

## **Prime Minister Kishida: Your Field of Vision on Nuclear Disarmament Is Out of Focus**

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Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida published a book entitled *Toward Nuclear-Weapon-Free World: A Courageous Will of a Peaceful Nation* (Nikkei BP) in October 2022 just in time for the election for the President of the Liberal Democratic Party, Japan. In his policy speeches after taking office as Prime Minister, he repeatedly spoke on efforts toward abolition of nuclear weapons “in order to move even one step closer to the world free of nuclear weapons” (December 2021), or “to take advantage of the opportunity of G7 Summit to be held in Hiroshima” (January 2023).

As a result of the invention of the man-made release of nuclear energy, a monumental scientific achievement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nuclear weapons were created and were used to attack two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the Second World War, resulting in instantaneous massive civilian deaths and life-long radioactive suffering. Japanese citizens and their government, who underwent firsthand experiences that should remain in the memory of human history, have the obligation to strive toward the ban and total abolition of nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, I have long been unable to find any determined will in this respect in speeches and behaviors of the Japanese government. In this situation, the presence of Mr. Kishida, who has repeatedly identified himself as “elected from Hiroshima” to characterize his political position and stated the need for efforts toward a nuclear-weapon-free world, first as Minister of Foreign Affairs and now as Prime Minister, deserves special attention with optimistic expectations.

But, I cannot help wondering what, in fact, he is, for I have been perplexed and even irritated many times by his inconsistency in words and deeds, which challenge my understanding. It seems quite natural to me that Kishida’s invitation of the G7 Summit to Hiroshima provokes criticism against him among citizens that it is a “bad use of Hiroshima brand for the sake of his political performance.” In order that his behavior, based on his belief may contribute effectively to advancing the efforts to create a nuclear-weapons-free world, he will have to reflect deeply upon his field of vision, the context in which his words and deeds on nuclear disarmament have taken place.

A recent well-known episode about Prime Minister Kishida may offer a clue in this respect. I am referring to a Hiroshima-Shrine tourist souvenir, “*Hissho Shamoji*,” a big wooden spoon with a slogan “Sure Victory” printed in Chinese characters which Kishida brought with him when he secretly visited Ukraine and presented it to President Zelensky. Considering the extremely severe situation in the war in Ukraine, with no apparent end in sight, and countless people, Ukrainian citizens or Russian soldiers, being killed, the flippant message of the spoon was completely inappropriate and trivial. Kishida’s out-of-focus vision is all the more serious,

considering the fact that his visit to Ukraine was made with the Hiroshima G7 Summit in mind. To him, Hiroshima is not the atomic-bombed “Hiroshima of the World”, but just a “Hiroshima of his Constituency”.

I noticed Kishida’s same faulty vision when I read the book mentioned above. The author says that a “nuclear-weapon-free world” is an ideal, but many obstacles exist in the real world. So, he continues saying that “he wants to discuss in a straightforward manner (in this book) about many difficult problems that the present world faces, in other words, about ‘Inconvenient Truths’ that we cannot evade to achieve the abolition of nuclear weapons.” In fact, however, he uses the phrase ‘Inconvenient Truth’ here in a misplaced context.

The phrase ‘Inconvenient Truth’ has become well-known since the former US Vice President Al Gore first used it. The term is an expression of warning based on the factual evidence that our daily life in which we enjoy wealth and convenience threaten our own future because it causes global climate warming. The phrase ‘Inconvenient Truth’ is precisely the term that indicates the fact that we should confront climate change squarely even if the attempt brings us inconvenience or hardship. The phrase makes no sense without asking someone to act beyond one’s own narrow vision of self-interest.

What are the ‘Inconvenient Truths’ that Mr. Kishida refers to in the book? For him “the most troublesome inconvenient truth” is nuclear development in the DPRK, and “the second inconvenient truth” is the increasing nuclear arsenals in China. The third point in his argument, while he doesn’t say ‘third’ explicitly, is Russian nuclear policy that emphasizes “tactical nuclear weapons” and “the first use” of such weapons. He points out that these truths define the nuclear strategy of the US on which Japan relies. But these are by no means ‘Inconvenient Truths’. These “truths” are nothing but the same old conventional reference to “evildoers” that serves the Prime Minister’s convenient political viewpoint.

Mr. Kishida must have encountered ‘Inconvenient Truths’ again and again in relation to the dilemma between ‘severe security environment’ and ‘nuclear abolition’ that he has often mentioned.

He himself participated as Foreign Minister of Japan in the 9<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference that started at United Nations Headquarters on 27 April, 2015 and made a speech expressing his determination to increase efforts towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. But on the same day, in New York, the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (2+2), including Mr. Kishida, agreed to and announced the New Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation that involve Japan’s exercise of the right of collective self-defense that used to be banned under the Peace Constitution and were to be discussed in relation to new legislation at the following Diet session. The legislation was eventually adopted by means of the forced passage by the governing party in September that year. The new joint-defense guideline has rapidly made the Peace Constitution a dead letter, and surely has caused deterioration of the security environment in Asia.

Last year, Prime Minister Kishida again participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference that took place amidst the challenging situation of Russian aggression against Ukraine. There,

he made a speech on the Hiroshima Action Plan for nuclear disarmament. However, at home, he announced a new security policy to acquire military capabilities to attack bases located on enemy territory, which used to be banned by the Peace Constitution, and to double Japan's defense expenditure in five years in terms of its GDP ratio. This message of the enormous military expansion of Japan has weakened the security environment in Asia and undermines efforts towards nuclear abolition.

His words and deeds are highly-inconsistent. In such circumstances, real "Inconvenient Truths" for nuclear abolition will not enter his field of vision.

I agree with Mr. Kishida's emphasis on realism. At the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, he should propose an approach to nuclear disarmament through improving the security environment in Asia, making full use of this highly significant occasion. More concretely, this is a rare opportunity to propose a ten-year plan of establishing a Northeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. It has already been proposed by academics and NGO researchers including from Japan, the ROK and the US. Why not also invite the ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol to the Summit to discuss this issue? It will also help G7 NATO leaders to plan peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine. (Published in Japanese on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.)

Translated by Akifumi Fujita and edited by Patti Willis.