

THAAD's Enough — Analysing the Pentagon's Korean Missile Deployment

By [Haneul Na avi](#)

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Trolling-in-real-life has become the State Department's favourite pastime, and recent developments on the Korean peninsula have given the State Department the perfect impetus to further political agitation.

Various Pentagon mouthpieces cited North Korea's semi-successful BM25 Musudan missile tests as potential concern for regional security and in response, and coerced Park Geun-Hye into accepting a shiny new Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system to the bemusement of South Korean protesters in the Seongju province.

Whilst rightfully acknowledging that the deployment was “a very sensitive issue for the partners throughout the region”, US Defence Secretary Ash Carter enthused that the US was “working closely to ensure the swift deployment of THAAD”, a Defence News article noted.

Regional superpowers Russia and China have also rightfully expressed concerns over the THAAD systems citing America's Asian Pivot strategy—which feeds off of Pyongyang's oscillation between brinkmanship and detente—which advanced immediately following the UNCLOS arbitration over the South China Sea.

Many shortsighted Western newspapers even admonished Park's pivot to American defences, rather than focusing on the long-term specifics of doing so. “The appearance of elements of the US global missile defence system in the region [...] can provoke an arms race in Northeast Asia and complicate the resolution of the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula,” the Russian Foreign Ministry mentioned.

He Yafei of the China Daily also referenced two neocon American professors who cheerleadered for America's Asian pivot and hailed it as “a superior ‘grand strategy’ to be applied seriously by the US in East Asia and Europe in order to contain the two rising powers”, namely by relying “on local powers to contain China’.

If unsuccessful, the report advises the US to “throw its considerable weight behind them’”. That “considerable weight” was reallocating defence funds from backing the Syrian “moderate Mafia” and the Turkish pivot back to Russia, to creating mischief in the South China Sea in order to counteract increasing rapprochement between Japan and Russia, as well as China and the Philippines.

As weapons, THAAD system are relatively useless against North Korea. Throughout 2016, the DPRK tested several Rodong 1-2 medium-range missiles and a Taepodong-2 ICBM in order to launch a Kwangmyŏngsŏng-4 satellite into orbit.

This was verified by Pentagon experts as a harmless experiment, where “Vice Admiral James Syring, director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, told reporters that North Korea’s launch was ‘provocative, disturbing and alarming,’ but could not be equated with a test of an intercontinental ballistic missile,” Reuters stated.

Chinese and Russian officials are also well aware that THAAD systems are ineffective against North Korean Nodong missiles, which travel at lower altitudes. “THAAD is incapable of intercepting Rodong and Scud missiles targeting South Korea as the DPRK missiles travel at an altitude of 20-30 km.

The U.S. anti-missile system is designed to shoot down missiles at a much higher altitude of 40-150 km,” a Xinhua analyst remarked. This was echoed by Chang Young-Keun, professor at the Korea Aerospace University, in who stated “if North Korea launches a medium-range Rodong missile near Mount Paekdu [...] it is found that the THAAD missile may not be capable of intercepting it.”

This reveals several discrepancies: (1) that North Korea is wholly capable of using low-altitude (and low cost) missiles to turn Seoul into a “sea of flames”, (2) that short-range nuclear attacks against Seoul, which would share Seoul’s nuclear fallout, go against Pyongyang’s existential interests, and finally (3) that the expensive THAAD systems are painfully vulnerable to primitive low-altitude attacks from Rodong-1 and Hwasong-series missiles.

Conversely, THAAD technology has tested more successfully since 2005 against terminally-high altitude threats such as nuclear-capable ICBMs and Multiple Independently Targeted Re-Entry Vehicles (MIRVs); weapons that only Russia and China possess.

Adding to this, 38 North analysed THAAD system inefficiencies, such as taking an hour to reload, which North Korea could facilitate by simply launching over 96 missiles.

They are also unable to track more than 20 missiles simultaneously, which effectively overwhelms the radar. Furthermore, the Aegis anti-ballistic systems the ROK Navy already possesses are adequate to deter low altitude missiles, yet Americans insisted on delivering THAAD units to the peninsula on the premise of yet another Pentagon lie.

Speaking of MIRVS, America’s thirsty attitude towards the Asia-Pacific is not rooted in North Korean antics, but in the American War on Terror. No longer bound by the 1972 USSR-US Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence Treaty or the wisdom attained from the Cuban missile crisis, both the Bush and Obama administrations have sought to advance NATO towards Beijing and Moscow by strategically proliferating missile defence systems in Europe, Asia, and the MENA region via their vassal states.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, gains made through negotiations between then-US President Richard Nixon and USSR General Secretariat Leonid Brezhnev were dismantled.

Notably, Article V of the treaty stated that “each Party undertakes not to develop, test, or deploy ABM systems or components which are sea-based, air-based, space-based, or mobile land-based”, which Lockheed and Martin’s mobile THAAD batteries in Guam and sea-based Aegis units in Japan and South Korea clearly violates.

On 13 June, 2002, George Bush struck gold in the post-9/11 environment when “[...] the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and recommenced developing

missile defense systems that would have formerly been prohibited by the bilateral treaty.

The action was rationalized under the need to defend against the possibility of a missile attack conducted by a rogue state. The next day, the Russian Federation promptly dropped the START II agreement, intended to completely ban MIRVs," a National Defence University publication expressed.

Shortly after renouncing participation in the long-held treaty, NATO allies led by George Bush held the Nov. 2002 Prague Summit in order to cement cooperation on missile defence systems' within Eastern Europe as well as the Baltics. Poland and Czech Republic accepted Bush's proposals, but acting President Barack Obama scrapped it in 2009, then reinstated it in Deveselu, Romania in May 2016, citing the usual "Russian aggression" mantra.

Currently, North Korea is that "rogue threat" for the US bureaucracy, but just how much of a threat, in what capacity, and how to neutralise it has proven how woefully misguided and ignorant the Obama administration is.

Russia and China have every right to counteract America's THAAD systems in the Asia-Pacific and Eastern Europe, and in the process, South Korea may pay a bigger price than the 1.25 billion USD spike in its military budget by risking 25 million people in the Gyeonggi-do province with a false sense of security.

Following the disastrous review of the F-35, THAAD technology may prove a much larger headache for America than its allies and rivals.

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