

## Session 6: Japan's Nuclear Crisis

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### Summary

The panel on Japan's Nuclear Crisis was moderated by Ambassador Abe Nobuyasu, Japan Institute of International Affairs, and consisted of a four expert panel including, Ota Maskatsu, Kyoto News, Sharon Squassoni, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Nakagome Yoshihiro, Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization and Suzuki Tatsujiro, Japan Atomic Energy Commission. Each panelist addressed various issues relating to the crisis including the current status of the accident, the future of Japanese nuclear energy and lessons learned.

Suzuki Tatsujiro iterated that the crisis is far from over. The Japanese government's current plan is to contain the crisis within six to nine months, although achieving this appears to be unlikely. The cooling process of the reactors, however, continues to be an on going process and despite progress being made in relation to this, there is still a vulnerability to aftershocks – his greatest concern. Mr Tatsuijiro discussed the reasons as to why the crisis unfolded as it did. A report recently published by the Japanese government and the IAEA, focuses on preliminary findings in the following areas: (a) Prevention; (b) Accident Management; (c) Safety Regulations; (d) Emergency Response from the government in coordination with other entities and (e) Industry Safety Culture. Tatsuijiro discussed the government report, which lists 28 items of lessons learned by specifically highlighting five areas that are of particular importance in his opinion. He concluded by discussing the current public opinion and their distrust of the government and it's nuclear energy policy. This, he stressed, is the government's biggest challenge in order to regain public trust in the short term in order to move forward.

Sharon Squassoni discussed the implications of the media coverage and how it generated unrealistic expectations as to what was known about the crisis and what could be done. The media, according to Squassoni, magnified the gaps and created strange expectations. In response, the Obama administration responded to the crisis by addressing the responsibility of the US to learn and draw on the lessons of the Japanese Crisis. Congress also responded in the form of bills and hearings in order to ensure that the safety and security of US power plant sites were prepared for similar crises. She highlighted however, that US power plants have been in trouble since the nuclear renaissance and any drawing down of current plants to expand nuclear power initiatives has not been in response to the Japanese crisis but rather due to the lack of financial assistance available and indecision over a carbon tax.

Ota Masakatsu discussed the recovery process and the hurdles that Japan faces in relation to this. Mr Masakatsu discussed the fear related to this process as those involved in the recovery are concerned about radioactive contamination. This is something that needs to be overcome in order for reconstruction and recovery to take place. He discussed the latest public opinion polls as published in Kyodo news and the lack of faith the Japanese public have for the government, in particular the Prime Minister and the criticism that surrounds how the government and other entities, such as Tepco, responded to the disaster. Lastly, he highlighted that the media should have done more prior to the crisis by reporting on the safety issues relating to Japan's nuclear power plants and its regulatory system.

The final panelist, Nakagome Yoshihiro, began his discussion by discussing Japan's concept of safety in relation to their nuclear power plants and the differences in their approaches in comparison to the rest of the world. The biggest difference according to Mr Yoshihiro is that Japan previously did not see dissimilarity between nuclear safety and nuclear security – something that to Western states is clearly defined. He stresses that in Asia, particularly between China, Japan and Korea, a common understanding of mutual understanding in relation to nuclear safety and security needs to be established. The best way to do this, in his opinion, is through education.

## Session Sketches

In conclusion, it was apparent to all panelists that the Japanese government and Asian region as a whole faces a number of challenges following the Fukushima crisis which will require efforts on the part of the government, public opinion, media and the international community.

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