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By Anthony DiFilippo

Just before the May 2005 NPT (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty) Review Conference, Tokyo made what appeared to be a bold announcement: Japan would press for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and for a reduction of all types of nuclear weapons. With the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki just a few months away, Japan was attempting to improve an image that had been undermined by its continuing willingness to accommodate the nuclear weapons states.

Tokyo's Approach to Nuclear Disarmament

Since 1994, when Japan submitted its original resolution calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons to the U.N. General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security, it has repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen the NPT regime. In addition to often advocating the abolition of nuclear weapons, Tokyo has become a strong advocate of the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. However, Tokyo's nuclear disarmament policy is discernibly disconnected from the immediate problems posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons. Indeed, it has long distinguished between a rhetorical commitment to the "idealism" of nuclear disarmament and a hard-headed approach to the U.S.-Japan alliance, the bedrock of its engagement with what it deems the real security problems that confront Japan. Tokyo describes its non-confrontational approach to nuclear disarmament as a step-by-step, realistic process that does not alienate the nuclear weapons states. A major part of this incremental process is the refusal to specify a target date when nuclear weapons will no longer exist. For Tokyo, as for all of the nuclear weapons countries, the abolition of nuclear weapons is a goal to be achieved perhaps someday.

The truth of the matter is that Tokyo is not worried about alienating all of the nuclear weapons states. It is worried about confronting and alienating just one of these nations -- the United States. Tokyo acknowledges that there is a continued utility for nuclear weapons, which is deterrence. Tokyo views both China and North Korea as major security threats to Japan. Primarily for this reason, it believes that Japan's national security still requires the protection of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. It is willing to forego nearly everything, including normalizing relations with North Korea, to ensure that Japan's place under the U.S. nuclear umbrella remains secure. Thus, not only is Tokyo's nuclear disarmament policy manifestly contradictory, since it advocates the abolition of nuclear weapons while accepting the U.S. nuclear shield, but it maintains and promotes the illusion that nuclear arms serve as a viable deterrent against attack. By continuing to maintain that the actual use of nuclear weapons is "contrary to humanitarian norms," Tokyo attempts to justify Japan's place

under the U.S. nuclear umbrella on the ground that if countries fear retaliation by the United States, they will not attack Japan with weapons of mass destruction. But this deterrence justification is very weak, since it hardly fits with Washington's aggressive nuclear weapons policy.

The contradictions are particularly clear in Asia. Although Tokyo supports nuclear-weapons-free zones in many areas, it does not favor one for Northeast Asia. Tokyo is well aware that Washington has never ruled out the first use of nuclear weapons in a military conflict with either North Korea or China, a situation made even more precarious by the Bush administration's preemptive strike doctrine.

Tokyo's continued pronouncements that it is working hard to strengthen the NPT regime notwithstanding, it has not wholeheartedly endorsed and promoted the development of legally binding negative security assurances to nonnuclear weapons states, which would protect them from both the threat and use of nuclear weapons by the nuclear powers. What is more, for nearly a decade Tokyo's appeals for the abolition of nuclear weapons have become steadily less important compared with its efforts to make Japan a "normal country" that possesses significant military force and is ready to use it, notably at U.S. bidding. Tokyo has strengthened its security alliance with Washington, including involvement in a missile defense system, provided logistical support to American troops in Afghanistan, deployed the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq, and strongly supported heightened U.S. counterproliferation efforts. Whereas the fundamental premise of NPT is that nuclear nonproliferation will directly complement nuclear disarmament, the counterproliferation emphasized by the U.S. and Japan is unilateral in design and relies on an unyielding diplomatic posture that emphasizes the willingness to use military force.

When President Bush declared in January 2002 that Iraq, Iran and North Korea constituted the core of the "axis of evil," Tokyo quickly supported Washington's aggressive counterproliferation campaign against these countries. In doing this, Tokyo turned away from the complementarity between nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. Tokyo's position toward Pyongyang in the current North Korean nuclear crisis has largely been indistinguishable from Washington's hard line policy. Despite considerable opposition at home, the Koizumi government pushed hard to send troops to Iraq, the first deployment of the SDF to a war zone since World War II. For months, Tokyo supported and actively participated in the Bush administration's counterproliferation campaign against Iran, bowing out only after it inked the Azadegan oil deal with Teheran in February 2004 because of Japan's petroleum needs.

Tokyo has long asserted that its significant financial contributions to the United Nations justify Japan holding a permanent position on the Security Council. In the past, Tokyo emphasized the fact that Japan, as a nonnuclear weapons state, would strengthen the composition of the Security Council. The Japanese government no longer highlights this fact today. Rather, Tokyo emphasizes its achievements as a "normal country," that is, not only its financial contributions to the U.N., but also its role in supporting U.S. aims in Iraq and elsewhere. That the Bush administration today supports the Japanese bid for a permanent position on the Security Council is indicative of Washington's approval of Japan's progress in becoming a "normal country". That "progress" means, among other things, that Washington need not worry that Tokyo's nuclear disarmament policy will impede U.S. objectives.

Other developments assure the Bush administration that Japan is unlikely to challenge U.S. nuclear weapons policies. The

Bush administration's disapproval of the CTBT led Tokyo to drop the time-specific goal for the accord to come into force that it had included in Japan's 2000 nuclear disarmament resolution to the U.N. General Assembly. Tokyo also declined to become a member of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC), which came into existence in 1998 following nuclear testing by India and Pakistan. The seven countries that currently comprise NAC -- Ireland, Sweden, Mexico, Egypt, New Zealand, South Africa and Brazil -- have been openly critical of the nuclear weapons states' failure to fulfill their obligation to eliminate their nuclear arsenals as required by NPT's article VI. Tokyo sees NAC's approach to nuclear disarmament as too confrontational, largely because it challenges the nuclear weapons states to comply with their NPT disarmament commitment. Moreover, Tokyo rejects NAC's focus on the expeditious abolition of nuclear arms, which is the polar opposite of the incremental approach officially endorsed by Japan.

Although for the last two years Tokyo has supported, with reservations, NAC's resolution presented to the U.N. General Assembly in an attempt to foster a favorable environment for nuclear disarmament at the 2005 NPT Review Conference, the members of NAC have abstained from voting on Japan's disarmament resolution. NAC has pointed out that Tokyo's resolution is not fully consistent with the disarmament commitments that countries had already made at both the 1995 and the 2000 NPT Review Conferences. By joining NAC, Japan would risk losing its place under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, something Japanese policy makers reject.

2005 NPT Review Conference

At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, Tokyo's role differed sharply from that of 2005. In 2000, Tokyo sought to work as a liaison between the nuclear weapons states and NAC, which had insisted that the nuclear powers had failed to meet their NPT obligations under article VI. While it can be debated just how effective Tokyo was in playing this liaison role, at the 2000 NPT Review Conference the nuclear weapons states agreed to an "unequivocal undertaking" to disarm. By contrast, bogged down by procedural matters rather than focusing on substantive concerns, the 2005 NPT Review Conference produced no consensus document. Washington's relentless pursuit of its counterproliferation campaign played a big part in preventing the nuclear disarmament process from moving forward. The Bush administration's desire for new nuclear weapons and its pressures to resume nuclear testing created an unpropitious atmosphere at the conference from the outset.

Tokyo's 2005 pre-conference announcement that it would push for a reduction of nuclear weapons and for the early entry into force of the CTBT was devoid of substance. While the documents that Japan submitted to the conference supported these and other key parts of the NPT regime, such as the importance of universalizing the Addition Protocol, which gives the International Atomic Energy Agency the right to conduct short-notice inspections of countries' nuclear facilities, Tokyo offered nothing new. In the end, Japan contributed nothing to ending the stalemate that has brought the NPT to its knees.

While the Japanese representative indicated that Japan would increase its efforts to bolster the NPT regime, the real stress was on counterproliferation, particularly with regard to North Korea.

Seizing Moral Authority

While opposition to the existence of nuclear weapons remains very strong in Japan today, Japanese anti-nuclear weapons organizations have been unable to substantially increase pressure on the central government to make nuclear disarmament a top foreign policy

objective. Rather, consistent with its continuing priority to make Japan a "normal country," the Koizumi administration has repeatedly demonstrated that it places the highest priority on its security relationship with the United States, including a place for Japan under the American nuclear umbrella. If Japan wants to make major contributions toward nuclear disarmament, significant changes in its nuclear disarmament policy are essential. These include abandoning a deterrence policy predicated on the U.S. nuclear umbrella, joining NAC and promoting nuclear disarmament, unmitigated support for negative security assurances to the nonnuclear weapons states, and firm endorsement of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Northeast Asia.

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