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Japan Shields Itself from Attack

Hisane MASAKI

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By Hisane MASAKI

TOKYO - It's not the fictional Super X project, designed to defend Tokyo, in the Godzilla movie series. It's a real project designed to shield Japan - the capital first and other parts of the country later - from a real threat.

Amid skyrocketing concerns about neighboring North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, Japan has recently revved up efforts to boost its defense capabilities, including a missile-defense system, either on its own or with its most important ally, the United States.

Japan will deploy the Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC3) system at an Air Self-Defense Force base near Tokyo at the end of this month. It will be the first in a series of PAC3 systems to be deployed at a total of 11 Air SDF bases across the country by the end of fiscal 2010. Surface-to-air PAC3 missiles are designed to shoot down incoming enemy ballistic missiles at altitudes of between 10 and 20 kilometers.



PAC 3 System in Japan

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government has made a significant boost in missile-defense expenditures for the fiscal year starting on April 1, despite a minuscule cut in overall defense spending due to the nation's tight fiscal situation, the worst among major industrialized countries.

In a move that stirred up controversy in Japan, the Abe government is also considering stretching the boundaries of the postwar pacifist constitution to make it possible for Japan to strike North Korean ballistic missiles heading to the US. In 2003, the government of then-prime minister Junichiro Koizumi issued a statement that Japan could not shoot down missiles bound for the US because doing so would be tantamount to collective defense - or coming to the military aid of an ally under attack - banned under the nation's "supreme law". Abe has vowed to revise the constitution.

Neighboring North Korea's nuclear test last October - which followed its test-firing of

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several missiles in the Sea of Japan between Japan and the Korean Peninsula last July - sparked an international uproar and raised regional tensions. Japan regards North Korea as its biggest security threat.

Japan's concerns about North Korea's nuclear and missile programs have not abated despite recent progress on the diplomatic front. To be sure, a landmark agreement was reached in Beijing in mid-February during the previous round of six-party talks - which also involve the US, China, Russia and South Korea - aimed at dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear program. But it remains uncertain whether the reclusive Stalinist state will actually go so far as to abandon its nuclear program completely.



In the agreement on North Korea's initial steps toward nuclear disarmament, Pyongyang pledged to "shut down" and "seal" its Yongbyon reactor within 60 days in return for 50,000 tonnes of fuel oil or economic aid of equal value. The closure of Yongbyon will be verified by international inspectors. North Korea will eventually receive an additional 950,000 tonnes of fuel oil or economic aid of equal value when it permanently "disables" its nuclear operations.

Aside from the nuclear threat, the issue of North Korea's missile program has so far been pushed to the back burner. North Korea firing missiles carrying biological or chemical weapons at Japan would also be a nightmare scenario for Tokyo. Biological and chemical weapons are less expensive and easier to manufacture than nuclear weapons, and North Korea is suspected of possessing a large stockpile of them.

Japan decided in December 2003 to introduce a missile-defense system at an estimated cost of up to 1 trillion yen (about US$8.5 billion). Under the system, PAC3 missiles will be deployed, with the first ones in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

In July 2005, the Diet - Japan's parliament - revised the SDF Law to allow the then Defense Agency chief - now the defense minister - to order emergency missile intercepts without waiting for approval from the prime minister and the cabinet. Since North Korean missiles could reach Japanese territory within about 10 minutes, the defense chief could not afford to follow normal procedures for getting permission at a cabinet meeting to launch interceptor missiles.

Under the revised SDF Law, if there are no clear signs of a launch but conditions call for high alert and there is no time to seek consent, the defense chief can mobilize the SDF to stand by for any sudden attack and order an intercept under emergency guidelines approved in advance by the prime minister. Under the new law, the prime minister must report the results of any intercept to the Diet shortly after launch.

The first batch of PAC3 missiles to be deployed will be imported from the US. Japan plans to get domestic defense contractor Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd to produce the rest. Although the cost of producing the missiles domestically is much higher than purchasing them from the US, the long-term costs, including maintenance, will be less and Japan will also be able to boost its own missile-production technologies.

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The government budget plan for the next fiscal year starting on April 1, which is expected to be enacted in the Diet as early as next Monday, calls for overall defense spending of 4.8 trillion yen for fiscal 2007, down 12.3 billion yen, or 0.3%, from the amount allocated in the current fiscal year's initial budget, marking it the fifth straight year of decline. But it calls for a sharp rise in missile-defense expenditures to 182.6 billion yen, up 42.7 billion yen, or 30.5%, from the initial budget for the current fiscal year.

The Defense Ministry plans to deploy its first PAC3 system at Iruma Base in Saitama prefecture, next to Tokyo, at the end of this month, as originally planned, and in three other prefectures, also adjacent to Tokyo, by the end of 2007, instead of the original March 2008 deadline. The Air SDF bases where the PAC3 systems are to be deployed in the three prefectures by the end of this year are Narashino Base in Chiba prefecture, Kasumigaura Base in Ibaraki prefecture, and Takeyama Base in Kanagawa prefecture.

The PAC3 missiles can protect areas within a radius of 20km from the launch sites. In an emergency, in which signs are apparent that a hostile missile launch is imminent, the PAC3 missiles at Iruma Base in southern Saitama prefecture are expected to be moved to SDF garrisons in Nerima and Ichigaya in Tokyo to protect key facilities in central Tokyo, such as the Diet building and the prime minister's official residence.

The missile-defense budget increase for fiscal 2007 is mainly to pay for accelerating the deployment of PAC3 missiles. It will advance some PAC3 purchases from the US originally planned for fiscal 2008 or later, resulting in an increase in the number of PAC3 missiles to be deployed in the four prefectures surrounding Tokyo by the end of 2007.

After deploying the PAC3 systems at the four Air SDF bases in the four prefectures surrounding Tokyo, the Defense Ministry plans to introduce the systems to seven other Air SDF bases in other parts of the country between fiscal 2008 and fiscal 2010. A total of 16 Air SDF missile units will be deployed at the 11 bases.

During fiscal 2008, the system will be deployed at Hamamatsu Base in Shizuoka prefecture, central Japan. During fiscal 2009, the system will be deployed at Gifu Base in Gifu prefecture, central Japan, Hakusan Sub Base in Mie prefecture, central Japan and Aibano Sub Base in Shiga prefecture, western Japan. During fiscal 2010, the system will be introduced to Ashiya Base, Tsuiki Base and Koradai Sub Base, all in Fukuoka prefecture, which is on the northern tip of the southernmost main Japanese island of Kyushu and closest to the Korean Peninsula.

Meanwhile, the US has also deployed PAC3 missiles at its Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, the first such missiles at a US base in Japan. The deployment is significant given the fact that the huge bulk of US bases and nearly 50,000 troops stationed on Japanese soil are on the southernmost Japanese island, making it a potential main target of North Korean attacks. Japan has asked the US to deploy PAC3 missiles at US bases in the Tokyo metropolitan area as well, most likely at Yokota Air Base and Yokosuka Naval Base.

In addition to deploying PAC3 missiles, Tokyo plans to install Standard Missile-3 (SM3) interceptors on its Aegis-equipped destroyer Kongo by the end of this calendar year instead of by the end of fiscal 2007 on March 31, 2008, as had been planned earlier. Japan also plans to finish refitting its three other Aegis ships so they can carry the SM3 system by the end of fiscal 2010.

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SM3 system

Japan and the US envisage a two-stage interception system to deal with a possible missile attack. First, Aegis vessels from both countries would try to intercept an incoming missile in space by launching SM3 missiles. If unsuccessful, the PAC3 missiles would provide the next line of defense.

Last August, the US Navy sent the USS Shiloh, a cruiser equipped with both the Aegis missile-tracking and engaging system and SM3 interceptor missiles, to Yokosuka Naval Base in Kanagawa prefecture, adjacent to Tokyo. The Shiloh is one of three upgraded Aegis-equipped warships and is the first to be deployed outside the US.

At present, eight Aegis-equipped warships, including the Shiloh, are stationed at the base. Another such warship is expected to be deployed there as early as June. But among the eight Aegis-equipped warships currently stationed at the base, only the Shiloh can shoot down short- and medium-range missiles. The US Navy said recently that it plans to upgrade and install that capability in most of the Aegis-equipped warships at the base by 2009.

Japan and the US are now jointly developing an advanced version of the SM3. The Japanese government decided in December 2005 to start the joint development of the new sea-based interceptor missile. The development cost is estimated at a maximum of $2.7 billion, with Japan shouldering up to $1.2 billion, while Washington is paying for the remaining maximum $1.5 billion. Japan's share will be spread over nine years starting in fiscal 2006. The two allies plan to begin production of the next-generation interceptor missile in fiscal 2015, which will be deployed on Aegis-equipped destroyers.

Japan and the US had conducted joint technological research into the new missile since 1999, after North Korea's test-firing of a Taepodong-1 missile, which flew over Japan and fell into the Pacific in August 1998.

In December 2004, when it adopted a new National Defense Program Outline, Japan also eased a decades-old ban on arms exports, enabling the export of parts and components needed for the joint development and production of the advanced missile-defense system. This easing of the arms-export ban paved the way for Japan to move into the development stage of a new interceptor missile.

The three-point arms export ban was adopted in 1967 under the government of prime minister Eisaku Sato and covered three specific groups of countries: countries in the communist bloc; countries to which weapons exports are banned by United Nations resolutions; and countries involved or feared to be involved in armed conflicts.

In 1976, the government of then Takeo Miki announced a "unified government view" on the ban, placing the nation's weapons exports under a total ban for all practical purposes. In

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1983, however, the government of prime minister Yasuhiro Nakasone exempted military technology exports to the US from the arms-export ban.

Last September, the US military activated a unit operating a high-powered X-band radar at Air SDF's Shariki Sub Base in Aomori prefecture, northern Japan, that is capable of tracking ballistic missiles in the region, a key part of the joint missile-defense project. The high-resolution radar is so powerful that it can identify baseball-size objects from thousands of kilometers away and is designed to differentiate between decoys and real missile warheads. The US military also plans to deploy the JTAGS (joint tactical air-to-ground station) system at its Misawa Air Base, also in Aomori prefecture, this summer. It will be the first time for the system to be deployed in Japan. JTAGS is a transportable information-processing system that supports forward-deployed combatant commanders with early-warning data on ballistic-missile launches.



Japan and the US are preparing to upgrade, by this autumn, the Concept Plan 5055 for a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, which was worked out by the SDF and the US military in 2002. The plan calls for Japan's support for the US, including the use of Japanese airports and seaports by US forces transporting supplies to the peninsula and the provision of medical treatment at Japanese hospitals for injured American military personnel. But it does not include specific names of such facilities and other detailed information, leaving its practical implementation in doubt. In addition to being far more detailed, the revised plan will spell out how Tokyo and Washington would respond to direct attacks against Japan, especially missile strikes.

Last May, Japan and the US signed a final agreement on the realignment of US bases and forces in Japan, which includes the movement of Japan's Air Defense Command to the United States' Yokota Air Base. There they will create a joint missile-defense command center in fiscal 2010. The creation of the center is aimed at strengthening Japan's ability to detect and deal with enemy missile launches.

Meanwhile, Japan's multibillion-dollar spy-satellite program made significant headway with the successful launch of the nation's fourth such satellite late last month. The program was prompted by North Korea's 1998 test-firing of a Taepodong-1 missile.

The successful launch of the new satellite atop the domestically developed H2-A rocket has completed Japan's planned four-satellite system, which provides the nation with an all-weather capability to survey virtually any point in the world at least once every day, and keep watch on North Korea's military movements.

Two of the satellites have optics that produce images of objects as small as a meter in diameter when photographed from outer space. The other two, including the newest one, use radar imaging to penetrate cloud cover.

Hisane Masaki is a Tokyo-based journalist, commentator and scholar on international politics and economy. Masaki's e-mail address is yiu45535@nifty.com.

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