NON-NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION AND STRATEGIC STABILITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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ABSTRACT. At present, there exists the clandestine proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Asia-Pacific region. The nuclear proliferation may alter or even upset the current regional balance of power and disrupt the stability of the region. It may also lead to new military conflicts. During a regional conflict, one nuclear threshold state may use nuclear weapons against its adversary. Under the circumstances, international community should devote its best efforts to eliminating the nuclear proliferation in the region. Before that final goal is reached, states in the region should seek to maintain the strategic stability of the region in the presence of nuclear proliferation. In order to achieve that objective, the Asia-Pacific region should set up a model including multilateral security mechanisms and bilateral confidence and security-building measures.

1. The Present Situation of Nuclear Proliferation in the Asia-Pacific Region

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar structure, the world has entered a transitional period toward a new international strategic structure. At present, the Asia-Pacific region is enjoying political stability and rapid economic growth, but there exist some unstable factors, which may make a negative impact on future peace and security of the region if they are not dealt with properly. One of the unstable factors is the presence of clandestine proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. How to maintain stability under the circumstances has become one of the most important security issues in Asia and the Pacific.

Up till now, the nuclear threshold states(areas) in the Asia-Pacific region can be sorted into two categories.

The first category includes the states(areas) which have some conditions to develop nuclear weapons but the conditions are not sufficient; and which have a strong desire to develop nuclear bombs but they are restricted by some factors. India, Pakistan, Taiwan, North Korea and South Korea belong to this category.

Since India exploded a nuclear device for self-claimed peaceful purpose in 1974, there has been a nuclear arms race in South Asia. Two de facto nuclear weapon states have emerged as a result, namely, India and Pakistan. Whether they will turn this more or less covered nuclear status into an open one is perhaps the most outstanding issue in the efforts for preventing nuclear proliferation in this region today.

Having greatly benefitted from the imported nuclear material, technology and facilities said to be for
the civilian use, India seemed to have succeeded in accumulating enough weapon grade plutonium for manufacturing nuclear bombs. According to another report, India is now capable of producing 75 kg weapon grade plutonium annually, with which 15 nuclear warheads may be manufactured. The country also has various aircraft to carry the bombs. All of them could be used to attack Pakistan. Recently, India has intensified its efforts for developing short-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. In 1988, it successfully tested "Prithvi" missiles with the range of 250 km. In 1989, India again succeeded in another test of firing an intermediate-range "Agni" missile with the range of 2,500 km, which was obviously intended for against China.

Pakistan was reported to start accumulated nuclear material in 1985. It is now said to be able to produce enriched uranium annually enough for manufacturing 2-3 bombs. It is widely believed that to reduce the pressure from the united States, Pakistan has so far refrained from producing a complete nuclear device. Once necessity acquires, however, it could have the bomb simply by assembling the various parts it has already stored within a short period of time. The carrying vehicles Pakistan has are chiefly combat airplanes.

The purpose of Pakistan maintaining the nuclear option seems mainly to cope with the threat it has perceived from India. Pakistan has repeatedly declared that if India relinquishes the nuclear choice, it will do the same. A number of proposals were put forward for this purpose, like simultaneous joining the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by two states; establishing a mechanism of joint supervising each other's nuclear facilities; or setting up the nuclear-free zone in South Asia. India has turned down all these proposals.

Thus the pace of the nuclear arms race in South Asia will largely depends on the attitude of India in the future. India claimed that it had retained the nuclear option chiefly to "deal with China", but in fact it has a desire to have the benefits of becoming a nuclear power. Many Indian high-Ranking officials have kept asking for the reformulation of India's defense strategy with nuclear force as its core, which may make India become an open nuclear weapon state. But on the other hand, one should not ignore the powerful elements, which would restrain India from crossing the nuclear threshold openly. The role of nuclear weapons in the political and military fields has now been markedly reduced. The nuclear superpowers will cut their arsenals in large numbers. The pressure of international community against nuclear proliferation is increasing. Under the circumstances, India has to realize that going into the nuclear club might have to pay a heavy price. It could well push itself into isolation in the world community, and reduce its important position in the third world. Moreover, the act could also militarilyinvite an accelerated nuclear arming of Pakistan, which would then only serve to erode the already superior position of India. There are perhaps also technological obstacles. The nuclear capability of India could not have been achieved without the assistance from Western countries (in many cases even illegally). And it seems also true in the future. Thus, when the developed countries are tightening their control over nuclear technology, one should not ignore the technological difficulties that India might have to become a nuclear weapon state especially with war-fighting capability. Perhaps owing to these factors, India also showed certain amount of restraint while carrying out its nuclear program. Hopefully, India seems now still not yet to make final decision. The possibility of India staying at the position as it does now should not be ruled out.

In a small degree, there is also a risk of nuclear proliferation in the Korean Peninsula. South Korea began its research program of nuclear weapons in the early 1970s. Although it suspended the program later under the pressure of the U.S., South Korea could make rapid progress in its nuclear program due to its high level of technology once it makes its decision of developing nuclear bombs again in the future.

The North Korea began its program of nuclear energy in the early 1960s. According to the report by North Korea to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in May 1992, there are 14 nuclear facilities in North Korea, including 5 nuclear reactors (3 completed, 2 under construction). North Korea joined the NPT treaty in 1985, and agreed to compliance with NPT safeguards in January 1992. From May 1992 to February 1993, the inspectors from IAEA made 6 inspections to nuclear facilities in North Korea. The results of former 5 inspections showed that the nuclear technology of North Korea is still