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Session I: Implications of nuclear weapons for regional stability

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Implications of nuclear weapons for regional security: In case for Japan

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ABSTRACT

Japan, as the only nation suffered nuclear attack, has been facing a fundamental security dilemma: Japan is pursuing a goal of nuclear weapon abolition while Japan's security policies have been dependent on the US nuclear umbrella ("extended nuclear deterrence"). Recently, given the tensions among countries in the Northeast Asia, especially the nuclear threats posed by North Korea, Japan's dependence on the US nuclear umbrella has become stronger. In addition, Japan's large stockpile of plutonium and complete nuclear fuel cycle capability has generated concerns over its "latent nuclear capability." In order to solve Japan's nuclear dilemma and eliminate international concern, this paper proposes three specific actions: 1) Enhance regional confidence building through Track 2 process ("Nagasaki Process") aiming at establishing a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NEA-NWFZ), 2) Reduce plutonium stockpile and explore regional confidence building measures for civilian nuclear fuel cycle programs, 3) Strengthen Nuclear non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) in global efforts to introduce legally binding instruments to prohibit nuclear weapons.

Introduction: Japan's Nuclear Dilemma

Hiroshima and Nagasaki of Japan are the two only cities in the world that suffered nuclear attacks in history. Since then, Japan's anti-nuclear sentiment, based on the tragic and traumatic experiences of bomb survivors (hibakusha), has been the core of Japanese basic non-nuclear policy, whose goal is to eliminate nuclear weapon from the world eventually. On the other hand, despite such strong anti-nuclear weapon sentiment, Japan's basic security policy has been dependent on the US "extended nuclear deterrence" (nuclear umbrella), and the so-called "Three Non-nuclear Principles (not to manufacture, not to possess and not to introduce nuclear weapons)" are always coupled with Japan's dependency on US nuclear umbrella¹. In addition,

¹ Now it is proven that Japanese government had a secret agreement with the US government to allow "bringing in nuclear weapons" into Japanese soil if necessary (without inquiry by the US government). See Ota, Masakatsu, "Nichibei 'Kaku' Domei: Genbaku, Kaku no Kasa, Fukushima" (US-Japan Nuclear Alliance: Atomic Bomb, Nuclear Umbrella, Fukushima), Iwanami Shinsho #1498, 2014.

Japan has been promoting civilian nuclear power programs since the US “Atoms for Peace” policy announced in 1954, including a complete nuclear fuel cycle program which are considered as “latent nuclear capability”. Although the Basic Atomic Energy Act in Japan legally limit Japan’s nuclear energy program only for “peaceful purposes, but now it is understood that its nuclear fuel cycle capability has been developed, at least partially with desire to develop such latent capability^{2,3}. In short, Japan’s nuclear and security policy has been facing this nuclear dilemma, abolition of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence plus latent nuclear capability, since the beginning of the nuclear development in Japan.

So the main challenges of Japan’s nuclear policy are; How to resolve such nuclear dilemma? How to eliminate concerns over latent nuclear capability while developing civilian nuclear program?

This paper addresses to resolve those two key dilemmas.

US President Obama’s Visit to Hiroshima: Implications and Issues Remained

President Obama visited Hiroshima on May 27, 2016, and became the first sitting US President ever who visited the site where atomic bombs were dropped. It became a historic day for both Japan and the US, especially for the hibakusha who have been longing for such a visit for a long time. The President’s speech⁴ at the Hiroshima Peace Park was also a moving one, and gave three important messages.

First, he emphasized the dual nature of scientific progress, taking discovery of nuclear fission as a symbolic example, and said that the scientific revolution requires a “moral revolution” as well. Second, the speech referred to the responsibility of states for eliminating nuclear weapons and he said that the all states, in particular nuclear weapon states, must have the courage to escape “the logic of fear” and pursue a world without nuclear weapons. Finally, he focused on the nature of war which was the true cause of tragic experiences of atomic bombs, and said that “we must change our mindset about the war itself … to prevent conflict through diplomacy.” The picture of his embracing one of the hibakushas after the speech became a symbolic one to show the meaning of this visit.

2 Aikawa, H., “Kakuni Miirareta Kokka (Nations obsessed by nuclear ambitions)”, Mainichi Press, June 2016.

3 Fitzpatrick, Mark, “Asia’s Latent Nuclear Powers; Japan South Korea, and Taiwan”, Routledge, 2016.

4 Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Hiroshima Peace Memorial, May 27, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/27/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-hiroshima-peace>

However, his speech does not contain any specific policies towards the elimination of nuclear weapons or even nuclear disarmament/non-proliferation. Responses from the hibakushas are mixed, some spoke highly of his visit but some remain unhappy as the speech did not say enough about his specific actions for nuclear disarmament⁵.

Prime Minister Abe of Japan also gave a short remark, but his emphasis was on US-Japan alliance and said that “together, Japan and the United States will become a light for hope.” This seems self-inconsistent as Japan-US alliance are built on strong “extended nuclear deterrence.”

Increasing Dependence on Nuclear Deterrence

Given the increasing tensions in the Northeast Asian region, especially with the nuclear threats posed by Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), Japan’s security alliance with the U.S. has become stronger.

Japan’s position, facing the dilemma of nuclear abolition and nuclear deterrence, is even clearer now as shown on the recent statement made by the Japanese government during the UN Open Ended Working Group held in Geneva, May, 2016. It says the following:

“Nuclear disarmament must be promoted based on two basic understandings, the first being a clear understanding of the humanitarian impacts of the use of nuclear weapons and the second being the objective assessment of the reality of the security environment. ...At the same time, severe security environment, especially that of Northeast Asia as it faces the clear and present security challenges such as the recent nuclear testing and ballistic missile launches by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, must always be taken into consideration in promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.”⁶

Concerns over Japan’s Latent Nuclear Capability

As a result of Japan’s basic nuclear policy of recycling plutonium from spent fuel, Japan has already accumulated 47.8 tons of plutonium (10.8 tons in Japan and 37.0

5 Nagasaki Shimbun, “71 nenn-me, Rekishiteki Ippo (Historic first step after 71 years),” May 28, 2016.

6 Paper submitted by Japan, “Effective measures towards a world free of nuclear weapons,” A/AC.286/WP.22, Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations,” Geneva 2016. <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/OEWG/2016/Documents/WP22.pdf>

tons in France and UK where Japan had commercial reprocessing contracts)⁷. This is the largest stockpile among non-nuclear weapon states and could increase further if the Rokkasho reprocessing plant starts operation and its recycling program into 15-18 reactors as currently planned does not smoothly move ahead. As a result, if the Rokkasho plant starts operating, Japan's plutonium stockpile is likely to grow (Takubo and von Hippel 2013).⁸

Most recently, a senior US government officials expressed his concern over Japan's plutonium stockpile and its reprocessing policy. John Wolfsthal, senior director for arms control and non-proliferation at the National Security Council said in a recent interview with Kyodo Press as following:

"There is no question that plutonium recycling in Japan has been expensive that is a challenging future for Japan. If Japan were to change course, they would find the United States to be supportive....Upcoming renewal of 2018 of a bilateral nuclear agreement with Japan has the potential to become a very controversial issue...If Japan keeps recycling plutonium, what is to stop other countries from thinking the exact same thing?"⁹

This is exactly the concern expressed by US and other experts on an Open Letter to Prime Minister Abe on March 28, 2016, saying:

"We call on Japan to announce....an indefinite postponement of its plan to start the Rokkasho reprocessing plant in order to further the mutual goal of US and Japan to minimize global stocks of separated plutonium."¹⁰

Concern over reprocessing programs are also spreading in the Northeast Asia. ROK government, during the bilateral negotiation with the US, strongly insisted that it has a sovereign right to reprocessing as Japan does. China is now planning to build a commercial reprocessing plant, imported from France while criticizing Japan for holding large plutonium stockpile. So it has become a regional security issue and needs to be dealt with serious attention.¹¹

7 Japan Atomic Energy Commission, "Current Status of Plutonium Management in Japan," July 21, 2015. <http://www.aec.go.jp/jicst/NC/iinkai/teirei/siryo2015/siryo28/siryo3.pdf>

8 Takubo, Masafumi and von Hippel, F., "Ending Reprocessing in Japan; An Alternative Approach to Managing Japan's Spent Nuclear Fuel and Separated Plutonium," International Panel on Fissile Material (IPFM) report, November 2013. <http://fissilematerials.org/library/rr12.pdf>

9 Kyodo Press, "U.S. would back a rethink of Japan's plutonium recycling program: White House," The Japan Times, May 21, 2016. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/21/national/politics-diplomacy/u-s-back-rethink-japans-plutonium-recycling-program-white-house/#.V1PF1PRAqD_.twitter

10 "Open Letter to Prime Minister Abe; Stop plutonium separation," March 28, 2016. http://kakujoho.net/e/call_nuc_scrry.html

11 Henry Sakolski, "Can East Asia avoid a nuclear explosive materials arms race?" The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 28 March 2016. <http://thebulletin.org/can-east-asia-avoid-nuclear-explosive-materials-arms-race9295>

Three specific proposals from RECNA

In order to resolve nuclear dilemma facing Japan and international concern over Japan's civilian nuclear fuel cycle programs, we propose the three specific proposals as the following.

- *Confidence building through Track 2 process ("Nagasaki Process") towards a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (NEA-NWFZ)*

RECNA, founded in 2012 as a regional think-tank for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, made a policy proposal, "A Comprehensive Approach to a NEA-NWFZ", in March 2015¹². The proposal called for a Comprehensive Framework Agreement (CFA) among the countries in the region, including; (i) termination of Korean War with mutual declaration of non-hostile intent (ii) assuring equal right to all forms of energy (including nuclear energy) (iii) agreement on "Three plus three" NWFZ treaty (the US, China and Russia [three nuclear weapon states in the region] will provide legally binding negative security assurance to South Korea, North Korea and Japan [three non-nuclear weapon states]) (iv) establishment of a permanent Northeast Asia Security Council.

Following up the report, RECNA held a workshop in February, 2016, inviting key experts from the region, and we agreed to establish an independent, non-governmental "Panel on Peace and Security in Northeast Asia (PSNA)" in November, 2016 hosted by RECNA. The PSNA will collaborate with other regional activities such as "Ulaanbaatar Process" organized by Blue Banner of Mongolia and Pugwash East Asia Group. We plan to make this process as an effective "Track 2" approach and call the entire process as "Nagasaki Process." Given the difficult security environment, it would be essential for non-governmental sectors to take initiatives in regional confidence building and we hope the "Nagasaki Process" will contribute to such objective.

- *Eliminating concerns over Japan's latent nuclear capability: Reducing plutonium stockpile and regional confidence building scheme for civilian nuclear fuel cycle*

As noted above, large plutonium stockpile owned by Japan and its insistence on reprocessing program have raised serious regional concern over Japan's latent nuclear capability and Japan has little to dismay such concern. One specific proposal is that

12 Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA), "Proposal: A Comprehensive Approach to a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone," March 31, 2015. http://naosite.lb.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10069/35476/1/Proposal_E.pdf

Japan needs to commit herself to *reduce* its plutonium stockpile by introducing more flexible recycling policy, such as restrain reprocessing until its stocks will be reduced significantly. Besides, it can collaborate with other countries with large plutonium stockpile, such as UK, France and the US, to jointly develop cost-effective, feasible options to reduce such stockpile.

In order to enhance transparency and confidence in civilian nuclear programs, Japan can seek various multilateral approaches for nuclear fuel cycle programs. One specific example is a regional verification scheme, such as ABACC (Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials), which could enhance regional confidence and increases transparency of all civilian programs in the region.

- *Strengthen Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) as a bridge between Nuclear Weapon States and Non-nuclear Weapon States to facilitate diplomatic processes for legally binding instruments to prohibit nuclear weapons*

Japan and other allied countries with nuclear weapon states are not popular among Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) at the recent UN Open Ended Working Group as they are closer to the position of Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). The main mission of NPDI is to be a bridge between NWS and NNWS and Japan should show a stronger leadership in enhancing its role by showing that nuclear weapons cannot be used under any circumstances and thus nuclear weapons must be prohibited legally.

Conclusion

While the historic visit by the US President Obama to Hiroshima left strong impressions, but without concrete actions on nuclear disarmament. Japan has to take this opportunity to change its security policy which is currently dependent on US nuclear umbrella. Japan also needs to rethink its full commitment to civilian nuclear fuel cycle programs to eliminate international concern. Specific proposals presented here (Confidence building toward a NEA-NWFZ, reduction of plutonium stockpile and strengthen NPDI) may bring the best chances to resolve Japan's long-standing nuclear dilemma.