

Japanese Perspectives on
A Comprehensive Approach to a NEA-NWFZ

Kazumi Mizumoto
Hiroshima Peace Institute
Hiroshima City University

1 Japan's Nuclear Policies and NEA-NWFZ

It is generally accepted that there are four nuclear policies in Japan, although they are not recognized as official policies established by the government. The four policies were proposed by Eisaku Sato, prime minister of Japan from 1964 to 1972, in the early 1970s before the resolution for the three non-nuclear principles was adopted in the Diet in 1971. They are, namely, a non-nuclear policy (the three non-nuclear principles), reliance on the US nuclear deterrence (nuclear umbrella), promotion of the peaceful use of nuclear energy (nuclear power plants), and active leadership for nuclear disarmament.

The idea of creating a NEA-NWFZ can be analyzed by examining the influence it may give to each principle as follows.

(a) Non-Nuclear Policy

Japan's non-nuclear policy is based on the three non-nuclear principles; no possession, no development, no transition of nuclear weapons. Despite the fact that a secret agreement was concluded between Sato and Nixon regarding the US transition of nuclear weapons to Japan's territory and it is assumed that nuclear warheads were actually brought to the US bases in Japan. Since the decision of both the US and Russia to eliminate all the tactical nuclear warheads from operating vessels in early 1990s, it is also assumed that the principle of no transition has been maintained since then.

Japan can and should keep its non-nuclear principles after joining the NEA-NWFZ. The environment under the NEA-NWFZ, with no hostile intent and the provision of negative security assurance, will enable us to strengthen these principles by providing an opportunity to add one more principle --- no reliance on the nuclear umbrella. Besides, Japan's non-nuclear principles can be applied to the DPRK after its de-nuclearizaion and the ROK, and if the two Koreas accepted these principles, the NEA-NWFZ would be strengthened.

(b) Reliance on Nuclear Umbrella

The real meaning of Japan's reliance on the US nuclear umbrella, described in the National Defense Program Guidelines (*Boei Keikaku no Taiko*), is as follows.

“To address the threat of nuclear weapons, Japan will play a constructive and active role in international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, so as to achieve the long-term goal of creating a world without nuclear weapons. At the same time, as long as nuclear weapons exist, the extended deterrence provided by the United States, with nuclear deterrent as a vital element, will be indispensable. In order to maintain and improve the credibility of the extended deterrence, Japan will closely cooperate with the United States, and will also appropriately implement its own efforts, including ballistic missile defense and civil protection.”¹ (Underlined by the author)

In sum, there is no description with regard to a retaliatory nuclear attack by the US in the case of a nuclear attack on Japan. Several high-ranking uniformed staff of the Ground Self-Defense Force once told me in the 1990s that, “if Japan is actually attacked by nuclear weapons, the US nuclear deterrence cannot be called ‘umbrella’ but ‘broken umbrella,’ and we are not assuming such situations.” This story suggests that there is no detailed agreement between Japan and the US on the military operational level against a possible nuclear attack on Japan.

The co-existence of Japan's non-nuclear policy and the nuclear umbrella policy has been regarded as a fundamental inconsistency by civil society. However, if Japan's reliance on the nuclear umbrella is a policy to deal only with the “nuclear threat,” it would give Japan a greater chance to change it unilaterally. Technically speaking, there are only three sources of potential nuclear threat in NEA to Japan; the DPRK, China, and Russia. Under the NEA-NWFZ with a de-nuclearized DPRK, the negative security assurance provided by China and Russia, and no hostile intent, the US nuclear deterrence will no longer be a “vital element,” Japan will be able to terminate the policy and be given more credibility for its non-nuclear policy and disarmament initiative. Then, the nature of the US-Japan alliance will be changed and should be re-defined.

¹ “NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM GUIDELINES for FY 2011 and beyond”, Approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on December 17, 2010, http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/security/pdfs/h23_ndpg_en.pdf#search='natioanl+defense+program+outline'.

Similarly, there will be no need of the nuclear umbrella provided for the ROK by the US and the nature of the ROK-US alliance might also be re-designed.

(c) Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy

Until the big earthquakes and the tsunami hit the eastern part of Japan and caused serious accidents in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plants on March 11, 2011, Japan had kept 55 nuclear power plants operating, had actively been promoting the “peaceful use” of nuclear energy, and the government had fully endorsed the policy of nuclear fuel recycling. Since the Fukushima accidents, most of the power plants were temporarily shut down, the government has started to review the policy, and we have not yet reached a national consensus on the future policy on the civil use of nuclear energy, although it seems to me that a majority of Japanese civil society is strongly supporting the termination of generating electricity with nuclear power plants.

On the other hand, the current international regime of non-proliferation, based on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), is still maintaining a policy of promoting the “peaceful use” of nuclear energy, described in its article as follows.

“Article IV

1. Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with articles I and II of this Treaty.”

As the NPT was designed in the 1960s when people in the world were drawing a rosy picture of the future of the civil use of nuclear energy, it is my view that the international non-proliferation regime should be re-designed so that the potential and actual danger of nuclear power plants and the nuclear fuel recycling will be taken into account.

One question arises with regard to a fundamental measure to be taken under the NEA-NWFZ. Is it still appropriate to give full support for the promotion of nuclear power energy by all the member states institutionalized in the element “Provisions of assistance for nuclear and other energy²”?

² Morton H. Halperin, “A New Approach to Security in Northeast Asia: Breaking the Gridlock,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol.10, Issue 34, No.3, August 20, 2015, p.5.

Conversion of nuclear fuel from civil use to military use is not the only danger we have to control. Possible accidents at nuclear power facilities for civil purpose, caused by natural disasters, mechanical mal-functions, and human error, might easily become an enormous threat to human society. Tight security and safety mechanism to control the civil use of nuclear energy should be introduced, especially to the narrow peninsula of the two Koreas and the islands of Japan, as one function of the NEA-NWFZ.

(d) Leadership for Nuclear Disarmament

In spite of its eagerness to play a leadership role in nuclear disarmament, in my view, Japan has not yet succeeded in achieving it, mostly due to its contradictory nuclear policies. The Japanese government's leadership as a leading non-nuclear nation is easily offset by Japan's reliance on US nuclear deterrence and the accumulation of a stockpile of plutonium as a result of its nuclear fuel recycling.

Therefore, if Japan actively takes initiative towards the establishment of a NEA-NWFZ, it can be an important achievement of Japan in this field. Besides, if Japan makes a decision to disengagement from the US nuclear umbrella, or if Japan revises its nuclear fuel recycling policy, it will gain credibility as a leading nation for nuclear disarmament.

2 Japan's Bi-lateral Relationship and NEA-WPFZ

For the creation of a NEA-WPFZ, however, there are some concerns in bi-lateral relationships with related nations.

(a) DPRK

As Japan has not yet normalized its relations with the DPRK, during the process of concluding a peace and security agreement by related nations, the issue of compensation by Japan to the DPRK for the period of colonial rule may arise, and it may easily complicate and prolong the negotiations.

The unsettled abduction issue is another source of negative influences for a successful conclusion of a NEA-WPFZ.

(b) ROK

The ongoing territorial dispute over the Takeshima/Dokto island between Japan and

the ROK may become a big obstacle for creating a favorable environment for the establishment of a NEA-NWFZ. If Japan fails to handle this issue of not provoking anti-Japan sentiment in South Korea, it is expected that North Korea and China could join the anti-Japan club, resulting in a big negative impact for the creation of a NEA-NWFZ.

(c) China

Similarly, the territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Pinnacle Islands between Japan and China is a potential source of conflict that may damage the negotiations.

(d) USA

The issues related to the US military bases in Okinawa, including the relocation of Marines troops from Okinawa, introduction of the Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey aircrafts, and the US soldiers' crimes, are a potential factor of instability in the US-Japan alliance.

(e) Russia

The long-unsettled dispute of the Northern/Kuril Islands between Japan and Russia is a potential damaging factor for the relationship between the two countries.

3 The Meaning of Some Elements of NEA-WPFZ to Japan

Some elements included in the "Comprehensive agreement on peace and security in Northeast Asia" may exert a positive or negative influence on NEA-WPFZ.

(a) A Peace Treaty between the two Koreas and the Normalization between Japan and the DPRK

As I have mentioned above, the negotiations for Normalization between Japan and the DPRK might be a tough process for Japan if the DPRK makes one-sided claims of compensation because of colonial rule. Besides, the public sentiments of ROK, which normalized its relations with Japan in 1965, seems unsatisfied with prior compensation for colonial rule including the comfort women issue settled by the Japan-ROK Normalization Treaty in 1965. Therefore, after successful conclusion of a peace treaty to terminate the state of war, the two Koreas might jointly escalate their criticism against Japan with regard to its historical recognition and attitude for compensation.

(b) End of Hostile Intent

It has been empirically observed, from Japan's point of view, that the nature of the DPRK's hostility against the US is not the same as against Japan. The DPRK might put an end to its hostile intent against the US if the US admits the existence of the Kim Jong-Un administration, but it is less predictable how Japan can meet the demands of the DPRK that will result in an end to its hostility.

(c) De-nuclearization of Korean Peninsula and Japan

The meaning of de-nuclearization should be clearly defined so that the same standard will be applied to Japan and the Korean Peninsula. Major issues to be defined are: the treatment of the nuclear umbrella, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and nuclear fuel recycling. As Japan's civil society is becoming more and more critical towards the operation of nuclear power plants in Japan, it may ask the Japanese government to introduce strict control of the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the DPRK and oppose support for building nuclear power plants there.

(d) Negative Security Assurance

The provision of negative security assurance is one of the most vital elements in the NEA-WPFZ. It eliminates the primary motivation of the DPRK to develop nuclear weapons. Also, along with the de-nuclearization of the DPRK, it deprives Japan and the ROK of the motivation to seek protection from the US nuclear umbrella, for China and the DPRK are virtually the only potential and actual sources of nuclear threat to the two countries. However, among the five existing NWFZs, the nuclear weapon states signed and ratified protocol of only one or two NWFZs. In order to secure the three nuclear nations' negative security assurance, Japan's diplomatic role is of great importance.

4 Conclusions: Final Goal of NEA-WPFZ

Since mid-1990s, a number of proposals for NEA-WPFZ were made by many scholars and practitioners, including the proposals of: Kumao Kaneko, John E. Endicott, Andrew Mack, Seongwhun Chon & Tatsujiro Suzuki, Hiromichi Umebayashi, and the Nautilus Institute.

There are some common weaknesses in these proposals, and it might be worthwhile to consider them for our discussion.

Firstly, they emphasize the need and importance of creating a NWFZ in Northeast Asia, but none of them clearly explains the feasibility of their idea. The biggest reason is that it is almost impossible to accurately predict the behavior of the DPRK. Some proposals require the joining of the DPRK as a non-nuclear state at the initial stage, whereas others suggest creating a zone by Japan and the ROK in the first stage and later inviting the DPRK to join after making acceptable environment, due to the uncertainty of the DPRK's diplomatic action.

Secondly, those proposals take different position with regard to the current status of the DPRK, whether it should be treated as a nuclear state or a non-nuclear state that violated the obligations of the NPT. If we treat the DPRK as nuclear state, we must pay some cost in the bargaining with the DPRK to induce it renounce its nuclear capability, whereas if we treat it as non-nuclear state violating the NPT, we have to put some punitive conditions in principle in the negotiation that may not be acceptable to the DPRK.

Thirdly, if we start creating a zone in Japan and the ROK in the initial phase, which is suggested by a majority of those previous proposals, we should expect Japan to take the lead, but Japanese current policy seems rather cautious towards the idea of a NEA-NWFZ.

“With regard to the plan to create a Northeast Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone that includes Japan, the Government of Japan holds the view that efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue must first be undertaken in order to ensure Japan’s security and improve the security environment of Northeast Asia³.” (Underline by the author.)

This is the same stance as the US and the ROK which want the DPRK first to dismantle its nuclear facilities and capabilities. As a measure to ensure Japan’s security, the Japanese government is sticking to the protection of the nuclear umbrella, and because

³ Edited by Disarmament, Non-proliferation and Science Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Policy of Japan 2011,” March 2011, p.74.
<<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/policy/pdfs/pamph1103.pdf#search='Disarmament+and+Nonproliferation+Diplomacy+of+Japan'>>

Japan is under this protection, the Japanese government does not want to join the international voice that proclaims the inhumanity of nuclear weapons.

As the general election is approaching, the next Japanese administration is expected to be transition from the Democrats, which has been more pro-nuclear disarmament than the Liberal Democratic Party, to a coalition of the LDP and some conservative parties, Japanese policy may become more cautious. In addition, the position of the Government of the ROK, which is similarly under the US nuclear umbrella, seems cautious with regards to the creation of a NEA-NWFZ as well.

In spite of these negative factors, however, we have to find a concrete solution in order to avoid a catastrophic result, which might actually occur if the situation becomes worse due to the escalation of current hostilities among the nations in this region. To keep proposing the idea of a NEA-NWFZ does function as a mechanism of confidence-building in NEA, and we need to think out a creative approach to change the atmosphere from the deadlock to trust and cooperation.

To establish a stable cooperative relationship between Japan and the ROK, to precisely read the action of the DPRK, and to adjust the interests of the three nuclear powers – the US, China, and Russia – , are the preconditions to put forward the idea of creating a NEA-NWFZ. What we can learn from the previous experiences of establishing NWFZs in other regions is that a sudden unexpected dramatic change of situation is possible if the international environment changes. In order to avoid another nuclear disaster, the idea should be further revised by engaging the related nations. The efforts of Japan, including the government, politicians, practitioners, scholars, and the civil society is strongly required.