Global Missile Defense Cooperation and China

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US-Russia ballistic missile defense (BMD) cooperation can improve strategic stability between both countries, but this cooperation would pose a potential threat to China’s strategic security, especially if it is a closed and deep cooperation. The United States and Russia should make their bilateral cooperation an open regime, and let China and other countries join, so that improvement of US-Russia strategic stability is not based on the sacrifice of strategic stability with China and other countries. China and the United States may also cooperate on BMD in areas of early warning and mutual launch notification. The security costs of these cooperative measures are very low, and the benefits would improve stability, confidence, and mutual trust. Finally, BMD cooperation between the United States and its East Asian allies (Japan and Taiwan) is threatening Sino-US strategic stability. The United States could improve Chinese confidence by increasing transparency about and limiting the performance of BMD systems. Keywords: ballistic missile defense, US-Russia relations, China, East Asian security.

At the summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) held in Lisbon in November 2010, political leaders decided to expand the ballistic missile defense (BMD) system from its current design, which is intended to protect NATO troops, to that of protecting populations and territories. NATO leaders also decided to explore the possibilities of seeking cooperation with Russia. With regard to the means of cooperation, Russia suggested building a joint system, but the US position was that there should be two independent missile interceptor systems, so cooperation would probably be in the area of early warning (Collina 2011a). However, during a summit meeting in May 2011 and a meeting of defense ministers in June, the United States and Russia were unable to reach an agreement (Collina 2011b). BMD thus remains a serious issue in US-Russia relations.

This is not the first time that the United States and Russia have
talked about missile defense cooperation. In 2007, when Russia responded strongly to President George W. Bush’s proposal for a European BMD system, President Vladimir Putin proposed to share the Gabala radar stations in Azerbaijan with the United States in exchange for the latter’s commitment not to develop a BMD system in Europe (Fletcher 2007). Although the Barack Obama administration abandoned the Bush plan, Putin’s suggestion continues to serve as the starting point for US-Russia talks on BMD cooperation. China pays close attention to US-Russia BMD cooperation, but only recently has discussion begun about the impact of this cooperation on China’s security.

Cooperation among the United States and its Asian allies also worries China. US-Japan BMD cooperation includes the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) system, the Aegis/SM-3 Block I midcourse BMD system, forward-based X-band radar (FBX), and joint development of SM-3 Block IIA interceptor missiles. US-Taiwan BMD cooperation includes the PAC-3 system and the PAVE PAWS early warning radar. The Chinese government has consistently opposed the US BMD system and related cooperation with its Asian allies. In its 2010 National Defense White Paper, the Chinese government asserts, “China holds that no state should deploy overseas missile defense systems that have strategic missile defense capabilities or potential, or engage in any such international collaboration” (Information Office of the State Council 2010).

**Problematic Aspects of Cooperation on BMD**

The above discussion illustrates two kinds of BMD cooperation. One is represented by US cooperation with its European and Asian allies. This kind of cooperation identifies certain countries as potential enemies and aims to respond to common threats, whether tactical, such as conventional ballistic missiles launched from China, or strategic, such as nuclear missiles launched from North Korea or Iran. The other kind is the proposed plan of US/NATO–Russia cooperation. This type does not target any specific state, as its primary objective is to build trust between both sides and to maintain strategic stability.

There is a potential contradiction between the two forms of BMD