

## Theater Missile Defense and Cross-Strait Relations<sup>1</sup>

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### I. Introduction

In July 1995, the world saw the most serious confrontation between China and Taiwan since the cease-fire between two sides in the late 1950s. After the United States decided to issue visa to Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui to allow him to make a "private" visit to his alma mater, Cornell University, the Chinese government responded immediately by announcing a series of missile tests and military exercises to be conducted in the East China Sea. Although China explained the test was a part of routine military exercises in its "territorial waters," the actions were clearly intended to retaliate against Lee's visit to the US. In the next few weeks, the Second Artillery Corps of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducted at least three missile-launching tests from the inland province of Jiangxi. The target area was only eighty-five miles north of Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. Military analysts believed the missiles launched were M-9 type, a tactical ballistic missile with a range of four hundred miles.

Although the first round of the tests was often interpreted as Beijing's opposition to Lee Teng-hui's visit to the US, the second round and the consequent military exercises were clearly intended to intimidate the residents on Taiwan from voting pro-independence candidates in advance of Taiwan's first direct presidential election. On March 5, 1996, China announced another missile test in the Taiwan Strait. The target areas were even closer to the main island. One was only twenty-two miles north of the port city of Keelung, and the other was thirty-two miles west of Kaohsiung, the largest industrial city in Taiwan and the fourth largest container port terminal in the world. At least four M-9 missiles were fired in the test.

US President Bill Clinton responded to China's war games by sending two aircraft carrier battle groups to the region to prevent China from using force to attack Taiwan. In Taipei, the government placed all troops on high alert and began to evacuate the residents from Matsu, the islets close to the exercise region. The missile threat also produced substantial effects on Taiwan's economy. Taipei stock market dropped to a 31-month low after the announcement of the tests. Fearing that the crisis would cause a devaluation of Taiwan's currency, people crowded into banks to exchange for US dollars. Capital outflow from the island during the crisis period was estimated at US\$10 billion.

Ever since the Kuomintang government (KMT)—with its official name Republic of China, R.O.C.—withdrew to the island of Taiwan in 1949, the Taiwan Strait, with an average

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width of ninety miles, has successfully prevented the new Communist regime on the mainland from launching an invasion to “recover” the island. Even today, military experts still doubt if China will ever be capable of launching a massive landing warfare against Taiwan. It makes missile attacks a more economical and efficient option for Beijing in its campaign against Taiwan’s move toward independence. Although missile attacks alone cannot force Taiwan into submission, they at least will produce substantial psychological effects on the people of the island and may even force the Taiwanese government to the negotiation table. As a result China never stops the deployment of more short-range ballistic missiles in the coastal province opposite to Taiwan.

To the people on Taiwan, the crisis of 1995-6 revealed the island’s extreme vulnerability to missile attacks. Since the cross-strait relations have been in stagnation over the past few years, whether Taiwan should develop missile defense capability so as to stand against the military and political pressure from Beijing has become Taiwan’s foremost concern. At present, the US is conducting a series of experiments to develop theater missile defense (TMD) systems. If missile defense technologies are developed, it will be likely for the US to deploy the systems in the Asia-Pacific region. Taiwan’s participation in the US-proposed TMD looks like a perfect solution to the missile threat from China.

This paper attempts to explore two questions: First, how did the decision-makers in Taiwan look at the TMD issue, particularly its contributions to Taiwan’s security? Second, how did the TMD issue affect the relations between Taiwan and China, and the US policy toward East Asia? In my view, the popular support of participation in the TMD system in Taiwan is closely related to the rise of a new national identity in the process of the island’s democratization over the past decade. The rise of such identity justifies the policies to enhance the island’s defense capability and the strategy of continuous reliance on the US for Taiwan’s security. Therefore, deployment of a missile defense system is considered in Taiwan as a legitimate right to preserve its political system, economic prosperity and core values, rather than a strategic alliance with the US to contain the rise of China. Unfortunately, because Chinese leaders often view the TMD issue from a pure strategic perspective, they demonstrate a strong opposition to Taiwan’s participation in TMD. Therefore, in this paper I will argue that the discussions about TMD in Taiwan is largely a “political” issue, despite that a growing number of debates concentrate on technological aspects. Eventually, whether Taiwan will be allowed to join in the TMD will be determined by the relations between the US and China and the US grand strategy toward East Asia.

The following analysis consists of four parts: First I will introduce the evolution of the TMD issue in Taiwan in recent years. The purpose is to see how the stagnation of China-Taiwan relations has created a context for the rise of such debate. Next I will discuss different views on the TMD issue in Taiwan and compare the similarities and differences between them. It will be followed by a discussion of different understandings of the concept of security in Taiwan and China. Finally, I will formulate a non-realist perspective to interpret the TMD issue, hoping such a view may have insights for future studies on China-Taiwan relations or East Asian security. I certainly understand that there has been a confusion in the media between “lower-tier” missile defense systems, including the land-based missile defense system (PAC-3) and Navy Area Defense system (operated by AEGIS

ships) and “upper-tier” systems that are the focus of the current debates about National Missile Defense (NMD) in the US. In the following discussions, the word “TMD” will refer to all missile defense systems that have been discussed in Taiwan in the past few years. In certain sections, I will distinguish a lower from an upper-tier system when it is necessary to do so.

## II. The Evolution of the TMD Debate in Taiwan

### *Rise of the debate*

Since the Strait crisis in 1996, China has deployed more than 350 ballistic missiles in Fujian and Jiangxi, the provinces across the Taiwan Strait.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Taiwan only has three batteries of PAC-2 Plus system and has them deployed in the suburbs of Taipei. The PAC-2 Plus in Taiwan, also called Modified Air Defense System (MADS), is a more advanced version of the second-generation Patriot air-defense system.<sup>3</sup> The US has also in principle agreed to sell a more advanced early warning radar system to Taiwan in the near future. The new radar will further improve Taiwan’s capability in operating a newer version of lower-tier, land-based missile defense system, PAC-3—if the US eventually decides to transfer it to Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> Certain military experts pointed out what Taiwan really needed was the “upper-tier” Theater High Attitude Air Defense (THAAD) system, but it was unlikely for the US to transfer such technology to Taiwan in foreseeable future.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of Taiwan’s inclusion in the US-proposed TMD system first rose to surface in November 1997, when the US House of Representatives passed a bill (H.R. 2386) by a vote of 301-116, demanding Secretary of Defense to study and report to the Congress by July 1998 on the establishment and operation of a theater ballistic missile defense system in the Asia-Pacific region capable of protecting Taiwan from missile attacks and the possibility of transferring the system to Taiwan.<sup>6</sup>

Although the bill was not passed in the Senate, its content was later incorporated into the 1999 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 105-261). Again, the Congress required the Secretary of Defense to “conduct a study of architecture requirements for the establishment and operation of a theater missile defense system in the Asia-Pacific region that would have the capability to protect key regional allies of the United States.”<sup>7</sup> The key regional allies, according to the bill, include Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Officials from Taipei responded to both bills cautiously, saying the Taiwan had never received a formal invitation from the US on the joint development of a ballistic missile

<sup>2</sup> *China Times News* (Chung Kuo Shi Pao) (Taipei), April 3, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> David Shambaugh, “Taiwan’s Security: Maintaining Deterrence Amid Political Accountability,” *China Quarterly*, (March 1997), 255.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Christenson, “Theater Missile Defense and Taiwan’s Security,” *Orbis*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Winter 2000), 79-80.

<sup>5</sup> *China Times News*, January 3, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> *Liberty Times* (Tzu You Shi Pao) (Taipei), November 8, 1997, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Martin L. Lasater, “Theater Missile Defense and Taiwan’s Security,” in Lasater ed., *Taiwan’s Security in the Post-Deng Xiaoping Era* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 2000), 251.

defense system. Political analysts, on the other hand, interpreted the passing of both bills as a symbolic gesture of the US support of Taiwan. Such a support became necessary after Chinese President Jiang Zemin made a successful visit to the US earlier in July.<sup>8</sup> Military leaders in Taiwan did not show much enthusiasm about upper-tier TMD, partly because they realized the technology did not yet exist, and because the project was too costly for Taiwan's limited defense budget.<sup>9</sup> Participation in the US-proposed TMD project, military experts believe, would produce an "expelling effect" on other critical military projects and delayed the entire military modernization agenda.<sup>10</sup> In a public hearing, Defense Minister Chiang Chong-Lin even called the TMD system a "money sucking machine" (*qian-keng*).<sup>11</sup>

### *From suspicion to endorsement*

Generally speaking, because of the ambiguous attitude of the US and the opposition of key military leaders in Taiwan, notably Defense Minister Chiang Chong-ling, Taipei had shown little enthusiasm in joining the US-proposed TMD system in the very beginning. However, since mid-1998 Taipei's attitude had dramatically changed. It is still unclear what caused the change, but it was apparent that the growing number of missiles deployed by China forced Taiwan's leaders to seriously consider the necessity of a missile defense system. In July 1998, Defense Minister Chiang Chong-ling for the first time declared the necessity of a ballistic-missile defense system for Taiwan, and he asked the US officials to provide information so as to allow Taiwanese military to assess the feasibility of joining in TMD.<sup>12</sup> It is a signal that military leaders started to consider TMD seriously. Later the Ministry of National Defense (MND) spokesman Kong Fan-Ting confirmed that Taiwan would be interested in joining in the TMD, but would place acquisition of a lower-tier system at top priority.<sup>13</sup> According to Taiwanese media, the change of Taiwan's attitude toward TMD was fostered by the rising influence of certain political and military leaders who had demonstrated a favorable position toward TMD. As a result, the General Staff Headquarters established a core group in January 1999 to study the issue and was reported to send delegations to the US to visit the facilities conducting experiments on missile defense.<sup>14</sup>

When General Tang Fei became Defense Minister in February 1999, he demonstrated a more flexible attitude toward TMD than that of his predecessors.<sup>15</sup> Tang believed that a TMD system, if it were to succeed, would serve as a reliable deterrent against future missile attacks from China. Tang emphasized that even if the confrontation across the Taiwan Strait is political by nature, Taiwan should not rely on a political solution and undermine the possibility of military conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Later Tang confirmed that Taiwan had been studying and developing an indigenous lower-tier missile defense system. The system was based on the

<sup>8</sup> *Liberty Times*, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Chen Ding-chung, "TMD: National Defense for the Twentieth Century," *Public Views on National Defense* (Chuan Min Kan Guo Fang) (Taipei), Dec. 1999, 103.

<sup>10</sup> *China Times News* (Taipei), December 23, 1998, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *China Times News*, January 12, 1999, 3.

<sup>12</sup> *The Commons Daily* (Ming Chung Ri Pao)(Taipei), July 8, 1998, 2.

<sup>13</sup> *China Times News*, December 2, 1998, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Liberty Times*, January 11, 1999, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Chen Ding-chung, *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>16</sup> *The Commons Daily*, February 10, 1999, 2.

existing Patriot-2 system and the Tian-Kung (Sky Bow) air-defense missile developed by Taiwan's Chun-Shan Institute of Science and Technology. In addition to the development of an indigenous lower-tier missile defense system, Taiwan had asked the US to transfer the more advanced PAC-3 system and four Arleigh Burke-class destroyers equipped with the AEGIS battle management system.<sup>17</sup> In August 1999, President Lee Teng-hui even declared that the establishment of a missile defense system would “not only respond to current needs but also fulfill the long-term interest of Taiwan.”<sup>18</sup> It was the first time the highest leader of Taiwan made a public endorsement of a missile defense system.<sup>19</sup> Right after Lee's remarks on missile defense, officials from MND announced that the budget for a missile defense system would be proposed in the fiscal year of 2000, and the priority was to establish a lower-tier missile defense system.<sup>20</sup>

### *DPP government's attitude toward TMD*

The TMD issue became more important in the year 2000, when Chen Shui-bian, the candidate from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was elected as Taiwan's new president. After Chen's inauguration, he attempted not to provoke Beijing by announcing that he would not declare formal independence during his term, and he made a few overtures to Beijing, hoping that the semi-official talks between two sides could resume. Beijing responded to Chen's proposals coldly. Instead, they insisted that Taiwan had to accept the “One China Principle” first: there is only “One” China and Taiwan is an inseparable part of it. Beijing made it clear that recognition of the “One China Principle” was the prerequisite for reopening of the semi-official talks. Chinese insistence of the “One China” principle, however, seemed unacceptable to President Chen and his DPP colleagues, who believed that “One China” principle should be one of the issues discussed on the negotiation table rather than a prerequisite for negotiation.

In dealing with the TMD issue, the new DPP government adopted a flexible but more positive attitude. In an interview with CNN in March 2001, Premier Chang Chun-hsiung argued that whether Taiwan should join in TMD would be decided by a consensus of the general public. As long as China's deployment of hundreds of ballistic missiles in Fujian province continued to pose a serious threat to Taiwan, it was legitimate for Taiwan to protect itself against possible missile attacks.<sup>21</sup> President Chen Shui-bian made a similar argument by emphasizing that since China's military threat to Taiwan is imminent, a reliable missile defense system is crucial to the security of the island.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the insistence on the right to acquire missile defense system for self-defense, a number of security experts asserted that Taipei should shift its focus from evaluating the possibility of joining in the development of the upper-tier programs in previous years to acquiring lower-tier systems first, particularly

<sup>17</sup> *The Commons Daily*, May 11, 1999, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Bodeen, “Taiwan Leaders Backs Missile Defense,” Associated Press, August 18, 1999, in <http://www.taiwansecurity.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Oung Ming-hsien, “TMD and the Security Environment of the Asia-Pacific,” *Public Views on National Defense*, Sep. 1999, 59.

<sup>20</sup> *United Daily News* (Lian Ho Pao) (Taipei), August 18, 1999, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Taiwan Daily* (Taiwan Ri Pao) (Taipei), March 23, 2001, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Bill Gertz, “Taiwan Calls for a Joint Missile Defense,” *Washington Times*, July 16, 2001. [www.taiwansecurity.org](http://www.taiwansecurity.org)

the sea-based AEGIS platform and PAC-3 missile defense system.<sup>23</sup> There has been a debate among military experts over the necessity of purchasing four AEGIS destroyers as supplement to the existing land-based Patriot missile defense system. The advocates believe that a sea-based TMD system can provide an active defense against ballistic missiles on a mobile basis, while the opponents argue that AEGIS destroyer is too big and too expensive to meet Taiwan's defense needs.

Because of Taipei's shifting focus from upper to lower-tier missile defense system, the battle over TMD entered a new stage in April 2001, when the new Bush administration approached a deadline to decide whether to sell four AEGIS destroyers and PAC-3 missile defense batteries to Taiwan in the annual US-Taiwan arms talk. Before the final decision was made, Beijing expressed a serious concern over the issue, arguing that an approval of selling PAC-3 and AEGIS ships would only encourage the pro-independence movements on Taiwan and trigger an arms race across the Taiwan Strait. There was also a considerable opposition voice in the Bush administration.<sup>24</sup> President Bush did not approve the deal eventually. Instead, he agreed to sell Taiwan four Kidd-class destroyers. Although Taipei finally accepted the offer, a number of opposition lawmakers still showed strong opposition to the purchase, saying that Kidd-class ships cannot meet Taiwan's defense needs and Taiwan should wait for another year to see if the US will be willing to sell the AEGIS system and PAC-3 missiles.<sup>25</sup>

Taiwanese leaders understand that participation in the TMD system is different from previous arms sales between Taiwan and the US. An effective missile defense system will fundamentally transform the nature of military balance across the Taiwan Strait and even incorporate Taiwan into an American missile defense network in the Asia Pacific. Therefore, whether Taiwan will acquire TMD system will be determined not only by the will of Taiwanese people alone, but also by the attitudes of other big powers in the region, particularly the US, China, and Japan. In fact, on various occasions Japan has demonstrated strong opposition to including Taiwan into joint development of the upper-tier TMD system.<sup>26</sup> Military leaders in Taiwan, however, tend to focus on the acquisition of a "lower-tier" missile defense system first, which seems less controversial under current political circumstances. In terms of an upper-tier TMD, both political and military leaders believe that Taiwan should "wait and see if the system really works" before making a final decision. The "strategic ambiguity" explains Taipei's attitude toward the TMD issue at present.

In the US, security experts and political leaders are aware of the threat Chinese ballistic missiles posed to Taiwan, and they believe a strong defensive capability for Taiwan will probably force Chinese leaders to change its intimidating strategy. Consequently, the US government has never renounced the possibility of transferring TMD system to Taiwan or even placing the island under the American missile defense umbrella. The Congressional

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<sup>23</sup> Chung Chien "Lower-Tier TMD System is Necessary for the Security of Taiwan Strait," *The Forum of the New Century Think Tank* (Hsin Shi Ji Chi Ku Lun Tan), No. 7 (Taipei), September 30, 1999, 86-90.

<sup>24</sup> David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt, "Bush Team Urges Holding Off Ship Radar Sale to Taiwan," *New York Times* (on-line version: [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)), April 18, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> *China Times News*, April 26, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> *China Times News*, January 13, 1999, 13; March 10, 1999, 2.

pressure is perhaps another reason that the US government has never promised to Beijing that the US will never sell TMD systems to Taipei.<sup>27</sup> Just like Taiwan, the US has also maintained an ambiguous position on the possibility of incorporating Taiwan into the US-dominated upper-tier TMD system in the Asia Pacific region in the future.

In the following part, I will further elaborate the views from those for and against the TMD system for Taiwan. The purpose is to help us better understand how the issue has been understood in Taiwan and how both positions have affected the attitudes of political as well as military leaders in considering the participation in the TMD system.

### III. Current TMD Debate in Taiwan

#### *Arguments for Taiwan's participation in TMD*

The primary reason for Taiwan to participate in the TMD system is the growing missile threat from China. In 1999, Taiwan's intelligence agencies estimated that China has deployed 100-200 ballistic missiles, and the number would reach 600 by the year 2005.<sup>28</sup> In July 2001, Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian claimed that China had deployed about 300 short-range ballistic missiles in Fujian province, and that the number was still rising by 50-70 missiles per year. Although the missiles deployed (mainly M-9 and M-11 type) were developed long time ago, their accuracy and reliability have been greatly improved in recent years.<sup>29</sup> Besides, China has also devoted to the development of the more sophisticated cruise missiles. As long as these missiles continue to point at Taiwan, it is hard for Taiwan to relinquish the right to develop a missile defense system.

Deployment of a TMD system has its political as well as strategic significance for Taiwan. An effective missile defense system will allow Taiwan to be able to stand against both military and political pressure from China. TMD advocates in Taiwan tend to make an analogy that a missile defense system is like a "protective shield" in sci-fi movies—both are pure "defensive" by nature, thus posing no threat to anyone. A shield will not function until being hit by a bullet. From Taiwan's point of view, a TMD system will not be used as long as China does not launch a missile strike against Taiwan.<sup>30</sup>

With a closer look, we will find that Taiwan's attitude toward TMD has been closely intertwined with ups and downs in cross-strait relations. Ever since President Lee Teng-hui's visit to the US in 1995, the relationship between Taipei and Beijing had come to a deadlock. The tension started to ease in October 1998, when Koo Chen-fu, chairman of the Straits Exchange Foundation of Taiwan, visited Beijing and met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. China agreed to let Wang Daohan, chairman of the Association for Relations across

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<sup>27</sup> In addition to the US-Taiwan Anti-Ballistic Defense Cooperation Act and the 1999 National Defense Authorization Act mentioned earlier, the House of Representatives passed the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act in early 2000, despite the warning from the White House that the bill would eventually be vetoed by the president.

<sup>28</sup> FLAK, "Establishing Taiwan's Missile Defense Network," *Military Expert* (Jun Shi Jia)(Taipei) No. 185, (January 2000), 53.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, *ibid.*, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Su Chin-Chiang, "The Impact of TMD on East Asia Strategic Environment and Taiwan's Response," *The Forum of the New Century Think Tank* (Hsin Shi Ji Chi Ku Lun Tan)(Taipei) March 20, 1999.

the Taiwan Strait in China, to visit Taipei in the fall of 1999. However, in an interview with Deutsche Welle, a German radio station, in July 1999, President Lee challenged Beijing by characterizing the relations between Taiwan and China as “special state-to-state relationship.” This new interpretation of the cross-strait relations, often labeled by the media as “Two States Theory,” infuriated the leadership in Beijing who in turn determined Lee’s remarks as a prelude to formal independence. In response, China intensified its military pressure on Taiwan. On August 2, the Chinese media reported that the PLA had just completed a successful launch of a new Dongfeng-31 long-range ballistic missile. The launch was interpreted by many in Taiwan as a psychological warfare directed against Taiwan.<sup>31</sup> President Lee’s public endorsement of the development of a missile defense system the week after was a direct response to the successful launch of Dongfeng-31 missile.

In addition, many in Taiwan believe that Taiwan’s participation in the US-proposed TMD system will further strengthen the strategic relations with the US and even place Taiwan under direct protection of the US. When the US decided to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, it terminated the formal commitment to the security of Taiwan built upon a mutual defense treaty signed in 1954. Although the US continues to play a critical role in maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait, it has never treated Taiwan as a formal ally. Taiwan’s participation in the US-proposed TMD system will improve the ambiguous relations between the US and Taiwan and bring the latter into the American defense network in Asia-Pacific. As China may rise to be a new military power and pose a serious threat to security of the region in the future, a close strategic relationship between the US and Taiwan will serve as an effective deterrent.

From technological point of view, Taiwan’s participation in the TMD will greatly enhance Taiwan’s military capabilities. Many in Taiwan believe that since Taiwan is determined to develop a missile defense capability, it will be cheaper to purchase the system from the US than developing an indigenous system. TMD is a complicated system that involves extensive coordination among advanced sensor, communication and intercepting capabilities. Taiwan’s participation in TMD will allow Taiwan to ask the US for technological assistance, which in turn will further improve Taiwan’s capability in advanced military technology.<sup>32</sup> Chen Ting-Chung, a retired army general in Taiwan, argued that the effectiveness of a TMD system is determined by the coordination among an early-warning system, locating and tracking capability, and a rapid and a reliable intercept missile system. Among these technologies, military satellite plays a critical role in the early stage because it helps detect the launch of a missile and sends the information to the commanding center on the ground. If Taiwan is allowed to join in the TMD system, the US will have to share its satellite capability with Taiwan. Therefore, Taiwan will not only become a formal ally to the US but also rise one of the original developers of missile defense technologies in the world.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review 2000*, (Tokyo, Japan: NIDS, 2000), 232-7.

<sup>32</sup> Lin Tzu Yang, *Missile Defense and National Security* (Feidan Fangyu yu Guojia Anquan)(Taipei: Youth, 2000), 119.

<sup>33</sup> Chen Ting Chung, “National Defense in the twentieth first Century: Theater Missile Defense,” *Public Views on National Defense*, Dec. 1999, 103.



*Arguments against Taiwan's participation in TMD*

Interestingly, those who demonstrate opposition to Taiwan's joining in the TMD have also raised their views from strategic and technological perspectives, but for different reasons. First, they argue that the inclusion of Taiwan in the TMD system will fundamentally change the military balance across the Taiwan Strait, thus making the situation less controllable in the future. Even if the US decides to transfer TMD-related technology to Taiwan right now, it will take about ten years to deploy the system.<sup>34</sup> Beijing may be forced to solve the Taiwan issue quickly before the TMD system becomes operational. Furthermore, a TMD for Taiwan will trigger an arms race across the Taiwan Strait, and Chinese leaders have constantly warned the US that kind of scenario. Therefore, certain military experts believe that it is unwise for Taiwan to pursue a missile defense for it will only destabilize the cross-strait relations.

Another view is that an upper-tier TMD system is unlikely to succeed. The high speed of ballistic missiles makes it extremely difficult for scientists to utilize existing technologies to intercept and destroy them. Even the experiments have shown that it is possible to develop a technology to "hit a bullet with a bullet", it cannot promise to intercept all incoming missiles. Besides, most military leaders are still convinced that the offensive side can always outnumber and outperform the defensive side. Given the fact that it will only take a five to seven minutes for an M-9 missile to reach Taiwan, a missile defense system only has a few minutes to respond. If one missile penetrate into the defense net, the whole system will fail.

Some people believe that the deployment of a TMD in Taiwan will only outrage China and force it to adopt more radical means. China may attempt to regain strategic supremacy by either deploying more missiles opposite to Taiwan or developing other weapons that can escape the sensor of the ballistic-missile defense system, particularly the cruise missile. Taiwan's Defense Minister Tang Fei pointed out that since China had devoted to developing cruise missile, Taiwan should place emphasis on developing a system capable of intercepting both tactical ballistic and cruise missiles.<sup>35</sup> As the trajectory of a short-range ballistic missile (such as M-9) is too flat to be intercepted by an upper-tier missile defense system, there is a considerable doubt about the necessity of an upper-tier missile defense for Taiwan.

Among the views against Taiwan's participation in the TMD system, money is the biggest reason. In 1999, Defense Minister Tang declared that Taiwan had decided to spend NT\$ 300 billion (US\$ 8.8 billion) in the next ten years to establish an indigenous lower-tier missile defense system capable of intercepting seventy percent of incoming missiles.<sup>36</sup> If Taiwan decides to acquire the upper-tier system, the costs will be much higher. As described above, former Defense Minister Chiang Chong-ling once declared that a TMD is a "money-

<sup>34</sup> Huang Chie-Cheng, "Does Taiwan Need TMD?" *Liberty Times*, December 1, 1998, 15.

<sup>35</sup> *The Commons Daily*, August 24, 1999, 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

sucking machine.” This view is widely supported by a number of generals who believe the top priority for Taiwan’s defense plan is to improve the efficiency of conventional weapons, particularly communication capabilities, rather than pursuing a sophisticated missile defense system. Even if Taiwan decides to limit its missile defense program at certain level, the costs may still be high. For instance, Taiwan had considered converting one of the newly built destroyers into an AEGIS-class missile defense platform a few years ago, and the US had agreed to transfer related technology, but the project was cancelled because of the huge cost and technological obstacles.<sup>37</sup>

A public poll conducted in Taiwan in March 1999 showed that about 86 percent of the residents supported Taiwan’s participation in TMD.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that the majority of the people on Taiwan are in favor of TMD, there has been lack of a serious discussion, particularly among political leaders, about the strategic and political implications of Taiwan’s participation in TMD. Although above discussions analyzed the issues from technological, strategic, and political perspectives, in the following sections I will focus only on strategic and political aspects of the issue, to see how the current debates about TMD in Taiwan is embedded in a particular understanding of security, which in turn is deeply rooted in the tension across the Taiwan Strait. Lack of mutual trust between Taiwan and China, unfortunately, further limits the strategists’ discussions of the issue and leads them to make realist-oriented judgments. The popular support of continuous military build-ups in Taiwan, as revealed in the TMD debate, only reflects the anti-China sentiment on Taiwan that the island country’s autonomy should be preserved and cannot be sacrificed under any circumstance. From Beijing’s point of view, however, Taiwan’s security is built upon China’s “insecurity”, because many in China see any change of the current cross-strait military balance to be an obstacle to ultimate unification, upon which the modern Chinese state is established.

#### **IV. Rethinking the Meaning of Security**

After examining the views from those for and against TMD, it becomes apparent that the TMD issue can be well explained by the propositions of the realist tradition in international relations theory. Realists highlight the impacts of military and security issues on world politics and argue that states act to maximize their influence in the name of national interest. The major difference among realists lies in their relative emphasis given to human nature and structure. Classical realists like Hans Morgenthau emphasize the negative effects of human nature and inappropriateness of applying moral principles into analysis of international politics. Structural realists, such as Kenneth Waltz, elaborate the assumptions of anarchy and balance of power to explain the change of power relations in the international system.

Since most security experts agree that the Taiwan Strait is still an area largely determined by military power, it makes realist interpretations of the issue more attractive

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<sup>37</sup> Lin Chong-dar, An Analysis and Evolution of Taiwan’s TMD Project, *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 7 (July 1999), 18.

<sup>38</sup> *China Times*, March 15, 1999, 4.

than that of liberals. Some scholars may claim that since it is unclear if China will launch a missile strike against Taiwan in the future, it is necessary for the US to transfer the TMD technology to Taiwan to prevent China from launching such attacks. Moreover, Taiwan's participation in the US-proposed missile defense system will allow the US to establish a broad regional defense network to maintain its strategic preponderance in East Asia. This view is based on the presumptions that American military presence is still crucial to the stability of the region and that China may eventually rise to challenge the US supremacy. Those who oppose TMD often argue that Taiwan's deployment of TMD will create a "security dilemma" in the region: when a state seeks to strengthen its security by improving its military capability, it will trigger similar reactions in other countries. The consequence is that all states decide to build more arms because they feel less secure. The possibility for military conflicts will only increase. Therefore, pessimistic realists argue that it will be unwise for Taiwan to deploy a missile defense system.<sup>39</sup>

In my view, even though realists offer an accurate description of the situation in the Taiwan Strait, their arguments are too determinate to be applied to Taiwan. Realist interpretations of the TMD issue is based on a particular understanding of security in which the strategic relationship between China and the US is the determinate factor in influencing the security environment of the region. The realist argument does not sufficiently capture the intentions of the people on Taiwan in constructing their conception of security that has been conditioned by the confrontation between Taiwan and China over the past five decades.

Therefore, what we need to find out is not *whether* TMD is necessary for Taiwan's defense, but why the general public on Taiwan prefers to rely on American support—as demonstrated in the TMD issue—for enhancing the security of island rather than seek a political reconciliation with China. Central to this question is the meaning of "security" and "threat" perceived by the people on Taiwan and China. The gap between Taiwan and China on the referent object of security and the means to achieving security are the main reasons that make TMD issue easily fall into the realist version of the world. Before exploring the conception of security in Taiwan and China, it is necessary for us to explore the meaning of security and how the concept has been understood in the field of international relations.

As Barry Buzan points out, the large amount of literature on national security and its significance in politics does not make it easy for scholars to have an agreed general definition.<sup>40</sup> One popular definition by Arnold Wolfers that "security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values; in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked" does not tell us *whom* and *what values* are to be secured.<sup>41</sup> Under the influence of realism, mainstream security scholars often take the sovereign state as the primary referent object of security, and military force as a valuable instrument for states to pursue security. As Stephen Walt argues, "Organized force has been a central part of human existence for millennia and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Any

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Christenson, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991), 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaborations: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 150.

attempt to understand the evolution of human society must take account of the role of military force.” Consequently, security studies are narrowly defined as “the study of threat, use, and control of military force.”<sup>42</sup>

Walt’s definition of security and security studies received several criticisms. Edward Kolodziej argues that Walt’s argument limits the objects of study to a highly selective realm and underestimate relevant theories needed to understand and explain what security is.<sup>43</sup> David Baldwin also points out that there exists a need for broadening the scope and definition of security to meet the changes in the post-Cold War environment. By broadening the scope and definition of security, some scholars advocate that new threats to international security, such as environmental deterioration, food and energy shortage, rising ethnic conflicts, terrorism, and poverty in Third World countries should all be included in security studies.<sup>44</sup>

Lack of consensus on the meaning of security also creates epistemological problems in the field. Critical security scholars often claim that realism-inspired security studies only reflect a particular understanding of threat and security, that the international environment is anarchic by nature and that sovereign states are subjects to be secured. For instance, Keith Krause and Michael Williams point out that the realist claim about security is the result of its epistemological position, one which views anarchy and the state as objective realities in international relations and that claims to search for timeless, objective causal laws to explain the human phenomena. Eventually, as they conclude, “grasping the contemporary meaning and nature of security means coming to terms with the historical dynamics that constitute contemporary world politics, and the way security is understood within the dominant modes of contemporary thought.”<sup>45</sup> Ronnie Lipschutz also argues that an attempt to define security or search for a referent object of security eventually becomes a product of historical development and processes.

Among those critical approaches in security studies, constructivists call for an attention to ideational factors in explaining international politics because they believe material resources only acquire their meanings for human actions through construction of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.<sup>46</sup> Although a radical constructivist view rejects all the bases of rationality-based knowledge and attributes all the phenomena in human society into discursive power, a more conventional constructivist view does not reject scientific knowledge. Instead, they put their emphasis on the salience of norm and identity in explaining the interest and behavior of actors in the international society.<sup>47</sup> Norm establishes

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Walt, “The Renaissance of Security Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 35 (1991), 212-213.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Kolodziej, “The Renaissance of Security Studies? Caveat Lactor!” *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 36 (1992), 421.

<sup>44</sup> David A. Baldwin, “Security Studies and the End of the Cold War,” *World Politics* 48 (October 1995), 117-141.

<sup>45</sup> Keith Krause and Michael Williams, *Critical Security Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 36.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security*, vol.20, no.1 (Summer 1995), 73.

<sup>47</sup> Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security*, vol.23,

expectations about who the actors are in a particular context and what behavior they will have. Identity as a self-image held by an actor and formed through the relations with others functions as a crucial link between the environment and the interest of actors.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike realists who often place the “survival of the state” as the ultimate goal to the studies of international security, constructivist theorists argue that the meanings of “threat” and “security” discussed by realists only reflect a state-centered and military-focused understanding of the world. By applying a constructivist approach to the study of East Asian security, Muthiah Alagappa argues that ideational factors, especially the consideration of identity and historical legacy, can complement the realist explanations of Asian security and provide a deeper understanding of security concerns in the region. His framework, which he calls “structure of security,” consists of three interrelated elements:

1. The referent object of security (who is to be secured?)
2. The scope of security (what values are to be secured, what types of threat are to be deterred, and what is the nature of security?)
3. The approach to enhance security (how is security to be achieved?)<sup>49</sup>

Alagappa’s structure of security provides a very practical framework for scholars to clarify some fundamental issues in empirical security studies. To apply Alagappa’s framework to Taiwan, we may see “the Taiwanese nation” has replaced “regime” as the primary referent object of security. As Roger Cliff points out, the conceptions of security in Taiwan have inevitably centered on two issues: the question of the national identity—whether “Taiwan” or “China” represents the proper identity of the nation— and the relationship with mainland China.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand, political developments of Taiwan over the past decades made many to believe that separation of the island from the mainland has created a distinctive identity for the inhabitants on the island. Compared to the past KMT regime that placed the preservation of its rule on Taiwan as top security objective, most political leaders today see Taiwan’s existence and autonomy from the mainland as the primary objective of security.

On the other hand, the security of Taiwan, to a large extent, is still determined by the political atmosphere across the Taiwan Strait. As long as China continues to treat Taiwan as a renegade province and refuses to renounce the use of force as ultimate means to achieve the goal of unification, Taiwan has no choice but to place military aspect of security as primary concern. However, as Alagappa points out, although the primacy of military security seems to make traditional realist propositions more convincing than other theories in explaining the

no.1 (Summer, 1998), 172; Jeffrey T. Checkel, “The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory,” *World Politics* 50 (January 1998), 324-28.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security,” in Katzenstein ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 53-65.

<sup>49</sup> Muthiah Alagappa, “Introduction,” in Alagappa ed., *Asian Security Practices: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 16.

<sup>50</sup> Roger Cliff, “Taiwan: In the Dragon’s Shadow,” in Alagappa ed., *Asian Security Practice*, *ibid.*, 289.

rivalry between Taiwan and China, the nature of the rivalry can hardly be explained by material capabilities alone.<sup>51</sup>

In terms of the approaches to enhance Taiwan's security, there exist three options for Taiwan. The first is to maintain a strong indigenous defense capability, the second is to develop a close security relationship with the US, and the third is to promote an international support for Taiwan's autonomy. Taiwan's security strategy over the past few years can be understood as realization of these three approaches.

In the following part, I will further elaborate the rise and development of the Taiwanese identity, to see how such an identity becomes an incentive for Taiwan to pursue defense capability. The purpose is to analyze the cross-Strait stalemate from their historical roots, rather than from geopolitical concerns as advocated by realist scholars.

### *Clashes between the Taiwanese Identity and the Chinese Patriotism*

The residents on Taiwan today are descendants of the Chinese settlers who came to the island between the early seventeenth and the late nineteenth century. In 1895, when the Qing government decided to cede Taiwan to Japan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki, there was a considerable agitation on the island against the transfer of the sovereignty without the consent of the local residents. During the five decades of the colonial rule, local Taiwanese people's resistance against Japan was consistent and violent. In order to reduce local people's hatred against Japan, Japanese colonizers established a modern education system which helped create a large number of intellectuals in the society, who later became the pioneers of Taiwanese nationalistic movements. When Japan surrendered in 1945, the Allies decided to return Taiwan to the KMT government in China. At first, the local Taiwanese welcomed KMT officials and troops as liberators, but they soon found these Chinese compatriots were very corrupt and the troops were undisciplined. Mismanagement of the KMT government also created serious inflation and unemployment on the island. Tensions between the native Taiwanese and the mainlanders suddenly escalated and finally led to the outbreak of the "2-28 Incident."<sup>52</sup>

The KMT government's misrule of Taiwan after 1945 created two substantial effects. First, because the regime declared itself "the heir of the orthodox Chinese civilization," some local Taiwanese turned their hatred from the KMT regime and mainlanders to all the things about China. They blamed China for bringing a tragic history and endless suffering to the Taiwanese people. In this respect, the image of China has been transformed from that of a beloved "motherland" to that of an enemy. Democratization in Taiwan since the late 1980s further strengthened the image shared among the local people that Taiwan had been different from China. As opposition leaders criticized KMT government's claim of representing the

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<sup>51</sup> Alagappa, *ibid.*, 665.

<sup>52</sup> On February 28, 1947, people gathered in Taipei to protest against the government for an accidental shooting of a civilian by the police. The protest soon turned into an uprising against the KMT regime. Chiang Kai-shek sent fifty thousand troops to Taiwan to suppress the revolt. More than 20,000 Taiwanese people were killed; most of them were intellectuals and professionals. See: Kho Ket-tun, *Taiwan Jindai Fazhan Shi (The History of Taiwan)* (Taipei: Chien-Wei, 1996), 455-458, 461-464, 471-474.

entire China to be too unrealistic, they believed that Taiwan should abandon the illusion of unification and build for itself a wealthy and democratic society. By the mid-1980s Taiwanese nationalism had developed into a multi-faceted movement involving the revival of Taiwanese culture, ideas of democracy, and the demand for Taiwanese national self-determination.

The anti-Communist propaganda imposed by the KMT regime in Taiwan created a second effect: the local people have developed a strong aversion to Communism and the Communist government on the mainland. Even though Beijing adjusted its policy toward Taiwan from “armed liberation” to “peaceful unification” in the late 1970s and formulated the “one country, two systems” framework for future unification, Taiwan never responded with enthusiasm. According to Beijing’s plan, Taiwan will be able to keep its administrative, legislative, and judicial powers, military forces, and economic system after unification. However, since the central government remains in Beijing, Taiwan would have no right to represent itself in the international society. As Beijing’s proposal relegates Taiwan into a local government under the PRC, it has no appeal to either the KMT government or the people on Taiwan. Most people have little confidence in Beijing’s promises. Instead, they believe if Taiwan gets unified with the mainland on Beijing’s conditions, they will lose their prosperity, autonomy, even personal security.

Realizing that a true democracy was essential for maintaining the development and stability of the society, President Chiang Ching-kuo finally agreed to abandon martial law in 1987. After Lee Teng-hui succeeded Chiang as the president and chairman of the KMT Party in January 1988, he boldly launched a series of political reforms that eventually led to the birth of a new democracy. The greatest achievement of Lee, however, was the “Taiwanization” of political apparatus. Unlike his predecessors, Lee recruited many of the local elite into the government and the ruling party. He spoke Taiwanese and promoted the new Taiwanese identity on public occasions. In an interview with Japanese journalist Shiba Ryotaro in 1993, Lee even admitted that the KMT had been an “alien regime.”<sup>53</sup>

Pro-independence opinions have gradually emerged as the most prominent platform in political realm. This trend can be observed from the changes in both internal and external circumstances. Domestically, because of the relaxation of governmental control over the media, pro-independence opinions have prevailed rapidly in newspapers and on TV shows and radio broadcasts. Several dozen pro-independence groups have emerged and become active in politics. By 1995 DPP had become the second largest party on Taiwan (only next to the KMT) and was able to gain one third of the votes in most national elections. The presidential election of 2000 marked the real breakthrough of Taiwan’s democratization. DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian won the election and became the new president of the ROC. The KMT was ousted from power after fifty-five years of rule on the island.

In order to reduce to the suspicion from those voters who fear the power transfer in Taiwan will eventually lead the island to a war with China, DPP leaders have adjusted the policy from “pursuing the *de jure* independence of Taiwan” to “recognizing the *de facto* independence.” Although political developments in Taiwan over the past ten years have

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<sup>53</sup> Shiba Ryotaro, *Taiwan Ji Hsing (A Recording of the Taiwan Tour)* (Taipei: Dong-Fan, 1995), 531.

helped consolidate a new national identity, yet they have intensified the distrust across the Taiwan Strait. A popular view in China is that Taiwan's democratization allows certain politicians to manipulate the issue for their own political gains. By playing "Taiwan Independence" cards, President Lee Teng-hui and his successor Chen Shui-bian were able to establish a popular support in the society and led Taiwan into a perpetuated confrontation with mainland China.

From constructivist point of view, Chinese claim of Taiwan's return is the result of a construction of a Chinese self-image in the process of China's interactions with the outside world, particular the influence of humiliations by imperialists in the past century and the pursuit of returning to national glory. In China, students have been taught since elementary school that Taiwan is part of China and only temporarily separated from its motherland. Recovery of Taiwan has been considered as a sacred goal and the final step toward national unity. In explaining the current situation across the Taiwan Strait, however, Chinese views become strictly realist, seeing Taiwan's separation as a serious challenge to the security of the Chinese state. On the one hand, Chinese are convinced that Taiwan's independence will trigger a chain reaction in China: Tibetans, Uighurs and other minorities will all demand the right to self-determination, and the consequence is the collapse of the Chinese state. Fearing that China will become another Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, Chinese leaders often place state integrity at top priority, and the recovery of Taiwan becomes an important symbol for achieving that goal. On the other hand, many people in China believe that granting Taiwan the right to independence will further push Taiwan to the American side and allow the US to establish a defensive line to contain China at its coast. Chinese realists seem to believe Taiwan's strategic position and the nature of great-power rivalry decide the fate of the island. As long as the U.S. continues to use Taiwan as a pawn to maintain its influence in the region, there is no reason for China to give up the claim of Taiwan's return.

## **V. Looking at the TMD Issue from A Non-realist Perspective**

From above discussions, we may conclude that TMD for Taiwan is a far more complicated issue than the considerations of the island's defense needs. The popular support of TMD in Taiwan can be attributed to a distorted development of cross-strait relations since 1995, when President Lee Teng-hui's "flexible diplomacy" forced China to adopt a more assertive strategy toward Taiwan. Fearing that Taiwan's democratization will eventually lead to independence, Chinese leaders became convinced that an intimidating strategy is necessary. They certainly understand that missile threat will not bring Taiwan back, but they believe such a pressure is an effective way to maintain the status quo. To the people on Taiwan, the military threat from China only reinforces the commitment to self-defense. Development of a missile defense system, being it lower or upper-tier, is justified as a divine right to preserve Taiwan's self-identity, autonomy, and core values. From this point of view, the TMD issue in Taiwan has little significance in strategic sense, but is more related to the rise of a new national identity and intensifying competitions in politics. TMD issue becomes a tool for politicians, who often publicize their support of the system to demonstrate their loyalty to Taiwan. Those who do not support TMD are easily criticized because voters tend to label them as sympathizers to Beijing. This view provides certain evidence for us to



explain why there has never been a serious debate about TMD in Taiwan—except a few debates among military experts—and why political leaders from all major parties tend not to declare a strong opposition to TMD.

Chinese leaders, however, develop their interpretation of the TMD issue from an entire different angle. Believing that Taiwan is a nothing but a pawn in great-power games, China considers Taiwan's participation in TMD as prelude to an US-dominated defense network in East Asia. As long as Chinese people are convinced that the US has been attempting to prevent China from rising to be a new great power in the region, they will continue to see TMD as a system designed to deal with China, rather than “rogue states” as claimed by the US. This “realist mentality” limits Chinese decision-makers' worldview and leads them to interpret the cross-strait dyad from a pure realist perspective. Chinese leaders simply ignore a fact that it is China's deployment of ballistic missiles that activates the anti-China sentiment in Taiwan and the call for TMD.

In conclusion, I believe that whether Taiwan will acquire a lower-tier TMD system or be allowed to join in the upper-tier TMD system will be determined by two factors: the relations between the US and China and the US security strategy toward East Asia. At present, both the US and Taiwan are trying to link the TMD issue to China's intimidating strategy: whether Taiwan needs TMD depends on whether China stops intimidating Taiwan with ballistic missiles. It is still too early to tell if China will accept this view and adjust its policy, but it is apparent that China prefers *status quo* to any radical change in the Taiwan Strait. It in fact leaves some space for the US and Taiwan to pursue a temporary peace in the Taiwan Strait. In considering the feasibility of allowing Taiwan to join the TMD system, the US and Taiwan have to take China's reactions into account. One possibility is to transfer lower-tier TMD technology to Taiwan to help it establish an indigenous missile defense capability but rejects Taipei's request for being a partner of upper-tier TMD. If China refuses to adjust its intimidating strategy toward Taiwan and the US decides to continue its deployment of missile defense systems in Asia, the Taiwan Strait will enter a highly unstable stage in which the peace will be based up military balance between both sides. Since China is still in a process of transition and is extremely sensitive to the issues regarding national security, it is not wise for either the US or Taiwan to adopt certain policies to misguide China.