

The struggle for withdrawal of the THAAD System from Soseong-ri is a key link for peace in the Korea peninsula and Northeast Asia

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The ROK-US authorities introduced the ‘tailored deterrence strategy’ and 4D operation concept (that is, detect-disrupt-destroy-defense) in order to counter the alleged North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile threat, and are building the kill-chain and the triangular ROK-US-Japan missile defense network as a means to implement this strategy.

The ROK and US authorities’ fulgurous decision (July 2016) on the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) deployment was also in accordance with this US-led plan to establish ROK-US-Japan trilateral MD network which targets North Korea, China, and Russia. This is also proven by the December 2016 conclusion of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between ROK-Japan and the Pacific Dragon, which is the trilateral anti-ballistic missile detection/trace military drill.

However, the establishment of this trilateral MD network will inevitably necessitate North Korea-China-Russia’s build-up of the nuclear/missile capabilities. There will be unlimited arms race and heightened reliance on nuclear weapons in military operation. As a result, there will be nuclear confrontations in the Northeast Asia which will surpass the cold war era and our hope for peace will crumble.

The THAAD system in Soseong-ri has been constantly upgraded since its deployment in 2017. Based on the THAAD system, the United States further seeks to implement the United States Forces Korea Joint Emergent Operational Need (USFK JEON)/ Indo-Pacific Joint Emergent Operational Need.

Its purpose is to integrate the upper tier system (THAAD and Aegis BMDs) and the lower tier system (Patriot MSE). Through that USFK JEON aims at heighten the possibility of interception against North Korea short-range ballistic missile and US military troops in the Indo-Pacific region and the US mainland from the medium- and long-range missiles of North Korea and China.

According to USFK JEON, there will be a possibility that a THAAD launcher or radar would move or be additionally deployed in the places beyond Soseong-ri. Even though THAAD in Soseong-ri is in the temporal deployment status, completing neither land grant procedures nor (strategic) environmental impact assessment. Nevertheless, United States has been investing on THAAD upgrades and South Korean government has turned a blind eye to it.

The THAAD upgrades and USFK JEON increases the possibility of pre-emptive strikes against North Korea and heightens military tension and inter-Korean arms race, bearing the risk of breaking down of prior NK-SK/ NK-US agreements such as the Panmunjeom declaration, the inter-Korean military agreements, and the Singapore joint statement, any time.

The USFK THAAD upgrades, as well as ROK-US-Japan integrated MD and military alliance establishment, are directly contrary to the so called ‘three **NO** policies’ by the Moon Jae-in government – no additional deployment of THAAD batteries, no South Korean integration into a U.S. led regional missile defense system, and no trilateral alliance with US and Japan. Obviously, it will be hard to avoid increased military pressure and diplomatic and economic retaliations from China.

Further, if ROK-US authorities revise the ROK-US Combined Crisis Management Memorandum of Agreement to include the US emergencies in the managed crisis categories and if US intermediate-range ballistic missile are deployed in South Korea, northeast Asia will be engulfed in the zero-sum game which would surpass the cold war era and Korea will fall as a mere U.S. outpost on the northeast Asia.

The Abe government revealed its ambition to retain ‘enemy base attack capabilities’ at the pretext of North Korea nuclear/ missile threat, which would follow the creation of marines and retention of actual aircraft carriers. Needless to say, Abe government seeks to retain preemptive strike capability under the pretext of North Korea nuclear missile threat and to strengthen MD system, in order to realize its militaristic ambition by taking advantage of US Indo-Pacific strategy.

The struggle to prevent ROK-US-Japan MD system and trilateral alliance for which the withdrawal of THAAD in Soseong-ri comprises a key link is a critical struggle to stop the nuclear arms races in the Northeast Asia and to realize the peace in Korean peninsula. The struggle to shut down US base in Okinawa is the key struggle in prevention of the US-Japan domination in Asia and resurrection of militarism by Abe government in Japan.

For the peace of Northeast Asia, let us stand together shoulder to shoulder and keep our struggles continue. (End)