



## Beijing's Korea bashing over THAAD: Is it someone else's problem for Washington? by Kim Tae-woo

*Kim Tae-woo ([onyi@khu.ac.kr](mailto:onyi@khu.ac.kr)) is Professor at Konyang University and former President of the Korea Institute for National Unification*

Beijing has continued to step up economic retaliation against Seoul since Washington and Seoul decided to deploy a US missile shield on South Korean soil on Feb. 7, 2016, immediately after Pyongyang's fourth nuclear test. China initiated retaliatory measures by banning South Korean celebrities from appearing in Chinese TV shows, events with K-pop content and the broadcast of Korean dramas. Then, it restricted Sino-Korean dialogue both at the public and private level and strengthened the visa issuance process to specifically target Korean citizens. Ultimately, the communist country's reprisals against South Korea have become comprehensive economic sanctions. For example, Beijing has enhanced anti-dumping regulations and quarantines for Korean products, removed subsidies for electric vehicles using Korean-made batteries, blocked charter flights to Korea, banned Korean cosmetics imports and prohibited Chinese tour groups from visiting South Korea. Also, Lotte Corporation, which played an instrumental role in providing the site for THAAD deployment, was another victim of China's crackdown on all things South Korean. Nearly half its stores on the mainland were shut down. In addition, there was an incident in which Chinese passengers who arrived at a South Korean port refused to disembark from their ferry, and some Chinese pedestrians vandalized Korean cars on the streets by throwing bricks at them.

Fortunately, some critics in China call for self-examination about excessive retaliation against South Korea over. For instance, Jia Qingguo, a member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and dean of the School of International Studies at Beijing University, stated at this year's CPPCC, which ended on March 15: "The Chinese government should be careful about economically sanctioning South Korea as such retaliation may deal a huge blow to China's economy as well. Nationalism is like a double-edged sword, it is hard to control and may shake China's political stability to the core; therefore, politics and economy should be separated." Unfortunately, however, Professor Jia is one of the very few who share this view. The one-party, communist country's newspapers, broadcasting companies, and experts have joined in government's effort to fiercely push back against South Korea, and the government has repeatedly contended that Korea's deployment of THAAD threatens China's security.

Nevertheless, Beijing's fury with THAAD and retaliatory measures are unfounded and full of contradictions. First, it

was North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations that triggered the deployment of THAAD on South Korean soil. The deployment was the South's response to the North's provocation. Second, THAAD is a purely defensive system that does not carry destructive warheads, and its objective is to protect the South Korean military and US Armed Forces in Korea (USFK) from the North's missile attacks. Third, THAAD is aimed at North Korea, not China. The system is equipped with an AN/TPY-2 TM (terminal mode) radar, which detects and tracks enemy missiles and has a maximum detectable range of just 800 km, not a FBM (Forward-Based Mode) one, which is deployed in Israel and Japan. Fourth, even if the THAAD radar can reach into parts of Chinese territory, this military capability will not match that of China, which has large and powerful radars installed in Heilongjiang and Shandong Province to monitor not only the Korean Peninsula and Japan but also the Western Pacific and a few dozen spy satellites. Therefore, it is absurd for China, a nuclear power, to claim that South Korea's THAAD radar poses a security threat to it.

Fifth, it is China that ignores South Korea's own security, not the other way around considering the severity of North Korea's increasing nuclear and missile capabilities. The Kim Jong Un regime has conducted three nuclear tests and fired 46 missiles through 28 test-launches over the past five years. Pyongyang continues to make frantic efforts to develop SLBMs, ICBMs, and GORAE-class submarines (2,000 ton), solid-fuel missiles, and new missile engines. In addition, China seems determined to rein in South Korea while keeping quiet about Japan's X-band radar deployment, hinting at its anachronistic suzerain authority over the Korean Peninsula. The government of South Korea and the country's pundits have repeatedly explained these facts and tried to convince the Chinese government, yet Beijing has demonstrated no interest in such explanations. China simply continues a two-sided game by officially participating in United Nations sanctions against North Korea but helping unofficially the Pyongyang regime to stay afloat.

Under these dire circumstances, Seoul faces an excruciating dilemma and Washington has a new mission. Since South Korea's survival and prosperity has depended upon its important neighbor, China, it has gone above and beyond the goal of maintaining non-hostile, friendly relations with its giant neighbor, and it will continue to do so. Seoul must understand the roots of Beijing's hyper-sensitivity to THAAD. Now that the United States and China are engaged in a new Cold War, conflicting views of South Korea and China over THAAD are natural: Seoul sees the deployment as a means to secure sovereign security under the increasingly grave threat of North Korean WMDs, while Beijing, which is challenging Washington to embark on a new China-dominated order, feels under siege from implacably hostile US power.

Against this backdrop, South Korea should make utmost effort to convince China to see the need to deploy THAAD to stabilize Sino-Korean relations. That said, if China infringes upon Korea's security rights, Seoul will have to sternly respond to such actions.

Seoul should use its own leverage to counter Beijing's retaliation. South Korea's never-ending patience and concessions only lead to heightened reprisals from China, worsening Sino-Korea relations. Also, South Korean citizens should respond to China's revenge by demonstrating the strength of its democratic maturity. If 8 million Chinese stop coming to South Korea, 4.5 million Koreans should refrain from visiting China. Likewise, if Korean products are boycotted in China, Chinese products should be treated in the same way in Korea. In addition, Korea should reduce its economic dependence on China to a sustainable level in the long term; it will require painstaking effort to bring down the level of dependence since Korea's dependence on China is bigger than that of China on Korea, but without ending the country's economic dependence on China, non-hostile, friendly Sino-Korea relations cannot take root and be sustained.

In the same vein, the United States is one of the most important stakeholders in THAAD; thus, it should not consider issues surrounding the deployment as someone else's problem. Recently, the US has been building a missile defense system in Europe designed to protect NATO allies from missiles launched in the Middle East. In fact, Washington deployed the US AN/TPY-2 (X-band) early warning radar system with a detectable range of over 1,800 km in Turkey in 2012, and it deployed Aegis-capable ships in Spain. In 2016, the United States activated a land-based missile defense station in Romania, and is building a missile defense complex in Poland that will be completed in 2018. In addition, a command-and-control center will be built by the US at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. Moscow perceives these actions as a NATO build-up in Eastern Europe and it has sped up the process of modernizing its nuclear military power and deployed a new short-range missile to threaten NATO allies. Such hostility has led to a European version of a new Cold War between Russia and the United States. Nevertheless, Moscow did not sanction relevant countries for deploying US missile defense systems. The Kremlin never boycotted products from Germany, Spain, Turkey, or Poland or banned Russian tour groups from visiting these countries over the deployment of US missile defense systems.

As the United States' construction of military stations in Europe was based on its treaty with NATO allies, Washington's placement of forces in, dispose and withdrawal of military equipment to South Korea are actions pursuant to the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty (1954) and the US-ROK Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) (1967). In other words, just as Russia does not interfere with the operation of US military forces in Europe according to the North Atlantic treaty, China should not meddle with the operation of US bilateral alliances with Korea and Japan. The United States' operation of military forces in its Asian allies is a matter of sovereign security and no different than China's recent decision to move its ICBMs from the western region to

Heilongjiang Province and deploy radars to monitor the Korean Peninsula as well as Japan without experiencing neighboring countries' interference. Consequently, China's retaliation against South Korea over the USFK's deployment of THAAD is not only an act of interference in but also an impudent challenge to the United States' alliance policy as a whole.

The ROK-US alliance is vital to Korea's security, and as the North's nuclear provocations increases, it will become even more vital. Despite South Korea's fervor to maintain and advance stable bilateral relations with China, relations have soured over conflicts surrounding THAAD. Against this backdrop, the South Korean public hopes to see the United States carry out meaningful action to respond to China's retaliatory measures against one of Washington's biggest allies, South Korea. Diplomatic rhetoric is not enough. On March 17, 2017, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson at the joint press conference with South Korea's Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se stated that China's economic retaliation against South Korea was "inappropriate and troubling," and urged Beijing to "refrain from such action." These simple comments seem far from sufficient to make China back down. If the United States continues to let China's 'South Korea bashing' go on, this inaction will weaken the ROK-US alliance and undermine the international community's trust in the US alliance policy. This is why many South Koreans pin great expectation on the summit between President Trump and Xi, scheduled to be held at the beginning of April.

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