

Japan's Nuclear Crisis

Panel: Session 5 (Orchid)

Date/Time: April 26, 2012, 16:00-17:15

Organizing Institution: The Japan Institute of International Affairs(JIIA)

Speakers: Abe Nobuyasu (Moderator), The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA)

Funabashi Yoichi, Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation (RJIF)

Endo Tetsuya, Nuclear Safety Research Association (NSRA)

Martin Fackler, *The New York Times*

Yim Man-Sung, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST)

Panel Short Summary

Madeleine Foley, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Moira Alice Kelley, Seoul National University
Jihye Suh, Korea University

A year following the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear accident, the causes of the incident are still in dispute. Only one of Japan's 54 reactors is currently operating. Further, weak leadership and public opposition have stalled Japan's efforts to restore nuclear power operations.

Dr. Funabashi Yoichi summarized the findings of the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation's independent commission report on root causes of the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear accident. The report concludes that a governance crisis and pervasive management problems in Japan's nuclear establishment were secondary causal factors to underlying social dynamics leading to the March 2011 accident. Funabashi noted that Japanese utilities respond to the public's nuclear allergy by concealing and deemphasizing risks of nuclear power. Similarly, Japan's regulator did not engage in contingency planning for fear of provoking a crisis of public confidence in Japan's nuclear enterprise. Funabashi concluded that this aversion to contingency planning will continue to undermine Japan's ability to predict and respond to future nuclear incidents.

Ambassador Endo Tetsuya analyzed the impact of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident on prospects for global nuclear power production and on individual states' nuclear power program development. The Fukushima accident, classified as a major accident on the IAEA International Nuclear Event Scale, inspired a global reevaluation of nuclear safety and regulation standards. While Germany, Switzerland, and Italy have committed to phase out nuclear power, states in Asia and the Middle East have not abandoned their nuclear energy pursuits. Fukushima has highlighted the need for stricter oversight, but has not eroded global confidence in nuclear as a green, reliable, and economical form of power generation.

New York Times journalist Martin Fackler presented a firsthand impression of events during and following the Fukushima nuclear accident. The initial disaster was followed by a crisis of Japanese leadership and deficient conflict management strategies in the nuclear sector and bureaucracy. Japan's Prime Minister Naoto Kan, though popular, proved ineffective during the crisis for two reasons. First, Kan's distrust of institutions, which lent him great credibility early in his career, ultimately prevented him from leveraging critical crisis management assets following the accident. Second, his low visibility in the media fostered further distrust among the public. Fukushima revealed endemic issues of weak political leadership and inadequate nuclear safety measures in Japan.

Dr. Yim Man-Sung from Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology asserted that the Fukushima incident provoked an economic and social crisis in Japan. The accident's impact on prospects for global nuclear expansion has tempered predictions of a nuclear renaissance. Nevertheless, Dr. Yim believes that this crisis presents opportunities for Japan in two areas. First, it inspired a shift in global nuclear regulatory practices, placing greater emphasis on severe accident management. Secondly, it links the issues of safety and security. Yim concludes that rebuilding the Japanese nuclear sector's credibility and enhancing its transparency is necessary to restore Japan's leadership role in nuclear power.

Given continued interest in nuclear power worldwide, Japan faces a great incentive to reestablish a leading role in the nuclear energy field. Central to this effort will be a reinvigorated domestic nuclear energy policy, which emphasizes a more pragmatic multiagency approach to nuclear safety and crisis management.

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