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JAPAN SHOULD WORK HARDER FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Mitsuru Kurosawa

President Obama's address in Prague in April on nuclear disarmament was warmly and favorably accepted by the Japanese government and people. His determination to pursue a world without nuclear weapons and his reference to the US' moral responsibility to act as the only state to have used nuclear weapons were highly appreciated by Japan, one of the leading promoters of nuclear disarmament.

The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.

According to my analysis, pursuing nuclear disarmament, and disarmament in general, is one of the four critical measures that should be implemented in parallel or simultaneously to strengthen and promote international peace and security. The second measure is solidifying international law on the non-use of force and the third is developing mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. The fourth is establishing international enforcement mechanisms to be applied against those who violate the fundamental laws on the non-use of force.

These four measures are deeply interdependent, so progress in one area will facilitate progress in other areas. If states decide to resolve their disputes by peaceful means without resorting to military force, the level of military forces could be reduced. If the possession of certain weapons is prohibited, the possibility of their use will radically decline.

In addition, nuclear weapons are quite different not only from conventional weapons but also from chemical and biological weapons in their destructive and apocalyptic nature. The first and the most important task now is to prevent the use of nuclear weapons as much as possible, since the greatest perceived international threat at the moment is the possible use of nuclear weapons either by terrorist groups or by nuclear-armed countries, as President Obama clearly explained in his address.

In these circumstances, Japan should take the following measures to promote nuclear disarmament.

First, Japan should work with other states to prevent nuclear weapons, materials or technologies from falling into the hands of terrorists. Nuclear deterrence will not work against terrorists who have no return addresses and do not hesitate to commit suicide bombings. As one of the most developed nations in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, Japan has many technologies and know-how for securing nuclear materials and technologies against falling into the wrong hands.

Second, to cope effectively with North Korea's nuclear threat, Japan should in the short term work with other states to persuade North Korea to come back to the Six-Party Talks as soon as possible in order to achieve a peaceful

settlement based on the 2005 Joint Statement among the six parties. Once a peaceful settlement is reached, then Japan should in the medium term work to maintain and develop the framework of the Six-Party Talks into a new security framework among the six states in Northeast Asia. Along with the construction of a regional framework, the establishment of a Northeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone should be pursued among the six nations, with the three nuclear-weapons states giving negative security assurances to the three non-nuclear-weapon states.


Third, with President Obama emphasizing the importance of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national security policy in order to put an end to Cold War thinking, he may declare a policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons. Japan should be prepared to cope with such a situation by carefully studying the best options for Japan in the short and long terms while engaging in periodical exchanges of opinions with the US.

The Japanese government has been ambiguous on the threats that should be countered through reliance on US nuclear deterrence, although the National Defense Program Guideline adopted by the Cabinet clearly states that Japan depends on the US nuclear umbrella against nuclear threats. For example, asked if the US would use nuclear weapons first in case of an attack on Japan with conventional weapons, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Kiichi Miyazawa told the Diet in 1982 that nuclear weapons could be used if the attack could not be deterred by conventional weapons alone.

Fourth, Japan has been one of the most active nations in promoting nuclear disarmament, for example, by submitting a draft resolution for nuclear abolition to the United Nations General Assembly that has been adopted with the approval of an overwhelming majority since 1994. Groups of states such as the five nuclear-weapon states, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) states, and New Agenda Coalition (NAC) states are playing important roles in the NPT Review Conference, the Conference on Disarmament and other multilateral forums.

In addition to acting alone, Japan should display leadership in assembling non-nuclear-weapon states under the US nuclear umbrella to form a strong group for nuclear disarmament – Australia, South Korea, and

non-nuclear-weapon states within NATO – in spite of being under a nuclear umbrella. This group could propose concrete measures for nuclear disarmament or take a mediating stance between the five nuclear-weapon states and the NAM or the NAC and promote nuclear disarmament based on realistic security analyses, not just on moral responsibility.

Circumstances surrounding nuclear disarmament radically and rapidly have changed with the advent of the Obama administration and nuclear policy under the Bush administration came under severe criticism because of the US' unilateral behavior and neglect of international regimes and international law. Japan should work with the Obama administration under the slogan of change for a much more secure and peaceful international community. 

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