

Japan, Germany seek consensus on nuke cuts

BY KATSUYA OKADA AND GUIDO WESTERWELLE SPECIAL TO THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

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In 2011, Japan and Germany will mark the 150th anniversary of diplomatic relations between their countries. Today, our two countries stand at the forefront of international efforts for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

At the same time, we both emphasize the right to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Our commitment to disarmament issues is built on our historical experiences during World War II and the Cold War.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand as reminders of the terrible consequences of nuclear bombs, while Germany and central Europe lived for decades under the looming danger of a nuclear exchange on their territories.

Against this backdrop, Japan and Germany became the strongest supporters of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We share a common approach toward strengthening all three pillars of the NPT.

Currently, the NPT regime faces serious challenges. We urge North Korea to immediately return to the six-party talks and take positive and concrete steps to fulfill its commitments toward denuclearization and other measures in accordance with the September 2005 Joint Statement.

We also share a serious concern over the Iranian nuclear issue and call upon Iran to comply fully with the relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions and to meet the requirements of the IAEA Board of Governors' resolutions.

Moreover, the ongoing Review Conference of the NPT needs to revitalize the intrinsic "Grand Bargain" and strengthen the future international nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation regime by reinforcing the commitment to the treaty.

In this respect, Japan and Germany must make nuclear disarmament a priority for the NPT Review Conference. For the past decade, the international community has placed emphasis on nonproliferation due to the effects of 9/11.

In his ground-breaking speech in Prague on April 5, 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama not only firmly expressed his support for a world free of nuclear weapons but also underlined the significance of appropriate steps toward that goal. Japan and Germany welcomed the signing of the new START treaty on April 8 of this year between the presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States as the first major step in this direction.

The new treaty clearly demonstrates that tangible steps in nuclear disarmament based on Article VI of the NPT can be realized. Our common view today is that on the basis of the new START treaty, the future focus must be on reductions of strategic arms with a more multilateral scope. Future disarmament talks should, therefore, also include China as an important player.

We also welcome the recently released Nuclear Posture Review of the United States. We see it as an important step toward a world without nuclear weapons since it reduces the number and role of nuclear weapons and makes clear the readiness of the United States to provide stronger negative security assurances toward non-nuclear weapons states that are in compliance with the NPT, while simultaneously reassuring the security of the United States and its allies.

We call upon all states possessing nuclear weapons to consider the Nuclear Posture Review and the new START Treaty as an opportunity to commit themselves to concrete nuclear disarmament measures based on the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and transparency at the NPT Review Conference.

Japan and Germany share the view that further progress in the field of nuclear disarmament must also be followed by continued efforts in the reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Non-strategic nuclear weapons carry a huge potential for destruction and political destabilization, as well as the danger of falling into the wrong hands, namely those of terrorists.

An equally important step to getting rid of nuclear weapons will be to reduce their role in the respective strategic doctrines of all nuclear powers. It would be immensely important to deepen discussions on these issues, taking a step-by-step approach and engaging partners to join in. Our common perspective, which we would like to promote at the Review Conference, is the commitment by all states possessing nuclear weapons to reducing the role of nuclear weapons in their national security strategies.

Another important step toward the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is preventing the development of new nuclear warheads, as recently announced in the NPR. In this regard, the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is essential. However, this treaty--signed by the vast majority of the international community nearly 15 years ago--still requires the signature and/or ratification by nine states for its entry into force.

We call upon these states to promptly sign and/or ratify the CTBT. Japan and Germany will deepen discussions on this issue at the NPT Review Conference and will actively work to facilitate the early entry into force of the CTBT.

Ultimately, only a world free of nuclear weapons can guarantee that these terrible and deeply inhumane weapons are never put to use. It is obvious that the path toward this goal will be a long and difficult one. However, we are convinced that it can be achieved.

At the Review Conference Japan and Germany will jointly speak out in favor of the entire international community mustering political will and exerting its best efforts to attain an agreement on the basis of a true multilateral approach. We will also work closely together after the Review Conference for a world of peace and political stability.

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