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Japan's Nuclear Hedging

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Suspicions and speculations have persisted that, given the right set (or wrong set) of international and domestic conditions, Japan might seriously consider the nuclear option. Certain section Japanese thinkers have openly broached the issue of Japan acquiring a nuclear weapon to manage what many in Japan see as severely untoward developments in the regional and international security environment. This article evaluates Japan's experiences in nuclear hedging and tries to analyse the six possible scenarios which would force Japan to reconsider its anti nuclear stance. Given the vulnerable situation in East Asia and changing contours of U.S-Japan alliance, it is crucial to study the "push" factors involved in a Japanese nuclear hedging.

Will Japan go nuclear? Most of the Japanese find it inconceivable given the strong anti-nuclear sentiments learned through their dreaded experience in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But on the contrary Japan's nuclear policy has remained strongly influenced by two major factors: Tokyo's determination to keep Japan's position under the US nuclear umbrella and US security objectivities in East Asia. For Tokyo, there is a very serious problem resulting from keeping Japan protected by the US nuclear shield. Tokyo has two simultaneous and antithetical objectives: the first is to keep Japan protected by the US nuclear shield and the second is to oppose the

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existence of nuclear weapons. Argued by some to be contradictory, a charge that Tokyo denies by saying that both objectives can be realised as the nuclear powers move toward disarmament, Tokyo attempts to maintain the first and promote the second, but only to the extent that the latter does not jeopardise the former.[1]

Japan is one of the most highly technologically advanced countries, relies heavily on nuclear power for its domestic energy consumption,[2] and has vast stores of plutonium[3] that can be used as nuclear weapons.[4] If it ever crosses the Rubicon into the realm of the nuclear arms, there is near-universal recognition that the potential consequences would be enormous and unpredictable – and quite possibly extremely dangerous.[5]

Theoretical Basis on Japanese Nuclear Hedging

Theoretical understanding of the current debate will enable us to get an enhanced picture. The current debate can be understood from the perspective of three conceptual paradigms – neo-realism, classical realism, and neo-liberalism. The significance of looking at these paradigms is that they help to explain why Japan failed to develop nuclear weapons in the past. But more importantly some of these paradigms possess prognostic power that could assist researchers and policymakers in determining what Japan might do in the future.

Neo-realism

Neo-realism is the theoretical perspective employed by Kenneth Waltz and by John Mearsheimer to explain how states were likely to ensure their security as the world transitioned from the bipolar system of the Cold War to a multipolar structure.[6] Both, Waltz and Mearsheimer, argued that once the Cold War was over, the spheres of influence that the United States and the Soviet Union presided over would eventually erode and the states ruled inside those spheres could eventually become independent multilateral players.[7] Kenneth Waltz believes that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than multipolar system. With only two great powers, both can be expected to act to maintain the system.[8] Since Japan had become an important member of the international community, it would feel compelled to create a military force to complement and maintain its established economic standing. This would by obligation include nuclear weapons.

However, Japan's current nuclear policy has proven the predictions of these two neo-realists wrong. The US–Japan security alliance allowed Japan to abstain from developing nuclear weapons in the past.

Classical Realism

Classical realism assumes that states are unitary actors that seek to maximise their power in order to survive in an anarchical international system.[9] If the rivals in the international system are developing nuclear weapons, the states facing this external pressure are likely to do the same. Accordingly, certain factors that would propel Japan towards the development of a nuclear weapons programme according to this framework are:

- the quest for normalcy;
- the breakdown of the US–Japan security alliance;
- fear of increasing Chinese political, social, economic, and military presence in the region; and
- reaction to the future missile developments and atomic bomb test by North Korea.[10]

Supporters of these arguments believe that nuclear weapons are essential for the continued protection of Japan's vital interests, which in turn will ensure their survival. However, classical realism fails to take into account the domestic political, social, and economic influences on the Japanese decision-making apparatus. It has been the intricate relationship between these three domestic factors that has prevented Japan from developing nuclear weapons in the past.

Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism hypothesises that the economic and political interests of the state influence the conduct and outcome of a situation; therefore, the interest of a state is to establish and maintain stable relations with the international community.[11] With the rapid spread of democracy and market economy after the Cold War, the costs of war or conflict are too immense. Moreover, neo-liberals argue that the economic and political costs are too great to develop a nuclear weapons programme to deter regional threats. This is because such a programme would undermine the norms and values

established and directed by international institutions as Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the United Nations (UN) and make the state an international pariah. As Japan is an active participant in the international economy and in the NPT and the UN, chances for developing nuclear weapons seems to be grim for the moment.

Since the end of the US occupation, Japan has evolved into a global economic force. Even though it eventually possessed the ability to develop nuclear weapons it decided not to because Tokyo thought it better to continue to develop Japan's economy. If Japan were to develop nuclear weapons, the fear was that it would damage trade relations with more powerful countries that did not want to see a nuclear Japan.[12] Instead of diverting funds that would benefit economic advancement of the state and risk ruining international relationships, Japan continued to depend on the United States for security. Although Japan currently possesses the economic and technological means to develop and deploy nuclear weapons,[13] political majorities continue to support a defence policy based on the current US–Japanese security relationship. Moreover, there are growing voices to amend Article 9 which restricts Japan from being assertive. Nuclear debate which was once considered a taboo is perhaps fading away and now giving ways for open debates and discussion.

History of Japanese Nuclear Hedging

At the onset of World War II, the Japanese Army initiated an atomic weapons programme – labelled *Ni-go Kenkyū* (NI) after its chief scientist, Nishina Yoshio, at Tokyo Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (Riken). While the Japanese Navy pursued its own nuclear programme at Kyoto Imperial University under scientist Arakatsu Bunsaku.[14] The Navy had done so with the intentions of using it for the propulsion of its vessels. The Army, on the other hand, had intended to use nuclear power to develop offensive weapons.

With the end of World War II, Japan came under the occupation of United States till 1952. The US occupation forces immediately developed a censorship policy that effectively muted public criticisms of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This censorship policy, which was not publicly discussed by occupation officials, prohibited Japanese newspapers from publishing stories that dealt with the problems and devastation associated with the bombing; it extended to literature and

the arts, school textbooks, and even to scientific and medical research. Because of this censorship policy, the Japanese people remained ill-informed about the adverse consequences of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during most of the occupation period. It was only in March 1954, with the US nuclear test (BRAVO) on the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands that the majority of the Japanese people became aware of the harmful effects of nuclear fallout. Among those who were exposed was a Japanese fisherman on board the *Fukuryu Maru* No. 5 (Lucky Dragon No. 5) who later died from radiation illness.[15] This resulted in mass anti-nuclear movements across Japan.[16]

While occupying the country after World War II, US authorities drafted a new constitution for Japan that limited the number and kind of security forces the new government could maintain. Chapter 2 of Article 9 of the so-called Peace Constitution explicitly states that ''the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation'' and that ''land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained''. While nuclear weapons are not specifically mentioned in the constitution, that left room for successive Japanese elites to debate the possibility (mostly in private) of developing this capability.

On December 19, 1955, Japan's national legislature, the Diet, adopted the Atomic Energy Basic Law,[17] which clearly states: ''The research, development, and utilisation of atomic energy shall be limited to peaceful purposes.[18] Japan joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1957. Japanese elites felt comfortable focusing on economic reconstruction because they had strong confidence that the United States would defend Japan against any external military threats – even if such a defence required Washington to threaten the use of nuclear weapons.[19]

China's first nuclear test in 1964 revived concerns among the Japanese that they could be drawn into a Sino-US nuclear conflict. This prompted several senior Japanese leaders, including Yasuhiro Nakasone and Shintaro Ishihara, to call for a re-examination of Japan's policy of nuclear abstention.[20]

When Prime Minster Eisaku Sato met with President Lyndon Johnson privately in January 1965, one of his first comments was that ''if Chicoms (Chinese Communists) had nuclear weapons, the Japanese also should have them.''[21] During the same time, advocates of nuclear weapons for Japan suggested that tactical nuclear weapons, as opposed to the larger strategic weapons, could be defined as defensive, and therefore were permitted under the constitution. A Japanese defence White

Paper, commissioned by pro-nuclear head (and future prime minister, 1982–1987) Yasuhiro Nakasone, stated that "as for defensive nuclear weapons, it would be possible in a legal sense to possess small-yield, tactical, purely defensive nuclear weapons without violating the Constitution. In view of the danger of inviting adverse foreign reactions and large-scale war, we will follow the policy of not acquiring nuclear weapons at present."[22]

To reassure the anxious Japanese public opinion, Prime Minister Sato announced to the National Diet in December 1967 the adoption of "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" (*Hikaku San Gensoku*). These held that Japan would not manufacture, possess or permit the introduction of nuclear weapons onto Japanese soil. These principles, which were subsequently adopted by the Diet as a parliamentary resolution never adopted into law, have remained the foundation of Japanese nuclear policy to the present day.[23]

Shortly after these declarations, in 1968, Sato commissioned a secret, non-governmental study on Japan's nuclearisation, entitled "The Study Group on Democracy". The study's findings were summarised in the 1968/1970 Internal Report, which became one of the most controversial documents in modern Japanese history when it was leaked to the public in 1994.[24] The study concluded that the costs of developing an independent nuclear capability would not be in the national interest.[25]

Meanwhile, according to the revelations by the former Vice Foreign Minister, Ryohei Murata (1987–1989), a secret agreement was signed in the 1960s between Tokyo and Washington that tacitly allowed the United States to transit nuclear weapons through Japan without prior approval. The practice was in clear violation of the terms of three non-nuclear principles.[26]

In May 1972 Okinawa was reverted back to Japanese rule, following a June 1971 agreement between Japan and the United States. According to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, all nuclear weapons had to be removed from the island. The United States, affirming the Japanese non-nuclear position, completed this withdrawal by the end of 1972 and on 1976 NPT was ratified by Japan. The nuclear debate in Japan lay largely dormant throughout the rest of the Cold War.

Japan anticipated that the end of Cold War would bring with it a reduction of nuclear weapons as the sole remaining superpower, the United States, would usher in a period of international peace, democracy, and good will.[27] Instead of eliminating

current nuclear stockpiles, the United States had to turn its attention to an international landscape scarred with animosity between India and Pakistan, China and Taiwan, and on the Korean Peninsula.

The conflicts were significant because they all occurred within or near the periphery of Japan. However, it was not only these specific conflicts that tested Japan's longstanding abstention from re-militarisation and developing nuclear weapons, but in 1991 the United Sates led Japan into a war it would otherwise have watched from the sidelines. Japan's action failed to impress the United States as it addressed the problem through economic support alone, as opposed to diplomatic or military support.[28]

These actions drew much criticism from the international community. Reluctantly, Japan submitted to the wishes of the international community and began to allow deployment of its Self Defence Forces (SDF) to participate in peacekeeping operations outside Japan.

However, in 1994 Japan once again openly discussed the possibility of developing a nuclear weapons programme. These discussions were influenced by North Korea's continued defiance of NPT norms and Nodong missile test in 1993.[29] In addition to that, Japan faced internal political pressures to sign an indefinite extension of the NPT. Amidst these debates, Japanese officials conducted another secret investigation to determine Japan's ability to develop a nuclear weapons programme. The study, similar to the 1968/1970 Report, bolstered Japan's non-nuclear position. Although the full details of the 31 page report have never been released, in 2003 the *Asahi Shimbun* obtained a copy of the report and revealed some of its finding.[30] The study reaffirmed Japan's non-nuclear status but this time it was not the lack of economic or technological support, but instead it was a lack of internal and external political and social support. Therefore, Japan supported the indefinite extension of the NPT.

Two events in 1998 stunned the Japanese public and strengthened the hand of individuals and groups advocating that Japan at least reconsider if not reverse its policy of nuclear abstention. First, in May 1998, India and Pakistan conducted back-to-back nuclear tests, formalising their nuclear status. Japan was quick to criticise the actions by both the nations and called the international community to censure both India and Pakistan. The laxness that the international community showed in condemning the countries' nuclear adventurism troubled the Japanese. And even more disturbing event in 1998 was the launch of a North Korean Taepo Dong missile

over Japan in August. This demonstration of North Korea's ballistic missile capability led to an outcry among all the sections of Japanese society and caused some to call for remilitarisation or nuclear weapons development.

But the increased threat to Japan perceived to be emanating from North Korea, combined with worries about China's ongoing military build-up, continued to raise the issue of Japan's acquiring nuclear weapons. In an interview with *Asahi Shimbun*, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe stated that Japan's possession of atomic bombs would not violate the constitution because "it does not necessarily ban the possession of nuclear weapons as long as they are kept at a minimum and are tactical."[31] Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda subsequently said, in trying to clarify Abe's statement, that "'in legal theory" Japan could have intercontinental ballistic missiles and atomic bombs and that the Three Non-Nuclear Principles might change if the people believed Japan should go nuclear.[32] Both Fukuda and Abe later explained that the Koizumi cabinet has no intention of developing nuclear weapons at present, but that future foreign policymakers should be able to decide whether or not to develop nuclear weapons. Other Japanese officials, including Prime Minister Koizumi, have repeatedly stressed that Japan will maintain its policy of nuclear abstention for the foreseeable future.[33]

Influential people outside the government also have called for Japan to reverse its policy of nuclear abstention. Terumasa Nakaniski, a professor at Kyoto University, insists that Japan now needs to posses nuclear weapons because the country cannot protect itself only with ballistic missile defences (BMDs) or conventional weapons like Tamahawk cruise missiles.[34] A conservative opinion leader from Keio University, Kazuya Fukuda, supports Nakanishi's view. Fukuda maintains that the U.S. nuclear umbrella is an illusion and compelling reasons have arisen as to why Japan should have nuclear weapons.[35]

Scenarios for Japanese Nuclear Hedging

What specific conditions would inspire Japan to retreat from a well-established, non-nuclear identity in favour of an arsenal that includes atomic devices and the means for the delivery? The most likely case would probably involve several scenarios. Six key international and domestic scenarios that could lead to a reversal in Japan's nuclear posture are:

- change in the direction of US foreign and security policy;
- rising Chinese influence in the Japanese periphery;
- aggressive North Korean nuclear stance;
- Russian advances in the north;
- breakdown of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime; and
- domestic imperatives.

Of course, no single scenario might flare up the Japanese endeavours to develop nuclear weapons; instead multiple scenarios might accumulate and reinforce one another will account for the new dangers. For instance, in future the growing Chinese influence in Japan's periphery and rise of strong leadership in Japan might evoke its nuclear ambitions.

Change in the Direction of US Foreign and Security Policy

Perhaps the most important ingredient in a new international calculation of the attractiveness – or perceived necessity – of acquiring nuclear weapons is the question of the future direction of US foreign and security policy. For decades Japan has come to depend on several aspects of US policy when making calculations about their own security and the question of abjuring nuclear weapons. These aspects include the stability of the US nuclear deterrent and security guarantees. Because of the continued faith in the US foreign and security policy, successive Japanese administrations have refrained from fully developing the military potential commonly associated with a ''normal'' state (that is, having the potential to wage war for both offensive and defensive purposes).

The Japanese–US alliance in the past has been plagued by long-standing disputes on a number of issues. The United States have attacked what they see as Japan's protectionist trade policies, export-led growth strategies, and alleged ''free riding'' on the United States to manage international security problems. For their part, the Japanese have persistently worried about Washington dragging them into a military conflict against their wishes. Furthermore, since the advent of the alliance, prominent members of the Japanese elite have displayed discomfort with the way it seems to diminish Japan's independent weight in world affairs or circumscribes the Japanese government's ability to pursue its preferred policies on a number of important global

issues. The presence of US troops in Okinawa and law and order problems created by the US forces have led to a popular outcry among the Okinawans. Even the financial cost of maintaining US troops is huge, as Japan has to pay nearly $4 billion to the United States annually. Yukio Hatoyama, as prime minister in 2009–2010, tried to oust the US troops from Okinawa but that only lead to Hatoyama's political fiasco.

While most officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly uphold the importance of the US–Japan alliance, some diplomats fear that the day will come when Japan can no longer rely on the United States, and that they want Japan to be prepared to defend its interest in that eventuality. Kumao Kaneko, former director of the Nuclear Energy Division of the Foreign Ministry, has written that the "United States would be highly unlikely to use its nuclear arms to defend Japan unless U.S. forces in Japan were exposed to extreme danger."[36] Certainly, the United States is not only factor in the calculations Japan makes about its own security, but it is a major one. US policy can, sometimes inadvertently, increase or decrease confidence substantially – a key component in Japan's evaluation of whether – or when – a nuclear capability is required. Moreover, Japan has realised the importance of United States in the context of Chinese and North Korean aggression.

Rising Chinese Influence in the Japanese Periphery

The rise in Chinese military spending and its presence in the region around Japan are causing concerns for the Japanese policymakers. The National Defence Programme Guidelines 2011, approved by the cabinet in December 2010, highlight Japan's concern with China's rapidly increasing defence spending, the stepped-up activities of its naval and air forces, and the lack of transparency in its military build-up programmes. The guidelines see these as a matter of concern for the region and the international community.[37]

Skirmishes in the disputed area of the East China Sea re-ignited long-standing sovereignty tensions between Japan and China. China's maritime activities have become more assertive in recent years, including Chinese naval helicopters flying over Japanese destroyers in the East China Sea in April 2010.[38]

Moreover, on September 8, 2010, the Japanese Coast Guard arrested the crew of a Chinese fishing vessel after the trawler apparently collided with two Coast Guard ships in the areas surrounding the Senkaku Islands (called the "Diaoyu" Islands by

the Chinese). The islands, located between Taiwan and Okinawa, and reportedly rich in energy deposits, are administered by Tokyo but claimed by Beijing and Taipei. Japan released the crew but kept the captain of the Chinese ship in custody, Chinese officials reacted vociferously: Premier Wen Jiabao himself threatened unspecified ''countermeasures''; the Chinese government suspended high-level exchanges; cancelled a visit to the Shanghai World Expo by 1000 Japanese youth; arrested four Japanese nationals suspected of spying in an apparently retaliatory move; and halted the export of rare earth minerals that are essential to Japanese automobile industries. Later on, the Okinawa authorities released the captain, citing diplomatic concerns. While the release appears to have calmed the hostile rhetoric, the episode has left deep scars in Sino-Japanese relations.

As the dispute played out, the United States reasserted its position that it would not weigh in on territorial disagreements but that the islands are subject to Article 5 of the US–Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty, which stipulates that the United States is bound to protect ''the territories under the Administration of Japan''.

A direct military confrontation between the United States and China could also prove disastrous for the Japanese–US alliance. US failure to defend Taiwan against China could also lead Japanese leaders to re-evaluate their reliance on the US extended deterrence guarantee to ensure Japan's security.

Aggressive North Korean Nuclear Stance

The spinning away of North Korea from the orbit of the former Soviet Union has caused it to emerge as a threat to Japanese security. It tested a ballistic missile over Japanese airspace in 1998 and has withdrawn from the NPT in 2003. In addition, it has carried out further missile tests in the Sea of Japan in July 2006, and in 2009, it carried out an underground detonation of a nuclear device. Further, North Korea appears to harbour aggressive intentions toward Japan, issuing bellicose statements threatening to turn it into a ''nuclear sea of fire''.[39] A major diplomatic initiative designed to halt North Korea's nuclear weapons programme – the six party talks involving North and South Korea, the United States, Japan, Russia, and China – has thus far failed to achieve its goal.

Even US officials are worried as to how the North Korean nuclear policy can prompt Japanese leaders to re-evaluate Japan's nuclear abstention. Ex-US Vice

President Richard Cheney has also touched upon the issue, saying that ''the idea of a nuclear-armed North Korea with ballistic missiles to deliver those will, I think, probably set off an arms race in that part of the world, and others, perhaps Japan, for example, may be forced to consider whether or not they want to readdress the nuclear question.''[40]

In the past, the Japanese have tended to be deeply ambivalent about Korean unification. On the one hand a strong united Korean state could entail political and economic problems and competition; on the other, a continuation of a divided Korea extends the life of an unpredictable state that presents a security threat.[41]

After the alleged North Korean torpedo attack on the South Korean ship, *Cheonan*, and the artillery shelling on Yeonpyeing Island, Japan has become alert to North Korean future moves. With the current leadership transition from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un, North Korea's aggressive moves in the future, to garner public reverence and more importantly from the military, might invoke an equally aggressive counter move by Japan.

Russian Advances in the North

Deep mutual suspicion underlies Japan–Russia relations giving rise to pressing concerns of security in North Eastern Asia. Central to this mistrust is the territorial row over the Kuril Islands which stretches north across the Pacific Ocean from the Japanese island of Hokkaido to the southern tip of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. Four islands – which Russia calls the Southern Kurils and Japan calls the Northern Territories – are the subject of a 60-year-old dispute between the two nations. They are Kunashir (known in Japanese as Kunashiri), Iturup (Etorofu), Shikotan and the rocky Habomai islets. The southernmost islet in the Habomai group lies only a few kilometres off Nemuro on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. The Kurils dispute dates back to the end of World War II, and has been a prickly enough issue to ensure that Japan and Russia have never actually signed a formal peace treaty. The Soviet government then expelled most of the original inhabitants and established military bases and other settlements in their place. The Japanese government's position is that while Tokyo did cede control of the Sakhalin and Kuril Islands to the USSR under the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty (which the Soviet government never signed), the treaty's provisions did not apply to the four islands of the Kurils because Tokyo has

never recognised them. Various proposals to divide control of the islands or establish creative shared sovereignty have failed to garner decisive support in both governments simultaneously – whenever one side seemed prepared to make a deal, the other party ended up declining to endorse it.

The sovereignty dispute has also fostered mutual distrust over alleged territorial violations. Russian ships regularly detain Japanese sailors and fire on Japanese fishing boats who attempt to fish in the waters surrounding the islands, charging them with violating Russia's maritime boundaries. In August 2007, a Russian coast guard ship killed a crew member of a Japanese fishing boat with a warning shot aimed at the vessel. In turn, the Japanese government has alleged that Russian military aircraft have periodically violated Japan's air space.

The Russian and Japanese media regularly criticise the exercises one side conducts in the proximity of the other, while the two governments have objected to each other's defence cooperation with third parties.

Tensions rose between the two nations after the visit of Dmitry Medvedev, President of Russia, to the Kunashiri Island in November 2010. Although both Japan[42] and Russia has reduced their ground forces level in the region, but Russia has deployed nuclear forces[43] and anti-ship cruise missiles and an advanced air defence system[44] in the region. China's support towards the Russian cause [45] might evoke Japan's nuclear hedging.

Breakdown of the Global Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime

The NPT has constituted a central component of Japan's strategy to manage the threat of nuclear weapons since the 1970s, yet verification and other mechanisms to ensure conformity with the treaty have been exposed as flawed by revelations in Iraq following the 1991 Persian Gulf War.[46] Further, the 1993–1994 North Korean nuclear crises, the subsequent withdrawal of North Korea from the non-proliferation regime, and its emergence as a declared nuclear power have undermined confidence that multilateralism can manage nuclear threats within Asia-Pacific region.

Japan has expressed concern over the US–India nuclear agreement of 2008, which in effect permits India to maintain its nuclear weapons power status in exchange for bringing its civilian nuclear programme under international safeguards, thus threatening to undermine the NPT.[47] Japan's grudging approval of the

agreement, which represents some movement away from its previous doctrinaire adherence to the NPT, can only raise doubts as to how far the United States would seek to impede other states seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, and whether Japan might view this as an opportunity to reconsider the utility of acquiring its own nuclear option in a nuclearising world.

Moreover, the Japanese government knows that its need for its main ally, the United States, to retain an adequate nuclear deterrent. But on the contrary, Japan fears that the NPT regime is eroding and it must be strengthened, lest an avalanche of nuclear weapons testing and development adversely affect Japan's interest. Tokyo's initial response has been to continue its efforts to shore up the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime through diplomacy and foreign economic assistance.[48] But a perception that the regime had collapsed beyond repair could prompt Japan's leaders to conclude reluctantly that they, too, had to join the nuclear bandwagon.

Domestic Imperatives

As the only people to have had a nuclear weapons used against them, the Japanese have long maintained a pacifist stance when it comes to nuclear and military issues. Even in the current debate regarding constitutional reform and Japan's becoming a normal state (that is, remilitarising), the Japanese public has not lessened its resistance to an independent nuclear capability. The depth of this anti-nuclear sentiment is such that only major changes in the international or domestic environment, and probably a combination of such changes, could engender a domestic political environment more permissive toward Japan's acquiring nuclear weapons.

Political changes that occur for reasons unrelated to international developments also could prompt Japan to re-evaluate nuclear options. For example, a hawkish political figure such as Shintaro Ishihara, the popular Tokyo mayor metropolitan governor who said that Japan should be prepared to develop nuclear weapons if China continued to modernise its nuclear arsenal, could emerge as the leader of a future Japanese government.[49] Similarly the current Foreign Minister, Seiji Maehara, is also perceived by the media as hawkish leader. A strong determined leadership in Japan could undermine Japan's faith in nuclear disarmament, although the coalition constraints will not allow a unilateral decision by a single party.

While Japanese public opinion remains, by most accounts, firmly anti-nuclear, some social currents could eventually change the conception of nuclear development. Many observers have recognised a trend of growing nationalism in Japan, particularly among the younger generation. Some Japanese commentators have suggested that this increasing patriotism could jeopardise closer cooperation with the United States: if Japan feels too reliant on US forces and driven by US priorities, some may assert the need for Japan to develop its own independent capability.[50] Another wild card is the likelihood that Japan will face a major demographic challenge because of its rapidly ageing population: such a shock could either drive Japan closer to the United States because of heightened insecurity, or could spur nationalism that may lean toward developing more autonomy.[51]

Although public sentiment against nuclear weapons remains strong, its ability to fully inhibit the decisions of Japanese leaders should not be exaggerated. For many decades, despite its government's professed policy of nuclear disarmament, Japan has relied on the United States to defend Japan, even with nuclear weapons if necessary. Anti-militarism in Japan has not prevented the country from becoming the sixth-highest military spender in the world.[52] Nor have anti-nuclear sentiments impeded Japan's extensive reliance on civilian nuclear power. Just as the Japanese people today appreciate that Japan has no choice but to rely on nuclear power to meet its energy needs, so in the future they might accept that international threats left Japan with no choice but to develop nuclear weapons.

Seeing the current changing nature in East Asia, here the scenarios are evaluated on a scale from 1 to 6 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Possible scenarios in the future for Japan's Nuclear Hedging

Scenarios	Importance
Change in the direction of US foreign and security policy	1
Rising Chinese influence in the Japanese periphery	2
Aggressive North Korean nuclear stance	3
Russian advances in the north	4
Breakdown of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime	5
Domestic imperatives	6

Conclusion

Japan's incentives associated with becoming a nuclear state might now outweigh the incentives associated with remaining a non-nuclear power.

Given the preponderance of US conventional and nuclear military presence, Japanese policymakers are unlikely to push for an independent nuclear deterrent as long as they remain confident that this deterrent power is conferred on Japan. Chinese rising influence in Japan's periphery or North Korean nuclear endeavours or Russian advances in the Northern Territories suggests that external threats alone are not sufficient to cause change in the status quo.

Rather, it is likely to be domestic political imperatives such as strong leadership, and, may be in the future, the changing demographics that will reignite debate within Japan on whether to rebalance the scales toward nuclear autonomy rather than protection. But given the current coalition constraints and consistent opposition by the people can prove Japanese nuclear hedging an imprudent action. Since Japan is an open society with a free press, any steps taken to change the current nuclear stance can bring international wrath and can lead to dire consequences.

If Japan should want to develop its own nuclear weapons, it would need to develop a network of delivery systems entailing short range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), and a sophisticated missile guidance system, etc. Such a network of delivery systems is more important than the weapons themselves and Japan may well find it too costly, economically, politically, and internationally, to develop.

Japan's decision to go nuclear can be seen as an outcome of events which will take place outside Japan, say the US decision to pull out of Japan and South Korea, followed by Chinese assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region and finally pushed by a strong unanimous political will. Japan's nuclear hedging will have a spill over effect in the other East Asian countries as well. All these factors will result in bringing East Asia into a highly ominous nuclear brinkmanship.

Notes

1. Anthony Di Filippo, *Japan's Nuclear Disarmament Policy and the U.S. Security Umbrella* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2006), pp. 2–3.

2. Since the 1960s, Japan has relied on nuclear power for a significant portion of its energy; nuclear energy currently provides 24.9% of its electricity; Mycle Schneider, Steve Thomas, Antony Froggatt, Doug Koplow, *The World Nuclear Industry Status Report*, 2009, (Commissioned by German Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Reactor Safety) p. 96.
3. Japan accounts for an increasing share of the total separated plutonium in the non-weapon states (10 metric ton). If the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant begins to operate at full capacity, Japan's stockpile of plutonium will increase by 8 tons annually for some years until its MOX-fuel fabrication plant can be completed and plutonium-recycle programs in about 20 additional reactors can be organised.
4. This article does not address Japan's technological capacity to manufacture a nuclear device or delivery systems. For assessments, see Matake Kamiya, "*Nuclear Japan-Oxymoron or Coming soon*?" Washington Quaterly, Vol. 26, No.1 (winter 2002/03), pp. 69–71.
5. Kurt M. Campbell and Tsuyoshi Sunohara, *Japan: Thinking the Unthinkable* (Brooking Institution Press: 2004), p. 219; Kurt M Cambell, Robert J. Einhorn, Mitchell B. Reiss, ed. *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices* (Brooking Institution Press: 2004).
6. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W. W. Norton: 2001), pp. 156–7.
7. Bruce M. Russett, Thomas Risse-Kappen, and John J. Mearsheimer, "*Back to the Future, Part III: Realism and the Realities of European Security*," *International Security* 15, no. 3 (Winter, 1990–1991): p. 216.
8. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Random House: 1979), p. 204.
9. Alexander Wendt, "*Constructing International Politics*," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (Summer 1995): p. 72.
10. *Sentaku Shuppan*. United States Embassy, Tokyo. *Daily Summary of Japanese Press.* Office of Translation and Media Analysis. 05 December 2006. These four issues have been argued by such senior officials as Foreign Minister Taro Aso in an interview translated in *Sentaku Shuppan* newspaper.
11. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Harper Collins Publishers: 1989), p. 5.
12. The concerns extend beyond the fear of jeopardising trade relations. For example, Japan's relationship within the NPT was also a concern. Membership within the NPT increases stable relations with China and maintains stable relations with the United States. NPT membership also provides Japan with access to materials and technology needed to fuel their civilian nuclear power program.
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international/en/publications/reports/Development-of-NW-in-NEAsia/ (accessed January 24, 2011).

14. Philip Henshall, The Nuclear Axis: Germany, Japan and the Atom bomb Race, 1939–1945 (Sutton Publishing Limited: 2000), p. 141.
15. Philip Nobile, ed. Judgment at the Smithsonian: the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Marlowe & company:1995), p. 122; The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Nagasaki: *The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*, translated by Eisei Ishikawa and David Swain (Basic Books: 1981), pp. 4, 575; Lawrence Wittner, The Struggle Against the Bomb, One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement Through 1953, vol. 1 (Stanford Press: 1993), pp. 45–48.
16. First anti nuclear movement seen in Japan was in signatory campaign in Suginami district in May 1954, also known as Suginami Appeal. Japan's first significant anti nuclear weapons organisation that served as the catalyst for the national movement was in September 1955 with the formation of Gensuikyo (Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs).
17. The Atomic Law, unlike the constitution, can be changed through simple majority vote.
18. For the text of this law, see http://www.nsc.go.jp/NSCenglish/documents/laws/1.pdf (accessed January 5, 2011).
19. This concept of extended deterrence was enshrined in the language of treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between U.S.A and Japan on 19 January 1960. Article 5 states: ''Each party recognises that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes.''
20. Nobumasa Akiyama, ''*The Socio-Political Roots of Japan's Non-Nuclear Posture*'', in Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson, eds., *Japan's Nuclear Option: Security, Politics, and Policy in the 21st Century* (Henry L. Stimson Center: 2003), p. 80.
21. Central Foreign Policy Files, ''Your Meeting with Prime Minister Sato,'' memorandum for the president from the secretary of state, secret, January 9, 1965, box 2376, RG 59, National Archives, College Park, Md.
22. ''Gist of White Paper on Defense,'' *Japan Times*, October 1970, p. 20.
23. They were also a primary factor behind the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Sato.
24. The title arises from the fact that the first part examining technical and economic issues was completed in September 1968, while the second part examining strategic and political issues was completed in January 1970.

25. For a detailed examination of the 1968.1970 report, see Yuri Kase, "*The Costs and Benefits of Japan's Nuclearisation: An insight into the 1968/70 Internal Report*," Nonproliferation Review, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 55–68.
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39. David Ibison and Andrew Ward, "North Korea Warns of 'Nuclear Sea of Fire,'" *Financial Times* (Asian ed.), 24 September 2004.
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