

Japan's Balancing Between Nuclear Disarmament and Deterrence

Stimson Center

March 19, 2018

SUMMARY

Panelists:

Yuki Tatsumi (Moderator)

Masahiro Kurita (Panelist)

Wakana Mukai (Panelist)

Masashi Murano (Panelist)

Masahiro Okuda (Panelist – Joining via pre-recorded remarks)

Heigo Sato (Panelist)

On March 19, 2018, the Stimson Center Japan Program hosted a panel discussion to launch its newest publication, *Balancing Between Nuclear Deterrence and Disarmament: Views from the Next Generation*. The discussion was moderated by Yuki Tatsumi from the Stimson Center with the authors of the report as panelists, including Masahiro Kurita (Fellow, National Institute for Defense Studies), Wakana Mukai (Assistant Professor at the Faculty of International Relations, Asia University), Masashi Murano (Research Fellow, Okazaki Institute), and Heigo Sato (Vice President of the Institute for World Studies, Takushoku University). Masahiro Okuda (Ph.D. Candidate, Takushoku University) was unable to join in person and gave pre-recorded remarks.

Tatsumi discussed how the *Views from the Next Generation* series introduces rising scholars in Japan who work on various foreign policy issues to the Washington, D.C. policy community. Tatsumi highlighted the nuclear situations in Iran and North Korea as the source of the new volume's theme, since nuclear deterrence and disarmament are an ongoing conundrum for Japan's postwar foreign policy.

Remarks by the authors began with Mukai. She focused on three factors that significantly impact Japan's challenging security environment: North Korea's brinksmanship, and whether Japan is prepared to live with a nuclear North Korea, or will continue to pursue denuclearization; China's lack of transparency in its military modernization and buildup, and subsequent tension in the region, in addition to the lesser degree of threat with which China is perceived; and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which has placed Japan in the uncomfortable position of being unable to support the treaty due to the way it reinforces the nuclear have/have-not gap. Mukai recommended that Japan foster an environment suitable for nuclear disarmament by easing regional tensions and strengthening trust between countries. She also suggested Japan consider options other than nuclear deterrence in its security policy, as a way of signaling to the international community that Japan views nuclear weapons as less important among its security options, essentially trying to create a shift in perceptions of nuclear weapons. She closed with a recommendation to find a way for Japan to join the new treaty by finding a unique position on disarmament and deterrence, perhaps by distancing Japan's policy from the U.S.'s to some extent.

Kurita discussed lessons for Japan drawn from experiences of failed international nonproliferation efforts, specifically India and Pakistan after their 1998 nuclear tests, and the impact of American engagement with both countries after proliferation. Kurita noted that India

has come to be regarded as a responsible nuclear state, thanks to its gradual entrance into the international nuclear order and the U.S.’s efforts to strengthen India’s nonproliferation policies, defensive nuclear posture, and participation in multilateral export control regimes. On the other hand, Pakistan remains a nuclear outlier, suffering from the stigma of the secret proliferation network operated by A. Q. Khan. Kurita emphasized that Pakistan sees unequal treatment from the U.S. towards India and Pakistan, and while American engagement in Pakistan has focused on nuclear security and export control, Pakistan’s mistrust of American intentions has resulted in an offensive-leaning and destabilizing nuclear posture. Kurita cautioned that Japan had few lessons to draw directly from South Asia: India’s case was made possible by certain facilitating factors unique to India, such as Indian leadership’s inclination towards global disarmament and the broader U.S.-India partnership. These conditions do not exist in North Korea’s situation. Kurita also noted that even Pakistan, despite its suspicion of the U.S., was willing to work towards stability and nonproliferation, and the U.S. lifted its sanctions relatively quickly. Kurita suggested that Japan would need to consider a new strategy for North Korea that balanced more severe coercive measures and negotiation.

Speaking through a pre-recorded slideshow, Okuda explored the implications from the Iran nuclear agreement for Japan’s security issues. He observed the uncertain fate of the nuclear agreement, as President Trump called for a review of the agreement this year and has considered not certifying Iran’s compliance, despite a lack of violations in the International Atomic Energy Agency’s report. Okuda argued that the nuclear agreement addressed only Iran’s nuclear capabilities, leaving out other problems, particularly Iran’s ballistic missile development program, which was banned by the U.N. Security Council. The nuclear deal has not been enough to mitigate concerns of an arms race in the Middle East. Okuda identified an important lesson here for the North Korea problem, noting that negotiations with North Korea will also focus on the most pressing issues facing parties in the discussions and may require compromising on other important security issues, such as agreeing to freeze ICBM development and compromising on shorter-range missiles that can still reach Japan. As with Iran, remaining issues would continue to plague the North Korea situation for years after an initial agreement.

Murano discussed the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)’s low-yield nuclear weapons as deterrence options for the Asia-Pacific, though the NPR mentioned them for use in a scenario against Russia. Murano noted that the NPR had several controversial policy changes, including denying sole purpose and no-first-use, but offered some different ways to assure allies in East Asia. He highlighted underwater options, such as the new sea-launched cruise missile, which can be installed on nuclear submarines and provide more flexible strike capabilities against North Korea and China compared to aerial assets. Murano recommended several measures to further deepen cooperation between the U.S. and Japan, including upgrading the ongoing extended deterrence dialogues and conducting joint exercises on extended deterrence. He also suggested multilayered regional missile defense, and cited Japan’s acquisition of Aegis Ashore as a step in this direction. He also recommended that Japan strengthen its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and develop counterattack capabilities so as to deepen allied missile defense.

Sato discussed the ongoing debate in Japan on how to balance between nuclear disarmament and deterrence, and mentioned the criticism he received in Japan from scholars on both sides of the issues for arguing that Japan should not sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. He noted that the treaty’s concept was good, but it would act counterproductively to divide the states with and without nuclear weapons further. Japan, as a non-nuclear state under a

nuclear umbrella, could not give up its extended deterrence protection against North Korea, and without extended deterrence, Japan might be forced to consider acquiring indigenous deterrence. Sato closed by recommending that Japan make the debate around the balance between deterrence and disarmament central to its security policy to ensure that the options are evaluated thoroughly.

After Sato’s remarks, Tatsumi opened the floor to the audience for questions. Steve Winters, a consultant, asked Murano about the estimate for Japan’s breakout time for developing its own nuclear capabilities. Murano stated that he did not have a breakout time for Japan, but emphasized that Japan, in gaining sea-based nuclear capabilities, since land-based would not be feasible, would run into issues with delivery systems and probably would not be able to maintain survivability of the vessels. Next, Tetsuro Hisano from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America asked how Japan can contribute to the sanctions regimes against Iran and North Korea, given the uncertain situation of the nuclear agreement and the potential for a Trump-Kim meeting in May. Sato answered that Iran’s domestic problems will make revising the Iran nuclear agreement a complicated task, since Iranian leadership will need to save face. The Japanese defense community, moreover, is still pessimistic that Trump can succeed in this, as well as with North Korea, but Sato recommended that Japan just follow the sanctions rules set by the international community. Hank Gaffney, retired from the Department of Defense, asked about why the discussion focused on extended deterrence rather than simply deterrence. Murano replied that deterrence also includes preemptive options and considerations about retaliation, and he cautioned that if only large-yield options are available, the only choices are full-scale war or surrender. He also emphasized that the deterrence posture of Japan not only includes nuclear weapons but also conventional weapon systems and the ballistic missile defense system. Sayuri Romei from Sasakawa USA asked Mukai if she would consider a nuclear weapon-free zone in Northeast Asia. Mukai replied that having such a zone in Northeast Asia is impossible because of North Korea and China’s nuclear weapons, and recommended instead taking steps to ease tensions and build confidence. Jade Wu, a foreign policy author, asked if Japan could afford to acquire nuclear weapons, given its economic slump in recent years. Tatsumi answered that such financial constraints are among the reasons why Japan does not have nuclear weapons, and said that investing in ballistic missile defense and conventional defense capabilities are another option, though expensive in their own right. Tatsumi added that, for Japan, withdrawing from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons would damage its reputation and security. Sato further noted that the fiscal burden and reputational issues would make it difficult for Japan to choose nuclear options, though it has been debated over the years. He added that the issue of relying more on the missile defense capabilities like Aegis Ashore is still under debate because of the cost.

Tatsumi wrapped up the panel by thanking the authors for traveling all the way to Washington to discuss their research and thanking the audience for attending.