

FRS – Japan Program

The NPT Review Conference: What are the chances for progress? A view from Japan

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Ms. Ichikawa Joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1985. Her assignments in Japan include Directorship at the West Europe Division, the Economic Integration Division (EU), the Non-proliferation, Science and Nuclear Energy Division as well as the Economic Policy Division. Overseas postings include the Embassy of Japan in the UK and the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna. She also assumed positions in international organizations as Political Affairs Officer at UNPROFOR (UN PKO in the Former Yugoslavia) and Special Assistant to the Director General, IAEA. She participated in the Six- Party Talks (December 2006-December 2008), and continued to follow the DPRK nuclear issue at the Permanent Mission in Vienna (2011-2014) and the IAEA (2014-2020).

Question 1: The NPT Review Conference 2020 has been postponed. What are the positions in Japan on this decision?

While it was hoped that the NPT Review Conference in 2020, as originally planned, would have marked an important milestone of the 50th anniversary of the NPT's entry into force, the postponement of the Review Conference does not affect its importance.

Japan is flexible as to the concrete timing of the Conference. From the Japanese

point of view, the most important factor to consider regarding the timing of the Review Conference is to ensure an environment in which meaningful proceedings can take place with the participation of all the Contracting Parties. It is also hoped that the Contracting Parties will make the best use of the additional time thus made available to advance their preparatory work and ensure the success of the Review Conference.

Question 2: What are the positive points that could be highlighted in the next Review Conference?

There is no denying that the global nuclear disarmament effort is facing multiple serious challenges today, including the US and Russia's withdrawal from the INF Treaty, the increasingly competitive military posture between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific region, the growing threat of WMD proliferation – in particular the one posed by the DPRK, as well as the views wide apart among countries on how to make progress towards nuclear disarmament. In this general environment, it is unfortunately not easy to point out positive developments to be highlighted in the next Review Conference.

One encouraging development is the ongoing talks between the US and Russia on the possible extension of the New START Treaty on the reduction of strategic nuclear weapons, which is set to expire in February 2021. It is strongly hoped that both countries will agree on the extension in time, which will send a positive signal to the world.

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Question 3: Are there potential positive evolutions on disarmament and in particular concerning the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)?

It is likely that the number of countries that ratified the TPNW will reach the threshold of 50 in the coming weeks,

which is required for the treaty to enter into force 90 days thereafter. The entry into force of the TPNW, now expected to be in early 2021, will be an important milestone and will certainly be seen as a positive development by those countries supporting the nuclear disarmament effort through this treaty.

However, none of the nuclear-weapon states recognized by the NPT, as well as the countries that declared or are considered to have nuclear weapons – India, Pakistan, Israel and the DPRK – took part in the negotiations of the TPNW, and there is no prospect that those countries may join it. This means that the imminent entry into force of the TPNW will not change the reality that the world is facing regarding nuclear weapons and the challenges for the international effort to eliminate them.

Rather, if the TPNW's entry into force results in detracting attention of countries from the nuclear disarmament effort through the NPT, it may even have a detrimental effect on the overall nuclear disarmament objective. Countries concerned should redouble their effort to ensure that such a situation does not arise through the success of the NPT Review Conference.

Question 4: What could be Japan's main contributions and initiatives for the next cycle of the NPT review?

Japan's steadfast position is to uphold and strengthen the NPT regime in order to advance realistic and concrete measures toward nuclear disarmament with the participation of both nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states. To this end, Japan has been taking several initiatives.

In addition to the ongoing initiatives, such as the annual UN General Assembly resolution on nuclear disarmament (submitted by Japan since 1994) and the NPDI (Non-proliferation and disarmament initiative) foreign ministers meetings, led by Japan and Australia since 2010, Japan created the Group of Eminent Persons for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament in 2017 ahead of the NPT Review Conference, for which the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) served as the secretariat.

The Group invited experts from both nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states in order to rebuild trust among countries having differing approaches towards a world free of nuclear weapons. It submitted its recommendations, aimed at contributing to achieve substantive advancement of nuclear disarmament, in October 2019, following five rounds of meetings. Building on this report, Japan held a Track 1.5 Meeting for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament in March 2020 to discuss concrete measures on transparency and nuclear risk reduction, as well as nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation education, with a view to building positive momentum towards a successful NPT Review Conference.

Looking forward the next five years, the current global strategic environment characterized by the US-China competition and difficult US-Russia relations is not likely to change anytime soon. Under these circumstances, the realization of a substantive reduction in nuclear arsenals by these states, an essential element for the ultimate objective of a world free of nuclear weapons, will face significant challenges. Japan, together with the like-minded countries of the NPDI, should promote concrete steps through a realistic

approach to nuclear disarmament which takes into account the security reality. Maintaining and strengthening the existing framework for nuclear non-proliferation, including the IAEA safeguards and effective export control measures, is another area where Japan should play an important role.

Question 5: How should the North Korean case be treated, what are the expectations in this area?

While the DPRK has not conducted nuclear and long-range missile tests in the past few years, it continues to develop its nuclear and missile capabilities, to the point that Japan's Ministry of Defense now states that "the DPRK is assessed to have already miniaturized nuclear weapons to fit ballistic missile warheads". Most recently, the DPRK demonstrated seemingly new models of ICBM and SLBM at the military parade to commemorate the 75th anniversary of its Workers' Party.

Such developments represent a significant and increasing threat to Japan, countries in the region and beyond, all the more so due to the reduced detectability and warning time for the DPRK's missile launches, multiple and simultaneous missile launches with increased accuracy, as well as the low altitude and irregular trajectory of some of new missiles.

In addressing the DPRK nuclear issue, it is essential that the future course of action is based on the fundamental principles reaffirmed by numerous UN Security Council resolutions, most recently Resolution 2397 (2017), supported by all the P5 members and countries in the region. They include the DPRK's obligation to immediately abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, other WMD and ballistic missile programs

in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. This in turn should pave the way towards the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the DPRK's early return to the NPT and the IAEA safeguards regime, which is essential in upholding the credibility of the NPT.

Japan, together with the US, South Korea and other countries concerned, should pursue a diplomatic resolution to the DPRK nuclear issue, while strengthening its own defense including through missile defense to cope with the significantly increased threat from the DPRK's nuclear and missile development.

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