

April 12th 2013

Dear Secretary of State John Kerry:

cc: senior State Department staff, Senate Foreign Relations/House Foreign Affairs

We are writing to you to express our concern at plans by the United Kingdom, France and Japan to resume shipments of weapons-usable plutonium to Japan. The shipment has direct implications for the effectiveness of U.S. non-proliferation and security policies at a time when tensions in Northeast Asia are rising. Therefore we believe there is every need for U.S. consent for this shipment to be suspended.

We understand that during the week of April 14th a cargo of 20 plutonium Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel assemblies, manufactured in France by AREVA and containing in excess of 900 kilograms of weapons-usable plutonium, will be loaded on to one of the UK- flagged armed freighters Pacific Egret or Pacific Heron, in the port of Cherbourg, France. The shipment will then depart for the nuclear reactor port at Takahama in western Japan.

Our concerns over this shipment, the first since the devastating Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in March 2011, include the following:

- ✧ No demand for plutonium fuel in Japan¹, no possibility for its use now, utility admits it is undetermined whether or not the fuel to be transported will be used²;
- ✧ Japan continuing to acquire, stockpile and attempt to scale up its use of weapons-usable plutonium, including efforts to start-up and operate the Rokkasho reprocessing plant;
- ✧ A flawed U.S. policy of supporting Japan's plutonium program which does not contribute to, but on the contrary distracts from stabilizing on-going non-proliferation efforts in East Asia;³
- ✧ Japan's program and its U.S. support undermining on-going U.S. Republic of Korea (ROK) Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (123) negotiations, including encouraging ROK to seek reprocessing and separated plutonium;⁴
- ✧ The impact of the shipment on exacerbating further tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the East Sea/Sea of Japan, particularly in relation to the nuclear program of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK); and,
- ✧ Inadequate transport security plan, including for passage through the Korea Strait.⁵

As the U.S. State Department and associated agencies review and sign off on the security plan for shipments of plutonium from Europe to Japan, we urge you to immediately undertake the following actions:

¹ It was reported in March that Japanese utilities are unable to provide a plan for the use of their separated plutonium stocks, <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130326p2a00m0na006000c.html>

² It was reported in the Fukushima Shimbun on 22 March 2013 (article in Japanese) that Kepco states, "concerning loading of this fuel into the reactor, the decision regarding this will be made based upon the debate concerning restart and upon the determination by local authorities, and therefore, "we have not decided [this] at this point." <http://www.fukuishimbun.co.jp/localnews/nuclearpower/41190.html>

³ For background, see, <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/planet-2/report/2006/4/Proliferation-Korea-Japan.pdf>

⁴ The new President of the ROK recently called on the U.S. Congress to assist it in expanding its peaceful nuclear program. Park calls for U.S congressional support for Seoul's case in nuclear accord negotiations <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/03/29/10/0301000000AEN20130329007051315F.HTML>

⁵ See, <http://www.nci.org/k-m/mmi.htm> for background.

- ✧ conduct a new risk assessment on both the demand in Japan for such plutonium and the risks of shipping weapons-usable plutonium through the Korea Strait at this time;
- ✧ inform Japan and France that U.S. consent has been suspended pending an updated review;
- ✧ inform the U.S. Congress that the State Department is conducting a new risk assessment and that consent has been suspended; and finally,
- ✧ initiate a wide-ranging U.S. review of its policy concerning Japan's reprocessing and plutonium-use program, which has resulted in Japan acquiring stocks of over 44,000 kg of weapons-usable plutonium with no practical peaceful use; and,
- ✧ no amendment to ROK-U.S 123 Agreement permitting development of reprocessing or enrichment program by the Republic of Korea.

As organizations working to reduce and eliminate the threat from the commerce in and use of weapons-usable plutonium, we believe these recommendations, if adopted by the Obama Administration, would help to reduce escalating proliferation threats in East Asia. Given the recent announcement of the DPRK to restart plutonium production at its Yongbyon nuclear reactor, the issue of plutonium proliferation in East Asia is clearly of major international concern. To allow the plutonium shipment to proceed at a time when tensions are escalating on the Korean Peninsula would only serve to stimulate the crisis and could be seen by North Korea as a provocative and confrontative act.

Long standing U.S. policy of approving Japan to acquire bomb material has led to policies that directly challenge U.S. efforts to reduce proliferation threats in East Asia. Nowhere more is this policy failure evident than on the Korean peninsula. The current U.S. attempts to have the DPRK return to its promise made by the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (i.e., no reprocessing or enrichment) could be directly undermined by U.S. policy applied to Japan, a short distance across the East Sea/Sea of Japan with the Republic of Korea asserting to have the same rights as Japan to reprocess.

As civil society organizations concerned for peace and stability in the region, we were very encouraged when a year ago President Obama warned of the threat posed by plutonium. He addressed the very core of the problem when he stated:

“We all know the problem: The very process that gives us nuclear energy can also put nations and terrorists within the reach of nuclear weapons. We simply can’t go on accumulating huge amounts of the very material, like separated plutonium, that we’re trying to keep away from terrorists.”⁶

The current tension in the region presents an opportunity to address what the President so poignantly stated above.

That is why we urge you to take immediate action and conduct a new risk assessment on this shipment, This will be an important step forward for reviewing the wider U.S. policy concerning commercial plutonium separation, transport, and stockpiling anywhere.

Sincerely,

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⁶ See, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/03/201203262737.html#axzz1qaFg16rG>

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