

'US Missile Shield Fosters Asian Arms Race'

China's English-language edition of "Global Times" published this editorial on March 29, 2012, under the above headline.

The US has announced that it is seeking to build a missile defense system in Asia and the Middle East, following a similar step in Europe.

This will no doubt create disturbance and tension in the region, as it has in Europe. Japan, South Korea and Australia, which are invited to join the system, must seriously ponder the consequences.

North Korea and Iran are named by Washington as the targets of the missile defense system, though it is clear the real targets are China and Russia. China should firmly oppose it.

This is not a fresh idea for the White House. The concept was raised during the Clinton administration. The impact it brings today is much worse than back then.

China needs to assess what long-term damage this system will impose on China's strategic security. The system will be deployed on the soil of Japan, South Korea and Australia. It is widely agreed that

China has little chance to stop it. The pessimistic view holds that China can do nothing about it.

But China can balance out the system's impact. North Korea's plan to launch a satellite next month has been used by Washington to install a missile defense system. It is a wise move. China can copy it and upgrade its nuclear weapon capability due to the possible threats posed by the US system. Specifically, China can improve its nuclear weapons in both quantity and quality as well as develop offensive nuclear-powered submarines. China's ballistic missiles should be able to break the interception capability of the US system.

Among the nuclear powers, China has the smallest number of nuclear weapons. It is also the only country to make a "no first use" commitment. Installing a missile defense system in Asia disrespects China's nuclear policy.

The US is seeking to shift the regional balance. A strong response from China should be expected. An overarching missile defense system would force China to change its long-held nuclear policy.

If Japan, South Korea and Australia join the system, a vicious arms race in Asia may follow.

It is not what China wants to see, but it will have to deal with it if the arms race happens.

The US is creating waves in Asia. The region may see more conflicts intensify in the future. China should make utmost efforts to prevent it, but prepare for the worst.