

Session 2: Missile Defense

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Summary

Panel on Missile Defense consisting of Paul Davis (Moderator), James Bonomo and Kim Taewoo examine the benefits and drawbacks of ballistic missile defense [BMD] for the Republic of Korea and its limitations in deterring nuclear attack.

James Bonomo warns that the relevancy of BMD for nuclear weapons deterrence is often confused and conflated. BMD is unsuited to intercepting nuclear weapons and largely untested for this purpose. Instead, Bonomo argues BMD is potentially useful in reducing the impact of low-end, low-intensity provocations and can be included in a normal cost benefit analysis for defense procurements. He rejected suggestions that BMD force major powers such as China and Russia to increase their offensive capabilities to protect their deterrents as BMD is ineffectual against major attack.

Kim Taewoo responded that much is related to perception. He observes that since China and Russia view BMD as a threat, the Republic of Korea must carefully examine alternatives less destabilizing to the region. He questions the technical reliability of BMD systems, the command and control processes, and the range of attacks BMD is supposed to effectively resist.

Kim Taewoo also observes BMD as having implications for military strategy on the Korean peninsula. He argues the Republic of Korea must move to a posture of 'mutual vulnerability' with the North. The panelists agree that an invasion by the DPRK across the 38th parallel is unlikely; but as the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong Island incidents demonstrate, the DRPK still commits provocations without fear of retaliation. BMD could re-enforce this,

Kim argues, by incentivizing tolerance of such attacks among South Korean people. By moving away from BMD towards a mutual vulnerability posture, the Republic of Korea would not concern itself with resisting attacks but on its ability to retaliate and deter attacks on its territory.

Paul Davis believes however BMD can still have a stabilizing effect on the Korean Peninsula. He argues high-end systems can be effective against low-level attacks, thereby raising the threshold of conflict. If a given attack is unlikely to succeed adversaries must increase the severity of their aggression, risking escalation. If the DPRK does not seek full-scale conflict then BMD could be an effective mechanism for deterring provocations.

The panelists agree BMD should be subjected to rigorous cost benefit analysis in line with overall defense and strategic priorities. One problem identified is the lack of understanding about the strategic utility of BMD systems. Paul Davis and James Bonomo observe that the US can demonstrate commitment to US allies in the region with BMD, and Israel can potentially intercept limited rocket attacks by Hamas or Hezbollah. At the same time it is recognized by the panel that BMD is expensive and ineffectual in managing strategic rivalries among nuclear armed states. Since BMD can be defeated by comparatively inexpensive counter-measures, and nuclear weapons can be delivered in a variety of ways, the panelists conclude BMD has limited relevancy in nuclear deterrence strategy now or into the future.

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