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## Study: Future of the Nuclear Arms Control and its Impact on Japan

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On February 3, 2021, the U.S. and Russian governments agreed to extend New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) for five years. The treaty, which was signed on April 10, 2010 and entered into force on February 5, 2011, stipulates that the two countries would reduce the number of their deployed strategic nuclear warheads to no more than 1550 and the total number of delivery systems (ICBM, SLBM, and strategic bombers) to no more than 800 (of which no more than 700 would be deployed) over the course of seven years. Although the effective period was 10 years, it was possible to extend up to five years in accordance with the provisions of Section 14 of the treaty. The agreement to extend the treaty was reached right before expiration.

What is the significance of extending New START? The two countries fulfilled their part of the treaty by reaching the reduction target on February 5, 2018. Of course, the expiration of New START would mean the termination of nuclear arms control that focused on limiting and reducing strategic nuclear weapons that has continued since the 1970s. Since the decision to extend the treaty was made, the stipulated strategic nuclear weapons will continue to be subject to inspection. If the international security environment regarding nuclear forces is currently unstable, the main cause of such instability is not the strategic nuclear weapons that New START aims to reduce, but rather the non-strategic weapons and conventional strategic weapons that are not stipulated in the treaty as well as China's increasing strategic/theater weapons. In other words, the extension of New START does not guarantee the stabilization of the current security environment. This is also evident in the remarks made by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Blinken pointed out that the extension of the treaty was just the beginning to address the security challenges in the 21st century, and said that during the provided extension period, U.S. would pursue arms control that will incorporate all nuclear weapons possessed by the United States, Russia, and China. Moreover, the Russian government attached a document to the New START extension ratification bill that would make future arms control more multilateral. In the future, the main focus will be on whether a more comprehensive and multilateral arms control regime can be established involving third countries and weapons in categories not specified by New START. The significance of New START may be the fact that the United States and Russia agreed on the need to establish a new arms control regime.

This argument, however, is not new. Since New START was signed, senior officials of the U.S. and Russia as well as some experts have questioned the meaning of continuing a Cold-War arms control regime that focuses merely on balancing the quantity of a certain category of nuclear weapons and is limited to the United States and Russia. The fact that the United States and Russia share problems in the existing arms control system can be appreciated, but it is unrealistic to establish a framework for a new nuclear arms control involving China within the provided five-year extension period. China has lagged behind the United States and Russia in terms of long-range strategic weapons, but its land-based medium range weapons have overwhelmed those of the two countries, which were prohibited in accordance with the INF Treaty (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty). Considering China's military structure, the country will unlikely join the arms control process led by the United States and Russia. Not only New START but also the arms control regime itself could end in five years.

Future development of the arms control is not unrelated to Japan. To repeat, the creation of a new arms control regime is currently being sought and the main focus is to include China's medium-range missiles. But this seems to be an arduous journey. Meanwhile, the arms race in the Asia-Pacific region surrounding Japan will certainly intensify. Without the restrictions of the INF Treaty, the United States is now considering to deploy land-based missiles in the region to counter China. The U.S. military bases in Japan will certainly be a potential site for deployment and will likely be the subject of future bilateral talks. Not to mention Japan-U.S. security and defense cooperation, Japan should closely monitor the development of arms control as a concerned country, and raise to the attention of the United States, Russia, and China the importance of building a new arms control regime at settings such as the United Nations and the Geneva Conference on Disarmament.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by TAKEMOTO Shuhei, Assistant Professor, Akita International University, which originally appeared on the e-Forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on March 19, 2021.)**