

Revised nuclear law stipulates aim to ensure Japanese national security

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Legislation enacted by the Diet on June 20 to establish a new nuclear regulatory panel in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns contains an appendix revising the Atomic Energy Basic Law to read that Japan's nuclear energy policy should contribute to the national security.

The revised law is raising concerns that adding a security guarantee runs counter to the principle of limiting the use of nuclear energy to peaceful purposes.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said at a news conference on June 21 that Japan remains committed to using nuclear power only for peaceful purposes and, abiding by the three non-nuclear principles, has no intention whatsoever to convert atomic power to military use.

The Atomic Energy Basic Law stipulates in Article 2 that research into and use of atomic power are restricted to peaceful purposes, championing democratic, independent and public disclosure principles. The appendix in question, however, alters Article 2 of the basic law, adding a sentence stating Japan's atomic energy policy should contribute to national security. A similar revision has been made to the Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law.

Although the national security provision was not in the government's original draft bill, amendments submitted in April by the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komeito mentioned the security issue. Inclusion of the expression in the enacted bill reflects the view of the bill's backers that Japan's high-level nuclear technology is a potential deterrent and should be part of national security policy.

Some members of the House of Councillors Environment Committee on June 20 questioned if Japan plans to declare its intention to build nuclear arms.

In response, nuclear accident minister Goshi Hosono emphasized the government's commitment to honoring the basic law. Masayoshi Yoshino, the House of Representatives member of the LDP who submitted the new regulatory body bill, cited three areas — security measures by the International Atomic Energy Agency to prevent the military use of nuclear materials, safety of nuclear power and nuclear security to prevent terrorism. Adding "security" to Article 2 means that these issues will be handled by the new regulatory panel, he said.

During the 2008 Lake Toya G8 Summit, Japan proposed an international initiative to address these three fields and consolidate the use of nuclear power only for peaceful purposes.

Initially enacted in 1955, the Atomic Energy Basic Law has been defined as the basic philosophy underpinning Japan's policy of using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

It took only four days, however, for the bill establishing the new regulatory entity to win parliamentary passage after it was submitted to the Diet on June 15. There was no full debate on the new panel's "security aim."

P.S.

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