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## Abolishing Nuclear Weapons: A Japanese Perspective

The recent heightened expectation for the prospect of abolishing nuclear weapons stems from the momentum created by two op-eds written by four former high-ranking U.S. officials advocating a world free of nuclear weapons. Along with those articles have come clear indications of the further promotion of nuclear disarmament by President-elect Obama, as well as a spate of concrete proposals put forth by major countries and preeminent think tanks advocating the need to work toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. However, these facts do not necessarily guarantee that the project will be successful. Numerous proposals for abolishing nuclear weapons have been raised repeatedly in the past, and they have failed. Now the world community has an opportune moment to carry out specific actions toward abolishing nuclear weapons, and we must not fail again. The Adelphi Paper, *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons*, by George Perkovich and James Acton addresses in a realistic and objective manner many of the issues that have been considered especially difficult to solve. This approach should contribute greatly “to encourage a conversation about the abolition of nuclear weapons.”

Abolishing nuclear weapons has been Japan’s long-cherished goal, and the promotion of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation has been one of the pillars in Japanese foreign and security policy. As the only country to have experienced nuclear devastation, Japan bases its nuclear disarmament policy on the strong beliefs that the atrocities of nuclear bombs

must never be repeated, that nuclear weapons must be eliminated, and that Japan has a unique responsibility to urge the international community to make faster progress toward disarmament. At the same time, its policy toward the nuclear conundrum has to be reconciled with the reality that Japan is geopolitically situated in the unstable security environment of Northeast Asia, as well as with the reality that nuclear weapons exist in international society and in fact have played a role in maintaining international order and stability.

### **Regional Concerns**

Northeast Asia is one of the most critical regions with regard to nuclear issues. Every state that has direct security stakes in the region has been closely engaged with nuclear weapons. The United States, Russia, and China are all parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while North Korea possesses nuclear weapons in violation of the NPT. Although neither Japan nor South Korea possesses any nuclear weapons, both are under the U.S. nuclear umbrella. On top of all this, the security environment of this region has remained volatile, even since the end of the Cold War. The possibility of major armed conflicts erupting in the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait has long been worrisome. Additionally, several unsolved territorial disputes exist in Northeast Asia, and the relationships among regional countries are not necessarily amicable. Furthermore, a rising China has continued to modernize its military force, including its nuclear capabilities, while its intentions remain unclear. In the medium to long term, the United States and China may vie for hegemony and influence in the Asia-Pacific region, resulting in confrontation.

The role of nuclear weapons in the Northeast Asian security environment cannot be lightly dismissed. Maintaining order and stability by deterring the use of military force is of prime importance, considering the confrontational or competitive relationship among the key countries. Moreover, simply eliminating nuclear weapons, without establishing an alternative security arrangement or framework that does not depend on nuclear threats, would increase the volatility of the region because conventional forces provide weaker deterrence than nuclear weapons. The result could be a possible heightening of the “security dilemma” as well as increased likelihood of an armed conflict caused by miscalculations or misperceptions. Specifically, one country might think it could achieve its (limited) objectives by force if it did not fear massive destruction by a United States, possessing only conventional forces.

### **Balancing Order and Justice**

The image of nuclear weapons as assuring order and stability continues to exist in the international community at large as well as in Northeast Asia. Although the abolition of nuclear weapons may very well be “justice”—ending the double standard between nuclear “haves” and “have nots,” and achieving a world free from fear of catastrophic destruction—blind pursuance of this cause could disturb order and stability. It would be questionable to pursue justice in this way as it may turn out to be hazardous if nuclear weapons are abolished without giving heed to order and stability.

However, in the nuclear age, order and stability are provided under the sword of Damocles. The logic of nuclear-armed states that deep reductions and the subsequent abolition of nuclear weapons cannot be initiated without the assurance of security and “strategic stability” is prone to be used as a pretext for maintaining the status quo under the premise that the present order and stability would continue. But there is no guarantee that this premise would hold indefinitely. Nor is there a guarantee that nuclear deterrence would continue to function in today’s increasingly complicated security environment as it did when it rendered the Cold War “the long peace.”<sup>1</sup> Nuclear weapons in the hands of North Korea, other rogue states, or non-state actors could easily destabilize Northeast Asia and the wider international community. It also cannot be ruled out that “good nukes” that contribute to international order and stability could suddenly change themselves into “bad nukes.” Moreover, no matter how “good” or “bad” a particular nuclear-armed state may be, a single use of these weapons could cause hundred of thousands of casualties and destruction of a city.

### **Practical Steps Toward Abolition**

The top priority in advancing nuclear abolition in Northeast Asia is the dismantlement of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal. Japan, the United States, and China should concurrently launch intensive bilateral or trilateral strategic dialogues to increase transparency and mutual understanding in security policies, nuclear policies, missile defense issues, deterrence postures, and so on. Strategic dialogue and triologue are also needed to encourage the rapidly rising China to proceed not to a confrontational relationship with the United States and Japan but to a relationship based on cooperation. Establishment of a pluralistic and stable Northeast Asian security framework that does not rely so heavily on nuclear and other military powers would be a positive step. Of course, the rapid progress of regional nuclear disarmament is not easy. However, discussions like

those we suggest could decrease opacity and increase predictability. That could enable the regional countries to reduce their dependence on nuclear weapons, which would then augment nuclear disarmament.

The effort to construct an enduring security framework that preserves order and stability without depending on nuclear weapons should be sought not only by Northeast Asian states, but also by the international community as a whole. As advocated by Perkovich and Acton, several measures—such as a highly intrusive verification process; multinational or international ownership of fuel-cycle facilities; strict enforcement mechanisms applicable even to major countries; and virtual nuclear arsenals and international control on nuclear weapons as a hedge against violations—are indispensable in the process of abolishing nuclear weapons. And perhaps what their article implies is that without a transition to a new international security framework, such measures, let alone abolition of nuclear weapons, cannot be realized. The root cause of why past abolition attempts have failed could very well have been the inability to establish a new security framework to supersede the existing one.

At present, one cannot fathom concrete and detailed images regarding either the necessary mechanics for abolishing nuclear weapons or the new security framework that would be required. That said, it is unrealistic to seek perfect verification measures or enforcement mechanisms from the outset. Such measures should be constructed and implemented step-by-step and improved incrementally, leading to a more effective system. Additionally, discussions and processes geared toward abolishing nuclear weapons should be seen as conducive to the formulation of a new security framework.

Therefore, international discussions on abolishing nuclear weapons should be undertaken on two levels: One at a high political level to influence decision makers of both nuclear-armed and non-nuclear-weapon states—a forum to reaffirm the political will to abolish nuclear weapons while keeping the formation of new security framework as a possibility. The other level consists of experts and specialists, who would discuss concrete measures to overcome impediments to abolishing nuclear weapons. In the meantime, proceeding with actual measures toward nuclear disarmament—particularly visible efforts by the nuclear-armed states—are certainly important and should not be overlooked.

### **Nonproliferation and the Civilian Nuclear Industry**

Japan can play a major role as one of the countries to lead such discussions and endeavors, particularly if, among various issues, the peaceful

use of nuclear energy is a focus. As the non-nuclear-weapon state that has actively promoted nuclear energy while faithfully complying with nonproliferation obligations, Japan can provide a model that could enable other non-nuclear-weapon states to develop peaceful nuclear energy programs that maintain a high degree of nuclear safety and security while complying with nonproliferation obligations. Japan has also contributed by developing proliferation-resistant technologies. In Japan, a serious debate is taking place concerning effective, nondiscriminatory conditions for assuring international nuclear fuel supplies.<sup>2</sup>

International debate on nuclear fuel supply assurances has been prompted by Iran's failure to comply with United Nations and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demands that it suspend its enrichment and reprocessing-related activities. While it is imperative to prevent would-be proliferators from gaining access to the most sensitive technologies for producing fissile materials, a criteria-based approach for nuclear fuel supply assurances is more desirable than one that is discriminatory.

The key challenge here is to determine the conditions for supplying nuclear fuel. For nuclear nonproliferation, acceding to the additional protocol as well as the IAEA comprehensive safeguards agreement and voluntarily renouncing enrichment and reprocessing activities should be included in the condition. But several potential consumer countries may oppose severe conditions, arguing that article IV of the NPT guarantees "the inalienable right...to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes" and also claiming the principle of nondiscrimination. At the same time, failure to agree on strict supply conditions would impede the original goal of nonproliferation. Either way, it is unlikely that determined proliferators such as North Korea and possibly Iran would participate in such an international approach, necessitating separate political settlements. Additionally, why should countries with leading civil nuclear technologies, such as Japan, which for years have abided by their nuclear nonproliferation obligations in good faith, be "punished" for activities by certain non-complying countries, resulting in the divestiture of the rights relating to the nuclear fuel cycle, such as enrichment and reprocessing? Japan is expected to propose constructive proposals addressing these issues.

As the only country that has experienced nuclear bombings, Japan has the responsibility to lead the effort to elevate to an international norm that nuclear weapons must be eliminated. Japan's standing is bolstered because the country continues to comply fully with nuclear nonproliferation obligations and has strived to promote realistic and progressive nuclear

disarmament. Japan acknowledges the realities of the region and of the international community, including the fact that under the current security environment, nuclear weapons have, to a certain extent, contributed to maintaining international order and stability. At the same time, Japan will continue proactively to participate in international efforts to construct a more stable security order under a desirable security framework that does not rely on nuclear weapons.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- <sup>2</sup> For example, the committee for strengthening nuclear nonproliferation, commissioned by the Japanese Cabinet Office and headed by Takaya Suto, is now elaborating on the Japanese proposals for the nuclear fuel guarantee approach.