

Comment by Hiromichi Umebayashi

Since last PSNA meeting in Ulaanbaatar in June, we saw significant developments in two facets in relation to the meeting's agenda: one is the rapidly evolving situation around the DPRK and the other is the conclusion and opening for signature of the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

As for the situation around the DPRK, the international community witnessed considerable degree of sophistication of its ICBM, IRBM and nuclear warhead capabilities. This may lead to an international public perception that the DPRK has acquired more confidence in its possible status of nuclear armed states and that the denuclearization of Northeast Asia has become very difficult. In this respect, it will be important to reconfirm the long-standing DPRK's position on its nuclear armament; its nuclear deterrent is the means to defend against the US threat, end the hostile relationship and achieve normalization with the US. There will be no change in this position, considering the consistency of its history.

On the other hand, it will be all the more important to develop a concrete and rolling plan for a comprehensive approach to a NEA-NWFZ on the premise that the DPRK's nuclear possession will continue for the time being. As long as the end picture of nuclear weapon free Northeast Asia is clear and firm, a variety of approaches with intermediate phases should be pursued and explored.

The imminent risk of the war of words slipping down to an actual war has to be controlled and stopped through every possible channel. Especially the roles of regional states, including the ROK, China and Japan, are important. Japan's message, reflecting its nation-wide concerns and independent of the US Trump Administration, will be effective and is strongly encouraged.

The progress of the prohibition treaty of nuclear weapons will lend force in many ways to advance the efforts to denuclearize Northeast Asia. In the recent ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the DPRK emphasized its loyalty to NAM. Many leading states of NAM are strong advocates of the prohibition treaty, thus will strengthen the prohibition norms in the NAM community. This will serve as an impediment against the

DPRK's long term possession of nuclear weapons. In the ROK and Japan, a NEA-NWFZ is a plain policy alternative to their current security policy that depends on the US extended nuclear deterrence, preventing them from joining the ban treaty. A number of civil society organizations adopt their campaign strategy to press the government along this line for the purpose of attaining its early participation in the ban treaty. In this situation, it will be appropriate to note that the argument for the possible coexistence of extended nuclear deterrence with a NWFZ, exemplified in Australia, which bears some merit in persuading conservative sections, will have possible demerits in promoting a NEA-NWFZ.