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**Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) In The Asia-Pacific Region:
Implications For South Asian Security**

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Of the several theatre missile defence(TMD) systems the United States is jointly developing with other countries, the one that it is co-developing with Japan in the Asia-Pacific region, has sparked wide public debate. This debate has, however, centered largely on two inter-related issues(a.)the likely impact of TMD on China's deterrent capability and (b.) its implications for East-Asian security. While these issues are important, they miss a key yet *under researched* problem: the possible impact of TMD deployment on South-Asian security.

It is useful to mention here that while Pakistan's security interests are inextricably tied to India's military posture, India's worries are not just centered on Pakistan alone but also on China and equally important, on the alliance between the two. Given the already tense stand-off between New Delhi and Islamabad, the potential Chinese response to a TMD will just add fuel to the fire in South Asia.

To understand the arguments and the stakes involved, a brief discussion of the TMD is essential. Theatre Missile Defences can be defined as military systems that are designed to attack and destroy ballistic missiles having either short-range or medium-range capabilities. Typically, both the launch point of the TMD systems and their intended target lie within a theatre or region. The best example would be the use of US Patriot missiles against Iraqi-modified Scuds in the Persian Gulf war.

Presently, the US is working on six TMD programmes: Hawk, Patriot, Medium Extended Air Defence System(MEADS), Theatre High Altitude Area Defence(THAAD), Navy Area Defence and Navy Theatre Wide System. Among these, the first three and the Navy Area Defence System are designed to intercept short range missiles. THAAD and Navy Theatre Wide System belong to Upper Tier Defence, which encompasses a large defence area. Several US reports suggest that the rationale for developing these TMDs include: protecting allied cities, safeguarding the basing and over-flight rights upon which a cohesive alliance or coalition depends and protecting US troops from theatre range missiles armed with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

TMD: Chinese Perceptions

On August 16, 1999 the US and Japan have signed an agreement to conduct joint technology research on TMD in the Asia-Pacific region. Since then China has heightened its campaign against it. There are three important reasons for China's opposition to a TMD in East Asia. First, China's opposition stems from its concern over the possible Taiwanese involvement in TMD. China strongly believes that Taiwan's inclusion in the TMD network will increase its momentum for formal independence and weaken its claims on Taipei by ruling out the use of force by it if the island seeks independence.

A second Chinese opposition is that the deployment of an upper-tier space based TMD system in East Asia could nullify its retaliatory capability. In particular, the TMD could undermine, the impact of China's short and medium range ballistic missile forces. China is also worried that its missile forces currently undergoing modernisation, will be rendered useless as a result of the deployment of TMD system, which is likely to happen just as the missile modernisation effort is completed.

Finally, China fears that missile defence will lead to a "militaristic" Japan. Beijing has not forgotten the bitter history of Japanese imperialism in China and Taiwan's status as a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945. Moreover, China considers Japan as a 'proto-nuclear' state with which it has unresolved territorial disputes. A TMD shield will not only harden Japanese stance vis-a-vis China over the issue but also greatly reduce the costs to Japan if it supports the United States in its military operations against China in a crisis over Taiwan.

China's Possible Response to TMD

The Chinese leaders have warned that should the US and Japan decide to deploy a TMD system, China would have no choice but to reconsider its nuclear policy. Viewing such a system as a threat to its own nuclear deterrent, Beijing might increase the number of its nuclear warheads and to reconsider its No First Use pledges.

The presence of TMD in East Asia could also prompt China to speed up its missile modernisation programme. The Chinese experts argue that TMD's interception capability could easily be overcome if China choose to amass overwhelming ballistic missile forces. Also the TMD could force changes in China's deployment posture. China currently lacks the technical capability to maintain its nuclear force on a high-alert status. Warheads are stored separately from their missile launchers. But the TMD could lead a reappraisal of China's relaxed deployment posture.

Another possible response would be for China to accelerate its Cruise missile programme. It is widely believed that China does not yet possess strategic Cruise missiles but that they are definitely under development. If China has indeed accelerated its Cruise missile programme as reported, the move may be in partial response to TMD. Furthermore, some security analysts even argue that the deployment of the TMD may prompt Beijing to equip its missiles with multiple warheads.

China's tough arms negotiator Sha Zukang has recently said that the whole architecture of his country's arms control and non-proliferation agreements could collapse if Washington deployed

the TMD system. Experts predict that China may threaten to boycott the MTCR in which it has yet to participate formally. It is also probable that China will link TMD with FMCT, which could have a significant effect on the global arms control process.

Implications for South Asian Security

How will the decision to deploy a TMD in the Asia-Pacific region impact South Asia? As mentioned earlier, since China features prominently in the security calculus in South Asia, the sub-continental security will come under pressure not from US-Japan missile defences but from China's response to them. For instance, in response to US deployment of TMD if China maintains its nuclear force on a high alert status, that would invariably increase threat perceptions in India and Pakistan successively. It would intensify pressure on governments in both New Delhi and Islamabad to accelerate the integration of nuclear weapons into their respective armed forces and improve operations readiness-actions that will have adverse consequences for nuclear stability in South Asia.

The quantitative and qualitative improvements in China's nuclear capability could also create pressure on the governments in India and Pakistan to modernise their nuclear arsenals through the resumption of nuclear tests and thereby prevent efforts to bring the CTBT into force. It could also stymie efforts to negotiate a global FMCT. Although Indian and Pakistan ruled out an immediate moratorium on fissile material production, neither country is averse to accepting a fissile material cap as part of a globally negotiated treaty. Both countries hope to use the interregum until such a treaty is negotiated to augment their stocks of fissile material. However, the expansion of China's nuclear arsenal could change India and Pakistan's strategic calculus, causing both countries to seek delays in negotiating an FMCT. Moreover, China considers US TMD cooperation with Japan as an act of missile proliferation and therefore violate the MTCR. Such an interpretation could lead Beijing to resume missile sales to South Asia and Middle East. Resumption of Chinese missile sale to Pakistan above the MTCR limit would invariably exacerbate the missile race between India and Pakistan.

The other link to South Asia might be joint Chinese-Russian or an independent Chinese decision to develop its version of a national missile defence(NMD) system. An Indian government that finds the credibility of its strategic deterrent reduced by a Chinese NMD capability would invest significantly for an anti-missile defence system. An Indian national missile defence would force Pakistan to seek countermeasures or to expand and diversify its nuclear arsenal. The overall outcome will be an increasing salience of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in South Asia, which will not only come as a blow to regional arms control initiatives but also serve as an incentive for other potential proliferators to follow suit.

Giving Peace a Chance

Thus the US Japan decision to deploy a TMD in the Asia Pacific region will affect East Asian security and have serious implications for South Asian security. Therefore, before taking a final decision, various alternative approaches need to be studied. At the very outset, efforts should be made by the US and Japan on the one hand and China on the other to address each others security concerns. For instance, both the US and Japan should be more explicit that Taiwan will not be

included in the any future TMD deployment. Similarly, China should wake up and accept that its missile proliferation policies have legitimised missile defence by others. Moreover, Beijing should not build up its nuclear and missile arsenal at a frenetic pace and threaten other states as it did with Taiwan in 1996 with its missile prowess.

Finally, a concerted diplomatic approach to the missile proliferation problem should be considered. Such an approach would involve a mixture of treaty-compliant defences and new diplomatic initiatives to strengthen non-proliferation objectives. As Deutch, Brown and White argue, this approach is more than adequate to deal with existing threats and provides at least a hedge against the possible near-term deployment of more advanced TMD systems.