Japan and France to Tighten Nuclear Ties

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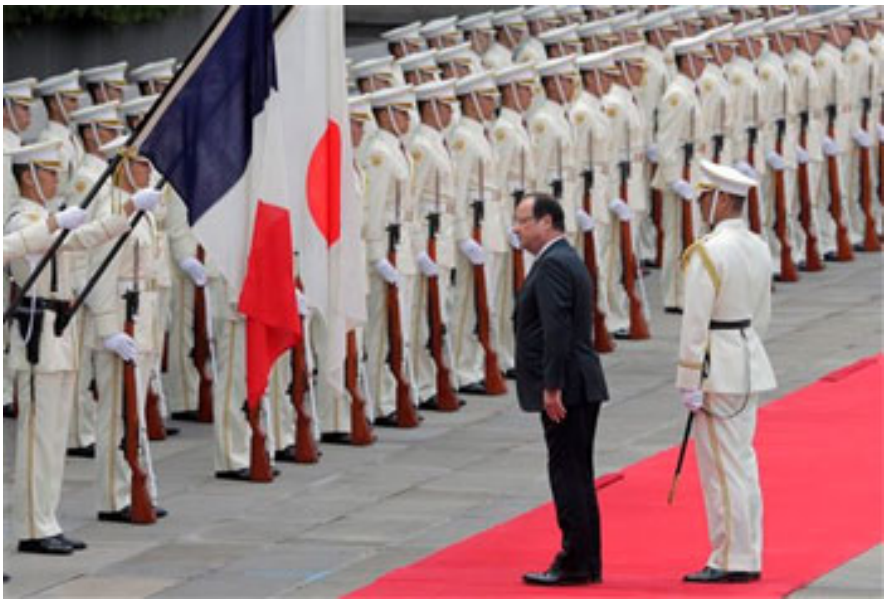
TOKYO (AP) — Japan and France agreed Friday to deepen their cooperation on nuclear technology and to discuss joint development of military equipment, vowing to raise the tenor of their partnership.



French President Francois Hollande, center, reviews an honor guard during the welcoming ceremony at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, Friday, June 7, 2013. Hollande arrived in Japan on Thursday for a visit expected to focus on closer cooperation in nuclear energy technologies and on Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic strategies. **(AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye,Pool)**

Visiting French President Francois Hollande and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe issued a joint statement pledging to prevent nuclear proliferation while raising safety standards for nuclear energy.

The two sides also agreed to establish a regular dialogue between their foreign ministers and defense ministers, discussions that would include possible cooperation in developing and managing exports of defense equipment. Japan has similar arrangements with the United States and Britain.

"This visit had a new ambience," Hollande said after summit talks with Abe, pointing to closer security and political ties as evidence the two sides are taking relations to "a new level."

Japan has expressed concern over French exports to China of equipment that potentially might have military uses, including the sale last year of equipment used to help helicopters land on ships. Providing China with such a capability alarms Tokyo given its tensions with Beijing over disputed islands in the East China Sea.

Hollande said he reiterated France's insistence that the helicopters were not intended for military use. Asked about the strains between Japan and China, which

the French president visited just weeks earlier, Hollande urged the two sides to pursue dialogue in resolving their disagreement and to above all observe international law.

Japan has been easing its restrictions on its own exports of military equipment, though it is the co-sponsor of a landmark treaty regulating the multibillion-dollar global arms trade, signed earlier this week by more than 65 countries, including France.

The pact, which must be ratified by at least 50 countries, requires countries to evaluate whether the weapons being exported could be used to violate international human rights laws or employed by terrorists or organized crime.

The two leaders pledged a united front in fighting against proliferation of nuclear technology for non-peaceful means and in combating terrorism.

Noting that 2015 will be the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hollande called on North Korea and Iran to abide by their international commitments on nuclear issues.

"We must all work together to prevent nuclear non-proliferation," he said in an address later to Japan's parliament.

The two countries exchanged agreements on various joint projects, including nuclear fuel recycling and tourism promotion.

Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and France's Areva are cooperating on construction of a reactor in Turkey, and Abe is eager to promote further Japanese exports of atomic technology despite the disaster at Fukushima following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami.

Areva signed a series of agreements with Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. and ATOX, a company responsible for nuclear decontamination and agreed to cooperate with Japan's used nuclear fuel recycling plant at Rokkasho, Japan.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and the European space consortium Arianespace signed a preliminary agreement on rocket services.

Hollande praised Abe, meanwhile, for his efforts to end a long spell of deflation and revive Japan's stagnant economy.

"This is good news for us," he said. "If Japan succeeds, then France and Europe as a whole will benefit."

"We have been in an unending crisis for far too long," he said. "First of all, we need to create a climate of confidence."

France's annual exports to Japan total around 7.5 billion euros ($9.8 billion), while its imports are just over 9 billion euros. Both rank 11th as respective trade partners.

The two sides also agreed to push ahead with talks on a free trade agreement between Japan and the EU and to cooperate on climate change, Syria and other world issues.

Hollande said France was determined to pursue much closer economic ties between Asia and Europe.

But in an apparent swipe at those who have been urging France and other European nations to abandon painful austerity programs in following Japan's example of aggressive government spending and monetary policy, he said: "The conditions are different."

"Each deciding what is best for their own country is what we must do," Hollande said.

Hollande's three-day state visit ends Saturday.

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