

Saturday, Nov. 3, 2012



John Hamre (right), president and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, discusses Japan's nuclear energy policy during a seminar at Keidanren Kaikan in Tokyo on Oct. 25, as CSIS colleague Michael Green listens. satoko kawasaki

JAPAN-U.S. SEMINAR

U.S. needs Japan to remain nuclear, expert says

Relations in region not likely to change with Obama or Romney, even in China ties

By **TAKASHI KITAZUME**
Staff writer

A "zero-nuclear" Japan will be a serious concern for the United States as its key ally both from economic and security standpoints, the chief of an influential U.S. think tank said at a recent seminar on Japan-U.S. relations.

The policy set out in September by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's Cabinet seeking to phase out nuclear power generation in Japan by the end of the 2030s — in response to strong anti-nuclear sentiments in the country following the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011 — is not viable given Japan's vast economic needs, said John Hamre, president and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Hamre, a former deputy U.S. defense secretary, and his CSIS colleague Michael Green were speaking at a seminar organized by the Keizai Koho Center on Oct. 25 to discuss American policy on East Asia ahead of the U.S. presidential election as well as the imminent change in leadership in China.

Nuclear power generation in Japan over the past four decades has been an important part of Japan's economic success that provided "a strong, reliable supply of base energy" for the historically energy-poor country, Hamre said.



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- I think he will really shake things up in the Diet.**
- His gaffe-prone statements could cause considerable damage at the national level.**
- I would like to see what happens if he and Toru Hashimoto join forces.**
- We should wait and see what his party's platform is before passing judgment.**

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While he said he understood that the Fukushima crisis shook people's confidence in nuclear power — just as the 1979 Three Mile Island incident did for Americans — he noted there is "too much of a romantic idea about alternative energy in this country as a substitute for nuclear power."

The Democratic Party of Japan-led government's policy does not include a specific road map to achieve the goal, but assumes that renewable sources like wind and solar power will account for a greater portion of the nation's energy mix in coming decades.

Citing U.S. experience in wind and solar power generation, Hamre said the low efficiency and output of these sources that rely on natural conditions will not "replace the base capacity of nuclear power generation."

Japan will also face a huge cost disadvantage if it is going to turn more to natural gas as a source of power generation, he said. While in the U.S., where the so-called shale revolution in recent years has dramatically changed the energy industry structure, natural gas today costs \$2.60 per million BTU, Japan is paying \$14 per million BTU, he pointed out.

"You're paying five times as much for natural gas. So if you're going to make the decision that you're only going to have natural gas-fired electric generation plants, you're going to encumber your economy with energy costs five times higher than the competition," Hamre said. "There can't be any romanticism about alternative energy. If you're going to be a modern, sophisticated economy, you have to address this question of making nuclear power a legitimate source of energy."

Hamre also said the policy poses a security concern from the viewpoint of international control for nonproliferation of nuclear materials.

"Nuclear power from the very beginning was (not only) a source of promise, but (also) a source of great threat because nuclear power electric generation is also the base for making nuclear weapons, and it's a great risk to the world to have commercial nuclear power plants because there is a possibility of diverting the material and turning it into weapons.

"So for the last 40 years the U.S. and Japan, along with Europe, have been leaders in creating an international system to monitor and control the use of commercial nuclear energy so that we know if people were illegitimately going to divert it and turn it into weapons," he said.

If Japan is to give up nuclear energy — and if nuclear power is to wither in the U.S. due to competition with cheap natural gas and in Europe as in the case of Germany — "the countries that have given us the security system are going to diminish, and who's going to replace them?" he said. "Americans cannot afford from a security standpoint to have Japan abandon nuclear power. It's too important to us."

Hamre said the March 11, 2011, earthquake caused triple tragedies — the tsunami that resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns and the loss of public confidence in the government. "Citizens right now do not believe the government can protect them and they don't have any confidence the government can provide safe nuclear power," he said.

"But if you're going to stay a rich and prosperous country, and if you're going to help provide a global system of security, we've got to rebuild confidence that the government can indeed protect citizens and it can oversee this industry and make sure that it's safe and reliable," he added.

Green, a senior vice president for Asia who holds the Japan Chair at the CSIS, discussed the prospect of American policy toward East Asia in the wake of the U.S. election and the shakeup of Chinese leadership in the Communist Party congress.

The importance that the U.S. attaches to its alliance with Japan as a cornerstone of post-Cold War security in the Asia-Pacific region is supported by a strong bipartisan consensus that has been carried on through three administrations since President Bill Clinton, said Green, a former special adviser to President George W. Bush on national security affairs.

The race between President Barack Obama and Republican contender Mitt Romney has highlighted some differences in domestic policy and tone on economic issues, but no major difference has emerged between them on foreign policy, he said.

"One can expect strong continuity" in U.S. policy toward Asia, particularly on Japan, he noted. Romney, if elected, is not going to change America's shift in emphasis toward Asia, and will likely continue the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations, Green said, adding that Obama is also committed to completing the TPP talks.

Xi Jinping, who is expected to replace Hu Jintao as Chinese president in the upcoming party congress, will be the first post-Deng Xiaoping leader of China in the sense that, unlike Hu and Jiang Zemin, he had not been handpicked by the late Deng for promotion to the party leadership, Green said.

Still, Xi is likely to basically take over Deng's worldview that has been carried on by his predecessors, and will continue to view U.S. relations as important, he noted.

In fact, "Xi is going to be very preoccupied with domestic affairs" where huge numbers of protests take place each year, Green said. "China spends a lot of money on its defense now, and that budget is rapidly growing, but in fact China spends more money on domestic security inside the country, which reflects that the real insecurity is domestic, not foreign," he observed.

Some of the nationalistic statements that Xi has made so far, including a speech he made in Mexico in 2009, "was not a message for the world but to the domestic audience to show that he could push back foreign criticism," he pointed out.

With his background as a former party chief in Fujian Province, Xi "has a very good understanding of maritime issues and will be persistent in China's maritime and territorial claims," he said.

When Xi visited the U.S. last year as vice president, Obama made it clear that the U.S. has a stake in China's success and development, Green said. Still, there are "some serious problems in China relations that are expected to complicate things," including its military buildup and apparent pursuit of an ability to "constrain the U.S. from entering or intervening in crises in the waters near China," he noted.

The 2010 collision of Japan's Coast Guard ship and a Chinese fishing boat near the Senkaku Islands "is not an isolated incident" but a part of China's geostrategy on territorial disputes that has seen 22 incidents involving Chinese government ships and local navy or coast guard ships in the region over the past two years, Green said.

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