

Fukushima: Concerned U.S. forced to offer support in nuclear crisis

Thursday 26 May 2011, by [Asahi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 24 May 2011).

With the Japanese government slow in responding to the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, U.S. forces provided it with a list of detailed support measures, according to an internal government document obtained by *The Asahi Shimbun*.

The list included not only technological support measures, but also offers of equipment and measures to prevent the spread of radiation.

The document shows that Washington apparently had doubts about Japan's abilities to deal with the nuclear crisis and thought it is necessary to make an all-out involvement.

"The U.S. stance is that, assuming the worst-case scenario, it will be prepared for everything," said Kyoji Yanagisawa, a former Defense Ministry official and former assistant deputy chief Cabinet secretary. "On the other hand, Japan adheres to the 'myth' that nuclear power plants are safe and believes that the current situation is not a worst-case situation. The list shows the difference of the sensitivity toward the crisis between the two countries."

According to Japanese government sources, the U.S. Pacific Command presented the list of support measures to the prime minister's office through the Defense Ministry immediately after Ground Self-Defense Force helicopters sprayed water on the Fukushima plant on March 17.

Earlier that day, U.S. President Barack Obama had promised Prime Minister Naoto Kan that Washington would help Japan deal with the nuclear plant crisis.

Immediately after the conversation, U.S. forces presented the list to Japan.

On March 22, Japan and the United States formed a council to talk about these support measures and which to adopt. Members consisted of representatives of the government of both countries, U.S. forces, Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, and other organizations. Goshi Hosono, a special adviser to the prime minister, was appointed as the council coordinator.

The proposed support measures, about 30, include those that are taken when the U.S. forces are deployed on a large scale, such as dispatch of engineering battalions and the prepositioning of troops and hospital ships.

The measures are classified into four categories as those that can be offered to Japan by the U.S. forces if requested by the Joint Staff Office of the Defense Ministry.

By the time the list had been presented, hydrogen explosions had already taken place at some reactor buildings of the Fukushima plant. Therefore, the list included the offer of high-capacity pumps, hoses and protective suits to allow workers to enter and pump water into those buildings. Japan accepted the offer of those goods.

In preparation for the possible spread of radiation, U.S. forces also offered to map out contaminated

areas. In response to the proposal, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the U.S. Department of Energy measured levels of radiation on ground surfaces in a joint aircraft survey in April.

Meanwhile, the offer of technological support by engineering battalions and the dispatch of hospital ships was not accepted as the Japanese government concluded that they were not necessary.

Washington, however, ordered the implementation of measures not on the list, including the participation of the U.S. Navy's barge carrier and rear-echelon deployment of U.S. Marines' special troops, consisting of 150 members.

Kiyoshi Sakurai, a critic on technologies and a former member of the government-affiliated Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, said the list of support measures shows that the United States made preparations on an assumption that the worst-case scenario could occur.

According to Sakurai, the crisis management capabilities of Japan and the United States are like that of child and adult, as Japan's crisis management capabilities for accidents at nuclear power plants were nonexistent. Therefore, the Japanese government had difficulty in gathering information and even supplying a sufficient number of dosimeters.

"(Seeing the list of support measures,) I had an impression that the United States proposed comprehensive measures that cover the weak points of Japan," Sakurai said.

Initially, the Japanese government was reluctant to accept assistance from the United States. A high-ranking government official said, "We must not depend on a foreign country from the beginning."

While other countries, such as France and Russia, were also showing interest in helping defuse the nuclear plant crisis, Washington apparently aimed to take a leading role with its support measures.

The Fukushima plant's No. 1 reactor was constructed by U.S.-based General Electric Co., and Obama has taken a stance of promoting nuclear power.

"Washington is concerned that if Japan fails to solve the nuclear crisis, the failure could have negative effects on the promotion of nuclear power generation in the United States and other countries," an official of the prime minister's office said.

Major support measures proposed by U.S. forces to the Japanese government

(** denotes measures that were actually implemented. - denotes measures not implemented.)

1. Management and decontamination of radioactivity

** Provision of protective suits

- Dosimeters

** Protective masks

- Filters

- Potassium iodide tablets
- Offer of decontamination facilities
- Dispatch of engineers for radiation management
- ** Support by the Department of Energy
- ** Taking photos or video footage by unmanned aircraft
- ** Radiation monitoring
- ** Sampling of water

2. Stabilization of nuclear power plant

- ** High-capacity pumps that contain electric source devices
- ** Hoses
- ** Remote-controlled vehicles and aircraft
- Offer of mobile generators
- ** Measuring radiation above reactor buildings by unmanned aircraft
- Dispatch of engineering battalions

3. Humanitarian and rear-echelon support

- Hospital ships
- Vehicles and aircraft for military purposes
- Dispatch of landing ships

4. Support concerning science and technology

- Devices for atmospheric measurements
- Radiation detection by devices for measuring radiation in the air
- ** Working out maps of contaminated areas on ground surfaces by unmanned reconnaissance devices

Asahi Shimbun

P.S.

* Asahi Shimbun, May 24, 2011:

<http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201105230133.html>