

Tokoy, 8 March, 2010

Rolf Mützenich

Regional Challenges to the NPT Regime: Focus on North Korea and Iran

Lecture in Tokyo, 8.3.2010

Thank you very much for inviting me here today. The conference reminds us that Japan and Germany are well advised to work together towards peace and security. This is not just an obligation in light of the historical role played by our two countries in the outbreak of and the crimes committed during the Second World War. It is also a task we share in view of our responsibilities in our respective regional environments and in international politics. Japan and Germany should work together to strengthen the rules and standards in international politics and to build up new fields for co-operation and stability in international politics. I believe that the combination of regional security, disarmament and arms control offers a great opportunity.

Regional co-operation and security communities in the Asian region

Two developments are currently crossing paths in East Asia. On the one hand, the region is an increasingly important part of the global economy. This development is being driven by the People's Republic of China and Japan. At the same time, there are classic security problems in East Asia. These include conflicts like the one over Taiwan or the ones between North and South Korea and North Korea and the United States. In addition, there are unresolved border issues. Competition for raw materials will grow. And there are also hidden rivalries for power, such as between Japan and China. Whereas in recent years Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and Libya have signed away any right to nuclear weapons, some Asian countries have grasped the bomb and developed launchers. Further countries in Asia are aspiring to gain nuclear weapons or possess all the necessary components. And conventional armament is also continuing unchecked.

I am convinced that regional security communities can make a vital contribution towards stabilising the international system. And the existing territorial and ideological conflicts in East Asia make steps towards co-operation and confidence-building all the more important. This process, which took decades even in Europe, could culminate in a regional security community in East Asia as well.

Despite the many smouldering and open conflicts, South-East Asia in particular is showing signs of a type of regional co-operation, in the form of ASEAN, which includes security issues.

ASEAN today has ten member states. Unlike the European Union, the Association does not consist of liberal democracies – except for Thailand and the Philippines. Nevertheless, ASEAN has recorded similar successes in terms of regional security to those achieved by NATO and the EU, and appears to be able to provide stability in the South Asian area – despite the heterogeneous structure of its membership. The ASEAN Regional Forum, set up in 1993, remains to this day the only security policy discussion forum in the Asian-Pacific region. In 2007, the medium-term to long-term goals of ASEAN were laid down in a Charter. The aim of the Charter is to create by 2020 a community which is based on three pillars: a security, an economic and a socio-cultural pillar. And the Shanghai Co-operation is also making progress. It may have started out as a loose association to combat terrorism, but it is increasingly becoming a forum for handling common security issues.

But viewed in overall terms, Asia remains a highly fragmented continent with numerous rivalries, opposing interests and conflicts.

The efforts of Iran and North Korea to possess nuclear weapons also form part of a regional security dilemma.

The significance of disarmament and arms control for regional integration

The process of European integration was primarily guided by

talks on disarmament and arms control. This had two advantages: firstly, the risk of conflicts turning into wars was minimised. Secondly, confidence between the partners grew. The concept and procedures for arms control could be said to have been tailor-made for regional integration. So efforts should be made towards regime formation in this field in Asia too. What are the tasks at present?

I believe that three processes need to be driven forward now:

1. We need a solution both to the Korean and to the Iranian nuclear crisis.
2. The Non-Proliferation Treaty needs to be strengthened.
3. Agreements on arms limitation and disarmament must be initiated in Asia.

All three approaches are interdependent and can complement one another.

The North Korean nuclear crisis

North Korea has repeatedly signed agreements committing itself to halting its nuclear programme and scrapping its nuclear facilities. But it has repeatedly broken its promises. Two nuclear tests and North Korea as a de-facto nuclear power with six to eight nuclear warheads are the outcome.

The concerns about the North Korean nuclear and missile programme have once again been increasingly worrying the international community since the tests in May 2009. Following progress in previous years, the six-party talks have been bogged down since the end of 2008. The question of whether North Korea is prepared to abandon nuclear weapons remains open. Since the beginning of 2009, North Korea has returned to a clearer path of confrontation. For example, under the guise of an alleged satellite launch, it tested a three-stage intercontinental missile on 5 April. The test was condemned by the UN Security Council in a Presidential Statement. North Korea responded by refusing to take any further part in the six-party talks, announcing the reconstruction of the Yongbyon Reactor and expelling IAEA and US inspectors.

The nuclear test of 25 May and the subsequent missile launches came as no real surprise. And in turn they were unanimously condemned by the international community. On 12 June, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1874. It extends the sanctions regime imposed by the preceding Resolution 1718, so that the existing arms embargo now applies to all arms exports from and to North Korea. Also, trade in other goods which might serve the weapons programme has been blocked, and the travel bans widened.

North Korea stressed its intention to stick to its nuclear programme and to make its plutonium weapons-grade. It also

admitted for the first time the existence of its uranium enrichment programme. At present, North Korea is making any return to the six-party talks dependent on the lifting of the sanctions and on negotiations on a peace treaty.

Not only Japan, but Europe too, has a great interest in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis. (1) The Non-Proliferation Treaty has been weakened by North Korea's exit. (2) The country supplies missiles, technology and knowledge to countries bordering Europe. (3) The crisis around North Korea is provoking fresh armament. I believe that a constructive handling of the crisis around North Korea requires three things:

1. flexibility on the part both of the United States and of North Korea,
2. a greater role for China, which has a key function in relations with North Korea, and
3. constructive involvement of the European Union.

The aim of the international community continues to be the full, peaceful and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. This necessitates a commitment from North Korea to abandon all nuclear weapons, to abandon its military nuclear programme and to return to compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty. On the other hand, I believe that any linkage with issues of a non-security nature will impede potential progress.

The Iranian nuclear crisis

The Iranian nuclear crisis has worsened dramatically in recent months. On 21 September 2009, Iran informed the IAEA about the existence of a second, previously secret uranium enrichment facility at Qom. Following a 15-month interruption to the talks, the E3+3 did succeed again in holding direct talks with Iran on 1 October 2009. At the meeting in Geneva, Iran stated its willingness to grant the IAEA access to its second enrichment facility. Furthermore, Iran agreed "in principle" to export slightly enriched uranium to Russia and France.

Since then, Tehran has stepped up its policy of obstruction again. On 27 November 2009, the IAEA's Board of Governors adopted a resolution calling on Iran to halt the construction work on the enrichment facility in Qom immediately, to cooperate with the international community and to reveal its nuclear programme. On 7 February 2010, Iran's President Ahmadinejad announced that uranium enrichment would be increased to 20 percent. According to statements issued by the Iranian government, the production of more highly enriched uranium commenced on 9 February. On 18 February, the IAEA presented a new report on the Iranian nuclear programme. This report again confirmed that Iran is still failing to answer any of the open questions about its nuclear programme.

It is high time for Tehran to accept the hand extended by the West, and particularly by Washington. The non-committal words need to be followed by deeds at last. And this needs to take the form of a binding agreement with the IAEA. We have been waiting for months for Iran to accept the IAEA's offer to enrich uranium abroad. Tehran does of course have the right to use nuclear power for civilian purposes. But there has to be full transparency. Nuclear armament by Iran is wholly unacceptable. It endangers not only the countries in the region, including Israel: it endangers the security foundations of the entire world. If Iran becomes a nuclear power, this will have direct effects on the global non-proliferation regime.

Japan has wide-ranging commercial relations with Iran. I believe that, for this reason, it should play a greater role than in the past. The decision-makers in Iran must be called on in every way to co-operate and to build confidence.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty must be strengthened

The conflicts in the case of Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programmes have shown how narrow the borderline can be between civilian and military use of nuclear technology. For this reason, NPT member states have expressed doubts as to whether the NPT regime will be able to prevent the emergence of further nuclear weapon states in the long term.

Any failure of the talks could foster the ambitions of further countries to gain possession of nuclear weapons. An increasing and uncontrolled spread of nuclear weapons would undermine the Non-Proliferation Treaty. At the same time, the NPT has been a reliable tool for stemming nuclear proliferation for 40 years. This is why we need to make a success of the NPT Review Conference taking place in New York this May. North Korea's return to the NPT fold would be an important step in the right direction. So 2010 is a decisive year for nuclear disarmament. Before this May's NPT Review Conference in New York, the nuclear powers will have to show that they take their disarmament commitments deriving from Article VI seriously.

The assumption of office by Barack Obama opens a window of opportunity. The START follow-up treaty, which seems to be close to completion, would be an important sign that the two global nuclear powers are complying with their duty to disarm. Even if the completion of the treaty is allegedly a mere formality, it seems unlikely to be ratified before the conference. But it would be an important signal if the text of the treaty were available by then. There is also keen interest in the Nuclear Posture Review, which will set out the US nuclear strategy for the next five to ten years. This document is to be ready by early March, and it will describe the role of nuclear weapons for US defence policy. It remains to be seen who will win the day: the advocates of nuclear disarmament, who wish to achieve initial successes on the way to a nuclear-free world,

or the advocates of nuclear modernisation, who argue that further steps towards disarmament are possible only if the nuclear arms potential of the United States is thoroughly modernised. Directly before the Review Conference, Obama is holding a nuclear security summit in Washington on 12 and 13 April. Hence there is no lack of possible encouragement for a successful Review Conference.

Even in the 21st century, the NPT remains the foundation of nuclear non-proliferation and the most important point of reference for further disarmament steps with the aim of the final abolition of all nuclear weapons. If this year's NPT Review Conference succeeds in agreeing on a substantial concluding document, this would provide a signal that co-operative arms control continues to play a significant role in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. So success in New York is crucial for the survival of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.