

Audio: Press Conference Q&A Koizumi
TRT: 1:00:20

Speakers:

Bryan Victoria

Charles Bonner

Question: various speakers (some by translator)

Junichiro Koizumi (by translator)

[0:00:00]

Bryan Victoria: Charles, would you act as the moderator?

Charles I certainly will. I'll start with you, ma'am, yes.

Question Prime Minister, what do you think the people of Japan or TEPCO should do for the sailors, or the people of the United States, the Navy, what do you think they should do for the sailors?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] At this point, this is an issue that I need to discuss with other people in Japan who are sympathetic to this situation, and it should be a collective decision on our part as to exactly how concretely we show our support for the sailors. So I won't give my personal opinion at this point until I've had a chance to talk about concrete actions that we can take after I've returned to Japan and spoken with them.

Question [translator] The question was—the former prime minister has met 10 sailors—what kind of sicknesses are they experiencing?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] One of the things that impressed me, that these were all once young and healthy people. They couldn't have gotten in the military without having passed rigorous physical examination. So there's no question that they were once quite healthy. So the sailors that the prime minister has met have various kinds of illnesses. It's been a progression of illness, that is it starts off with rather simple symptoms, and then they become gradually more and more serious. So they start off sometimes with pain, a pain here or a pain there. Sometimes it starts off with a nosebleed here or blood from the rectum. And then gradually the symptoms become so severe that they can no longer continue their service in the military. They have to leave the military.

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And the doctors they consult, this doctor and that doctor, this specialist and that specialist, and so very often the doctors don't understand what's wrong with them either. They can't say, "This is the problem. This is what we can do to fix it." The doctors don't know. And this ends up with a tremendous mental pressure on the sailors themselves, and they often fall into depression as a result of the fact that no

one can help them and their symptoms continue to get worse. And I've been impressed by the dedication to duty that these sailors have shown and the fact that they don't show any bitterness because of what has happened to them, but they do feel left out or lonely or excluded from help or from life itself. That's why I feel so strongly that we have to do something.

Charles Yes, sir.

Question [translator] The question was raised is that it's not really just a question of Japanese TEPCO, it's also a question of Japanese makers of nuclear power plants and the question of the American makers of nuclear power plants, and that until the makers would change their attitudes, the producers, that it's not going to change, and especially Japan is not going to give up nuclear power until America says that they should. Given that situation, we know that next week President Obama will be visiting Hiroshima for the first time, and the question was what advice Former Prime Minister Koizumi would give to President Obama in light of his upcoming visit to Hiroshima?

[0:10:08]

Mr. Koizumi [translator] In the first place I think it's wonderful that President Obama is going to Hiroshima, because he will have, I think, a better understanding of the pain and the suffering that nuclear weapons cause. And, secondly, I think that he has committed himself to a reduction in nuclear weapons and that his visit to Hiroshima is part of the process that will lead to a reduction of nuclear weapons in the world. Third, America is a country that if it were to decide to put its full power in to develop alternate forms of energy, that it could make a great contribution to the world, and that his visit may lead to increased American emphasis on renewable energy. So those things are all to the good.

Japan is a country, as we know, that has many, many earthquakes as well as volcanic activity, and whenever these accidents happen the claim that's made was, well, we couldn't anticipate this large an earthquake, we couldn't anticipate that there would be this volcanic activity, but what that really tells us is that since they can't anticipate it, they shouldn't build these nuclear reactors in the first place. Before Fukushima, Japan was operating 54 nuclear plants, and after the accident at Fukushima I came to realize through my study that Japan must not produce nuclear reactors. When I initiated my policy of zero nuclear reactors in Japan, those people who were supporting the development of nuclear reactors, they criticized me severely and said that it is impossible for Japan to go to zero nuclear reactors.

And they said if we were to go to zero nuclear reactors, zero nuclear energy, that when it is cold in Japan we wouldn't have electricity to heat our homes, when it is hot in Japan we wouldn't have electricity to cool our homes, and that we're going to have electrical blackouts in Japan as a result, but it's been five years with almost no nuclear electrical production and yet Japan has had no blackouts and there has been

no shortage of electricity in our country. In Japan between 2011 when the accident occurred and 2013 there were only two active nuclear power plants that were operating.

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And, in fact, between 2013 and September of 2015 there was not a single nuclear power plant in operation in Japan. Since September of last year two nuclear reactors have been restarted. We're in a situation now that for the last five years effectively we have had not simply sufficient electricity, but the electricity has been more than sufficient to meet our needs without substantial nuclear power generation at all. So we can see that Japan is perfectly capable even now of going to zero nuclear reactors without waiting for any period of time in order to meet the energy needs of the country. The proponents of nuclear power say that it doesn't make any difference what power source we use, there will be accidents, so we should just be aware there will be accidents, but the benefits outweigh the dangers and we have to continue with nuclear power generation.

So what I realized through Fukushima is that we cannot afford to have any accidents. The idea that, well, you're going to have some accidents and just get used to it, that idea, the damage that results from that way of thinking is far too great to accept in the future. And we see that in the case of nuclear accidents, we can see that in Three Mile Island, but particularly in Chernobyl and now in Fukushima, that it's not just a question of an accident occurring. It's a question of whole areas of the country that are no longer inhabitable. So we cannot afford to have any accidents. The only way to stop the accidents is simply not to have any nuclear power generation. And they claimed, up until this point they kept claiming [indistinct 0:19:00].

Within the space of only 50 years we've already had three major nuclear accidents. Each of these accidents was claimed that it was unprecedented, that it happened outside of anyone's imagination that it might happen. And to those three major accidents, if you add all of the minor accidents, the mechanical accidents that have occurred, there is no end to the number of accidents that have occurred in conjunction with nuclear power generation.

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Japan is a country that is smaller than the state of California, and yet we had 54 reactors, and over 100 million people, 127 million people, and we simply cannot afford the risk or the further risk of additional accidents in our country, because we simply won't be able to live there anymore. Further, we have actual proof for the last five years that we can get along without nuclear power generation. There's just no comparison between an automobile accident or even a large airplane accident and the damage that results from either of those with the damage that results from a nuclear power accident.

So the claim is made, of course, that nuclear power is clean, that it doesn't produce any CO₂ and therefore it's making a contribution to global warming, etc, that problem, but the reality is when you put nuclear power, the whole cycle together of mining the uranium, refining it, etc, that it is overall contributing to global warming, to CO₂. So we simply can't afford to have another major accident like this in Japan as a result of nuclear power. We must go to a zero policy of no nuclear power generation in Japan, and it must not just be limited to Japan. It's got to be put into effect throughout the world.

Question First of all, thank you so much for coming all the way from Japan, and I am deeply moved by you guys. You guys are so courageous, taking the action against TEPCO. Can I ask in Japanese?

[translator] So, simply put, the question is will Prime Minister Koizumi also be showing his concern for the Japanese people who have been subject to radiation contamination, especially to those children in Fukushima who have had thyroid cancer? She suggests there are over 200 such children, and she's wondering if Prime Minister Koizumi will also be working on their behalf.

[0:25:46]

Mr. Koizumi [translator] In response the former prime minister said that as far as the pain and the suffering of the people in the Fukushima area, children, etc, the Japanese government is trying to do something. They have a plan. They are trying to enact their plan. But the prime minister says that for his personal responsibility, he feels there are many Japanese who are concerned in Japan about the situation of their fellow Japanese, but there are so very few Japanese who are even aware of the situation of these sailors who helped Japan and yet are continuing now to suffer. So he wants to make it—he didn't use the word 'personal project'—but it's something that he personally wants to make certain that the Japanese people are aware of the sailors' situation and that they actually take some concrete measures to show their concern and support, and that's what he personally is going to be focusing on when he returns to Japan.

Question What do you think about how this lawsuit of US Navy sailors will support or affect your activity of nuclear-free society? And, also, what are your thoughts about most lands at this time?

[0:30:00]

Mr. Koizumi [translator] So the answer was—the short version hopefully—first of all, the prime minister by coming here recognized once again how fearful, how terrible radiation can be, especially because you can't taste it, you can't smell it, you can't see it. Once you're exposed to it, unless it's a massive amount of radiation, it takes months and sometimes years before it affects your body, before you get serious diseases. And even once you get the diseases you go to the doctor and they say, "Well, we don't know what the cause is." They won't say it's radiation. It could be radiation. They

don't know how to treat it, because they don't know what the cause is. So they're left in limbo. So one thing the prime minister has learned is how terrible radiation is.

Second, when these accidents occur the specialists always claim, well, we couldn't have foreseen that this kind of situation would ever exist and therefore we couldn't plan for it, but next time, now that we know it, next time we have now planned for it and it won't occur again, but it's already occurred three times in only 50 years, and it's foolish to think it's not going to occur again. So especially the lawsuit that the sailors have brought can be very valuable in bringing new facts to light about how this accident occurred in the first place, who was responsible for it.

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And hopefully when people realize how irresponsible the people involved were, whether it's the nuclear reactor makers, producers or the electrical power companies, when they realize that from the new facts that emerge from the sailors' suit, that they will then become even more strongly convinced that this is too dangerous to leave in human hands, and that will then lead to greater emphasis on alternate energy sources, and it will lead to increased financial commitment, financial resources for the development of alternate energy forms.

Question I'd like to say thank you for all the wisdom in your words. I was part of a coalition that quickly shut down our nuclear power plant here in Southern California with the help of Japanese citizens. We did it in about two years. We have real and rational fear and concern about our last remaining nuclear power plant in Diablo Canyon, and we are moving quickly to close that power plant, too. California, comparable in size to Japan, will very soon be nuclear-free. If Japan embraces nuclear still, do you fear that Japan could have another nuclear disaster like Fukushima?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] As you well know, the Japanese government's position now is to restart the nuclear reactors once they have passed what the Japanese government considers to be stricter codes. The first reactors that supposedly met the new stricter safety standards, two of them were approved last year by a new nuclear regulatory agency that supposedly not only has stricter safety standards but itself is composed of more experts who claim that they are not going to be influenced by political decisions, blah, blah, blah. So they have said that two reactors have been remodeled sufficiently that they now meet the new safety standards. However, when they held their press conference to announce that these two reactors have met the safety standards, the head of the regulatory agency himself said, after he said they had met the standards, but then he went on to say, "But I can't guarantee that the nuclear reactors are safe."

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But, nevertheless, even though he couldn't guarantee the safety, the Japanese government said, "Oh, these plants have met these new tougher, stricter standards, and so we are going to allow them to restart." And I said at that point to the Japanese

government, “You claim that you have the strictest safety standards in the world now, but compare your standards with those in the United States.” So when you compare, for example, the evacuation plans under the new supposedly stricter standards, you find out that the evacuation plans don’t even meet the evacuation standards that the United States currently has in place. On top of that, they don’t meet the earthquake standards that the United States currently has in place. And therefore it is impossible for the Japanese government to claim that they have the strictest safety standards in the world when they can’t even meet many of these basic standards that America already has in place.

There is a man by the name of Amory Lovins [?] who has written a book that has been very convincing to the former prime minister, who points out that it would be possible for the United States to also develop alternate or renewable energy sources, that it would not have to rely on nuclear power either. So it’s clear that, compared with Japan, the United States has a lot of shale gas, it has oil, that if the United States wished to, it could also end its dependence on nuclear power as well.

Question Mr. Prime Minister, the plans to hold the 2020 Olympics are continuing to go forward in Japan, even though there is some doubt about the bribery in the process of selecting Japan to host them. Does it make sense to expose the world’s top athletes to the dangers involved or to the already contaminated region of Fukushima where they will be holding baseball trials and so on? What do you think of the idea of holding the 2020 Olympics in Japan?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] I am not really in a position to comment on the 2020 Olympics, but we know about the recent bribery scandal or the allegations around that scandal. The reality is we don’t know when the next large earthquake or the next major tsunami will occur. The only thing we can really do is to pray that they don’t occur.

[0:45:00]

Charles I wanted to get somebody that had not asked. Yes, Adam.

Question I wanted to bring you back a little bit to right after Fukushima happened and what you were starting to see that really aggravated you and started to turn you against nuclear power.

Mr. Koizumi [translator] So it was really what the accident did for me was cause me to start to study about nuclear power generation and to investigate the claims that were being made that it is safe and cheap and clean. And as I read these books and consulted with people who were opposed to nuclear power, etc, I came to realize that all of those three claims were lies, and that was the process that led me to a zero nuclear energy position. And I recognized that I bear some responsibility, because I simply went along with expert opinion when I was the prime minister, and so I didn’t stand up when I was prime minister, when I had the opportunity. It was only later after Fukushima. So I bear some responsibility for what happened in Japan.

Now I realize and I pay a great deal of respect to those professionals who knew about the dangers of nuclear power generation and had been opposed to it prior to Fukushima. And there is a very famous proverb in Japan that says: once you have recognized your own mistake, you must act quickly, don't mess around anymore, do it, do something. And that's what he's trying to do now.

[not translator] Don't hesitate to rectify a mistake.

Question Quick question, are you thinking that it would be appropriate for the government of Japan or Tokyo Electric to make a financial settlement with these sailors for their injuries?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] I don't know how the court case is going to play out, but I do know that, yes, the Japanese government and TEPCO should, given the situation and the pain and suffering experienced by at least 400 and maybe in the future many more sailors, that they should step forward and do the right thing and support these sailors.

Question Financially?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] Across the board, including financially.

[0:50:16]

Question Yes, Prime Minister, thank you so much for making this noble effort. I have family in Japan and I lived in Japan for 25 years, so it's just so very, very important what you are doing. We can see that you have been very touched and very, very deeply affected by meeting these sailors and hearing their stories of truth. So I'm very, very hopeful and we are aware that you have a son who holds a seat in the parliament and who has been very active in the reconstruction effort in Fukushima. And, as such, it is my deepest hope that you go home and share the truth, your story, and that is my hope, that you can share your story. And in light of the difficulties of the state secret act in Japan, it is very difficult, therefore, that the average Japanese people do not hear these details. It's the same in America, the same thing. It's all over. Your son is poised to be a hero. And it is my wish that there could be a dialogue in the House of Parliament among the LDP. Is that in your opinion a possibility?

Mr. Koizumi [translator] Since I have retired as a politician myself, I've taken the position that I should not interfere with my son's political career. Nevertheless, I think that my son is aware of my position, especially about nuclear power, and even though—to say the direct translation—even though my son is new rice, meaning my son is still a young politician, that he will do the right thing. But in Japan our parliamentary system is such that you don't get any real political power even though you're a Diet member until you've been there for some time, but I am hopeful that in the future as he becomes more experienced that certainly with regard to this issue that he will take appropriate action. I have that expectation.

Question [translator] The question is he mentioned that he's going to be talking to people who are sympathetic to this question, and the question was who might those sympathetic people be?

[0:54:50]

Mr. Koizumi [translator] So, for example, one of the people I'm going to be talking with is a person who's already with us, Mr. Yoshiwara. He is an official at the Jōhnan Shinkin Bank. Although it's called a bank it's really what we would call in America a credit union. Japan has many credit unions throughout. Like most credit unions, they are limited to a particular area of the country. And certainly some of the people who I'll be talking—and I serve, the prime minister serves as the honorary president of their think tank for that Jōhnan Shinkin Bank—and they and people like them are certainly some of the people I'm going to be talking to about what we can do concretely.

And one of the distinguishing features of Jōhnan Shinkin Bank is that they, of all of the different credit unions in Japan, at this point they are the only ones who have come out with a very specific policy of zero dependence on nuclear power. And within their power they are lending money to small and medium enterprises that are involved in the development of renewable energy. And, in fact, the reason I was able to come here was because when they heard about this invitation that Brian and others extended to me, they said, "We will pay for your expenses to come to the United States." They realized that I am not a politician who retired wealthy. And it's thanks to them that I was able to be with you today. And so I'm going to be speaking with them, but certainly with other members of Japan's financial community to see what we can collectively do as a group.

Charles Let's give the prime minister a great round of applause. Thank you all for being here.

[1:00:20]