

[SE6-GB-1] Japan's Nuclear Crisis

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Full Summary

The panel on Japan's Nuclear Crisis at Fukushima Daiichi was moderated by Ambassador Abe Nobuyasu, Japan Institute of International Affairs, and consisted of four expert panelists: 1) Dr Ota Masakatsu, Senior Editorial Writer for Kyodo News who has studied nuclear policy, non-proliferation issues and the US-Japan alliance; 2) Ms Sharon Squassoni, Director and Senior Fellow of the Proliferation Prevention Program at CSIS; 3) Nakagome Yoshihiro, Vice Chairman and President of Japan's Nuclear Energy Safety Organization which is a non-governmental organization but works on the Nuclear Safety Program of the government; and 4) Dr Suzuki Tatsujior, Vice Chairman of Japan's 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 that can be learned.

Ambassador Abe explained the circumstances surrounding the Japanese crisis. He highlighted that although the panel's title used the word "crisis" it was in fact an "accident" that resulted from an earthquake followed by a tsunami which led to the nuclear incident and the subsequent impact on neighboring countries, even as far as Europe and the United States. He expressed Japan's gratitude for the assistance from such countries as Korea, China, the United States and France. He also discussed the questions that Fukushima has raised: Why did this happen? What is the current status? What can be done in the future? And what is the public reaction in Japan and abroad?

Ambassador Abe asked Suzuki Tatsujiro to begin the discussion by addressing such aspects as what happened, the current status of the accident, what went wrong, what caused the accident and what is the future of Japanese nuclear energy. Before commencing his discussions on the above topics, Tatsujiro stressed that the Commission is responsible for nuclear policy and not safety of nuclear power. He explained that the biggest cause of Fukushima was the tsunami and the subsequent power losses at the nuclear power plants, which led to the exposure of the reactors. Tatsujiro stressed that the crisis is far from over, despite mild improvements. 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 is still a major problem, despite the progress that has already been made.

Tatsuijiro's greatest concern is that the reactors are still vulnerable to aftershocks. He also discussed the radiation concerns and the long-term process of encouraging people to return to their neighborhoods once they are deemed safe.

Mr Tatsuijiro discussed the reasons as to why the crisis unfolded as it did. His analysis borrowed heavily from a report recently published by the Japanese government and preliminary findings by the IAEA. The report lists 28 items of lessons learned. Mr. Tatsuijiro highlighted five critical areas: 1) Prevention; 2) Accident Management; 3) Safety Regulations; 4) Emergency Response from the government in coordination with other entities; and 5) Industry Safety Culture. *Prevention*, he argues, was a problem because the IAEA and Japanese government underestimated the strength and after effects of the tsunami. Both the Japanese government and IAEA concluded that *accident management* was insufficient and should be made a legally binding requirement. *Safety regulations*, both the government and IAEA agreed that these assessments must be completed by a non-biased entity independent of the government. Although the IAEA said the response was good, in some cases, *emergency response* was not up to standards especially in areas such as communication and the logistics of emergency power. He also argued that there needs to be a renewal of *industry safety culture*. He concluded his discussion by looking at the future of nuclear energy in Japan. The Japanese Prime Minister has created a new energy policy, which consists of four pillars: 1) nuclear energy with the highest safety standards; 2) efficient use of fossil fuel; 3) expansion of renewable energy; and 4) improvement in household efficacy. He pointed out that 14 more nuclear plants had been scheduled to be built by 2030 in Japan as well as an increase in the share of nuclear deposits from 30% to 50%. Currently, Japan has 54 nuclear power plants, but only 19 are operating. According to a recent public opinion poll 65% said there is a need to reduce dependency on nuclear energy. The disdain for nuclear energy at this time is not surprising, but nuclear energy remains a key pillar in Japan's energy policy. If the government fails to regain public trust, Tatsuijiro anticipates that by the end of 2012 no nuclear power plants will be operating in Japan. In order to move forward, he stressed that the government must regain the public trust or they will have an even greater energy crisis in the future.

The next panelist, Ms. Sharon Squassoni, discussed a CSIS event held in Washington DC on April 1 that looked at the Japanese domestic implications of Fukushima as well as the international ramifications for nuclear safety. Ms. Squassoni stated that during the unfolding of the crisis she observed the media, government, public and especially industry reactions to the crisis. Fukushima, Squassoni explained, was the first nuclear crisis in a 24/7 media coverage cycle that reminded her somewhat of 9/11, as it became a horrified fascination of every detail whether it was correct or incorrect. Subsequently, this generated unrealistic implications about what was known and what could have been done - in some ways the

media magnified those gaps between expectations and reality and created strange expectations. She spoke of the global perspective and looked at the reactions of the United States government legislative and executive branches. President Obama reiterated his support for nuclear power and affirmed that US reactors are safe and critical to the energy security of the United States. Obama also stressed that in a crisis like Fukushima we have a responsibility to learn from the event and draw on the experiences, which the United States is in the process of doing. The legislative branch was very interested in the topic and held multiple hearings and introduced bills within the first few weeks following the disaster relating to such elements as earthquakes, flood resistance, station blackouts, spent fuel pools, radiation, ocean contamination, and international nuclear safety. Ms. Squassoni detailed three bills that were introduced to the United States Congress, one by Senator Ed Markey, which contained specific regulations such as the removal of spent fuel as soon as possible and the need to ensure primary power has a reserve of at least 72 hours. Senator Akaka of Hawaii lobbied for a second bill on international safety. In the House, Representative Nita Lowey sponsored a bill on a Nuclear Power Licensing Reform Act that called for, among other things, that when reviewing licenses for existing power plants they should be held to the same standard as new power plants. Ms. Squassoni participated in a session with 20 members of congress for a week about nuclear energy and nonproliferation and she noted a general frustration regarding the lack of international cooperation and failure of the IAEA to complete routine safety checks of all nuclear power plants. She explained that on April 1, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission announced a task force to conduct a 90-day review. After the 90 days another review would be conducted to examine a longer-term view, what it would look like, and how it would be conducted. She noted the skepticism of the group as to why a review wasn't conducted by an outside entity. The task force released its initial results on May 12. The review addressed how to respond to events like earthquakes, floods, station blackouts and also security and emergency preparedness. Ms. Squassoni explained that there would probably be shortcomings with that process and that we would learn as we go along. She lastly highlighted that closures of US nuclear plants is not in response to Fukushima, but rather the high costs of maintaining a nuclear power plant.

The third panelist, Ota Masakatsu, discussed the public reaction and problems with reporting such an accident like Fukushima. Mr. Masakatsu visited the Fukushima site to witness first-hand the destruction. He described the slow recovery process and the hurdles that Japan faces to overcome this challenge. He discussed the nuclear history of Japan and how this disaster has impacted Japan's nuclear policy. He explained that Japan relies on nuclear deterrence, a policy since the late 1960's which is based on three premises: 1) not to possess nuclear weapons; 2) not to create nuclear weapons; and 3) not to allow outside entities to bring nuclear weapons onto Japanese sovereign territory. He highlighted the opinion polls in the Kyoto news. At the beginning of the crisis a poll on March 22, 15 days after the accident

stated that 35.5% wanted a reduction in nuclear power plants. In contrast, a recent poll on May 14 stated that 47% said they were in favor of illuminating Japan's nuclear power plants. According to Mr Masakatsu the crisis management conducted by the government and Tepco is the main reason why the Japanese public is becoming resistant to nuclear energy. This, in addition to the public's mistrust of the government, as they believe the crisis has been mishandled, has led to the unpopularity of nuclear energy in Japan. 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 a correlation between nuclear safety and nuclear security – something that is clearly defined by Western states. He explained that Japan's current safety approach towards radioactive material is to remove the dangerous substance, which is then locked away, not because of safety but because of security. He stressed that in Asia, particularly between China, Japan and Korea, a common understanding in relation to nuclear safety and security needs to be established. The best way to do this, in his opinion, is through education. He also discussed how the Fukushima accident gave valuable information to terrorists who have the desire to attack nuclear power plants in the future.

In conclusion, it was apparent to all panelists that the Japanese government, Asian region, and the rest of the world 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 to correct.

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