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US Nuclear Technology as a Cure for Japanese Ignorance?日本人への療法としての米国核技術

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature

Scholars have long recognized that the United States government and bureaucracy considered Japanese anti-nuclear sentiments in the 1950s to be irrational prejudices working against American interests or even part of an anti-American communist conspiracy. In the wake of the Lucky Dragon No. 5 incident of 1954 in which 23 Japanese fishermen were hit with fallout from the Bikini Atoll hydrogen bomb test, United States Atomic Energy Commission head Lewis Strauss claimed that the fishermen, one of whom died from radiation exposure, were a “red spy outfit” who had either faked their injuries or deliberately sought to be irradiated to discredit the America’s atomic weapons program. There were also efforts to control the release of Bikini fallout information to the Japanese public.

Now, documents located at the US National Archives and publicized by Japan’s Kyodo News provide insight into how the Japanese public, still struggling with the legacies of the atomic bombings and the new military partnership with the US, was convinced to accept American nuclear power technology as a major part of their country’s energy strategy. With the legacy of decisions made in the 1950s now being felt in the form of the Fukushima Daiichi crisis, Kyodo’s exposé of the intimate connections between American atomic weapons strategy and the promotion of nuclear energy could not be more timely.

US used atomic power cooperation to remedy Japan's 'ignorance'

Original here

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The United States used atomic power cooperation with Japan in the 1950s to ease the Japanese public's aversion to nuclear weapons and remedy their "ignorance" about nuclear power, declassified U.S. papers showed Saturday.

The U.S. move, which eventually led the world's only country to have suffered atomic bombing to embrace nuclear power, was initially devised to counter the antinuclear sentiment among the Japanese public after a tuna fishing boat, the Fukuryu Maru No. 5, was exposed to radioactivity from a 1954 U.S. hydrogen bomb test while operating at Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific.

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The documents, collected by Kyodo News at the U.S. National Archives, show that President Dwight Eisenhower's administration, concerned about Japan's possible exit from the Western camp, accelerated cooperation with Japan in atomic energy technology to contain antinuclear and anti-U.S. sentiment among the Japanese.

In a memorandum to U.S. Secretary of State John Dulles, dated May 26, 1954, Eisenhower said he was "concerned about the Japanese situation," and asked Dulles to help ''have a better idea of what it is now possible for us to do to further our interests in Japan."

In a top-secret memo to Eisenhower, the State Department replied: "The Japanese are pathologically sensitive about nuclear weapons. They feel they are the chosen victims of such weapons."

To overcome it, the department proposed compensating the crew of the fishing boat, providing the Japanese with information about radioactivity, and conveying to then Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida the United States' regret over the Fukuryu Maru incident.

Noting that several exchange projects were under way, the memo concluded that "in the long run, scientific interchange is the best remedy for Japanese emotion and ignorance and we intend to push such projects."

In a secret memo titled "Bikini Incident and Nuclear Matters" and dated Oct. 19, 1954, the State Department said the incident placed "the most severe strain" on bilateral ties since the end of World War II, leading to heightened resentment toward the United States and fear of nuclear weapons.

It went on to float the possibility of providing Japan with atomic reactors in the future, saying: "It is important to our relations with Japan that we seek to remove the strong Japanese notion that atomic and nuclear energy is primarily destructive. We should accordingly attempt at an early point to include Japan in bilateral and multilateral actions intended to develop peaceful uses of atomic energy."

In November that year, atomic energy documents that ran to about 200,000 pages were provided to Japan. Japanese scientists' visits to U.S. atomic energy installations also began.

(Mainichi Japan) July 24, 2011

Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related themes:

Lawrence W. Wittner, How Japan Learned About “Nuclear Safety”: The Politics of Denial

Oishi Matashichi and Richard Falk, The Day the Sun Rose in the West: Bikini, the Lucky Dragon, and I

Yuki Tanaka and Peter Kuznick, Japan, the

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Atomic Bomb, and the "Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Power"

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