ENGAGING IRAN AND BUILDING PEACE IN THE PERSIAN GULF REGION

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I don't claim to be an expert on the Middle East. My expertise is on East Asia, but I was the Japanese deputy foreign minister for three years, up until two and a half years ago, and I negotiated with Iran as the G-8 political director. I will discuss the question of Iranian nuclear development in comparison with North Korean nuclear development. I think there are some relevant points, some commonalities and differences.

Let me first talk about where we are in relation to both North Korea and Iran. As you all know, North Korea has a track record of developing their nuclear weapons for the past 20 years. Now we have come so far as to have North Korean nuclear testing into '06. And we have the Six-Party Talks which are a comprehensive approach to the question of nuclear development. If you look at the agreement in February last year, in exchange of denuclearization of Korean peninsula, we are to talk about the normalization process between the United States and DPRK, between Japan and DPRK, economic and energy cooperation, as well as the future peace regime as well. Indeed, nuclear development is an entry point, but the way we deal with the North Korean nuclear issue is indeed a comprehensive approach.

In the case of Iran, we have come a long way to deal with issue in a piecemeal way. This is a question of Iranian covert activities. I talk with Iranians often, and they say that they assume they have peaceful nuclear development. They would like to model Japan, meaning that they would like to develop their nuclear technology in an advanced way, which does mean that, at the end of the day, they would like to convert their technology militarily in a short period of time, as is the case for Japan.

We tell Iranians that Japan has a track record of being a very faithful member of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), and a huge amount of money has been spent on Japan for inspections, verification, et cetera. We have the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Iran therefore has to establish trust vis-a-vis the international community. That is where we are. We have not created any resolution in relation to Iran. Iran continues to defy, and Iran continues to develop their enrichment facilities.

I would like to argue both cases in three dimensions. First, global governance. Second, the NPT regime. Third, the regional and global security context.

First, global governance. I think the Iranian nuclear development is clearly the deed of the nation state, very unique state. But yet the international community has some responsibility for failing to produce the right answer to the question of nuclear development on the part of Iran.
Starting with U.S. President George W. Bush’s 2002 state of the union speech categorizing Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as rogue states, the “axis of evil,” and the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy which endorsed preemptive strike, there was a perception that United States would like to pursue regime change instead of constructive engagement policy. Faced with that policy approach on the part of the United States, Japan, as well as the European Union, pursued what we call a "good cop" approach.

In the case of North Korea, in 2002 Japan sent Prime Minister Koizumi to North Korea, and I negotiated for what we call the Pyongyang Declaration concerning normalization, a bilateral resolution to do with nuclear development on part of North Korea, the question of abduction, and all sorts thing. This is possible because the United States took a “bad cop” approach. We took a “good cop” approach. We clearly used the atmosphere in which North Korea was terribly intimidated by the might of the United States.

The same thing applies to the question of Iranian nuclear development. The European Union took a “good cop” approach. We negotiated in pursuit of a negotiated settlement. But, again, on the question of national security such as nuclear development, this “good cop, bad cop” approach will not result in a settlement. All are clear about this. We need to have a very practical policy on the part of the United States. And we have to produce a united front in relation to the question of nuclear development on the part of Iran.

Second, the NPT. I think North Korea has clearly violated its NPT obligation in a bad way. Their violations are worse, clearly worse than Iran’s. Iran claims that they pursue peaceful nuclear development, while North Korea claims that they would like to create nuclear deterrents. They declared that they develop nuclear weapons, and they tested their nuclear devices – clearly serious violations of the NPT regime. Under the current system, those violations are reported to the United Nations, and the UN takes relevant actions, recognizing those violations as a threat to international peace and security. In both cases, the UN Security Council produced sanctions. But yet, in the case of North Korea, while the degree of violation is much worse than Iran’s, we talk about a conciliatory approach, the Six-Party Talks. We have given carrots to them. We would like to negotiate with North Korea, avoiding any coercive actions. We talk about the question in a comprehensive way.

Iranian authorities may think that United States will become serious only when Iran has developed their own nuclear capability as in the case of North Korea. Therefore, the sooner the better, we need to have the United States be a kind of frontal negotiator in relation to the question of Iran. We shouldn't repeat the mistakes we have committed in relation to North Korea.

Third, the question of regional and global security as well. The nuclear North Korea may be less harmful than nuclear Iran for a couple of reasons. One is that North Korea is surrounded by two nuclear states, China and Russia, and Japan and Korea are under the nuclear umbrella of the United States. A couple of nuclear bombs may therefore not be that threatening to the regional security surrounding the Korean peninsula. In the case of Middle East, in the case of Iran, it's only Israel under nuclear power. All those Sunni governments
will be threatened in a very deep way if Iran becomes a nuclear power. The second reason is that North Korea is a small nation, a small, weak, economic power, while Iran is already a strong economic power. Therefore, a nuclear Iran poses a much more serious security threat to the region of the Middle East than the nuclear North Korea poses to the region in East Asia.

For all those reasons, I would very much like to see a different approach in relation to Iran. I would like to call for a similar comprehensive approach to be introduced in dealing with the question of Iran, but comprehensive in a different way.

One, I would like to call for the establishment of a G-8 process. We currently have a “3 plus 3” process -- we call it the “5 plus 1,” the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. I would like to see Iran, the United States, and Japan on board. There is no reason why Japan is excluded from the consultative mechanism for the resolution of the Iranian development. Iran claims that they would like to be a civil nuclear power. We have lots of expertise on how to be a faithful member of the IAEA and the NPT. We are very much dependent on oil, and Iran is the third largest exporter of oil to Japan. Japan has a very strong relationship with Iran. Japan's hand is clean in relation to Middle East. Any framework which is going to deal with the question of nuclear development of Iran in a comprehensive way must therefore include representative members of the international community.

So I would like to call for a creation of eight-party talks to discuss comprehensive issues with nuclear development as an entry point. At the same time, this group needs to talk about various other issues, including economic and technical cooperation, the question of the Iranian support to the terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the question of Middle East peace process. Only when we recognize Iran as a legitimate power in the region, and only when we view the Iranian question in a comprehensive way will we be able to find the right resolution to the question of nuclear development.

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