

Local Governments Vs. The Nuclear Village 地方自治体 vs 原子カムラ

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature

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In the last several months, the Abe Shinzo government has favored a rhetoric of economic revival by using nuclear power at home and selling nuclear technology abroad. It appears, however, that only a minority of the Japanese public supports these plans. As the *Asahi* has reported

(http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201306100070), polls show that 58% of voters are opposed to Abe's nuclear plans with only 28% responding that the government should go ahead with restarts. Similarly, a poll (http://www.jiji.com/jc/c?g=eco_30&k=2013061500165) carried out by Jiji News Service revealed that 58% "do not support" nuclear exports with only 24% in favor. With news (<http://www.asahi.com/national/update/0616/TKY201306160211.html?ref=yahoo>) of a new leak or system failure at the site of the Fukushima Daiichi cleanup coming every few weeks, it is little wonder that the population is skeptical about the safety and utility of nuclear power.

Despite resistance by the numbers, however, there is a certain ambivalence evident in Japanese popular views of nuclear power. Despite resistance to the idea of restarts and exports, voters turned the Democratic Party out of power, rejected diverse options on the left, and handed the Liberal Democrats, the most pro-nuclear among major political parties, a

landslide election victory in December 2012. As Abe talks of unpopular plant restarts and a strong nuclear export push, he has maintained a very high approval rating. Poll results reported

(<http://news24.jp/articles/2013/06/16/04230582.html>) by broadcaster NTV in mid-June have Abe's overall approval rating at 60.1% with support for the LDP at 47.7%, far ahead of the second place Democrats who garnered a mere 8.6%. These numbers seem to point to a landslide LDP victory in the upcoming July House of Councillors elections. While opposition to nuclear power is clearly there, it has not had a significant impact on LDP support.

One sector of the Japanese public sphere that has maintained anti-nuclear momentum, however, is that of local government. On June 11, the *Asahi Shimbun* published a piece, included below, detailing the continuing resistance to nuclear restarts at the local level.

In age of Abe, local governments still fight for nuclear-free society

June 11, 2013

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

OSAKA--Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his government have abandoned a nuclear-free policy, largely ignored anti-nuclear protests and are accelerating efforts to restart idled reactors.

But many local governments and groups have still not given up their drive to end the nation's dependence on nuclear energy. They say the nation simply cannot risk another accident like the one that hit the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

For example, an energy strategy council jointly set up in February 2012 by the Osaka prefectural government and the Osaka city government compiled a final report on May 31 that concluded: "Japan can achieve a nuclear-free society by 2030."

That more or less matched Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's appeal, "Let's make a proposal from Osaka to build a nuclear-free society."

The 10 experts on the council include Chairman Kazuhiro Ueda, professor of economics at Kyoto University; Kenichi Oshima, professor of economics at Ritsumeikan University; and Hiroshi Takahashi, senior researcher at Fujitsu Research Institute.

The final report provided a road map that reflected Kansai Electric Power Co.'s enormous difficulties in supplying electricity to customers after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

All reactors in the country were shut down for

safety reasons following the Fukushima accident. Kansai Electric, based in Osaka, had depended on nuclear power generation for more than 50 percent of its electricity supply, and thus the Kansai region faced the most serious electricity shortage among all regions in Japan.

There were also concerns that an accident at one of the many nuclear reactors in Fukui Prefecture could contaminate Lake Biwa in Shiga Prefecture, which serves as a water source for many areas in the Kansai region.

"The weakness of the electricity supply system centering on nuclear power generation became clear," the Osaka council's report said.

It also said that "nuclear power generation does not have an economic advantage" over other power generating methods, citing the procedures to secure land for a nuclear plant and the enormous costs for construction or possible clean-up work following an accident.

Saying it is "reasonable" to achieve a nuclear-free society by 2030, the report mapped out measures that should be taken through fiscal 2017.

The main pillar is "reforming the electricity supply system" earlier than the central government's schedule to increase the use of renewable energies, such as solar power and wind power.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

plans to separate the electricity transmission division from electric power companies from 2018 to 2020.

However, the report urged the central government to implement the separation within two years from now. It also called on the central government to completely liberalize the electricity retailing business to allow the entry of other power companies.

“It is impossible to reform the electricity supply system in two years,” a ministry official said. “If the proposal is not realistic, it is just pie in the sky.”

The Osaka report also acknowledged that the idled nuclear reactors would be restarted, but it attached conditions. “The central government should thoroughly study safety regulations around the world,” the report said. “It will take at least three years (until a restart).”

The report also said that the central government should stop giving grants to local governments that host nuclear plants, and called for changes to industrial structures in some areas that depend too heavily on nuclear power plants.

It also requested the enactment of a law to promote the decommissioning of nuclear reactors.

In the background of the report was dissatisfaction with the way Kansai Electric raised electricity rates earlier this year.

“It is unreasonable to raise electricity charges unilaterally when consumers cannot choose their electric power companies,” Osaka Governor Ichiro Matsui said.

The governor said he will work out the “Osaka Power Denryoku Koso” (Osaka power electricity plan) within this year to establish a power generation organization that can rival Kansai Electric.

He will also demand the central government adopt contents of the report.

The Fukushima prefectural government is also pushing for a nuclear-free society by demanding the central government decommission all 10 nuclear reactors in the prefecture.

About 160,000 residents of the prefecture are still living as evacuees due to the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The neighboring prefecture of Yamagata also advocated a move away from nuclear power generation and a promotion of renewables in its energy strategy compiled in March 2012.

The Shiga and Kyoto prefectural governments have also compiled plans to shift away from nuclear power. Shiga Governor Yukiko Kada is known for advocating a “graduation from nuclear power generation.”

In April 2012, local government leaders looking to phase out nuclear power generation set up a council that now has 68 local leaders as members, including Tatsuya Murakami, chief of Tokai village in Ibaraki Prefecture that hosts the Tokai No. 2 nuclear plant of Japan Atomic Power Co.

But Abe and his ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which nullified the previous administration's goal of "achieving a nuclear-free society by the end of the 2030s," are moving in the opposite direction. They plan to speed up the process of restarting reactors approved by the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

(This article was written by Ryuta Sometaya, Nahoko Kyotani and Yuriko Suzuki.)

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