

THAAD Deployment Opposed by New South Korea Moon Jae-in Government

Halt for Environmental Reasons as an Attempt to Save Face?

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On June 8, 2017, a representative of the presidential administration of the Republic of Korea told reporters that the deployment of US missile defense systems on South Korea territory should be suspended until the completion of a full-fledged environmental impact assessment of the land plot to be transferred to the US military for these very purposes.

As it turns out, even though the site covers some 70 hectares in all, the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Korea decided to transfer the plot in stages. In the first stage, a total area of 32 hectares was transferred to the US military, with this amount having been chosen to avoid the full-scale environmental assessment that is required when constructing any facilities on an area of more than 33 hectares. The remaining 38 hectares promised in accordance with the agreement shall be provided later.

The THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) complex is located on an area covering 10 hectares. However, this is the minimum area required to accommodate the missile launchers, with the total area of the military base, including facilities and the security zone, amounting to 70 hectares. In the opinion of the new authorities of the Republic of Korea, in an attempt to accelerate the deployment of THAAD, the previous authorities had deliberately underwent serious violations. However, incumbent president Moon Jae-in does not consider the deployment of the missile defense system a priority task for which the law should be ignored. As a result, he has gone ahead and given personal instructions for everything to be checked.

Naturally, part of the missile system already delivered to the country should not be returned back. Nonetheless, the environmental assessment could last from six months to a year, or even longer (it effectively lasted two years for Guam). Under these conditions, it follows that the missile defense complexes are unlikely to be deployed in 2017, as originally planned. In addition, the presidential administration has ordered a fact-finding mission on the people who were involved in planning the allocation of the land for the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system specifically to avoid a full-scale environmental assessment.

True, there is a bottleneck in that, since the land was transferred to the US side in accordance with the U.S.-South Korea Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), it is not subject to the laws of the Republic of Korea. However, there are indications that Moon Jae-in's administration is choosing to ignore this.



The environmental assessment has been preceded by another scandal, connected with the fact that the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Korea knowingly refrained from providing information on the import of additional four launchers for the US THAAD missile defense system. According to the presidential administration representative, this fact was revealed based on an investigation conducted on May 30 within military circles. The initial draft of the report referred to the importation of six launchers, but afterwards this proposal was deleted. In addition, according to the Report of the Ministry of Defense of May 26, Head of the National Security Agency Chun Yi Yong also only indicated that the THAAD missile defense systems had been deployed without explanation. As the high-ranking official of the administration emphasized,

“Not a single word on the four additional THAAD launchers was mentioned in the May 26 report that was forwarded by the Head of the Defense Policy Department of the Ministry of Defense to the Head of the National Security Agency Administration and the first and second deputies.”

It was also found out that the military department chose not to report the deployment of four “additional” THAAD missile systems to the Consultative Committee on State Planning, which is now engaged in work on developing the main directions of the policy of the new government, in the process reviewing cases from the previous administration.

News on the import of the additional four launchers became known on May 26 by the First Deputy Chief of the National Security Agency Li Sang Cholyu, who received this information from one of the military officials. The Deputy Chief then immediately personally contacted Defense Minister Han Min-goo on May 28, who confirmed the reports, thinking that his subordinates had already long reported all the detailed information.

As a result, President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae-in described the whole situation as “extremely shocking” and sought to find out who had made the decision to import the facilities, and why this was not reported in the Ministry of Defense report to the new government.

On May 31, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Korea Han Min-goo and Head of the National Security Agency under the President Kim Kwang-jin were summoned to the President Administration to clarify the circumstances. Han Min-goo was asked on the reasons for the deletion of the information on the import of an additional four launchers from the report for the presidential administration. He replied that he had not given such an instruction.

On the same day, Moon Jae-in met with Democratic Senator Dick Durbin, who was in Seoul

on a visit, and noted that all measures being taken with respect to THAAD are the internal affairs of the South Korean government, and that they are not aimed at changing previous agreements, and are whatsoever not a kind of message to the American side. The new Government of the Republic of Korea is serious on the issue of THAAD deployment on South Korean territory, since the decision to implement this project was taken by the authorities of the two countries in order to counter the North Korean threat, but in the process of project implementation, the principles of democracy and the procedure itself were violated.

Meanwhile, on May 16, a representative of the US Department of Defense announced that the first stage in the supply and installation of components was completed. It turns out that the information that six THAAD missile systems had been delivered to the Republic of Korea was by no means a secret. Later, Pentagon representative Jeff Davis, who confirmed that the deployment of THAAD on the territory of Republic of Korea is a procedure that is being conducted openly. On June 5, Head of the Anti-Ballistic Defense Department of the Pentagon James Schilling and Commander of the US Armed Forces in the Republic of Korea General Vincent Brooks met with the Head of the National Security Agency Chon Yi Yong and explained to him the technical capabilities of the THAAD missile defense complexes and the reasons for their deployment.



President Moon Jae-in

As a result, it was found that the decision to remove those parts of the document that indicated that four more launchers had been brought into the country from the report to President Moon Jae-in and his assistants was adopted by the Head of Policy Department of the Ministry of Defense Wu Xing-ho. At the same time, Prime Minister Hwang Gyo-an, who acted as president of the country after the impeachment of Park Geun-hye, also supported the deployment of the US anti-missile system. Wu reported all the reasons why he had been removed from his administrative position.

However, on June 1, 2017, Chong Yi-yon, who had arrived in the United States to discuss the details of the upcoming South Korean-American summit, stated that the deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula may take a little longer, and that this was due to the need to check the impact of this project on the environment. At the same time, Chong immediately clarified that the problem surrounding THAAD was being caused by purely procedural violations and that there would not be an obstacle to the development of South Korean-US relations.

What conclusions can be drawn out of this? Although the story with the digging out of figures from the report seems somewhat strange to the author, the author rather believes in the hardware games inside the Ministry of Defense and in the organizational disorder inherent in this structure, rather than in the conspiracy of generals and a conscious attempt

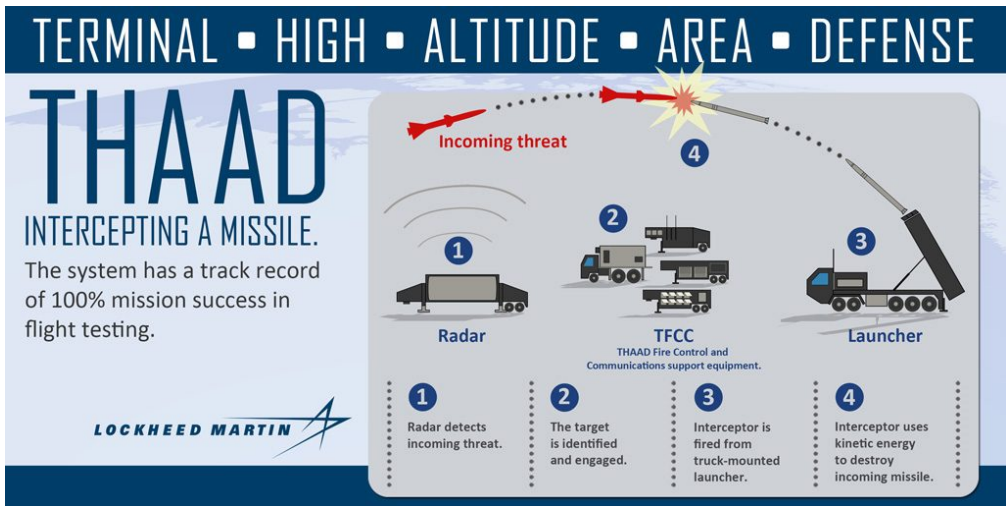
at sabotage designed to place Moon before the fact. It is another matter that Moon cleverly took advantage of this opportunity, and raised eyebrows in a situation in which he could have demonstrated his desire to fight the deployment of THAAD, without having real power and capabilities for this.

Setting his will in opposition to Trump's will is something Moon is not yet in a position to do. Under direct confrontation, the option we discussed in the previous article is too likely (the Americans could activate a whole set of measures of economic pressure, and in exchange for the removal of this pressure, the THAAD project would have to be allowed to continue. Based on his communication with the President of the Republic of Korea, the same Dick Durbin has openly said that if South Korea does not need THAAD, the US could always find ways of spending the USD 923 million. However, had he been living in the Republic of Korea, he would have liked to have as many anti-missile systems capable of ensuring protection against hundreds of North Korean missiles that would be directed to the south in the event of war. "Considerations on national security must [prevail](#)".

The idea of pushing the question through the National Assembly, which Moon was planning as a presidential candidate, is also potentially dangerous. Even the People's Party, which is the one closest to Moon in a number of positions in general, is in favor THAAD deployment, which means that Moon would probably not achieve the necessary majority in the parliament. And when the ruling party proposed holding parliamentary hearings on the concealment of military information with regards to the importation of the four launchers, the representative of the opposition party Free Korea immediately stated that the plan for holding hearings was not going to be considered, as such actions could damage the South Korean-US alliance and also lead to the disclosure of state secrets.

On the other hand, getting the question out on a referendum is also risky, since, according to the latest polls, along with the protesters, there are enough people who believe that the deployment of the US missile defense system now or in the future would protect the country from the North Korean threat. In addition, Moon is very much afraid of being called a socialist or pro-North Korean element, and imposing a discussion along the line of "if you are against THAAD, you support the DPRK" is not too difficult for a political technologist.

Therefore, the only remaining way out is to rely on issues related to the environment assessment. It is highly probable that, among the supporters of this move, there will be a sizeable number of specialists who will convincingly explain that the deployment of THAAD in this area poses a deadly threat to a rare and endemic species of subflora fauna, and, therefore, the US missile defense system must be placed elsewhere. In this regard, Moon is hoping to enter a "no peace, no war" situation in which, on the one hand, the placement of THAAD would be postponed indefinitely, but at the same time, all obligations would not be formally violated.



However, in actuality, such a strategy comes with a number of dangers. For example, the opposing party too can also find its ecologists who will no less convincingly prove that the claimed species of subflora fauna are neither rare nor endemic at all, and are also able to breed in captivity, from which their existence in the virtual space is completely matched with the placement of THAAD.

The only thing that can save Moon is a situation in which, because of some incident (a real one, not provoked), it would be possible to carry out a mass mobilization of public opinion similar to what Roh Moo-hyun organized fifteen years ago when, in 2002, two schoolgirls crossing a road were run over by an American armored personnel carrier. By re-inflating anti-American hysteria on this unpleasant history, Roh managed to achieve his set political goals, including assuming the presidency. With weekly mass demonstrations such as “the people’s promenades for impeachment” behind him, Moon theoretically can improve his position by bargaining with the United States, demonstrating that the whole country is against the deployment of the US missile defense system, and in the changed situation, he could not fail to then follow the people’s opinion and cancel the force majeure circumstances and previous arrangements.

But for this, such an emergency must occur. Meanwhile, until it does occur, Seoul shall continue playing a double game. On June 9, the presidential administration reported that, despite the change of hands of political power in the Republic of Korea, the new government is still very serious about THAAD, and is ready to continue close cooperation with the US. However, it is adhering to the need to comply with a number of procedures aimed at determining the justification for the project, ensuring its transparency, and conducting a review of the impact of THAAD on the ecology of the location area. According to South Korean media, such statements are aimed at creating more favorable conditions for preparing for a bilateral summit by alleviating the concerns of the American side.

Against this backdrop, on June 11, Reuters reported that when US diplomats openly asked the South Korean side whether the current environmental assessment is an attempt to abandon the project of the deployment of the missile defense, they confirmed that cooperation in this area shall continue, and all previous and current agreements will be respected. Head of the Defense Ministry Han Min-goo, during a meeting with Pentagon Chief James Mattis, also assured his American counterpart that Seoul is not making any attempts to cancel the agreements on this matter. According to him, the problems that have arisen in the South Korean society in this regard are related only to the lack of transparency in the deployment of the missile defense systems. Seoul shall solve the problem “in a spirit of

alliance" with Washington.

But how is THAAD already operating on the ground? As per media reports, there are currently constant disruptions due to problems with electricity. And until a constant supply of electricity is provided, generators, which in turn require fuel, shall continue powering the system. Attempts to run the system on the ground have already been blocked by protesters twice. As a result, fuel is currently being imported using helicopters, and according to media reports, on days when the DPRK was testing new medium-range missiles, the whole system was [down](#).

What the attempt to play a double game will end up producing, and whether the new authorities in Seoul will have enough courage to raise the question, are issues that are going to be discussed in the following articles on this topic.

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