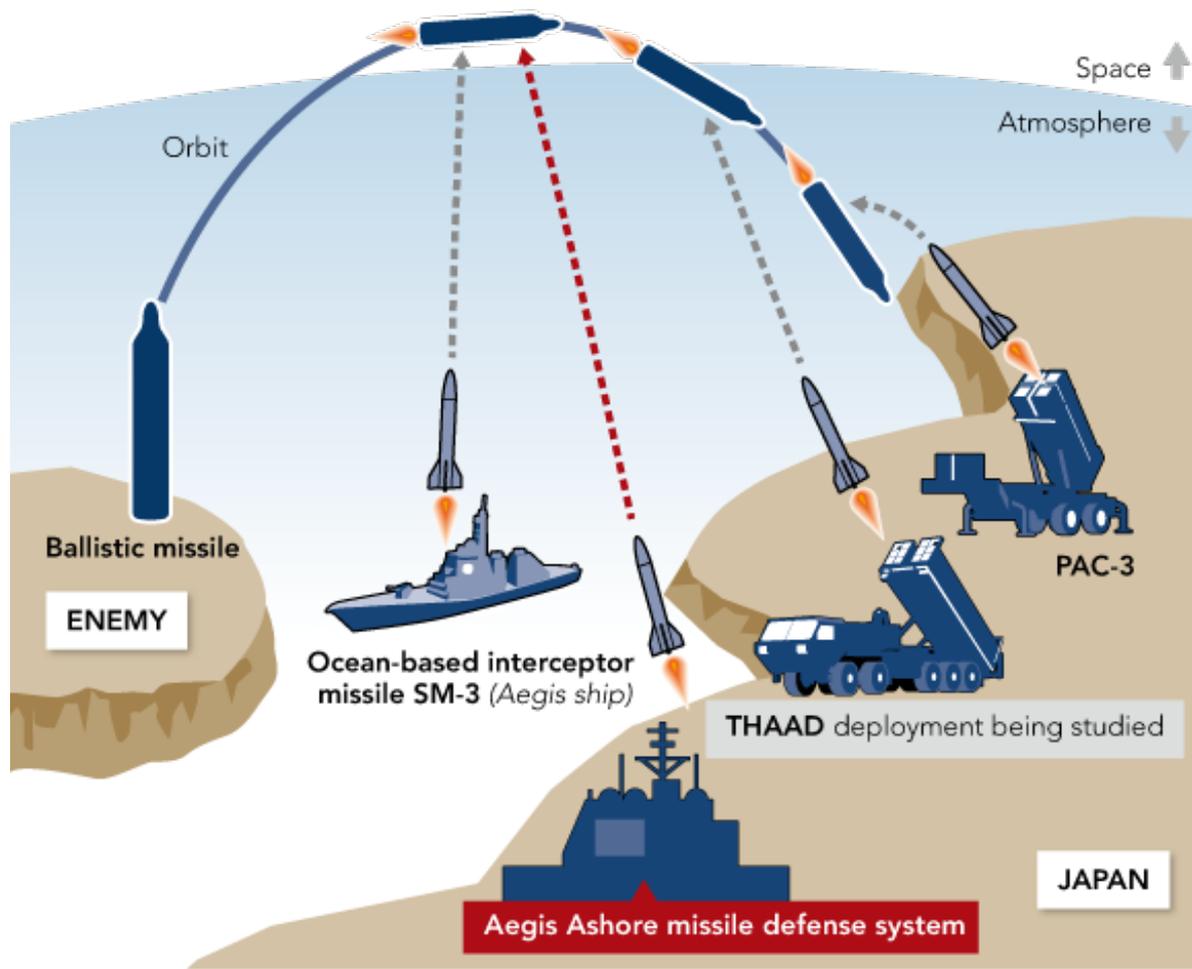


Japan to deploy new land-based missile defense system

asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Japan-to-deploy-new-land-based-missile-defense-system

Japan's ballistic missile defense system



WASHINGTON -- Japan is planning to deploy a new U.S.-developed ground-based missile defense system.

The Defense Ministry is to provisionally request that the fiscal 2018 budget cover planning costs for installing the Aegis Ashore system, according to a ministry official. "We are being urged to enhance our capabilities to continually protect the entirety of Japan from the threat of a missile attack," the official said.

The move comes with North Korea making both threats and rapid advances in its ballistic missile program. On Aug. 10, Pyongyang said it would target the waters around Guam with its missiles. The U.S. has an important military installation on the Pacific island that allows long-range bombers to take off and project power into Asia.



North Korea displays its new intercontinental ballistic missile, loaded on what appears to be a portable launch vehicle, in a military parade in Pyongyang on April 15. © Kyodo

North Korea this year has test-fired numerous missiles, some from portable launch vehicles that make prelaunch detection difficult.

Japan currently has two missile defense systems. Ship-based SM-3 missiles are deployed on Aegis destroyers. They are said to be able to intercept ballistic missiles mid-course. If this system's initial interception attempts fail, Patriot PAC-3s would be called on to try to intercept missiles at the terminal stage.

With the planned installment of the Aegis Ashore system, Japan will be able to deploy SM-3 missiles on the ground -- another layer of defense.

Lockheed Martin, which developed the system, calls it "the first operational land-based version of the Aegis Combat System."

Japan's Defense Ministry has studied whether to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, system or the Aegis Ashore shield. But it has not planned for Aegis Ashore installations. The system is not included in the current National Defense Program Guidelines or mentioned in mid-term defense planning documents. The official said Aegis Ashore plans will be finalized by the end of the year.

At present, two of Japan's four Aegis destroyers are being refitted. One of the ships was initially expected to be back in operation by next March, but the ministry has since decided to hasten its return to December.

Meanwhile, China and Russia are stepping up their development of stealth aircraft, and Japan wants to devise advanced radar technology to detect these planes. The defense Ministry envisions a portable radar system with increased capability to collect radio-wave information. The ministry hopes to put the system into operation by fiscal 2024. For this purpose, it will ask for 19.6 billion yen (\$178 million) in the fiscal 2018 budget.