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## U.S. nuclear special team sent to Japan right after 3.11

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The United States sent a special nuclear response team trained to handle nuclear accidents and terrorism to Japan right after the outbreak of the March 2011 nuclear disaster, but Japan was slow to make use of radiation data from the unit, according to U.S. and Japanese government sources.

This was the first dispatch of the Consequence Management Response Team (CMRT) for an emergency outside the United States. The team, affiliated with the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a semi-autonomous agency of the Energy Department, is tasked with dealing with nuclear accidents and terrorism in the United States by detecting and analyzing radiation contamination.

The Japanese government, however, did not acknowledge the significance of the team's mission and failed to immediately utilize the initial data provided by the team for evacuation of residents living around the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

In recent interviews with Kyodo News, U.S. sources involved in making the decision to dispatch the team said that on March 14, 2011, three days after the nuclear disaster began, the White House's National Security Council decided to send the CMRT to Fukushima Prefecture at the request of U.S. Forces Japan and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo.

The CMRT is dispatched to nuclear-disaster zones equipped with the Aerial Measuring System (AMS), an airborne system using military aircraft to detect gamma rays from altitudes of about 150 to 700 meters and calibrate doses of radiation with the help of highly advanced analytical software.

The AMS technology was first developed in the 1960s in the context of the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union conducted atmospheric nuclear testing. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, its capability to deal with nuclear terrorism has been enhanced.

The U.S. military and embassy requested the team's dispatch as U.S. troops were engaged in the "Operation Tomodachi (Operation Friendship)" relief mission in the early weeks after the nuclear disaster triggered by

the huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The AMS data "helped confirm that there was no significant threat to the health and safety of the people" at U.S. military bases in Japan, one U.S. government source said. "So I think that was the primary reason" for the dispatch of the special team, the source said.

According to this source, AMS operations concerning the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant confirmed there was no fire in a spent fuel pool of the Unit 4 reactor, which senior officials and scientists of the U.S. administration were seriously worried about in the first week of the accident.

The CMRT, consisting of 33 scientists and engineers, arrived at Yokota Air Force Base in Japan on March 16 from Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas and initiated test flights within 12 hours of arriving, according to a NNSA senior official. The CMRT conducted the first round of AMS operations from March 17 to 19, using two U.S. military aircraft.

"We have never done such a large response overseas," the NNSA official said. "We have used our aerial system overseas before, but not in an emergency. It was for doing surveys of previously contaminated areas, to do environmental remediation surveys."

The AMS flight operations in Fukushima were conducted around 100 times totaling 525 flight hours until the CMRT left Japan on May 28, 2011, he said. Its experience in Fukushima did and would enrich the capability of the AMS, he and the U.S. government source suggested.

The CMRT provided radiation data from the first round of AMS operations to the Nuclear Industry Safety Agency (NISA), then the nuclear regulatory body of the Japanese government, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology from March 18 to 20 through the Foreign Ministry.

These initial data, however, were not effectively utilized in making decisions about the early evacuation of residents living around the plant, several Japanese sources told Kyodo News recently. Even worse, top-level officials of the Japanese government's crisis-management team were not informed of the CMRT's arrival and its initial operations.

"We did not have any prior explanation (about the CMRT and AMS operations)," said Tetsuro Fukuyama, then deputy chief Cabinet secretary. "We first knew (of the AMS operations) when the first radioactive-contamination map was presented to the Japanese side," he added, suggesting that Fukuyama and senior leaders of the government became aware of the AMS operations on March 20 at the earliest.

Yukio Edano, then chief Cabinet secretary, said something similar. "We did not get any briefing (about the AMS operations from lower-level officials). At my level, we did not go into any detail (about the operations)," Edano said.

"We established areas within 20 kilometers of the plant as an evacuation zone before this (the first AMS operations). People in areas 20 to 30 km away were recommended to stay indoors," Edano said. "I cannot not exclude the possibility that we would have recommended people who lived to the northwest of the plant to evacuate from those areas earlier" had quicker and better use been made of the AMS data.

Based on the data from the initial AMS operations, the CMRT worked out the first radiation-contamination map covering areas within about 40 km of the plant. The map was provided to NISA and the science ministry

on March 20. It took another three days before it was made public due partly to confusion among science ministry officials as to whether or not the U.S. information was classified.

Kazuhiro Yoshida, chairman of the assembly of Namie town, Fukushima Prefecture, located northwest of the plant, said the delay in the release of the data caused residents in areas 20 to 30 km away from the plant to be exposed to radiation unnecessarily.

He told Kyodo News, "It is outrageous that the government did not inform us about the radioactive data at that time."

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