

Beating up on S. Korea not proper response from China to THAAD: U.S. expert

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 11 (Yonhap) -- Beating up on South Korea is not the right response from China to Seoul's decision to host the U.S. THAAD missile defense system because the agreement does not reflect hostility toward Beijing, a U.S. expert said Thursday.

Instead, China should focus on reining in North Korea as Pyongyang's provocations not only provided justification for the deployment, but are endangering important Chinese security interests as well, Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, said.

"There is no question that the THAAD deployment signals a cooling of relations between Beijing and Seoul. It reverses a multi-year trend that saw a concerted Chinese courtship of South Korean President Park Geun-hye," the expert said in an article to the National Interest.

"Yet Park has shown little enthusiasm for an overt anti-China policy. If anything, both her inclination and public sentiment in South Korea seemed more receptive to a frosty policy toward the former colonial master, Japan, than toward China," he said.

Carpenter noted how much effort Park has put in to win over China, including her attendance in a massive military parade in Beijing that was boycotted by the U.S. and other Western countries, as well as her decision to join the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Some Chinese view the THAAD decision as a sign of strengthening trilateral security cooperation between the U.S., South Korea and Japan, but the three-way cooperation is barely better than before due to persisting tensions between Seoul and Tokyo, he said.

"The Japanese, and to a lesser extent the Americans, likely do see THAAD as having a dual role: intimidating China as well as guarding against a reckless missile launch by North Korea," the expert said.

For South Korea, though, THAAD is almost exclusively aimed at dealing with the North Korea problem and few South Koreans want to alienate China, he said.

China has two clear options, he said.

"Beating up on South Korea is not the proper one. Beijing's best move would be to get extremely tough with its North Korean client, including taking direct action to remove the Kim regime from power, if necessary," he said.

"Pyongyang's behavior has become ever more reckless and irresponsible. It is now endangering important Chinese security interests as well as the overall peace of East Asia. The message that

these events should be sending to Chinese leaders is fairly direct. If you don't like seeing THAAD deployed, then eliminate the justification for the deployment.