

Session 4: Japan's Nuclear Disaster and the U.S.- Japan Alliance

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Summary

In the wake of Japan's triple disaster, this panel session addressed the significance and impact of the nuclear disaster on the U.S.-Japan alliance. Patrick Cronin provided an introductory overview of the breadth of issues intersected by the recent nuclear crisis, ranging from nuclear safety and crisis response, to issues of energy strategy, economic and political implications, and alliance cooperation momentum. Noboru Yamaguchi provided high-level perspective on the post-March 11 disaster response, emphasizing U.S. crisis support and three aspects of the 'Operation Tomodachi' coordinated military response: the rapid deployment of sea and land-based forces, facilitated by forward basing proximity; the importance and significant impact of U.S. military assistance, and the overall effectiveness of joint Japan-U.S. coordination at all levels. Tetsuo Kotani elaborated on the actions and impact of 'Operation Tomodachi' for the U.S.-Japan alliance, highlighting the positive implications of alliance visibility and contribution, in terms of rapid response and positive public awareness. More negative aspects can be associated with the initial communication delays, interpretations regarding the movement of the USS George Washington, and possible re-igniting of Japanese opposition to nuclear power issues associated with military maritime movement, which may have negative implications for regional stability responsiveness. Zachary Hosford focused on the challenges and opportunities resulting from the March crisis. Whilst the crisis was a vivid demonstration of Japan-U.S. interoperability, and did not fundamentally change the overall alliance orientation, it has brought to the fore formidable challenges, with respect to Japan's security planning path, notably the energy sourcing alternatives, recovery costs and resource constraints, which may presage adjustments to Japan's defense posture and NDPG. On a more positive level, there are opportunities for enhanced alliance collaboration in areas such

as intelligence gathering and expected improvements in nuclear safety, security and regulatory control.

Chaim Braun provided an overview of technical, regulatory and institutional issues associated with the nuclear crisis; drawing tentative lessons and highlighting areas of concern and action for Japan's nuclear future: foremost, strengthening plant safety standards, most critically, preventing station blackout and the issue of spent fuel management, storage and reprocessing, including the uncertain future of the Rokkasho facility. Despite a fundamental case for Japanese nuclear energy, in terms of economy, diversity and security of supply, the Fukushima crisis is impacting on the global nuclear industry, and will likely increase pressure for super-safe nuclear plants; more stringent international safety standards through the IAEA and greater industry responsibility and control measures for maximum safety.

Panel group discussion included questions and comment regarding the crisis impact on Japanese public perception of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, the Okinawa/Futenma base issue, and whether the crisis and domestic recovery will lead to a more inward or outward-looking Japan. The overall opinion was that the crisis has strengthened U.S.-Japan alliance coordination and stimulated new initiatives, such as the decision to create a permanent, joint emergency response force.

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