



Japan & Nuclear Disarmament

Looking through the US Umbrella

Tomoko Kiyota
Former Intern, IPCS

Introduction

On 27 April 2009, the Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, issued a statement, titled "Conditions towards Zero-11 Benchmarks for Global Nuclear Disarmament." This was made as a follow up to President Barack Obama's speech at Prague on 5 April, where he said that the "US government will take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons."

However, if the Japanese nuclear policy is studied carefully, one will notice that the Foreign Minister's speech does not signify any change in Japan's policy towards nuclear weapons, unlike Obama's speech. While the foreign minister's declaration requires other countries to disarm, he was also articulate in mentioning the importance of US nuclear umbrella for Japan.

This essay aims to examine the paradoxical nature of Japan's nuclear policy and its implications for India. As long as the Japan seeks a nuclear umbrella from the United States, the goal of 'zero' will remain just a dream.

JAPAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY: MAIN DETERMINANTS

Japan has had a contradicting nuclear policy since World War II. On the one hand, it advocates disarmament and non-proliferation and on the other it seeks protection under the US nuclear umbrella. It may be the right destiny for a country that waged war against a powerful country such as the US which had the ability to produce and use nuclear weapons for the first time. Japan accepted defeat after nuclear weapons were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and complied with the peaceful constitution written by the US,

thereby abandoning the pursuit of military power. The Cold War and the China's acquisition of nuclear weapons were consequential in Japan's decision to seek extended deterrence from the US. As an economic partner for a small maritime country like Japan, America is considered important for Japan's development. For the United States, Japan is a key country in its strategy. It is, therefore, quite obvious that the US has a major influence on Japan's foreign policy and not just on its nuclear policy.

Japan's nuclear policy was also affected by its people's will. The Japanese opinion of nuclear weapons can be classified into three categories. First, there are the pacifists. They are strongly averse to nuclear weapons and consider them as horrible instruments of death and destruction. According to them, nuclear weapons massacres tens of thousands of people in a split second and torments millions of others through radioactive release, thereby, leaving the environment uninhabitable. This leads to generations of victims who inherit the nuclear hazard biologically. People who have witnessed the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki urge for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Therefore, they criticize the government's ambiguous policy in this regard.

Second, there are the moderates who understand and empathize with the government's position. They realise the cruelty of nuclear weapons; however, they also appreciate the importance of the US nuclear umbrella for deterrence against nuclear capabilities of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the presently from China and North Korea.

Third, there is another group of people which doubts the effectiveness of the US nuclear umbrella. They are of the opinion that Japan should not abandon its option of going nuclear.

However, at the same time, Japanese public

opinion has been influenced by the policies of its government as well as that of the United States. In other words, Japanese have slowly grown accustomed to the nuclear umbrella. For example, at the end of 1960, the presence of American nuclear-powered ship at Japan's ports triggered strong oppositions. The absence of any such opposition in the past few years signify that the Japanese are getting used to the presence of US nuclear ships at Japan's ports. An opinion poll in 2005 by *Asahi Shin Bun* showed that 39 per cent of the people thought that the US nuclear umbrella was important for Japan's national security. Despite the poll reflecting a change in popular perception, a majority of people are against possessing nuclear weapons. According to the same poll, 86 per cent disagreed for going nuclear in future.

However, the dilemma for the Japanese government is that, it can neither give up the US nuclear umbrella nor can it ask the US to eliminate nuclear weapons. At the same time, it cannot act against the public and go nuclear either. Therefore, it has selectively responded to all the three positions, which is also evident in its nuclear policy, that is, policy of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as a victim of nuclear holocaust; policy of seeking nuclear deterrence as an ally of the US, and a policy of keeping the nuclear option open since the constitution of Japan allows for the same.

Although they appear contradictory, these policies have complemented each other, at least in the foreign policy domain. Japan requires nuclear deterrence; however, it will not develop nuclear weapons on its own under present circumstances. In order to secure an assured US protection, Japan has often threatened to go nuclear. This allows Japan to have an extended credible deterrence and at the same time declare its commitment against possessing nuclear weapons by positioning itself as the lone victim of nuclear holocaust and thereby banking on the sympathy generated by such a position across the globe.

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II UNDERSTANDING JAPAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY

Japan's nuclear policy can be explained as follows: Article IX of Japan's Constitution does not prohibit Japan from possessing nuclear weapons; it has, however, decided not to do so as a matter of policy rather than constitutional constraints. Japan is bound by the three non-nuclear principles - not to manufacture, possess or introduce nuclear weapons - known as "KOKUZE" (national promise) since the 1960s.

The nuclear restraint is neither legal nor constitutional in nature, but emanates from the resolution of the Diet which is the Japanese parliament. In 1976, this promise was further strengthened and legally enforced by signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). While Tokyo was in the process of giving up its nuclear option, it also tried to consolidate its position under Washington's nuclear umbrella. Although Japan acknowledges the difficulty for achieving a world that is free of nuclear weapons, it is firm in its commitment to non-proliferation and global nuclear disarmament.

This understanding of the Japanese Constitution comes from the 1958 Kishi administration. According to former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi's statement at the House of Councilors, "Although it is possible to have strategic nuclear weapons within the right of self-defence, Japan will not possess any type of nuclear weapons as a policy." The earlier part of this declaration is still valid since no subsequent government has denied its legitimacy. The reason why no government has ever disclaimed this understanding is because of a constant fear of the worst case scenario which may unfold in the future.

Nevertheless, the Japanese government has researched the possibility of manufacturing nuclear weapons at least four times. The four instances where Japan considered an indigenous nuclear option were revealed by newspapers or other studies and all of them advised against the possession of nuclear weapons on the grounds of cost effectiveness, fear of diplomatic isolation and doubts regarding the usefulness of nuclear weapons as a counter measure against a nuclear attack from the erstwhile USSR, China or North Korea. Although there is no evidence that the Japanese government undertook the development of nuclear weapons after the World War II, the 1969 research suggested maintaining the required technical and financial ability to do so in case the need arises.

Thus, the Japanese government has both the

legitimacy and an option to be a nuclear weapon state. However, successive administrations have preferred otherwise.

The decision not to manufacture, possess and introduce nuclear weapons was formed and firmed gradually. The period between 1950 to the end of 1970 was crucial in this regard. In 1955, when the nuclear law was enacted, it was decided that nuclear power would only be used for peaceful purposes and not for military purpose. In 1958, as mentioned above, Kishi stated that "Japan will not possess any type of nuclear weapons as a policy." In 1960, Kishi again asserted that Japan would not possess and not accept the introduction of nuclear weapons. The 1967 Sato administration adopted these promises as the three non-nuclear principles. The committee of Japanese Diet resolved the three non-nuclear principles as a "KOKUZE" in 1976. Since then, successive policy makers have repeated these principles.

In the process, Japan also sought an assured extended deterrence from the United States. It must be noted that the Japan-US Security Treaty does not carry the provision of a guaranteed US nuclear umbrella. It was confirmed by the Sato administration in the 1960s after China conducted its nuclear test. There are several declassified diplomatic correspondences which reveal that the then Prime Minister Eisaku Sato pleaded with Washington (President Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert McNamara) to use nuclear weapons against China, in case China attacks Japan. He is also supposed to have conveyed that Japan would like to possess nuclear weapons if China weaponizes. It was after these negotiations that the US announced that it would defend Japan against any type of attack and would use any type of weapons in its defence. In 1967, during a speech on the three non-nuclear principles, Sato stated that Japan would depend on the US nuclear umbrella.

Interestingly, Japan has opted for a first use policy since the Sato administration. In the 1965 talks, Sato asked McNamara to use nuclear weapons even if China used only conventional weapons. In addition, Takeo Miki and Gerald Ford agreed on the first use of nuclear weapons in 1975. Even after the end of the Cold War, Japan considers the first use policy as necessary for its security. In 1994 and 2003, Washington was pressurized by Tokyo to not declare a 'No First Use' (NFU) doctrine against Pyongyang. In 2009, Prime Minister Taro Aso did not deny the first use policy, when he was asked about it. The persistent threat of a nuclear attack has forced Japan to opt for the US umbrella. In a way, the policy of "not to introduce" nuclear

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weapons has not worked from the beginning. The government, however, does not admit the fact the US war ships arriving at Japan's ports carry nuclear weapons.

Japan's policy makers have tried hard to push for disarmament and non-proliferation, since the public opinion is strongly supportive of disarmament measures. Still, Japan took six years to ratify the NPT. This delay can be attributed to a number of factors. Although, officially, the Japan expressed doubts over the enforceability of NPT regulations, there were other reasons for Japan to have signed the NPT after delaying it for six years. First, some sections of the Japan's elites wanted to have the nuclear option open, in case of future demands for the same. Second, Japan had exhibited concerns regarding the efficacy of the US nuclear guarantee, once the NPT regime got established. Moreover, when the illegality of nuclear weapons was discussed by the International Court of Justice in 1996, Japan avoided stating its opinion clearly even when the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stated the futility of nuclear weapons. This attitude of Japan has been criticized at both the domestic and international level.

III

NAKASONE'S SPEECH: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

On 27 April 2009, the Japanese Foreign Minister spoke on "Conditions towards Zero." Coming soon after Obama's speech, Tokyo may have considered this as a good opportunity to dissolve the contradiction in its nuclear policy. However, there is nothing new in the proposed 11 benchmarks. All that the Foreign Minister did was to just confirm and repeat approaches put forth by other countries or Japan previously. For example, "Japan welcomes the initiative of the United Kingdom and Norway to conduct technical research on the verification approach," or "Japan supports the globalization of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the United States and Russia and "EU's

move to propose a treaty to ban short and intermediate-range ground-to-ground missiles" is nothing but rhetoric.

The Foreign Minister believes that the US and other nuclear weapon states will make an earnest effort towards disarmament and rightly so, he also strongly urges them to do so. He, however, did not provide a roadmap or a course of action that the international community can undertake for eliminating nuclear weapons.

The remarkable point of his speech was when he admitted the importance of the US nuclear umbrella for Japan. He said that "nuclear deterrence under the Japan-US security arrangements is of critical importance for Japan." Comparing this to the remarks from previous other policy-makers, one could say the Japan still does not want the US to scrap all of its nuclear weapons.

If the Foreign Minister would have said that Japan would give up the nuclear umbrella and then demanded the US to forego its nuclear weapons, his speech would have been historical like that of Obama. Moreover, the speech was made by the Foreign Minister and not the Prime Minister. These facts indicate that Japan's policy towards nuclear weapons will not change soon. This also means Japan's policy towards India will not change. When India conducted the nuclear test in 1998, Japan strongly objected the tests and applied economic sanctions. However, after 9/11, it followed the US and lifted all the sanctions. At the NSG meeting in September 2008, when India was granted a waiver to conduct nuclear commerce, Japan did not object strongly and was criticized as a weak-kneed approach by its people. Although Japan wishes that India sign the NPT, it can only urge the Indian state to do so. Even as the public criticized such an attitude, India is now considered as a very important country by Japan.

IV CONCLUSIONS

Japan cannot discard the nuclear umbrella in the present unstable security environment in Northeast Asia. Japan is familiar with nuclear cruelty and therefore it is concerned about any future nuclear attacks. China has more than 50 nuclear capable missiles which can reach Japan. North Korea has attempted nuclear and missile tests in recent years. Tokyo's real concern, however, is the gap between the US and Japan. Japan even requested the US not to promise NFU to North Korea but it was ignored by the US. In March 2009, Aso expected that any disarmament measures undertaken by the US administration must be

sensitive to Japan's security concerns.

For Japan, Obama's speech may have been a golden opportunity to change its policy, give up the nuclear umbrella, and strongly urge the US to scrap all of its nuclear weapons. Tokyo could then be emancipated from its paradox and truly become the zero-seeking-country. It has, however, missed the opportunity. The nuclear umbrella was prioritized over disarmament. As long as it is firm on the nuclear umbrella, Japan will not be able to get rid of the contradiction in its nuclear policy.

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