

Ballistic Missile Defense and the US-Japan Alliance

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By Martin Sieffup

[Ever since the Nixon-Mao accommodation in 1972, Chinese strategic analysts have generally viewed the US-Japan security pact as a way to restrain Japanese remilitarization. Some have called it the "cork" in the "bottle," or a "leash" on a possible new Japanese military threat in a region whose tensions, pivoting on China-Japan conflict, are growing even as its economic bonds expand. Now, however, Koizumi's decision to deploy missile defenses in collaboration with US surveillance and command-and-control — in conjunction Japanese dispatch of Self-Defense Forces to support the US in the Iraq War, the permanent stationing of the Maritime Self-Defense Forces in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, the repositioning of US forces centered on the transfer of I Corps to Japan, and the explicit inclusion of Taiwan within the scope of the alliance --- have convinced the Chinese that Japan has become an active participating in a US design to contain China. Japan's substantial commitment to the development of a cooperative Ballistic Missile Defense program coordinated the US thus has important regional and global ramifications. Japan Focus]

WASHINGTON -- Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro is due to step down in a few months after five confident, controversial years at the helm of the world's second-ranking industrial power, but he will leave a ballistic missile defense juggernaut behind him. Hardly a week now goes past without some

isolated, usually little-remarked upon item that heralds another enormous stride in fulfilling his guiding vision of a gigantic, long-lasting new high-tech partnership with the United States to develop a world class BMD shield for his nation.

On Thursday, U.S. Army secretary Francis J. Harvey discussed progress in BMD cooperation with Japanese officials in Tokyo.

Earlier this month, a senior Boeing executive told a group of Washington reporters who specialize in covering BMD issues that the Japanese government is extremely interested in studying the Missile Defense Agency's controversial Airborne Laser, or ABL anti-ballistic missile system, for which Boeing is the prime contractor. Should such a system become operational in the next few years, it could be of the greatest value in protecting Japan's huge, densely populated cities from nuclear missiles fired from nearby North Korea.



Boeing's Airborne Laser

"The Japanese are very interested in ABL," Greg Hyslop, director of the ABL program at Boeing. He said Boeing had already launched a

study "to explore where Japanese defense industry might participate."

"They have very strong capabilities and they are very interested in doing it," Mitchell B. Kugler, Boeing's director of its Strategic Initiative Missile Defense Systems, told reporters in the March briefing. "Our friends and allies in some ways are more at need (of upgraded ballistic missile defense systems) than we are now."

Indeed, Japan is now America's most significant international partner in developing BMD systems, Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry "Trey" Obering III, director of the Missile Defense Agency, told the House Armed Services subcommittee hearing on March 9.

Obering was speaking the day after the first successful flight test of an interceptor missile using a nose cone developed by Japan occurred on March 8 off the coast of Hawaii. He told the subcommittee that the United States has been working with Japan on missile defense research since 1999.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Peter Flory, who testified with Obering, said with its commitment to spend around \$1 billion, Japan has become the United States' largest international partner in missile defense. "The United States and Japan have agreed to work together to develop a more capable sea-based interceptor" that would improve the defense of both nations, he said.

The comments of the Boeing executives, Obering and Flory come after an epochal year when Koizumi pushed through the institutionalization of Japan's high-tech BMD cooperation with the United States in a series of hugely ambitious projects, including the purchase of more than \$1 billion worth of U.S.-built Standard Missile 3s developed for the sea-based Aegis anti-ballistic missile system to defend against threats from unpredictable

North Korea.

Indeed, as the last year of Koizumi's mandated maximum five-year run as Japan's prime minister peters out, he appears to be trying to step up the pace of institutionalizing U.S.-Japanese technical and industrial cooperation on the BMD programs that may endure for years or even decades to come.

Last year, Koizumi closed a deal with Lockheed Martin for Japan to either buy off the shelf or produce itself 124 Patriot PAC-3 missiles by 2010.



Patriot PAC-3 Missile

The deal will not come cheaply for Japan and is

a welcome boost for the prime U.S. contractor Lockheed Martin. The costs of developing the massive industrial and technological infrastructure needed to make the PAC-3s in Japan will be vastly greater than if the Defense Agency bought them off the shelf from the United States. However, Koizumi, ever the visionary, wants use the deal to establish the foundation for an independent Japanese ABM production capability. The program would also be a huge boost to Japan's own missile production technologies.

Koizumi also knows that Japan's once ambitious space and missile programs have long languished with engineering problems and clearly needed a shot in the arm. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries is expected to produce the PAC-3 surface-to-air missiles domestically for deployment starting fiscal 2008 in association with Lockheed Martin.

Now, the interest Japanese officials are expressing in the Airborne Laser offers the prospect of another major area of cooperation between the two countries and major corporations in both.

The ABL has had a rocky road recently and speculations that now appear unfounded about its possible cancellation have circulated the U.S. media. The ABL program currently looks secure at least until it passes the crucial tests Gen. Obering has decreed for it in 2008. But having Japanese financial and engineering resources available to develop it would be an enormous shot in the arm for it.

And from the Japanese side, cooperation offers access into a rich new frontier area of technological breakthroughs that Japanese science and technology by itself has been lagging in until now.

The flourishing U.S.-Japanese special relationship in BMD has become one of the most important and overlooked developments in global strategy. The prospect of expanding it into ABL research suggests that there may be a lot more to come.

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