Japan's New Anti-nuclear Policy

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The issue of nuclear war and nuclear disarmament have repeatedly been submerged in recent years by issues of terrorist attack and wars such as those in the Congo, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Iraq and Gaza. But as former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans recently pointed out at the October meeting of the Australia-Japan International Conference on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, "The truth of the matter is that there are at the moment, depending on how you calculate these things, somewhere between 13,000 and 16,000 nuclear warheads actively deployed, a great many of them still on hair-trigger alert even though the Cold War has been long over. And between them having a phenomenal destructive capability. The reality also is that we are on the brink - after years and years of containing rather well the emergence of new nuclear weapon states, with all the risks of either deliberate or accidental use of nuclear weapons that flows from the existence of nuclear weapons or nuclear arms proliferation . . ."

ICCND October, 2008 meeting

Against this background, and with a new administration taking office in Washington, there have been important but little noted developments in the world anti-nuclear movement. The present article examines the basis for the reemergence of Japan to leadership in the movement to halt proliferation and eliminate nuclear weapons. Japan Focus

A notable meeting took place in a room of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Kasumigaseki, Tokyo, on December 24, 2008. The meeting was the first direct conversation between representatives of all of Japan's major anti-nuclear-weapons NGOs and Kawaguchi Yoriko, the former foreign minister (2002- 2004) and currently a diet member belonging to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

Not only was it remarkable that MOFA organized and sponsored this meeting but it is also noteworthy that it convened the meeting on Christmas Eve. A national committee selected the participants. All told, 19 NGOs were represented at this historic meeting. In addition to the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), which won the Noble Peace Prize in 1985, those present included the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikyo), the Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs (Gensuikin), the Japan Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, Hiroshima and Nagasaki Citizen's Groups for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, Pugwash Japan, YWCA, the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, Nihon Hidankyo (Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations), Soka Gakkai (a Buddhist Association for Peace, Culture and Education), as well as a number of organizations involved in the anti-nuclear-weapons movement.

Ms. Kawaguchi is a co-chair of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), which is a joint initiative of the Japanese and Australian governments. Optimistic about a favorable outcome for the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and encouraged by the prospect that Barack Obama, then the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee for president, would win the presidency and fundamentally change U.S. nuclear weapons policy, ICNND was organized in July 2008 to reinvigorate international efforts for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

At the Christmas Eve meeting, Ms. Kawaguchi and MOFA asked the NGOs to make straightforward suggestions to ICCND. Twelve NGOs proposed what each thought was most crucial for making ICCND effective. Ms. Kawaguchi promised to make all twelve proposals known at the ICCND's forthcoming meeting.

Among the many issues discussed, three stand out as critically important. First, the ICCND should adopt a realistic approach to nuclear disarmament but at the same time not lose sight of the principal goal, which is the abolition of all nuclear weapons. According to the ICCND: "To succeed in engaging political decision makers, the Commission will need to recognize and bring a realistic approach to the many factors continuing to drive nuclear weapons acquisition and retention. The case for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament will need to be restated in terms that are not only technically sound but also compelling for political decision makers." Included here is the controversial yet important proposal that the ICNND create a plan to eliminate Japan's reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella and therefore propose a security model that does not depend on nuclear weapons.

Second, the ICNND must begin work to facilitate the development of a successful Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). At present there is no NWC in the form of an international treaty. An NWC would do a number of important things, such as codify norms that reject the existence of nuclear weapons; ban all forms of activities related to nuclear weapons, including development and possession of them; create a framework for the complete abolition of nuclear weapons; and establish a fair yet stringent verification system. [1]

Third, the ICCND should meet regularly in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with anti-nuclear weapons NGOs and citizen groups. These meetings should take place in an open environment and should demonstrate cooperation and consensus among the participants and with MOFA.

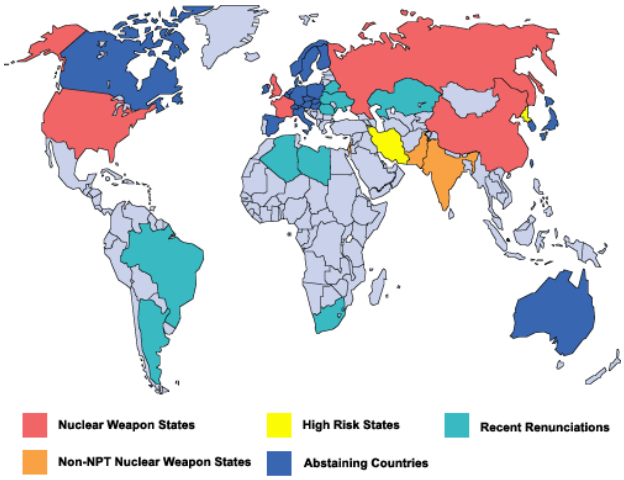
Moreover, the comments made by MOFA at the Christmas Eve meeting were consistent with existing efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons, such as the Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision, an initiative supported by 236 cities in 134 countries

and regions of the world to abolish all nuclear weapons. MOFA's comments also reflected the Japanese government's recognition of the legitimacy of the Article VI of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty that calls for complete nuclear disarmament. Speaking for herself, Ms. Kawaguchi criticized the nuclear deal recently struck between the United States and India.

Hiroshima Mayor Akiba Tadatoshi with Prime Minister of Finland promoting Peace 2020

No one would have predicted a year ago that MOFA would be engaged in significant dialogue with Japanese anti-nuclear organizations or adopt such a positive position on nuclear disarmament. Constrained by the Bush administration's aversion to nuclear disarmament, the Japanese government was unwilling to heed the demands of anti-nuclear weapons groups calling for immediate action on the abolition of nuclear weapons. For example, MOFA demonstrated its sensitivity to U.S. interests when it abstained from the 2007 U.N. draft resolution reaffirming the importance of the International Court of Justice's 1996 conclusion that every state should work in good faith to achieve nuclear disarmament. The Japanese representative explained that Japan abstained on the grounds that it was premature for countries to meet their immediate obligations for the elimination of nuclear disarmament.

Perhaps the best example of Japan succumbing to the Bush administration's position on nuclear-weapons-related issues was Tokyo's sudden reversal on an important matter pertaining to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which many view as a core component of the nuclear disarmament regime. Since its inception in 1996, the Japanese government has been an especially strong – if not the leading – advocate of the CTBT, urging states, but particularly those like the United States that must sign and ratify the accord before it can go into force, to do so. Unlike its predecessor, the Bush administration openly expressed a strong aversion to international treaties, including, most notably, the CTBT. In 2000, as it had done frequently in the past, Tokyo submitted to the U.N. General Assembly a draft resolution calling for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. This resolution called for the CTBT to come into force "before 2003." Aware that the Bush administration did not support the CTBT, Tokyo's 2001 draft resolution, which it submitted in October to the U.N. General Assembly, left out the words "before 2003." Even though Tokyo made the change hoping that the Bush administration would support Japan's draft resolution, the United States still voted against it. Tokyo's failed effort to accommodate the Bush administration stemmed from its belief that Japan needed the security provided by the U.S. nuclear umbrella.



Map showing nuclear weapons states (2006)

Similarly, Tokyo has been a strong proponent of getting the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty to come into force. However, the Bush administration made clear in 2004 that it wanted the discussions on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty to remain within the U.N. Conference on Disarmament, where disagreements between Washington and Beijing have stalled movement on the accord. As it has with the CTBT, the Bush administration has maintained that the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty "cannot be verified effectively." [2] As a result, Tokyo has not expended nearly enough effort on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty to get it to come into force.

Today, MOFA's position on the abolition of nuclear weapons appears to be changing and Tokyo may be expected to begin to take important steps to promote nuclear disarmament. Tokyo's change in attitude appears to anticipate change in Washington's nuclear weapons policy. It is important to recall the 2008 Democratic Party's platform on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It states, "America will seek a world with no nuclear weapons and take concrete actions to move in this direction. We will make the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons worldwide a central element of U.S. nuclear weapons policy."

Thus, MOFA no longer fears publicly declaring that Japan should play a leading role in the abolition of nuclear weapons. Moreover, the Japanese government should feel encouraged by the fact that the Democratic Party's platform also states, "we will convene a summit in 2009 (and regularly thereafter) of leaders of Permanent Members of the U.N. Security Council and other key countries to agree on implementing many of these [nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation] measures on a global basis."

Japanese anti-nuclear weapons organizations are very hopeful that the influence of the Obama administration will give rise to a sustained global movement, which will include the active involvement of the government of Japan, leading to progress toward a nuclear-weapons-free world. Given the growing recognition in certain quarters in the United States that nuclear disarmament is important for its survival, the possibility exists to establish a world consensus that the total abolition of nuclear weapons is possible.

The danger exists that international conflicts and wars fought with conventional weapons could undermine the movement to abolish nuclear weapons. Although there are a number of anti-nuclear weapons organizations in Japan, they are not unified. There remain historical and policy differences among them. In 1963, serious political disagreements relating to the acceptance of nuclear testing emerged within Gensuikyo and caused a major factional dispute that led to the formation of Gensuikin. [3] Because of geography and political loyalties, the international anti-nuclear weapons movement is even less coherent than it is in Japan, with interstate or regional conflict or war a frequent basis for divisiveness. Thus, anti-nuclear weapons organizations need to keep their sights unswervingly trained on nuclear disarmament.

A nuclear-weapons-free world cannot be accomplished without U.S. leadership. This important point was stressed recently by four former senior U.S. statesmen, and subsequently endorsed by a number of other well-known public figures. [4] Alternatively, however, US leaders could increase pressure on Japan to subordinate itself to the military partnership with the United States.

This ominous prospect could lead one to suspect that MOFA's new approach to nuclear disarmament might be intended to manage a complicated public situation, given the strong opposition to nuclear weapons in Japan, the only nation to have experienced nuclear bombing. For

this reason, it is important that Japanese anti-nuclear weapons groups firmly maintain that worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons is the highest priority for human survival, while continuing to strive for complete nuclear disarmament.

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Notes

[1] International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, International Network of Engineers and Scientists Against Proliferation, and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Security and Survival: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (Cambridge, MA: IPPNW, 1999).

[2] Anthony DiFilippo, Japan's Nuclear Disarmament Policy and the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[3] Ibid.

[4] George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," The Wall Street Journal, January 4, 2007; George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, "Toward a Nuclear-Free World," The Wall Street Journal, January 15, 2008.