

Japan Obstructing Progress on Nuclear Disarmament

Written by John Hallam

Thursday, 06 August 2009 12:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 August 2009 13:11

On July 17, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) held a meeting in Tokyo to inform the Japanese public of the way in which their government is obstructing progress on nuclear disarmament and to urge the nuclear disarmament movement to take action.

In his Prague speech on April 5 this year President Obama said, "we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and urge others to do the same". In the same paragraph he went on to say, "we will begin the work of reducing our arsenal." But in between these two landmark pledges he made the following qualifying statement: "as long as these weapons exist, we will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies."

The way Japan views US extended nuclear deterrence (otherwise referred to as the "nuclear umbrella") is turning out to be a key sticking point, which may end up blocking progress on nuclear disarmament.

Unless the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy is reduced, the number of nuclear weapons in its nuclear arsenal will not be drastically reduced. There are too many targets to cover. But the Japanese government is concerned that reducing the role of nuclear weapons will reduce Japan's national security. This is a dubious presumption, but regardless of the validity of the concern, we have it on good authority that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) are lobbying vigorously against such a change in US nuclear weapons policy.

The key test for the vision spelt out by President Obama in Prague is the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which his government is now preparing. It is expected that the NPR will determine the direction of US nuclear weapons policy for the duration of the Obama Administration. It will be completed by the end of this year, but because of the timetable of disarmament negotiations with Russia, it must be essentially ready by September or October.

A reduction in the role of nuclear weapons in national security strategy is being seriously considered in the context of the NPR. Unfortunately, not all people involved in the process support such a change. The principle argument being used by the opponents is that the Japanese government will not accept it. This is probably surprising for people who take for granted that Japan is one of the strongest advocates for nuclear disarmament, but the fact is that Japan is being used as an excuse to prevent the US making the single most important policy change necessary to enable a drastic reduction in the size of its nuclear arsenal.

The specific reduction in the role of nuclear weapons that is being contemplated is that they would be retained for only one purpose. Their sole purpose would be to deter the use of other people's nuclear weapons. However, the Japanese government has long taken the view that the US nuclear umbrella should also cover threats from biological weapons, chemical weapons and even conventional weapons. To maintain this expanded role in the context of the US nuclear umbrella, the Japanese government is willing to jeopardize progress on nuclear disarmament.

At first glance, reducing the role of nuclear weapons, without discarding the doctrine of

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deterrence entirely, might not seem to represent very significant progress. Those of us campaigning for the elimination of nuclear weapons believe that the doctrine of deterrence is one of the biggest barriers to achieving this goal. However, the reality is that the US is not going to discard this doctrine in a single step. Reducing the role of nuclear weapons to the sole purpose of deterring other people's nuclear weapons would be a major step towards reducing the relevance of nuclear deterrence doctrine. It is also a prerequisite for reducing nuclear weapon stockpiles. This step should, therefore, be supported by all people working for nuclear disarmament.

It is a great irony that the greatest obstacle to taking this key step towards nuclear disarmament is Japan, the only country to have been attacked with nuclear weapons.

Citizens' Nuclear Information Center (CNIC)
July 27, 2009

Appeal from the Union of Concerned Scientists

The Union of Concerned Scientists' Gregory Kulacki recorded a statement explaining how people involved in the NPR process are using Japan to block progress towards nuclear disarmament. He appealed to the Japanese people to take action during the vital two-month period before the NPR is set in concrete. His statement, with Japanese subtitles, is available on YouTube at the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itFI87hixy0>

Ideas for Action

Here are some actions you might like to consider:

- 1) Send this article to your English-speaking friends (Japanese and expats).
- 2) Use it as reading material in English classes.
- 3) Send letters to newspapers in Japan and the US.
- 4) Ask candidates for the forthcoming Japanese elections what their position is on this issue.
- 5) Inform candidates that you will only vote for people who support nuclear disarmament and who also support, as a vital first step, a reduction in the role of nuclear weapons in the national security policies of Japan and the US.
- 6) Tell NHK to cover this issue in their August 15, 2009 program on nuclear disarmament. A Japanese questionnaire is available on the following link:
<http://www.nhk.or.jp/korekara/>
- 7) Find out more about this issue. The following Japanese web site has lots of information:
<http://www.kakujoho.net/>

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We hope to post additional action ideas on our web site as the campaign gains momentum, but don't wait for us to tell you what to do. Take whatever action you can in the limited time available.