

**Failed Defense Pact Worsens Japan Nuke Fears**  
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**By Lee Byong-chul**

*Clandestine negotiations blow up*

Over the past two weeks, South Korea-Japan relations have declined more than at any time since South Korea's Lee Myung-bak government took office in 2008 over a fiasco in which the two countries sought to enter a clandestine pact for collective security.

The Blue House has not publicly acknowledged the existence of the General Security of Military Information Agreement, as Japan calls it, although government officials have spoken in general terms about plans to work closely with Japan as a cornerstone of its regional cooperation strategy against North Korea\*. If it had been signed, it would have been the first military agreement ever signed with Japan, which colonized the entire Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945, creating emotions that remain raw to this day.

President Lee's key foreign policy aide, Kim Tae-hyo, was forced to resign following a government investigation into the decision-making process leading up to the aborted signing. In a major embarrassment for the Lee government, the signing had to be postponed just an hour before the planned ceremony on June 29. The investigation concluded that officials had not been transparent and had failed to get the backing of the South Korean people. Cho Sei-Young, director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Northeast Asian affairs bureau, has also been replaced.

The architect was Kim Tae-hyo, a recipient of the fifth Nakasone Yasuhiro award in 2009, named after the former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, an advocate of Japan's nuclear option. A hard-core conservative, Kim miscalculated the weight of history that overshadows the animosities between the two countries.

Added to the controversy over the failed pact is a decision in June in which Japan sought to pave the way for moving closer to nuclear weaponization by altering its basic law on atomic energy to include "national security" among its goals for nuclear power, a red flag to the surrounding countries.

Koreans feel strongly that Japan has many sins to answer for. It is impossible to understand Japan's future without looking at its past. Animosity between Japan and Korea – on both sides of the DMZ – goes back centuries and includes not just brutality and torture but humiliation. Japanese thugs murdered the Korean Empress Myeong-seong and turned the imperial palace into a zoo. Tens of thousands of Koreans were massacred during the colonial period, with the pace picking up as it went on. As World War II intensified, the Japanese drafted hundreds of thousands of Korean men for hard labor as Japan's own men went to war. Anywhere between 20,000 to 200,000 were killed or injured in inhuman labor conditions. These scars remain to this day despite Japan's recent decades of apparent rejection of war.

The legacy of Japan's military adventurism is not in the proposed pact but rather in the transformation of the collective consciousness of Japanese political elites. In particular, the

renewed sense of a right to nuclear empowerment plays a bigger role in this transformation than its advanced technology.

To many South Koreans who still vividly remember Japan's brutal 36-year rule of Korea, Japan's expanding military ambitions, especially its nuclear ones, evoke ominous signs.

Japan's hint that it might become a nuclear-armed country provoked widespread commentary as to what a samurai state with a nuclear allergy would look like, and if it did, whether it could actually get anything done. It probably could. Japan has taken many steps on nuclear capability that once seemed unlikely or even impossible. By the same token, Tokyo enjoys the full benefits of a nuclear-ready status.

Could Japan go nuclear peacefully? The question is of great importance to the international community and is a key premise of global nuclear policies toward Japan and the discussion of a nuclear free zone in Northeast Asia. While I don't think the question per se could actually be the beginning of the end of a nuclear weapon-free Japan, it is certainly true that an atmosphere of pessimism about the prospects of a reasonable transition to a transparent and eventually trustworthy nuclear-powered Japan is being created over time.

In particular, given that Japan has a tilting-at-windmills quality that includes its attempt to reinterpret the Constitution related to 'collective self-defense exercise,' I am not optimistic about Japan's nuclear security in the long term. Japan is increasingly moving toward the path of becoming a militarily dangerous country.

It is of course important not to exaggerate the impact of nuclear weapons program but it is true that there are no technological barriers to Japanese construction of nuclear weapons. While the presence of nuclear weapons in Japan has been accepted generally as unthinkable because of the horror generated by atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, we all have known for a long time that Japan would have a far shorter timetable aimed at nuclear weapons development program given its advanced civil nuclear facilities.

Other conventional wisdom awaits us. Japan is far ahead in the development of delivery systems through her space research and satellite programs. If the decision were made to produce nuclear weapons, a ready-made system for its delivery would be at hand. Japan is by no means overpriced militarily, so to speak. If South Koreans were asked to make a list of things to worry about, Japan would be on a par with the rogue regime in Pyongyang, which has gone ahead with nuclear weaponization in defiance of its regional neighbors, with the exception of China. Japan appears unlikely to take a single step back from its self-defense rights---a clear reference to fast-forwarding the nuclear program.

The response to Japan's rising nuclear appetites shows that going nuclear is a dance that requires no partners. Any crisis might unexpectedly shove the Japanese and the Koreans into taking the nuclear path. Radically speaking, Koreans believe Japan cannot be trusted to change its culture and norms. Japan could go nuclear at any time even if it does not make sense. When it's actually sandwiched between Tokyo and Pyongyang, a traditionally nationalistic South Korea is going to be under enormous pressure to follow the path of Japan and North Korea and China. South Korea would be only the example of the spillover from Northeast Asia's nuclear zone.

A leading journalist of Chosun Ilbo claimed in a recent column that "With regard to nuclear

issues, we should no longer trust any country entirely, including the United States." Reading the controversial column, I thought to myself that how many mini crises will be needed before Japan's long game becomes a big crisis?

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