

Toward a nuclear-free northeast Asia or preservation of the status quo? A Symposium

Shimbun Asahi

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By Asahi Shimbun

The following are edited excerpts of a panel discussion coordinated by Wakamiya Yoshibumi, chairman of The Asahi Shimbun's editorial board with Amano Yukiya (former Director-General of Arms Control and Scientific Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Asai Motofumi (former diplomat and President, Hiroshima Peace Institute), Choi Sang Yong (South Korean Ambassador to Japan), Kato Koichi, former Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General, and Okada Katsuya (leader of the Democratic Party of Japan).

Wakamiya: The focus of the six-party talks is whether North Korea should be allowed to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes. There is a view that North Korea will never abandon its nuclear development programs.

Amano Yukiya: In North Korea, there are no nuclear development programs for peaceful uses. Every program seems to be leading to the development of nuclear weapons. Therefore, every nuclear development program must be abolished. That is the stance of the Japanese government.

Odaka Katsuya: The nuclear issues are important cards for North Korea to survive. It is not easy to push the country to the goal (of abolishing nuclear development programs) in a short period. On the other hand, as time passes, North Korea will come closer to technological completion. This is an ultimate dilemma. But, in reality, we cannot help taking a step-by-step approach.

Kato Koichi: North Korea is worried very much about whether it can continue to exist as a country. Even if the nuclear programs are ineffectual, North Korea is exaggerating them in order to use them as a threat. It is necessary for Japan to have a broad mind to lead North Korea toward a proper course.

Wakamiya: Japan also has an abduction issue. Mr. Choi, what do you think about the Japanese government's stance in the six-party talks?

Choi Sang Yong: I have great expectations for Japan the only country that suffered atomic bombings. But I have doubts about whether Japan really intends to make the utmost efforts to resolve the nuclear issues. For me, it seems that Japan lacks a serious stance on nuclear issues as it is too eager to pursue the abduction issue.

Umebayashi Hiromichi: At least, it is necessary for the six-party talks to reconfirm the 1992 joint declaration of two Koreas for their denuclearization. In the declaration, both Koreas promised that they would implement neither uranium enrichment nor reprocessing for plutonium.

But the problem does not end there. What is important is how to resolve nuclear issues of all northeast Asia, such as the issue of mutual inspection among countries in the region, including Japan.

Wakamiya: The DPJ has proposed a plan for making northeast Asia nuclear-free.

Okada: I hope that Japan, South Korea and North Korea will conclude an agreement not to possess, develop or use weapons at least in the field of nuclear arms. I think that a nuclear-free zone

involving the three countries should be realized as early as possible.

Umebayashi: Last year, we made a model treaty for a northeast Asian nuclear-free zone. The treaty stipulates that Japan and the two Koreas not have nuclear weapons. It also stipulates that the United States, Russia and China guarantee that they will never carry out nuclear attacks on the three northeast Asian countries.

Motofumi Asai: I want to address a question to Mr. Okada. Since Japan is protected under the nuclear umbrella of the United States, do you really think that the establishment of a northeast Asian nuclear-free zone is a realistic idea?

Okada: The idea can be realized if we obtain a promise from the United States, Russia and China that they will never launch preemptive nuclear strikes in the region.

Umebayashi: As a policy of Japan, I think that "non-nuclear security" is possible. The problem is whether countries involved in the program can establish a fair inspection system (for nuclear weapons).

Amano: North Korea has more than one million soldiers. China has nuclear weapons. Though China insists that nuclear weapons should be abolished, it is the only country that is not reducing its nuclear weapons. We must also

consider the past behavior of North Korea. Considering those factors, we hesitate to support the idea of protecting Japan's security with a promise of a nuclear-free zone. The conditions to realize a nuclear-free zone have not been met.

Wakamiya: The government controlled by the Liberal Democratic Party has long attached importance to the nuclear umbrella of the United States. Meanwhile, some prime ministers considered arming Japan with nuclear weapons. Some people say that the idea of going nuclear could be advocated again depending on the results of the negotiations on North Korean nuclear programs.

Kato: There are three options for Japan to deal with nuclear threats. One is to possess nuclear weapons. Another is to remain under the nuclear umbrella of the United States. And the last is to make a security framework by talking with countries that have nuclear weapons. As Japan has a big influence on Asian politics, it must not possess nuclear weapons. Instead, we should consider a nuclear-free scheme that makes it possible for Japan to go out of the nuclear umbrella. If Japan is not confident in the scheme, it should put itself under the nuclear umbrella of the United States.

Wakamiya: Mr. Amano and Mr. Umebayashi saw the latest review conference of the NPT in New York in May. What went wrong?

Amano: Many countries complained that nuclear powers like the United States are not making sufficient efforts for nuclear disarmament. Some countries also said that they do not want to destroy the agreement reached in 2000. As those issues were piling up, participating countries spent as much as two-thirds of the conference time on procedural matters.

Umebayashi: The United States has said that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a bad treaty, and has taken a position denying the treaty itself. In the preparatory meetings for the May review conference, the United States continued to express a stance critical of the CTBT. The U.S. way of doing things denies the multilateral meetings' methods (for producing agreements).

The latest review conference prompted me to think that a different multilateral meeting is necessary. At that meeting, the thoughts of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would be shown to the countries that gathered for the purpose of eliminating of nuclear weapons. By mobilizing world public opinion, the meeting would make it possible for the NPT to function.

Amano: In the talks on the CTBT, we made strong assertions and the United States heatedly countered our views. Japan's resolution for the elimination of nuclear weapons includes the early effectuation of the CTBT.

Okada: I think that the Japanese government tried (to make the latest NPT review conference a success). But we were not able to see the intentions of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro. The U.S. attitude towards the CTBT, its development of small nuclear weapons, and its preference for unilateral actions or for conferring only with countries with the same ideas these will all adversely affect the United States in the long term. But the Japanese government was unable to persuade the United States of the long-term effects of its stance.

Asai: The reason Japan was eventually unable to do anything (to prevent the review conference from ending in failure) is that Japan was paying consideration to the United States and was feeling constraints because of the presence of the United States. It is impossible (for Japan) to comment on (nuclear nonproliferation) positively as long as it is protected under the nuclear umbrella of the United States.

Wakamiya: What roles should Japan play toward the elimination of nuclear weapons?

Choi: Japan is a country which suffered from the atomic bombings. It also has three non-nuclear principles (of not possessing nuclear weapons, not making them and not allowing them to be brought into Japan). Japan also has political power appropriate to its economic power, which is the second largest in the world. The Japan-U.S.

Security Treaty is decades old, therefore Japan has power to move the United States. Japan also has the power and legitimacy to take an initiative toward a nuclear-free world. I have repeatedly spoken of those matters, but I still am not satisfied with the present situation of Japan.

Asai: The Holocaust in Germany has become a common memory for all humanity. But, why haven't the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki become a memory like that? People in Germany have tackled the issue together by involving the government and the parliament. Therefore, I think that the efforts in Germany have had a persuasive power. The German people's efforts for not escaping from the responsibility as an assailant have contributed greatly to making the Holocaust a common heritage for all humankind.

So long as Japan is protected under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, it will not be able to make Hiroshima and Nagasaki a common heritage for humanity.

Okada: Why can't Japan tackle the issue of the atomic bombings as an entire nation? I think it is because Japan has not reached a conclusive judgment about its conduct in the war. First we must admit the mistakes Japan committed. Then, we should say that dropping atomic bombs is not permissible from a humanitarian viewpoint.

Wakamiya: After the September 11 terrorist attacks took place in New York, the site of the attacks was called "ground zero." But, the words originally meant the place where a nuclear bomb explodes. If a nuclear bomb actually exploded in the site in New York when I thought about that, I felt horrible.

It is not easy to eliminate nuclear weapons. But what encourages us not to give up is the thought

that we must never allow the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to occur again. For that purpose, we must continue to tell the world and our descendants of the misery of the real ground zeros of the two cities. Today, I felt strongly again that it is Japan's duty to do so.

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