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Japan Joins U.S. in Dangerous Space Race

By Bruce K. Gagnon

Japan is now embarking on a historic and potentially dangerous journey into space, urged on by the U.S., which seeks a more heavily armed and militarily active partner in the Asia-Pacific.

Space technology is being developed for two primary reasons. One is to give nations the ability to better coordinate warfare on Earth. The second is that many nations and corporations view space as the "new world." Gold on asteroids, water and helium-3 on the moon, magnesium, cobalt, and uranium are believed to be on Mars. Corporations intend to venture to these planetary bodies and secure massive profits in the years ahead. But first new space technologies have to be created that make it possible, and cost effective, to "mine the skies." [1]

If citizens can be convinced that their nation must use space technologies to "protect them" from enemies, real or imagined, then this investment in space technology can also be used to create the infrastructure that will allow these same aerospace industries to mine the heavens. Thus space technology becomes "dual use." With the development for military use also comes development for corporate use. The question is who benefits? Who pays and who reaps the profits?

Japan is working on both military and civilian space technologies, developing so-called "missile defense" systems, new generations of military spy satellites, and planning for manned stations on the moon. All of these programs will come at a tremendous cost to Japanese taxpayers and will set the course for a more aggressive foreign policy in the coming years. Most important, Japanese military space developments dramatically link Japan and the U.S. military in a dangerous course of confrontation in the region as the U.S. moves to counter China's development as a global economic competitor.

The Washington Post reported that "The Pentagon is looking at Asia as the most likely arena for future military conflict, or at least competition." [2] The article concludes that the U.S. will essentially double its military presence in the region. For example, on Guam today the U.S. has lengthened and widened runways to handle the B-1 and B-2 bombers. Cruise missiles have been prepositioned on Guam and new fighter squadrons are planned to make it a "power projection hub." New small "lily pad" bases are being developed throughout the Asia-Pacific by the Pentagon for rapid interventionary capability. At the same time, the transfer of the U.S. lst Corps to Japan more tightly integrates that nation in U.S. global military planning.

Theatre Missile Defense (TMD) is a key program in the U.S. arsenal to surround China. Based on ships and sold to the public as a "missile defense" system to protect allies like Japan and South Korea, new interceptor missiles (SM-3) are planned that will be deployed on Navy Aegis destroyers in Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Taiwan. Ground-based (PAC-3) interceptor missiles would be deployed in Japan. Converted Boeing 747 aircraft, called the Airborne Laser (ABL), are in development that are envisioned to fly round-the-clock giving the U.S. complete air coverage of China's coast. The ABL would have a laser beam on the airplane's nose and would fire at any missile launched by China or North Korea. The ABL, though, is having huge technological development problems and is enormously over budget. The U.S. seeks to involve Japan as a partner on this program to share the cost.

All of this is being done to give the U.S. the ability to surround and neutralize China. Tokyo's shift in policy, as a U.S. proxy in the region, at a time of mounting China-Japan conflicts over territorial issues and provocations such as the Prime Minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, signals to China a more aggressive Japanese role in the region and tighter alignment with U.S. strategic goals. In particular, U.S. missile defense strategy is designed to neutralize China's small nuclear deterrent capability giving the U.S. first-strike advantage.

The U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee meeting in Washington DC on February 19, 2005, identified "new threats" emerging in the Asian-Pacific region and called for the "modernization of military capabilities" in response, notably ballistic missile defense (BMD). The joint statement concluded that the "U.S. is reorienting and strengthening its global defense posture to provide it with appropriate, strategy-driven capabilities in an uncertain security environment." [3]

Space in U.S. Strategic Planning

The U.S. is embarking on a dangerously destabilizing plan to deploy so-called ground-based "missile defense "interceptors at Ft. Greely, Alaska and Vandenberg AFB, California. Although the systems have yet to be successfully tested, they are already being deployed. We are told that these new interceptors will protect the U.S. from attack by the "rogue states" that so far have shown zero technological capability to hit the continental U.S. with nuclear weapons. And why would they want to? The U.S, with over 7,500 nuclear weapons, could easily annihilate any "rogue" that fired a lonely missile its way. Even China, with 20 nuclear missiles capable of hitting the U.S., would not ignore the strategic consequence, nor for that matter would it be oblivious to the economic consequences of attacking one of its best trade partners. Then what is this "missile defense" scheme really all about?

The logic is clear in Pentagon planning documents like the Space Command's Vision for 2020 that outlines the need for the U.S. to "control and dominate space" and to "deny" other countries access to space. [4] Once it is recognized that all warfare on earth today is essentially coordinated and directly by space military satellites, the reader can begin to understand why the Pentagon is racing to control space and deny access to other nations..

U.S. military doctrine is predicated on Full Spectrum Dominance. [5] This notion is that the U.S. will dominate conflict at every level – control the Earth with conventional military forces; control the seas with the Navy; control the sky with the Air Force; and now control space with new technologies under development today.

In a recent planning document, Strategic Master Plan FY06 and Beyond, the Air Force Space Command boldly states, "While our ultimate goals are truly to 'exploit' space through space force enhancement and space force application missions, as with other mediums, we cannot fully 'exploit' that medium until we first 'control' it." The report goes on to say, "The ability to gain space superiority (the ability to exploit space while selectively disallowing it to adversaries) is critically important and maintaining space superiority is an essential prerequisite for success in modern warfare." [6]

Once you connect this language about space "control and domination" with the idea of mining the sky for precious and valuable resources you begin to understand the U.S. and Japanese rejection of the United Nation's Moon Treaty in 1979. The moon treaty outlaws any "military bases" on the moon and states that no country, no corporation, nor any individual can make land claims on the Moon's surface or subsurface. The U.N. rightly was concerned about creating a body of international law in order to preempt any conflict in space as humankind inevitably moved off the planet.

It is clear that planning is underway to create the military infrastructure to control the pathways, or shipping lanes, on and off the planet Earth. Whoever controls and dominates these pathways in years to come has the ability to determine which countries or corporations can profit from mining the sky. This military control would also determine who militarily controls the planet Earth.

The U.S. has spent well over $120 billion on space research and development since the creation of the space program following WWII. In a recent book called The Hunt for Zero Point, military journalist Nick Cook explains the Pentagon's "black" (secret) budget. For 15 years Cook has been a defense and aerospace writer for Jane's Defence Weekly. Cook argues that over $20 billion a year is spent on these programs outside the purview of the U.S. Congress. Cook states, "It (black programs) has a vast and sprawling architecture funded by tens of billions of classified dollars every year. The height of its powers was probably in the Reagan era. But it has not stopped since then. In fact, under the Bush administration it is having something of resurgence. Stealth technology is a primary example...research into anti-gravity technology...has been going on for quite some time." [7]

The aerospace industry has stated that plans for space control, popularly called Star Wars, will be the largest industrial project in the history of the planet. But how will it be paid for? In 2005 the U.S. Pentagon is spending $10 billion on space weapons research and development. Clearly the U.S. cannot afford to fund these programs alone. So far Japan, Australia, England, and Italy have signed up as part of this plan. In recent weeks Canada decided not to join the Bush "missile defense" scheme. Canada's Prime Minister Paul Martin, with strong urging from the aerospace industry, wanted to join Bush's program but popular opposition has thus far prevented cooperation. [8]

Japan's Role in Military Space

Spread among six Japanese ministries and agencies involved in space programs, the government has allocated $3.4 billion for fiscal year 2005. Japan will devote nearly one-third of its space spending in fiscal 2005 to developing military reconnaissance and war fighting satellites manufactured by Mitsubishi Electric Corp. Nearly as much will go to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) for all of its space exploration, manned space and operational programs. Japan's share for its participation in "missile defense" is expected to cost another $1 billion. [9]

In December 2003 Japan opted for a U.S. developed missile defense system in response to the North Korean missile threat. Second, third, and fourth generation spy satellites are planned for launch in 2006, 2009, and 2011. These new smaller and more maneuverable satellites will increase Japanese ability to target and direct war in the region. The estimated lifetime cost for the Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) missile defense program is $30-50 billion [10] As of 2002 the JDA had spent over $30 million on missile defense research and development.

The recent successful launch of the H-2A rocket is the centerpiece of Japan's space program. Japan was the fourth country to launch a satellite, in 1972. It now has a space probe on its way to collect and retrieve samples from an asteroid, and a major lunar exploration mission in the works. In a major policy move last year a government panel recommended that Japan begin studying the possibility of establishing its own manned space program. [11] The major consequence of these moves, however, is that Japan is playing an expanded role in the U.S. military plan to contain and manage China. [12]

The China Factor

China today has 20 nuclear missiles that could hit Los Angeles or San Francisco. But are 20 Chinese nuclear missiles enough to justify the U.S. spending another $100 billion or more on Star Wars?

Jonathan Pollack, director of the Strategic Research Department of the U.S. Naval War College, told the New York Times that while China did have the largest standing army in the world and was in the process of modernizing, "I don't see these capabilities as the leading edge of a more comprehensive, long-term plan to either supplement U.S. military power in the Western Pacific or challenge U.S. power on a global scale," adding, "Let's not make them out to be 10 feet tall." [13]

The U.S., with its new agreements to sell "missile defense" technologies to Japan, Australia, England, and Italy, and to upgrade its own offensive and defensive capability in Asia and globally, may force China to embark on an accelerated missile development program.

The Opposition Grows

In order to make Star Wars work, the U.S. is upgrading key radar facilities in Greenland, Germany, England, Australia and other locations around the world. In addition the U.S. is working to base missile defense systems in many countries including Poland, Romania, England, Japan, South Korea and Australia, offering many of those same nations a piece of the Star Wars bounty by extending an open hand to their aerospace corporations.

The Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space was created in 1992 to build an international constituency that would work to protect the heavens from this new and deadly arms race. Today the network has over 170 local affiliated peace groups throughout the world. We believe that once people understand the issue about the militarization of space, they will move to

block all nations from militarizing the heavens.

Space is a place where our dreams, hopes, fears, and joys reside. It is a sacred place that must be protected. For the last several years an attempt has been made at the United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to create a new global ban on weapons in space. (The current U.N. Outer Space Treaty of 1967 is limited by its out of date definitions that prohibit weapons of mass destruction in space.) But each year the U.S. government has blocked the attempts saying that there is no need for such a new treaty because there are no weapons in space today, and thus no problem. It is precisely the nation that is actively working to take "control and domination" of space that is obstructing the new international treaty and aggressively accelerating its nuclear development program. One thing is certain: moving the arms race into the heavens will only make life here on Earth more insecure and at immense cost.

[1] John S. Lewis, "Mining the Sky: Untold Riches from the Asteroids, Comets and Planets," 1996.
[2] Thomas E. Ricks, "For Pentagon, Asia Moving to Forefront," Washington Post, May 26, 2000.
[3] "Full Text of Joint U.S.-Japan Security Committee Statement," Feb. 20, 2005, CNA News.
[4] U.S. Space Command, "Vision for 2020," planning document Feb. 1997.
[5] U.S. Space Command, "Long Range Plan," March 1998, Pg. 7.
[6] Air Force Space Command, "Strategic Master Plan FY06 and Beyond," Oct. 1, 2003.
[7] Space Alert! Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space, Issue #14, Fall 2003.
[8] Oliver Moore, "Canada refuses further role in missile defense," Feb. 24, 2005, The Globe and Mail.
[9] Eiichiro Sekigawa, "Recce Recovery," Aviation Week & Space Technology, Feb. 7, 2005.
[10] Paul Mann, "Economic Woes Shadow Japan's Missile Defense," Aviation Week & Space Technology, March 11, 2002.
[11] Associated Press, "Rocket Success Puts Japan in Space Race," Feb. 26, 2005.
[12] Nao Shimoyachi, "New defense chief sees SDF playing more active role in global security,"The Japan Times, Sept. 29, 2004.
[13] Conn Hallinan, "Cornering the Dragon: Bad Idea," Feb. 26, 2005, Foreign Policy in Focus.

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