



JAPAN  
AND  
AMERICA'S NUCLEAR POSTURE

U n i o n o f C o n c e r n e d S c i e n t i s t s

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Union of Concerned Scientists  
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## Introduction

In a major foreign policy address in Prague in April 2009 President Obama committed the United States to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and urge others to do the same.”<sup>i</sup> One such step that is being debated is to declare that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter and, as a last resort, respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another country. Advocates argue that this declaration would enhance U.S. national security and promote nonproliferation.

As the president considers the policy options that emerge from his administration's Nuclear Posture Review, opponents of such a change in U.S. declaratory policy argue that some U.S. allies, including the government of Japan, could not accept it because of concerns that it might diminish the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. Some of the president's advisors on Asian foreign and security policy believe that limiting the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in this way creates an unacceptable risk that the Japanese government would reconsider its nuclear options, leading it to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and acquire its own nuclear deterrent.

In this report we examine the claim that the Japanese government opposes the U.S. government declaring that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter or respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another country. We also examine the claim that in response to such a change in U.S. policy there is an increased risk Japan's leaders may decide to develop Japan's own nuclear arsenal. We find that:

- Some Japanese security experts and officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense are concerned about the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. However, these concerns are not new nor a consequence of the potential changes in U.S. nuclear policy the Obama administration is discussing.
- There is a long-standing consensus among Japanese security officials and experts, including those concerned about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, that there is no imaginable scenario in which developing nuclear weapons would be advantageous to the defense of Japan.
- Japanese public opinion polls consistently register strong levels of support for nuclear disarmament and strong levels of opposition to the development of nuclear weapons or the introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons into Japan.
- The prime minister, the foreign minister, and more than 200 members of the Japanese Diet have expressed strong support for a change in U.S. declaratory policy stating that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter or respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another country.

These findings imply that the United States could reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy without weakening the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Moreover, there is no evidence that these changes will increase the risk that Japan will withdraw from the NPT and develop its own nuclear weapons. To the contrary, it appears that both the Japanese public and the Japanese government would welcome these changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy.

## U.S. Concerns About Japan

The Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States (called the Perry-Schlesinger Commission after its chair and vice-chair, former U.S. Defense Secretaries William Perry and James Schlesinger) released its report in May 2009. The report stated, “one particularly important ally has argued to the Commission privately that the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent depends on its specific capabilities to hold a



They also reveal little cause for U.S. concerns that Japan is a potential proliferation risk.

### Japanese Concerns About Extended Deterrence

The current debate over Japanese views of America's nuclear posture began when four Japanese diplomats presented testimony to the Perry-Schlesinger Commission, reportedly requesting the United States preserve cold war-era nuclear weapons capabilities in Asia, including the nuclear Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM/N). TLAM/N is a nuclear-armed cruise missile President George H.W. Bush removed from U.S. attack submarines in the early 1990s, placed in storage, and scheduled for retirement. The four Japanese diplomats also reportedly gave the Commission a paper that presented their desires for U.S. nuclear capabilities in the Pacific, including modernized and low-yield warheads, B-2 and B-52 deployments to Guam, and submarine-based weapons capable of being used quickly.<sup>v</sup>

We interviewed Japanese officials in the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about these requests in July 2009. This testimony began to be discussed by members of the Japanese Diet and the Japanese press, and Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada launched an investigation of the testimony in response to questions from members of the Diet.

Following his investigation, and concerned about a potential misunderstanding of the testimony, Mr. Okada sent a letter in December 2009 to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stating that requests for specific weapons systems did not reflect the views of the current Japanese government or the government in power at the time of their testimony,<sup>vi</sup> implying that the Japanese diplomats who testified to the Perry-Schlesinger Commission were stating their personal doubts about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. Other conservative

security analysts and officials in the Japanese defense community share these doubts, which have a long history in internal Japanese debates about nuclear weapons.

Japanese concerns about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence are not a result of potential changes in U.S. force structure or declaratory policy but of larger changes in the international system. The 1995 JDA study argued that the end of the Cold War also ended the possibility that regional conflicts could escalate into a global nuclear war. The authors of the study argue that in the absence of an existential threat to the United States from another nuclear-armed nation it is unthinkable and would be immoral for the United States to use nuclear weapons. They believe U.S. domestic and international public opinion would prevent the United States from using nuclear weapons against small or medium-sized states like North Korea, especially when the conventional capabilities of the United States are more than sufficient to destroy North Korea's ability to make war.<sup>vii</sup>

The JDA study accepts as credible China's current pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states. However, even if China withdrew this pledge, which the authors are concerned could happen due to Chinese domestic political instability and increasing nationalism, the study still argues there is virtually no possibility of a military conflict between China and Japan that would lead to Chinese use of nuclear weapons. A large-scale conventional conflict is also considered highly unlikely.

But the JDA study does express the concern that China might use its nuclear capabilities to attempt to coerce Japan to concede on bilateral disputes, such as the sovereignty of the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands or economic rights in the continental shelf.<sup>viii</sup> The authors raise questions about the utility of U.S. extended

nuclear deterrence in preventing Chinese nuclear coercion.

The concerns about U.S. extended nuclear deterrence expressed in the 1995 JDA study are the same concerns Japanese government officials and security specialists expressed to us during the interviews we conducted in Tokyo and Washington, DC, during the latter half of 2009. Conservative Japanese security officials and experts, including one of the authors of the 1995 JDA study, prefer the United States maintains ambiguity about whether and when it might use nuclear weapons. They also prefer the United States maintains the appearance of a nuclear war-fighting posture, which in their view could be demonstrated by the visible deployment of tactical nuclear weapons such as the TLAM/N and nuclear-armed bombers; this is similar to the view of the Japanese diplomats who testified to the Perry-Schlesinger Commission. Conservative Japanese security officials and experts also oppose changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy that would limit the role of U.S. nuclear weapons, including a declaration that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter or respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another nuclear armed state.

However, these same conservative Japanese security specialists concede that even an ambiguous U.S. declaratory policy and a war-fighting nuclear posture still would not resolve their concerns about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. One of the diplomats who testified to the Perry-Schlesinger Commission told us that the only way to resolve those concerns would be for the United States to give Japan the authorization to decide when to use U.S. nuclear weapons, and to make this type of “nuclear sharing” arrangement clear to both North Korea and China. To this group of people, measures short of that would not resolve the central issue of credibility of the deterrent.

## **Japan’s Non-Nuclear Consensus**

Despite their concerns about the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent, the Japanese officials we interviewed denied that Japan was attempting to pressure the United States to retain a nuclear war-fighting posture or preserve particular weapons systems.<sup>ix</sup> Indeed, many Japanese officials laughed at the suggestion that Japan could pressure the United States on nuclear policy, feeling that Japan has very little leverage and its views on nuclear weapons issues carry little weight with the United States. Several suggested their American colleagues might be intentionally exaggerating Japanese concerns to preserve their own policy preferences.

When asked how they would respond to a change in U.S. nuclear policy declaring that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons was to deter or respond to the use of nuclear weapons, these conservative Japanese security analysts and officials all agreed they would have little choice but to accept it. None of the Japanese analysts or officials we interviewed suggested Japan would reconsider the nuclear option, withdraw from the NPT, and develop its own nuclear weapons. When specifically asked about Japan’s nuclear options, all of the Japanese officials and experts we interviewed agreed: acquiring nuclear weapons was not in Japan’s national security interest.

The 1995 JDA study discussed above was the second of two confidential Japanese government studies of Japan’s nuclear options. The first study was commissioned in 1968 as Japan was considering ratification of the NPT. Both studies reached the same conclusions as the Japanese officials and experts we interviewed in the latter half of 2009.

The 1968 study, conducted on behalf of the Japanese government by an independent panel of four university academics, was based on extensive consultations with Japanese government officials and industrialists. It concluded

that while Japan possessed the technical and economic capacity to develop, deploy, and maintain a small nuclear arsenal, nuclear weapons were not well suited to the defense of Japan. The country's population was highly concentrated in a small number of urban areas that could be easily destroyed by just a few large warheads delivered by China or other nuclear-armed adversaries. Moreover, the decision to develop nuclear weapons would risk isolating Japan from the international community and limiting Japan's access to vital natural resources and international trade.

As a result, the 1968 study concluded that the costs of becoming a nuclear power far outweighed the principle benefit, which was to reduce Japan's reliance on the United States for its national security.

The second official assessment of Japan's nuclear options was the 1995 JDA study, which was conducted as Japan was considering permanent extension of the NPT. In addition to reiterating and reconfirming the conclusions of the 1968 study on Japan's vulnerability to a nuclear attack, the JDA study concluded that a decision to acquire nuclear weapons would:

- Lead to the destruction of the present nonproliferation regime
- Undermine and potentially destroy the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty
- Create domestic political confusion and unrest
- Involve enormous political and economic costs for developing the infrastructure to control nuclear weapons
- Create economic and political instability in Asia

The JDA study considers a number of future scenarios, including a worst-case scenario in which the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the NPT no longer exist. The authors of the JDA study, who are three of Japan's most conservative military strategists, conclude:

“Even in such a case, it is questionable whether there is any value for a trading nation that depends on the stability of the international society to try to secure its survival and protect its interests with its own nuclear weapons. It would more likely undermine the basis of its own survival.”<sup>x</sup>

The study goes on to conclude that neither a nuclear North Korea nor a large-scale war between the United States and China would alter its view that “the nuclear option is not a favorable one for Japan.”

### **Japanese Public Opposition to Nuclear Weapons**

Public opinion polling consistently confirms very high levels of Japanese opposition to the introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons into Japan and to the development of Japanese nuclear weapons. This opposition is not diminishing over time. Recent polls show that the large popular majorities in favor of Japan remaining a non-nuclear weapon state are the same or higher than polls taken in the late 1960s at the height of the anti-nuclear movement.<sup>xi</sup> Even after the North Korean nuclear test of 2006, 80 percent of Japanese polled said Japan should continue to prevent the introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons into Japan.<sup>xii</sup>

Some U.S. defense experts discount the Japanese public's opposition to nuclear weapons and place greater weight in the opinions of the Japanese ruling elite. But even the Japanese elite shows very high rates of disapproval. NIRA, a respected semi-governmental Japanese research organization, conducted a poll shortly after the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in 1998. NIRA found that 86 percent of the “informed” Japanese elite, compared with 93 percent of the general public, would still not choose to develop nuclear weapons even if the U.S.-Japan Security

Treaty were dissolved.<sup>xiii</sup> In this regard popular and elite opinion is consistent with the military judgment of the conservative Japanese defense officials who authored the 1995 JDA study on Japan's nuclear options.

Japanese attitudes toward nuclear weapons developed in reaction to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings made the enormous destructive power and costly long-term effects of nuclear weapons clear to the Japanese public. Each year, Japanese political leaders travel to ground zero to remember the bombings. The annual memorials, as well as constant public debates related to proper care and compensation for the survivors and their descendants, force Japanese government officials to reiterate and reaffirm Japan's anti-nuclear commitments. The annual ritual denunciation of nuclear weapons is a defining feature of contemporary Japan's national identity, much like the annual celebration of Thanksgiving is a defining feature of the national identity of the United States.

The political influence of the Japanese anti-nuclear lobby was first demonstrated in the massive Japanese public protests against U.S. nuclear testing that sickened and killed a group of Japanese fishermen in March 1954. Concerned about the safety of their seafood—a

staple of the Japanese diet—a group of homemakers launched an appeal to ban nuclear weapons that garnered the signatures of 32 million Japanese people—a third of the population. Shortly afterward, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke indicated he supported the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent. Public pressure compelled Kishi, a conservative, to make public promises to both houses of the legislature that Japan would not possess, manufacture, or allow the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan. These came to be known as Japan's "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" and in 1971 were codified in a resolution of the Japanese Diet.

Conservative Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, who is reported to have called the Three Non-Nuclear Principles "nonsense" and who approved an agreement with the United States to allow U.S. nuclear weapons to enter Japan, was nevertheless forced to publicly defend the principles in Oslo when he accepted the 1974 Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel committee awarded him the prize for his role in bringing Japan into the NPT. The former prime minister accepted the award "on behalf of the people of Japan" who, he proclaimed, had reached "a national consensus not to be armed with nuclear weapons."<sup>xiv</sup> The current government plans to strengthen the Three Non-Nuclear Principles by enacting them into law.



### **THE FUKURYU-MARU**

In March 1954 fallout from a U.S. nuclear weapons test sickened the crew of a Japanese tuna-fishing boat. One of the crew died from radiation sickness—a vivid reminder of the suffering endured by the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Press coverage of the incident led to a nationwide panic among Japanese consumers who worried that atomic testing was poisoning fish, a staple of the Japanese diet. A group of homemakers in the Tokyo district of Suginami started a drive to gather signatures on a petition to ban atomic weapons that ignited a massive grassroots anti-nuclear movement. Within a year 32 million Japanese—a third of the population—had signed the Suginami Appeal to ban atomic weapons. The Japanese anti-nuclear weapons movement became—and still remains—a powerful force in Japanese politics.

## Japanese Government Support for Changes in U.S. Declaratory Policy

In his December 2009 letter to Secretaries Clinton and Gates, Foreign Minister Okada explained, "While the Japanese Government places trust and importance on your government's extended deterrence, this does not mean that the Japanese Government demands a policy of your government which conflicts with the goal of a world without nuclear weapons." The foreign minister also informed the United States that he supports a new U.S. declaratory policy in which "the role of nuclear weapons be restricted to deterrence of the use of nuclear weapons and that the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon state members of the NPT be banned." Mr. Okada requested a dialogue with the United States on making these suggestions "first steps" toward the goal of a "world without nuclear weapons" articulated by President Obama in Prague. Mr. Okada repeated his support for what is now known in Japan as the "sole purpose" doctrine in a major foreign policy address to the Japanese Diet on January 29, 2010.<sup>xv</sup>

Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama went on record expressing his support for the "sole purpose" doctrine and negative security assurances for non-nuclear weapons states in remarks to the Public Account Committee of the Upper House on February 4, 2010. In response to question from a member of the Komei party, the prime minister stated that "it would be unbearable if it was said Japan was reluctant" to adopt the recommendations of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), a joint commission sponsored by the governments of Japan and Australia that called for the immediate implementation of a "sole purpose" doctrine by all nuclear weapons states.<sup>xvi</sup>

On February 19, 2010, a letter to President Obama signed by 204 members of the Japanese Diet was delivered in person to U.S. Ambassador John Roos in the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo.

The letter was copied to the vice president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the national security advisor, and the chairs and ranking members of the House Armed Services Committee, the Senate Committee of Armed Services, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The Diet members declared their support for the U.S. president's "policy objectives of moving toward a world without nuclear weapons." They wrote, "We strongly desire that the United States immediately adopt a declaratory policy stating that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter others from using such weapons against the United States or U.S. allies." The Diet members also assured the elected and appointed leaders of the U.S. defense and foreign policy establishment that they "are firmly convinced that Japan will not seek the road toward possession of nuclear weapons if the U.S. adopts a sole purpose policy."

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The government of Japan is not requesting a strengthened nuclear deterrent. Japan's prime minister, foreign minister, and 204 members of the Diet have officially communicated their strong desire for a change in U.S. declaratory policy stating that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter or respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another country. While there are concerns about the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent among some conservative Japanese security officials and analysts, these analysts agree their concerns cannot be resolved by preserving the TLAM/N, nuclear-armed bombers, high alert levels, or an ambiguous declaratory policy that leaves open the possibility that the United States would initiate the use of nuclear weapons.

There is a strong and longstanding consensus among Japanese security officials and experts that there is no imaginable scenario in which developing nuclear weapons would be advantageous to the defense of Japan, even in a scenario in which Japan was without the protec-

tion of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the NPT ceased to exist. U.S. nuclear policy in Asia should not be predicated on the assumption that changes in U.S. policy, including changes in declaratory policy, would cause the government of Japan to decide to develop nuclear weapons.

The Japanese public strongly opposes the re-introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons into the territory of Japan, including Japanese territorial waters and Japanese ports. The Obama administration wisely informed the Japanese government that it is retiring the TLAM/N.<sup>xvii</sup>

There appear to be dramatic differences between Japanese and American perceptions of Japanese concerns and intentions regarding

nuclear weapons policy. In a consensus opinion firmly held for more than four decades, Japanese security officials and experts see the acquisition of Japan's own nuclear deterrent as counter to overall Japanese interests. In contrast, some U.S. officials and experts, who seem to take a more narrow military view of the issue, see a serious risk that Japan will seek to acquire nuclear weapons—serious enough that the United States should constrain U.S. decisions on nuclear weapons policy, even when it runs counter to the president's nonproliferation and arms control policy. Both governments should address this misunderstanding at the earliest possible opportunity.

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> U.S. White House. 2009. Remarks by President Obama, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic. April 5. Online at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered).
- <sup>ii</sup> Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. 2009. *America's strategic posture: The final report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 20–21, 26. Online at <http://www.usip.org/strategic-posture-commission/view-the-report>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Campbell, K.M., R. Einhorn, and M. Reiss, eds. 2004. *The nuclear tipping point: Why states reconsider their nuclear choices*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 230–231.
- <sup>iv</sup> Japan Defense Agency. 1995. *Concerning the Problem of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*. Online at [http://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear\\_weapons\\_and\\_global\\_security/nuclear\\_weapons/policy\\_issues/1995jdastudy.pdf](http://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear_weapons_and_global_security/nuclear_weapons/policy_issues/1995jdastudy.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> Kristensen, H. 2009. "Japan's Nuclear Secrets," *Sekei*, September. Online at <http://www.iwanami.co.jp/sekai/2009/09/directory.html> (English version available at <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/publications1/Seikai2009.pdf>).
- <sup>vi</sup> The letter states: "It was reported in some sections of the Japanese media that, during the production of the report of the 'Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States' released in May this year, Japanese officials of the responsible diplomatic section lobbied your government not to reduce the number of its nuclear weapons, or, more specifically, opposed the retirement of the United States' Tomahawk Land Attack Missile-Nuclear (TLAM/N) and requested that the United States maintain a Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP). However, the Japanese Government is not in a position to judge whether it is necessary or desirable for your government to possess particular [weapons] systems. Hence, although the discussions were held under the previous Cabinet, it is my understanding that, in the course of exchanges between our countries, including the deliberations of the above mentioned Commission, the Japanese Government has expressed no view concerning whether or not your government should possess particular [weapons] systems such as TLAM/N and RNEP." See [http://icnndngojapan.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/20091224\\_okada\\_letter\\_en.pdf](http://icnndngojapan.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/20091224_okada_letter_en.pdf).
- <sup>vii</sup> Japan Defense Agency. 1995. 12-13.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. 16.
- <sup>ix</sup> This appears consistent with Foreign Minister Okada's December 2009 letter to Secretaries Clinton and Gates.
- <sup>x</sup> Japan Defense Agency. 1995. 37-38.
- <sup>xi</sup> Kamiya, M. 2002. "Nuclear Japan: Oxymoron or Coming Soon?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002-2003, 63–75. Online at [http://www.twq.com/03winter/docs/03winter\\_kamiya.pdf](http://www.twq.com/03winter/docs/03winter_kamiya.pdf).
- <sup>xii</sup> The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation. 2006. Yomiuri Shimbun November Opinion Polls. From The Mansfield Asian Opinion Poll Database, accessed Feb. 27, 2010. Online at <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/polls/2006/poll-06-18.htm>.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Sato, E. 1974. The Pursuit of Peace and Japan in the Nuclear Age. Nobel Lecture, December 11. Online at [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1974/sato-lecture.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1974/sato-lecture.html).
- <sup>xv</sup> Okada, K. 2010. Foreign policy speech to the 174th session of the Japanese Diet, January 29. Online at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/okada/speech1001.html>.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Prime Minister Hatoyama's remarks were recorded in the records of the Japanese Diet at <http://www.sangjin.go.jp>. For the full set of ICNND recommendations see: International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. 2009. *Eliminating nuclear threats: A practical agenda for global policymakers*. Canberra, Australia, and Tokyo, Japan. November. Online at [http://www.icnnd.org/reference/reports/ent/pdf/ICNND\\_Report-EliminatingNuclearThreats.pdf](http://www.icnnd.org/reference/reports/ent/pdf/ICNND_Report-EliminatingNuclearThreats.pdf).
- <sup>xvii</sup> Okada 2010.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Kyodo News. 2010. U.S. to retire nuclear Tomahawk missiles: Japan told step won't lessen atomic arms deterrence. *The Japan Times*, February 23. Online at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20100223a2.html>.