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Japan's View on Nuclear Weapons*

Mitsuru KUROSAWA**

Abstract

Entering into the 21st century, radical change of international environments has some impact on Japan's view on nuclear weapons. In particular, the growing threats from North Korea's nuclear missiles in the short term and from China's military modernization in the longer term have influenced Japanese perception on nuclear weapons. In addition, the nuclear non-proliferation regime is suffering from erosion by the lack of universality and effectiveness of the NPT.

Since 2002, it is no longer a taboo to speak on a nuclear Japan, though it had been a strong taboo for many years. In order to analyze Japan's view on nuclear weapons, I will take up three questions on nuclear weapons. Should Japan have its own nuclear weapons? Should Japan keep depending on the nuclear umbrella of the U.S.? Should Japan keep pursuing nuclear disarmament? On each question, I will first show the Government's official position, and then the opinions of both proponents and opponents.

In addition, I will touch upon the Japan's frustration at the U.S. nuclear weapon policies. One is the relationship between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and the other is the criticism to recent U.S.-India agreement on nuclear cooperation.

Keywords : nuclear weapons, NPT, nuclear non-proliferation,
nuclear disarmament, nuclear Japan, nuclear umbrella, U.S.-India

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SHOULD JAPAN HAVE ITS OWN NUCLEAR WEAPONS?¹⁾

The Government's Position

The current Government position is clear as Prime Minister Koizumi stated in June 2002 that his cabinet has never considered nuclear weapons and earnestly abides by the three non-nuclear principles. The then Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba also stated, "Even if North Korea has nuclear weapons, Japan will never go nuclear," and Yukio Takeuchi, the then Administrative Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly denied the possibility of a nuclear Japan, stating, "A nuclear Japan is not a realistic option for Japan. The administration has never examined the issue."

Members of the Japanese Diet are also very sensitive to the issue of nuclearization as reflected in recent survey data. For example, in a September 2003 questionnaire to all members of the Diet including Houses of Representatives and Councilors, 1 percent said we should examine nuclearization soon, 6 percent said we should examine it in the future, 19 percent said we may examine it according to changes in domestic and international circumstances, and 68 percent said we should never discuss it.²⁾

Although it is no longer a taboo to discuss the probability of a nuclear Japan, the current administration and the vast majority of the members of the Diet are reluctant even to discuss this issue.

Proponents

Japan should develop independent nuclear forces

Regardless of U.S. approval, Japan should develop nuclear weapons not only to counter the North Korean nuclear threat, but also to emerge from subordination to the United States and become truly independent.

Japan should go nuclear under U.S. approval

Japan should go nuclear to counter the threat from North Korea, as the United States will approve Japan's nuclearization. The vast majority of those who support

1) On a more precise analysis of the issue, see, Mitsuru Kurosawa, "Moving Beyond the Debate on a Nuclear Japan," *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Fall/Winter 2004, pp. 110-137.

2) *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 28, 2003.

the idea of Japan going nuclear presuppose that the United States will approve or acquiesce to a nuclear Japan. These presuppositions are mainly based on the statements by American experts, in particular those made by Vice-President Cheney.

Professor Terumasa Nakanishi, an advocate of Japan's nuclearization even before Cheney's statement, interprets his statement as an advertising balloon for Japan, and a sign of containment against North Korean nuclear development and Chinese arms buildup. In the longer term, he states, Japan's nuclearization is in the U.S. interest. Responding to the claim that Japan does not need nuclear weapons because of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, he states that the option of relying on extended deterrence can only be considered credible in a situation where there is a perfectly bipolar confrontation, such as the structure during the Cold War. He states that it would be hard for Japan to find any effective way of dealing with the situation other than with nuclear arms of its own. Japan must not hesitate to declare its intention of acquiring a nuclear capability if any of the following three situations becomes reality: i) a situation in which the U.S. commitment to Japan's security clearly wavers; ii) a situation in which China develops a full-fledged naval capability extending to the high seas and establishes a regular presence around Okinawa and the Senkaku Islands; or iii) a situation in which the question of North Korea's nuclear capability is allowed to remain ambiguous.³⁾

Professor Satoshi Morimoto, while arguing that we should respond to North Korea's nuclear forces by development and deployment of missile defense and guided precision weapons, asserts that as a last resort we should pursue British-style nuclearization where the United States provides us with nuclear-capable Polaris submarines. Such an arsenal would be used in the cases when we are under serious nuclear threat from a neighboring country, but we can not completely depend on nuclear deterrence under the Alliance, and the NPT and other international undertakings do not ensure the survivability of Japan.⁴⁾

3) Terumasa Nakanishi, "Nihonkoku Kakubusoueno Ketsudan (Decision for a Nuclear Japan), *Shokun!* 35 (August 2003), pp. 22-37. See the English translation, Terumasa Nakanishi, "Nuclear Weapons for Japan," *Japan Echo* 30 (October 2003), pp. 48-54.

4) Satoshi Morimoto, "Eikokugata Last Resort Kakusenryakuno Susume (Pursue British-Style Last Resort Nuclear Strategy), *Shokun!* 35 (August 2003), pp. 67-69.

Japan should keep the nuclear option open

Japan should keep the nuclear option open. Although nuclear weapons are not necessary now, we should never say that we will never have nuclear weapons.

Japan should introduce U.S. nuclear weapons

Japan should permit the introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons in order to counter the North Korean nuclear threat, by dropping the third principle of the three non-nuclear principles.

Passive Opponents*The United States will never approve a nuclear Japan*

The United States will never approve of nor acquiesce to Japanese development and possession of nuclear weapons. In contrast to the above-mentioned opinions, the majority of speakers on this issue believe that it is unthinkable for the United States to allow a nuclear Japan.

Japan needs no nuclear weapons because of the U.S. nuclear umbrella

Japan does not need nuclear weapons as long as the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is healthy and nuclear deterrence is effective. Many experts have expressed opinions, such as "As long as the U.S.-Japan Alliance is functioning, Japan can rely on nuclear reaction from the United States. As a result, a nuclear Japan will become a realistic option only when the Alliance disappears," and "There is no better option for Japan than to stay under the U.S. nuclear umbrella for nuclear deterrence."

Nuclear weapons would be useless as a deterrent against North Korea

Japan's nuclear forces would be useless because they will not function as a deterrent against the threat from North Korea. If U.S. nuclear deterrence will not work because the leadership in North Korea has a peculiar and irrational way of thinking, then Japanese nuclear forces cannot either.

Japan's nuclearization would be impossible from a military and strategic point of view

It is impossible for Japan to develop and deploy nuclear weapons from a military and strategic point of view because of Japan's geographical nature. Japan

has its own geographical vulnerability that it can not absorb nuclear damage. As Japan is surrounded by the sea it is difficult to assume the situation like in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) states where tactical nuclear arsenals are supposed to intimidate massive conventional attacks.

Active Opponents

Japan's nuclearization would jeopardize the U.S.-Japan relationship

Japan's nuclearization would obstruct the friendly relationship between the United States and Japan, and lead to the collapse of the Alliance. This would put Japan on a confrontational track with the United States, and the result would be harmful to Japan's security.

A nuclear Japan would endanger East Asian security

With regard to East Asian countries, a nuclear Japan would encourage a Chinese nuclear build-up and probably lead to nuclearization by South Korea and Taiwan as well. The result would be a reduction in Japanese security.

Japan's nuclearization would lead to the collapse of the NPT

Japan's nuclearization would have effects on the international nuclear nonproliferation regime as well. A nuclear Japan would lead to a breakdown of the regime and invite many states to have nuclear weapons. As a result, Japan's security would decrease while Japan would suffer from particularly damaging economic sanctions.

Japan's international standing would be put at risk by nuclearization

Japan's international standing would also be put at risk by nuclearization. If Japan withdraws from the NPT and develops nuclear weapons, it would incur intense criticism and isolation from the rest of the world. That result would run counter to Japanese political and security interests.

Japan should not develop nuclear weapons because of their absolute immorality

Japan should not develop nuclear weapons because Japan is the only victim of the nuclear holocaust and is the only nation that knows their disastrous effects. Many in Japan still completely deny nuclear weapons from the viewpoint of their

immorality based on the experiences in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Probability for Japan Going Nuclear

While some Japanese experts argue for a nuclear Japan, many experts are rather negative about the likelihood Japan will go nuclear. They cite not only passive reasons, such as that it is not necessary or useful, but also cite the active reasons that nuclearization would detract from Japan's security. Taking all arguments above into consideration, the probability that Japan will develop a nuclear arsenal seems to be extremely low for the foreseeable future. The reasoning included in the opponents viewpoints is very convincing, and overall analysis including traditional non-nuclear feelings among Japanese people, Japan's national and security interests, Japan's position in the international community and technical, military and strategic difficulties leads us to conclude that a nuclear Japan is not likely.⁵⁾

SHOULD JAPAN KEEP DEPENDING ON THE NUCLEAR UMBRELLA OF THE U.S.?

The Government's Position

Even after the end of the Cold War, uncertainty and unstable factors such as regional conflicts due to complex and diverse causes, the proliferation of WMD and missiles, still persist in the Asia-Pacific region. Since Japan is unable to respond to all the situations that might threaten the country's security solely with its own defense capabilities, Japan must uphold its security under the deterrence provided by firmly maintaining the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and thereby securing the forward deployment of U.S. Forces.

From this perspective, Japan must continue unremittingly with its efforts to

5) For example, Katsuhisa Furukawa who recently examined the issue enumerates four conditions for Japan to make a decision to develop nuclear weapons: a perceived lack of credibility regarding U.S. extended deterrence; the virtual collapse of international regimes for arms control and nonproliferation; a significant increase in perceived threat from neighboring countries; and most importantly, the U.S. Government's approval for Japan to go nuclear. (Katsuhisa Furukawa, "Nuclear Option, Arms Control, and Extended Deterrence: In Search of a New Framework for Japan's Nuclear Policy," Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson, (eds.), *Japan's Nuclear Option: Security, Politics, and Policy in the 21st Century*, The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003, p. 97.)

further enhance the credibility of the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements. As a part of such efforts, in order to ensure the effectiveness of the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation, Japan has been continuing with bilateral defense planning in case of an armed attack against Japan and mutual cooperation planning in situations in areas surrounding Japan.

In addition, the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements, based on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, function effectively as a basic framework not only to ensure the peace and prosperity of Japan and the Far East, but also to realize peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.⁶⁾

According to the *National Defense Program Guideline for FY2005 and After*, in order to protect its territory and people against the threat of nuclear weapons, Japan will continue to rely on the U.S. nuclear deterrent. This is the same as the previous National Defense Program Guideline published in 1995. In the preparation of the new Guideline, the private advisory group to Prime Minister Koizumi suggested the phrase, "against the threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction", with the implication of nuclear deterrence against not only nuclear threat but also the threat by chemical or biological weapons. However, this suggestion was not adopted.

It is also noticed that after the phrase of nuclear deterrence, the following sentences appear.

"At the same time, Japan will play an active role in creating a world free of nuclear weapons by taking realistic step-by-step measures for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Japan also will play an active role in international disarmament and non-proliferation efforts regarding other types of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means, such as missiles."⁷⁾

Proponents

A majority of politicians, scholars and the general public support the idea of nuclear deterrence by the U.S. as a basic security foundation for Japan.

6) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2005*, p. 155.

7) Japan Defense Agency, *National Defense Program Guideline for FY2005 and After*,
[http://www.jda.go.jp/e/policy/f-word/taikou05/e01_03.htm]

Opponents

A few experts argue against not only nuclear deterrence by the U.S. but also the Japan-U.S. alliance itself. They search for a Japan that is completely independent, in particular, from the U.S. They also argue that Japan should have its own nuclear weapons for its defense and for its prestige.

On the other hands, some politicians, scholars and citizens criticize the nuclear deterrence from the other side. They maintain that the theory of nuclear deterrence would only lead to a nuclear arms race and make the world more dangerous. The criticism of the theory of nuclear deterrence has been expressed by mainly liberal scholars who are eager to achieve nuclear elimination as soon as possible.

Instead of, or in parallel with the U.S.-Japan security treaty, they argue for some form of East Asia framework to maintain peace and security in this area.

SHOULD JAPAN KEEP PURSUING NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT?

The Government's Position

Japan, in order to realize a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons, considers the strengthening of the international regime for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation based on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty very important.

Japan takes the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) as an indispensable pillar of the regime for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and urges its early entry into force as one of the most urgent issues of high priority in the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation field. Japan also strongly supports the early commencement of the negotiation on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for weapons purposes (FMCT). Japan is one of the leading countries to the elaboration and implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, and urges other countries to sign and ratify it for its universalization.⁸⁾

8) On Japan's policy, see Directorate General, Arms Control and Scientific Affairs, Ministry of Foreign

Since 1994 Japan has submitted a resolution at the UN General Assembly annually to realize nuclear disarmament.

On December 8, 2005, a resolution titled "Renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons," was adopted by the General Assembly with 168 states in favor, two states (the U.S. and India) opposing, and 7 states abstaining. It reaffirms the importance of compliance with and universality of the NPT, encourages further steps leading to nuclear disarmament, and in particular encourages Russia and the U.S. for a further nuclear reduction. It calls for the reduction of operational status of nuclear weapons and stresses the necessity of a diminishing role for nuclear weapons. It urges the signing and ratification of the CTBT, and emphasizes the importance of immediate commencement of the negotiation of the FMCT.

Even in the National Defense Program Guideline mentioned above, the importance of nuclear disarmament is emphasized in connection with the nuclear deterrence.

Proponents

Vast majority of Japanese politicians, scholars and citizens are in favor of nuclear disarmament, and there is a general consensus in Japanese society that nuclear disarmament is one of the main pillars for international peace and security.

As the only victim of nuclear bombings, Japanese are in general very sensitive regarding nuclear weapons, and the peace movements in Japan mainly focus on this issue.

Opponents - Not Enough

Japanese Government nuclear disarmament policy is criticized by active participants in peace movements that its demand for nuclear disarmament is too weak, because the Government emphasizes a practical, progressive and step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament starting from the CTBT, FMCT and nuclear reduction.

Affairs, *Japan's Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Policy*, April 2004. A new Japanese version (the third edition) was published in March 2006.

The Mayor of Hiroshima City proposes the idea of 2020, that is, to completely eliminate nuclear weapons by the year 2020. Activists in nuclear disarmament also urge for the total elimination of nuclear weapons as soon as possible, or in accordance with a time framework.

JAPAN'S FRUSTRATION AT THE U.S. NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICIES

U.S. Sole Focus on Non-Proliferation and Ignorance on Disarmament

The first is that the recent U.S. nuclear weapons policy focuses only on the aspect of nuclear non-proliferation and no regard is paid to the aspect on nuclear disarmament. At the 2005 NPT review conference, Japan strongly argued that, "35 years after the NPT's entry into force, we must once again recall: our obligations under Article VI to pursue negotiations in good faith on disarmament measures; our commitment to the 1995 decision on 'Principles and Objectives,' an integral part of package with the NPT indefinite extension; and the 'unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear weapons,' one of the 13 practical steps agreed upon in the 2000 Final Document,"⁹⁾

The United States argued for a discussion focused on non-compliance with non-proliferation norms while ignoring the issue of nuclear disarmament, stating that "Today, the treaty is facing the most serious challenge in its history due to instances of noncompliance. Some continue to use the pretext of a peaceful nuclear program to pursue the goal of developing nuclear weapons. This conference provides an opportunity for us to demonstrate our resolve in reaffirming our collective determination that noncompliance with the treaty's core nonproliferation norms is a clear threat to international peace and security."¹⁰⁾

Japan does not underestimate the importance and necessity to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials, as you find that Japan is one of the most active core members of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) that

9) Statement by H. E. Ambassador Yoshiki Mine, Representative of Japan to the NPT Review Conference in 2005 at the Plenary Meeting of Main Committee I, 19 May 2005.

10) Statement by Stephan G. Rademaker, United States Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control to the 2005 Review Conference of the NPT, New York, May 2, 2005.

was initiated by President Bush and tries to impede the transfer of weapons of mass destruction. Japan also strongly supports the UN General Assembly resolution 1540 that was also initiated by President Bush to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to non-state actors.

Japan considers that both nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament are indispensable for international peace and security and both should be pursued in parallel. Japan is working not only for nuclear non-proliferation but also for nuclear disarmament such as the early entry into force of the CTBT that is generally perceived as a measure to stop arms race and lead to nuclear disarmament. However, the U.S. is strenuously opposed to the CTBT.

U.S. Treatment of Non-NPT Parties

The second is that the United States seems now dealing non-NPT parties such as India, Pakistan and Israel as if they were nuclear-weapon states. A basic foundation for Japan to accept the NPT has been that there should be no more nuclear-weapon states other than the five nuclear-weapon states. When Japan decided to sign and ratify the NPT in the 1970s in spite of strong opposition from some parts, the basic presumption was that no new nuclear-weapon state should be recognized.

It means that a state that tries to manufacture or detonate nuclear weapons must be criticized, punished or isolated by the international community, in particular, by the five nuclear-weapon states. Moreover, they should not help a state to develop nuclear weapons.

However, the U.S. lifted its economic sanctions against India and Pakistan that had been imposed because of their nuclear test explosions in May 1998, just after the 9/11 in order to get support from Pakistan for the war on terrorism in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the India-U.S. Joint Statement on July 18, 2005 that promises U.S. full-scale civil nuclear cooperation with India means that the U.S. will help in civilian nuclear field with the state that has developed and manufactured nuclear weapons in clear confrontation with the international norm of nuclear non-proliferation. Although India is not a party to the NPT and has no obligation

under the treaty, the U.S. as a party is under the obligation to treat India as a non-nuclear-weapon state.

It is said that Japan is the best example of the states that may reconsider the wisdom of their prior nonproliferation decisions in the light of the new U.S. posture toward India, because they made explicit the conditionality of their NPT membership on assurances that the international community would not recognize any additional nuclear-weapon state.¹¹⁾

CONCLUSION

Views on nuclear weapons in Japan are various as stated above. However, the Government policy on nuclear weapons is clear. Japan will not have nuclear weapons, Japan depends on nuclear deterrence by the U.S. and Japan pursues nuclear disarmament sincerely.

On the first point, there seems to be a general consensus that Japan should not possess nuclear weapons in the foreseeable future, because it would have an adverse effect on Japan's security.

On the second point, there seems to be a general consensus that Japan should depend on nuclear deterrence by the U.S. because it is the best way to maintain peace and security around Japan in the foreseeable future.

On the third point, there seems to be a general consensus that Japan should pursue nuclear disarmament aiming at a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons, because Japan is the only victim of nuclear bombing and there still exists general consensus on nuclear allergy.

However, the second point and third point may collide in some cases. For example, when Japan criticized India as it conducted nuclear tests in May 1998, India counter-criticized Japan that Japan was not entitled to criticize India as Japan depended on the nuclear umbrella of the U.S.

The resolution of this discrepancy will depend on the international security environment in the future. We should work for a more peaceful and secure world

11) William Potter, "India and the New Look of U.S. Nonproliferation Policy," *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, July 2005, p. 348.

in all its aspects including not only promoting disarmament and non-proliferation, but also strengthening the norms and practices of no-use of force, peaceful settlement of international disputes, peace-keeping, peace-enforcement, and peace building.