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The “Global Zero” Campaign to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons

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“Global Zero” is an international campaign launched in the US to eliminate nuclear weapons, and its inaugural conference was held in Paris in December 2008. Another world conference is to be held in Paris in February 2010, with as many as 250 leaders of the international community expected to be in attendance.

I chose to participate in “Global Zero” because I thought a Japanese perspective should be reflected in discussions aimed at achieving “a world without nuclear weapons.”

The catalyst for this was an invitation from an American friend in July of last year; I noticed that the draft invitation for the inaugural Paris conference listed the UK, Norway and several other countries as actively supporting the idea of a world without nuclear weapons but did not include Japan. Explaining that Japan has firmly held to its Three Non-Nuclear Principles for many years and that it plays a leading role each year at the UN General Assembly in the adoption of a resolution calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons, I asked that the list be revised. The campaign organizers promptly agreed to do so and ever since Japan has been at the top of the list. This episode made me realize that Japan’s nuclear disarmament diplomacy of recent years has not caught the eye of strategists in the US.

In contrast to today’s world, “a world without nuclear weapons” would be one in which North Korea and Iran had renounced their nuclear development programs, the non-NPT signatories Israel, India and Pakistan had relinquished their nuclear arsenals, the countries recognized as nuclear weapon states under the NPT – the US, Russia, the UK, France and China – had given up possession of their nuclear weapons, and thereafter no country or terrorist group would be able to gain access to nuclear weapons. Of course, such a world cannot be realized immediately nor are the prospects for its realization very encouraging at the moment.

Achieving “a world without nuclear weapons” would require an international order completely different from that which we have now. Today’s UN, for instance, could never

create or maintain such an international order.

Nevertheless, “a world without nuclear weapons” is once again being pursued today as a result of various changes in crisis levels and issue awareness: there is an increasing sentiment worldwide in favor of moving away from “mutually assured destruction,” a hazardous strategy that served as the foundation for mutual deterrence between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era; nuclear proliferation has not halted, as symbolized by the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran; the US has experienced a heightened sense of crisis over nuclear terrorism since 9/11; the development of precision-guided weapons has made it possible to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence strategy; and the economic burden of maintaining nuclear weapons has grown considerably. The discussions aimed at a world without nuclear weapons have thus gained momentum as the consequence of a variety of factors, including the view shared by all countries that a repeat at the NPT Review Conference (held once every five years and due to meet next year) of the previous conference’s major failure would be unforgivable.

Discussions at “Global Zero” have focused on approaches to nuclear disarmament by the US, Russia and other nuclear weapon states. A “Global Zero Commission” comprising a total of 23 persons – five each from the US and Russia, three each from China and India, two from Pakistan, one each from the UK, Germany, and France, and former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and myself from Japan – is endeavoring to create a model case offering a road map for eliminating all of the nuclear weapons of the nuclear weapon states for submission to the world conference next February in Paris. The Commission held its first meeting in July, with its next meeting scheduled for October.

The lineup of participants from the US bears noting, including as it does former US Senator Chuck Hagel, who serves as Chairman of the overall campaign, Richard Burt, one of the persons involved in the SALT negotiations under the Reagan administration, Tony Lake, National Security Advisor during President Clinton’s first term, and Tom Pickering, a veteran US diplomat.

The discussions at “Global Zero” tend to center on the US and Russia, and it is none too clear how far the participants from countries such as China and India will join in the discussions at this venue.

Still, I believe that Japanese participation in this campaign is of great significance in that it enables Japan’s positions and thoughts on the various issues pertaining to nuclear

disarmament to be presented to the nuclear weapon states. I think it crucial to express at this venue Japan's views on the importance of US expanded deterrence and missile defense in the nuclear disarmament process and on the issue of a multilateral balance of nuclear forces, especially among the US, Russia and China.

Hagel is said to be a close friend of President Obama and Lake served as a top foreign policy advisor to Obama during last year's presidential campaign, so I think the campaign is also an effective means of conveying Japan's outlook to persons close to the Obama administration.

From this standpoint, I mentioned at last year's Paris conference, for instance, that the Japanese are second to none in calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons in light of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that the key issues of the moment from Japan's perspective in advancing nuclear disarmament are (1) improving the reliability of the US' extended deterrence, (2) preventing the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea, and (3) pursuing the peaceful use of nuclear power in a manner completely distinct from nuclear weapons development.

While there is no question of the importance of the objectives of reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons, there is room for debate on the process for achieving these objectives, and ensuring Japan's security during that process is essential. I think the time has come, therefore, for Japan to begin research on issues pertaining to the US' extended deterrence as well as to a multilateral balance of nuclear forces, especially a trilateral balance among the US, Russia and China, that will inevitably be confronted in the nuclear disarmament process.

I would like to see government organizations and think tanks undertake research on these issues, and I think special effort needs to be devoted to fostering young specialists on nuclear strategic issues both inside and outside the government.

While I myself am not a specialist in nuclear strategy, I have built friendships with American and European specialists on strategic issues since my time at the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in London in the early 1980s. Hence I think my role from here on is to introduce those of the younger generations to my friends overseas and convey to them the information received from these friends. I very much hope that today's talk on "Global Zero" will be seen as part of that endeavor.