

Breaking the NPT Stalemate: Japan Could Help

By Anthony DiFilippo | June 21, 2005

Deterring attack is usually cited as the main motivation for states to keep or acquire nuclear weapons. Yet today's NPT stalemate involves both security and economic concerns. Nuclear and nonnuclear weapons states alike have associated nuclear-energy-generating capabilities with economic growth. By far the biggest problem that the NPT faces today is that nations have come to see and use it as a self-serving accord.

The NPT is also hampered by two other problems: the nuclear states' studied neglect of the treaty's obligations on them to disarm, and the substitution, especially since 9-11, of counterproliferation for nonproliferation. In addition to being accusatory and demanding, too often in a unilateral way, the trouble with pursuing a counterproliferation policy is that it invites serious challenges to the NPT regime. By casting some countries as rogues while ignoring the behavior or weapons stockpiles of friends, a counterproliferation policy provokes a confrontational environment that highlights differences and minimizes the prospects for prompt resolution.

Breaking the Stalemate

There are several things that the international community can do to strengthen and universalize the NPT. Without amending and reinforcing the NPT, nations will continue to use the accord to serve their national interests, thus sustaining the stalemate.

Article X, which gives countries the right to withdraw from the NPT, needs to be amended to make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any country to retract its commitment to the accord. This "divorce clause" threatens and undermines the disarmament and nonproliferation objectives of the NPT.

Universal participation in the NPT needs to be encouraged and ultimately mandated. Any country that refuses to become a party to the NPT should be regularly informed of the expectation to explain to the United Nations General Assembly its reasons for not acceding to the accord. A majority vote by the General Assembly will determine if a country's reasons are valid. Invalid reasons will automatically cause the matter to be taken up by the Security Council, which will immediately issue a formal request for the country to accept the accord. After a specified period, any nation that continues to resist becoming a party to the NPT should face sanctions imposed by the Security Council, which should also work to coordinate the international efforts of other multilateral organizations to gain a country's acceptance of the accord.

Complete acceptance of and compliance with the Additional Protocol, which allows for short-notice and comprehensive inspection of countries' nuclear facilities, needs to exist. This will go a very long way to ensuring that countries

are not clandestinely using their nuclear programs to build nuclear weapons.

Article VI, which obligates the nuclear powers to disarm, needs to be given momentum so that it can be implemented, as intended by the NPT. Since 1970, the nuclear powers have shunned the responsibility of eliminating their nuclear weapons. What is more, at least three other nuclear weapons countries have not even confronted this responsibility, since they remain outside of the NPT.

Giving momentum to article VI will require the committed involvement of the international community. Considerably more pressure must be brought to bear on the nuclear weapons powers, given their sustained reluctance to part with their arms. An amendment to NPT needs to require that all nuclear weapons countries biannually report to the United Nations General Assembly the status of their disarmament efforts. When progress has not been made, a specific and unequivocal explanation should be required so that the General Assembly can offer suggestions and direction to realize disarmament. Ideally, this amendment should include a target date of ten to fifteen years for the nuclear weapons states to have eliminated all of their nuclear weapons.

More countries need to become associated with the New Agenda Coalition (NAC). Currently comprised of only seven countries, Brazil, New Zealand, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa and Sweden, NAC, which has worked to expedite nuclear disarmament since India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998, has been insisting that the nuclear weapons states have not fulfilled their obligation to eliminate their arms. The more countries that join NAC, the more international pressure will be directed at the nuclear weapons states to conform with their obligation to abolish their nuclear arms.

Japan's Contribution to the NPT Regime

One of these countries should definitely be Japan. A Japan outside of NAC is an anomaly. Tokyo's refusal to join NAC since its inception centers on its inherently contradictory position toward nuclear disarmament: seeking the abolition of nuclear weapons while refusing to relinquish Japan's perceived security under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, and opposing a

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nuclear free zone for northeast Asia. The continued existence of this contradiction in Japanese policy has caused Tokyo to accept a gradualist path to nuclear disarmament, much preferred by the United States and the other nuclear weapons countries than the more expeditious course advocated by NAC. The gradualist position is fully consistent with virtually all politicians' views that nuclear weapons should be abolished – someday.

Tokyo cannot continue to accommodate the nuclear weapons states if it is genuinely committed to nuclear disarmament. By joining NAC, Japan will not only be creating more pressure on the nuclear weapons states to abolish their arsenals, but it will also be sending a much stronger signal to the international community that it is ready to accept the moral authority to help direct the world toward disarmament.

Tokyo understands the importance of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) to the NPT regime. Indeed, Tokyo's continued commitment to the CTBT, despite Washington's aversion of the accord, is commendable. However, Tokyo needs to reintroduce a specific time for the CTBT to come into force, similar to what appeared only in Japan's 2000 nuclear disarmament resolution to the General Assembly, which called for the accord to come into effect before 2003. Although Tokyo has been a reasonably strong advocate of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, here too it must overcome its reluctance to push harder for this accord because of balking by Washington, precipitated by a disagreement with Beijing on missile defense.

Tokyo's overriding concern with strengthening the U.S.-Japanese security alliance and maintaining the American nuclear umbrella afforded to Japan have caused it to abandon its efforts to normalize bilateral relations with North Korea. Moving away from supporting Washington's hard line position toward Pyongyang and working just as hard to normalize relations with North Korea is the best way for Tokyo to ensure Japan's security. Had Pyongyang believed that Tokyo was fully committed to rapprochement and to nuclear disarmament during the North Korean nuclear crisis that emerged in October 2002, this would

have assuaged regional tensions and distrust and helped with negotiating a resolution, perhaps before North Korea announced its objective of increasing its nuclear deterrent force.

Tokyo has long assumed that its position under the U.S. nuclear umbrella is central to Japan's security. However, the extension of the U.S. nuclear umbrella to Japan offers far less security than the assurance of nonproliferation and the abolition of nuclear weapons. If North Korea does possess nuclear weapons and if it makes the wrong choice of proving this by conducting a nuclear test, Tokyo should look critically at whether being under the U.S. nuclear umbrella with a regional arms race perhaps imminent is better for Japan's security than a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and normalized relations with Pyongyang.

The best way to reduce threats to Japan's security is not to be seen as a threat. Tokyo's insistence to strengthen its military alliance with the United States and its determination to seek a "normal country" status for Japan rather than work unreservedly to promote nuclear disarmament has meant that it has compromised the widespread Japanese sentiment supporting the abolition of nuclear weapons. By following Washington down the counterproliferation trail, Tokyo has moved off of its self-identified path of nuclear disarmament and, like the nuclear powers, has accepted the justification that nuclear weapons exist to deter potential adversaries.

While Tokyo has stressed the importance of universalizing the Additional Protocol, it has not done much to persuade and push the nuclear powers to comply with NPT's article VI. Nor has it promoted other substantive ways to fortify the weakened NPT. If Tokyo really believes that nuclear weapons need to be abolished then it must begin to show its leadership skills by seriously seeking creative ways to improve and strengthen the NPT.

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Recommended citation:

Anthony DiFilippo, "Breaking the NPT (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty) Stalemate: Japan Could Help," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: ForeignPolicy In Focus, June 21, 2005).

Web location:

<http://www.fpiif.org/commentary/2005/0506npt.html>

