. Overall, the pace, tempo, and level of support for BMD so far have been heavily influenced by the Japanese government's bureaucratic and budgetary processes, U.S. pressure, and actions taken by North Korea.

Japan's level of involvement in BMD is presently limited to the creation of national and bilateral study and oversight groups to examine and guide the issue in the Japanese bureaucracy; the production of largely technical studies; decisions to acquire lower-tier BMD-related systems; and a limited agreement with the United States to conduct research and manufacture prototypes relating to the NTW missile. To the authors' knowledge, the Japanese government has undertaken few, if any, thorough assessments of the most critical political and strategic dimensions of a Japanese ballistic missile defense system, such as its effect on the U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S. forward presence in the Asia-Pacific region, and the possible responses of China and Russia.

Moreover, the government of Japan is apparently attempting to limit the number of actors involved in decisionmaking regarding BMD. Thus far, the policy process has remained largely under the control of the prime minister and his cabinet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Defense Agency, and, to a lesser extent (given the relatively small sums of money spent thus far on the program), the Ministry of Finance. The Japanese government has also successfully stifled debate on key substantive issues, such as how this system would relate to Japan's long-term strategic objectives, by arguing that it is precipitous to debate any issues related to development or deployment as long as the technology remains unproven.

Absent major external precipitants or shifts (such as a crisis involving North Korea or China, or a major increase in U.S. pressure), the emergence of a strong, decisive leadership (along with a significant improvement in Japan's economic situation), or the development and availability of a workable TMD system, Japan is likely to continue its existing minimalist, incremental approach to BMD research and funding for several years and postpone entering the development and deployment phases. The specific pace, scope, and content of such limited research efforts will largely depend on commercial and technology transfer considerations, and the level of government funding available, as well as perceptions of the success or failure of current efforts to improve relations with North Korea.

Recent warming trends on the Korean peninsula have arguably produced a drop in Japanese enthusiasm for BMD, although certain military strategists continue to push BMD as a counterbalance to growing Chinese missile deployments. The latter view is not yet the prevailing one in government circles, however. Therefore, the perception of a less belligerent, more cooperative North Korea will make Japanese decisionmaking on BMD more difficult as any decision must be based upon a real and credible threat. The total disappearance of a North Korean threat could undermine the motivation for acquiring even a minimal BMD capability. Moreover, without a basic government decision to proceed beyond the research stage and the promise of large government contracts for the development and procurement that such a decision would bring, Japanese commercial and technological interests will have few incentives to greatly accelerate or deepen the research program.

Many observers believe that the decision on whether or not to move forward on BMD will ultimately be a political one. This means that the decision will be heavily dependent upon whether or not the prime minister is willing to take the political risk and exercise the leadership this issue will require. The configuration of the governing coalition at the time will also be a factor.

Currently, the LDP is the majority party in a three-way coalition in which the Buddhist-linked Komeito controls the swing vote. The Komeito states in its basic policy that collective defense falls outside the permissible limits on defense imposed by the Japanese Constitution. Hence, it is likely to oppose BMD should it require coordination with countries beyond the United States. In addition, Komeito members pride themselves on their historic role in reducing tension between Japan and other countries in Asia—particularly China. One can predict that they will advocate restraint should BMD appear likely to substantially contribute to the deterioration of Japan's relations with one of her nearest and most powerful neighbors. Their support for updating and improving Japan's intelligence capabilities—including acquisition of a surveillance satellite—as well as their preference for a less deferential, more independent policy toward the United States, albeit within the framework of the alliance, provides some room for maneuver and compromise. It is conceivable that they could support a decision to expand Japan's participation in BMD under certain conditions. For instance, they could accept the purchase of pieces of a BMD system but dramatically reduce its effectiveness by preventing the development of a well-integrated C3I system.

Should the Democratic Party join the ruling coalition, it would likely support similar policies. Its current foreign policy stance represents an attempt to find common ground for its two disparate factions. Thus, it calls for Japan to improve its comprehensive diplomatic as well as defense capability; to work toward the establishment of more autonomous security policies while recognizing the importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship in the area of security; and to promote active debate on the Constitution while retaining its emphasis on pacifism. More specifically, the DP asserts that China is a major

power in the region “on a par with the United States,”¹ and therefore they advocate working to strengthen partnerships between the United States and China and Japan and China. One of their proposals for dealing with the missile threat from North Korea is the creation of a Northeast Asian security framework centered around Japan, the United States, China, South Korea, North Korea and Russia.

Regardless of its composition, in the near term the fragility of any ruling coalition will increase the need for compromise in order to make difficult decisions. Such a compromise in the case of BMD could include demands for Japan’s control of the decision to launch, sharing of technology to enable Japan to acquire its own early warning capability, and including China and possibly Japan’s other Asian neighbors in dialogues related to BMD.

Japan’s political structure is in a period of transition. Over the course of the next five to ten years—the period in which Japan will confront most of the major decisions regarding the future direction of its BMD program—it is possible to imagine a number of different political configurations, including a splintering of the LDP brought on by a crushing electoral defeat, the rise of a DP-led government, or a shift in coalition partners. As argued above, who exerts leadership will matter particularly with regard to the pace and scope of Japan’s participation. However, party affiliation or labels may not.

The breakdown of the strong ideological biases that separated Japan’s political spectrum into those who were supportive of the U.S.-Japan security alliance and those who opposed it has created room for a new consensus to begin to emerge. One of the key precepts of this emerging consensus is a general acceptance of the need for a continued U.S.-Japan Security Alliance. But there is an equally strong desire for more autonomy within this alliance brought on by a recognition that Japan’s strategic interests do not always coincide with those of the United States. In particular, Japan for a variety of reasons related to history and geography perceives an arguably greater need than does the United States to maintain a non-confrontational relationship with China.

¹The Democratic Party of Japan Basic Policies, <http://www.dpj.or.jp/english>, downloaded March 20, 2001.

POSSIBLE TIMETABLE

According to knowledgeable observers, a formal decision to move into the development and deployment stages could occur within the next four to five years,² in response to the likely introduction by the JASDF of an advanced C3 system for air defense, missile defense, or both. In other words, milestones anticipated by BMD-related C3 infrastructure improvements could force a basic decision on overall BMD architecture during this time frame.³ Any formal decision over whether or not to enter the BMD development phase will likely involve a debate over many of the issues mentioned above, including the appropriate level of Japanese dependence upon the United States for its security; the weaponization of space; cost and feasibility concerns; and legal or procedural issues relating to collective defense, the Constitution, and Diet resolutions. Among these issues, the question of the creation of a U.S.-Japan joint C3 system and the level of Japanese versus U.S. control over long-range surveillance and cueing capabilities will arguably pose especially significant challenges, given the relationship of these factors to core issues such as alliance maintenance and service rivalries.

Although legal or procedural considerations will probably play a prominent role in any likely public debate over BMD, such factors will almost certainly not exert any substantive influence over the final decision, especially if the political and bureaucratic pressures in favor of BMD are strong. If the political and bureaucratic pressures are weak or divided, however, perceived legal and procedural considerations could substantially constrain the contours of Japan's participation. Lack of political will could also allow the Ministry of Finance to exert its budgetary authority, severely limiting the funds available for both development and deployment.

²Green and Dalton state (p. 15), "A decision on NTW procurement and deployment is expected to take place by 2005." However, they do not explain the reason for this assessment.

³It is also possible that the JASDF might decide to upgrade its C3 infrastructure without making a clear, explicit statement on the development phase of the BMD effort. But it will be difficult for the Japanese government to avoid such a statement entirely, since this decision is linked to some extent with developments on TMD in the United States.

At the same time, it is also possible that various components of a BMD architecture, such as the PAC-3 system, additional AEGIS ships, and certain C3 and radar tracking infrastructure elements, might be acquired by Japan's self-defense forces as necessary and planned "upgrades" of existing systems without any prior debate or decision on ballistic missile defense per se—particularly if they are seen as useful for non-BMD missions. In other words, while avoiding an explicit, formal decision to develop and deploy a BMD system, Japan could gradually acquire many of the elements of such a system.⁴ Moreover, financial considerations will probably not obstruct such selective acquisitions, given the likely ability of the Japanese government to imbed such relatively limited costs in existing program budgets or to utilize off-line or special allocations.

Assuming the systems are proven operable and effective on some level, however, a basic decision on the construction of a more complete and integrated BMD architecture will almost certainly need to be made at some point, given the highly sophisticated technologies involved, the significant sums required for the development and deployment of such a system, the significant limitations of lower-tier BMD systems such as PAC-3, and the likely pressures created by a future U.S. deployment of TMD systems in Japan.

A full-fledged LT and UT BMD architecture for Japan will probably consist of a mix of PAC-3 lower-tier and NTW upper-tier systems, supported by a more integrated and extensive Japanese EW and BM/C3 infrastructure. Land scarcity and bureaucratic restrictions virtually preclude the acquisition by Japan of THAAD, according to many Japanese interviewees. Moreover, although the U.S. Navy will exert strong pressure on Japan to acquire a NAD system, its limited intercept range and high cost will likely preclude Japanese acceptance. As indicated above, it is likely that many of the elements of a Japanese BMD system will be built on existing foundations in the Patriot, the AEGIS JMSDF ships, and the ongoing improvement of the JASDF C3 and individual radar tracking systems of the JSDF. At the same time, most experts believe that any BMD system developed by Japan will have a very limited utility—especially against Chinese or

⁴For example, many Japanese observers believe that the JASDF will eventually acquire PAC-3 regardless of whether or not a larger policy decision on BMD is made.

Russian missiles—without the addition of an integrated U.S.-Japan EW/C3 system. Moreover, the longer Japan waits to initiate discussions with the United States on developing and deploying such an integrated system, the more expensive the final product will likely be.

Japan will probably need to make a basic decision on the deployment of a combined LT and UT BMD architecture by 2007–2010 at the latest, in response to the likely emergence and deployment by that time of a workable, largely U.S.-produced NTW system. If the United States deploys such a system with U.S. military forces in Japan, the pressure for Japan to adopt a nationwide BMD system will almost certainly become enormous, particularly if there is a recognizable threat. This is because the Japanese citizenry would likely not accept a situation in which some segments of the Japanese population living in areas close to U.S. bases would be protected, while others would not.

Absent such a threat, however, the deployment of even defensive missile systems by the United States may be seen as provocative and hence likely to increase rather than reduce the local population's vulnerability to attack, thus creating pressure for Japan to resist U.S. efforts to deploy these systems at all. Given the lengthy list of military acquisitions already in the pipeline, the restricted size of Japan's defense budget, and the long period of time required to procure, deploy, and operationalize an integrated BMD architecture, Japan is unlikely to field a full-blown BMD system before 2015, even if a decision to deploy is made by the end of the decade.⁵ Hence, absent major external precipitating factors or a rapid (and unexpected) acceleration in the pace of BMD development, the United States should not expect Japan to move quickly to acquire and deploy an integrated LT and UT BMD system.

The development or deployment of a BMD system with the United States will likely exert a major influence on the tenor of the U.S.-Japan alliance. As other analysts have observed,⁶ the mishandling of the BMD issue by the United States could damage the alliance and

⁵Some knowledgeable Japanese observers believe that a complete BMD system might not be fielded by Japan for as long as 20–25 years, especially if additional delays are encountered in the U.S. development of both PAC-3 and NTW systems.

⁶For example, see Stimson Report, p. 73.

U.S. security interests far more than any military benefits obtained from BMD. Yet the potential for mishandling is arguably rather high, in large part because significant suspicions or uncertainties exist between Tokyo and Washington over each other's perceptions, motives, and level of commitment to the notion of joint ballistic missile defense, and because the two sides have thus far failed to conduct a detailed and sustained dialogue over these and other critical issues.⁷ Both governments should commence such a dialogue as soon as possible.

In order to undertake such a dialogue, however, each side must first separately clarify its own position on ballistic missile defense for Japan. This will likely require a more systematic examination of the many complex strategic, technical, commercial, political, alliance-related, and force interoperability-related issues involved in U.S.-Japan BMD development and deployment than has occurred to date. The details of such factors obviously cannot be clarified in every instance in advance of a dialogue, but basic interests, principles, and priorities arguably can.

CRITICAL ISSUES

In the overall process of preparation and subsequent dialogue, Japan will most likely face more obstacles than the United States given the highly contingent nature of the BMD issue within the Japanese polity and society, and the absence of major external precipitating factors. An important near-term issue for the U.S. side should be to clarify how essential it is for Japan to participate in a more extensive program of joint research and development. As the above analysis suggests, Japan has few domestic incentives at present to expand its involvement significantly in that effort. Washington must weigh the relative financial and other benefits of an expanded joint R&D effort against the potential long-term costs of pressing Japan on this issue. The primary objective for the United States should presumably be to

⁷As indicated above, the joint U.S.-Japan TMD Working Group does not engage in such discussions. Other bilateral interactions on BMD issues are usually either at too high a level (i.e., between heads of state or defense chiefs) or too narrow in focus (i.e., between functional specialists interested in narrow technical issues) to be productive in this regard.

ensure that Japan's ultimate posture regarding BMD is fully compatible with the larger political and strategic interests and objectives of the United States and of the alliance.

A second critical issue of importance for both Washington and Tokyo is that of interoperability, especially concerning early warning and BM/C3 systems. This is a highly complex factor, involving not just technical problems but also problems of political and military coordination and control between the two countries. Both sides need to devote sustained attention to these issues, both before and during a dialogue.

A third issue of importance concerns the larger political and strategic implications of various types and sizes of BMD systems acquired by Japan. In particular, the impact of likely Chinese reactions to such systems upon Washington's and Tokyo's bilateral relations with Beijing, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and the larger Asian security environment should be examined and discussed in significant detail by both Japan and the United States, both separately and via dialogue.

The perception that U.S. NMD and TMD are integrated parts of the same system, and that this system is partly designed to counter Chinese missiles, could cause Tokyo problems with China—as well as igniting a domestic debate in Japan over the constitutional limits on defense outside its own borders. Insufficient attention has been given to these issues by both countries. Although dialogue alone will not eliminate the frictions that will no doubt emerge as the United States and Japan work out the contours of their collaboration on BMD, it is certain that without it the road ahead for the U.S.-Japan alliance will be bumpy indeed.