Japan’s Shift in the Nuclear Debate: A Changing Identity?

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Abstract:

Throughout the Cold War, Japanese leaders and policy-makers have generally been careful to reflect the public’s firm opposition to anti-nuclear sentiment. However, the turn of the 21st century has witnessed a remarkable shift in the political debate, with élites alluding to a nuclear option for Japan. This sudden proliferation of nuclear statements among Japanese élites in 2002 has been directly linked by Japan watchers to the break out of the second North Korean nuclear crisis and the rapid buildup of China’s military capabilities. Is the Japanese perception of this double military threat in Northeast Asia really the main factor that triggered this shift in the nuclear debate? This paper argues that Japanese élites’ behavior rather indicates that the new threats in the regional strategic context is merely used as a pretext to solve a more deep-rooted and long-standing anxiety that stems from Japan’s own unsuccessful quest for a less reactive, and more proactive post-Cold War identity.
Keywords: Japanese identity, nuclear debate, post-Cold War, nuclear hedging, nuclear latency, nuclear power, political maturity, perception

Introduction:

The scarring events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 shaped the history of Japan and its people's perception of nuclear weapons, which in turn shaped the country's strategic culture and security policy. However, partially because those infamous events were considered still part of the war, and certainly because of the media censorship imposed at the time by the General Headquarters, it was the Lucky Dragon Number 5 (Daigo Fukuryū-Maru) incident on March 1, 1954, that unleashed for the first time a fierce nationwide anti-nuclear movement. Reacting to Japanese anti-nuclear protests in a memorandum to President Eisenhower from May 1954, a startled US Secretary of State John F. Dulles even argued that...
“[t]he Japanese are pathologically sensitive about nuclear weapons”, stating that “they feel they are the chosen victims of such weapons.”

The relationship that the Japanese have had with atomic issues was even described in the late 1950s as “religious”, and throughout the Cold War this deep-rooted nuclear allergy had a strong impact on Japanese policy toward nuclear weapons. This feature contributed to widening the gap between the public opinion—extensively hostile to nuclear weapons—and the government, who was expected to reflect and adhere to the idealistic anti-nuclear principles dominating public opinion, but in fact secretly violated the Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not producing and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japanese territory.

Despite this legacy of public nuclear aversion, the beginning of the 21st century has featured a major turn in the public debate on the Japanese nuclear option. As Andrew Oros states, 2002 marks “the year Japan’s nuclear option re-entered acceptable public discourse.”

In other words, a number of Japanese policy-makers seem to have adopted a stronger nuclear hedging stance since 2002. This boost of the nuclear narrative is particularly remarkable

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3 Memorandum of Conversation between “Mr. Inagaki” and R. L. Sneider, Subject: “Red Wing Claims”, March 15, 1957, Record Group 59, Declassification Review Project NND 917353, Box 10, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

4 The Three Non-Nuclear Principles were first stated by former Prime Minister Eisaku Satō at the Budget Committee in the House of Representative (December 11, 1967): “My responsibility is to achieve and maintain safety in Japan under the Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not producing and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons, in line with Japan's Peace Constitution.” (Kokkai Kaigiroku (Diet Record), 12-11-1967: [http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/syugiin/057/0514/05712110514002.pdf](http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/syugiin/057/0514/05712110514002.pdf)) Although the Diet passed a resolution formally adopting the Principles in 1971, they were never made into law. Further readings on the volatility of the Three Non-Nuclear Principles: Fintan Hoey, *Sato, America, and the Cold War*, Routledge, 2015; Masakatsu Ohta, *Nichibei Kaku Mitsuyaka no Zenbō* [The Complete Story of the Japanese-American Secret Agreement], Tokyo Chikumashobo, 2011

because of Japan’s current status as a virtual nuclear weapons state, which makes the country stand out as a potential proliferator. In his 2002 article, which still remains the centerpiece of the literature on nuclear hedging, Eli Levite defines the concept of nuclear hedging as “A national strategy of maintaining, or at least appearing to maintain, a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons, based on an indigenous technical capacity to produce them within a relatively short time frame ranging from several weeks to a few years.”

Japan indeed shows at least two of the three symptoms of a country that has chosen to adopt a nuclear hedging strategy, according to Wyn Bowen and Matthew Moran’s parameters. First, Japan possesses a high degree of nuclear latency: roughly seventy years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan has a stockpile of over 48 metric tons of separated plutonium, enough to make 6,000 warheads like the one used for Nagasaki.

Despite being a seismically unstable country, Japan seems neither capable nor willing to halt or solve its controversial policy of reprocessing, which continues to produce a substantial amount of weapons-grade plutonium. Although Japan has insisted over the years that it is determined not to develop nuclear weapons, doubts always linger both in Northeast Asia and in the United States. Morton Halperin, former director of the U.S. Department of State’s

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Policy Planning Staff, gave a warning in 1999: “No one should take for granted the Japanese commitment over the long run to refrain from developing nuclear weapons.”

In addition to its growing stockpile of plutonium that is a source of concern, Japan also shows additional traits of a nuclear hedging stance: the second parameter listed by Bowen and Moran is the nuclear narrative, i.e. any “[p]olitical discourse and domestic debate regarding nuclear issues.” The beginning of the 21st century has seen a sudden increase of public nuclear statements by several Japanese government officials, party members and academics. If part of a hedging strategy, these statements are meant to provide a deterrent against any potential aggressor or any rival state. It would thus make perfect sense that public statements in favor of a domestic nuclear option would start appearing in 2002, when President George W. Bush opened his mandate by including the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK) among the “Axis of Evil” states. The hostile tones between the United States and the DPRK escalated very rapidly in 2002 and throughout the George W. Bush administration, and the stronger tones of the nuclear debate in Japan appeared to signal a higher perception of the North Korean threat and the emergence of a more realist view vis-à-vis the volatile strategic environment.

Although the third parameter – diplomatic cat and mouse – is not present in the case of Japan, it is noteworthy that Japan’s unclear behavior has been raising more suspicions about its nuclear intentions. On June 20, 2012, for example, the government altered Article 2 of Japan’s 1955 Basic Law on Atomic Energy to add “national security” among the purposes for nuclear

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10 Bowen and Moran, op. cit.
11 See President George W. Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002
power, a rather cryptic expression which could lead to very loose interpretations of the clause, including the military use of nuclear power. This tiny change in the law fueled concern in East Asian countries, to which the Japanese government responded that the amendment would not conflict with the “peaceful use” of nuclear power, and was actually aimed at preventing nuclear proliferation. The startling vagueness of the amendment and of the official explanation perfectly reflects Japan's flirting with a nuclear hedging stance.

Since the North Korean and Chinese military buildup in the late 1990s, Japan has been seen as being more anxious and concerned about its own safety. "No one feels safe with missiles flying over their head," commented John Neuffer, a political analyst for the Mitsui Marine Research Institute in Tokyo. Historian and political analyst Hideaki Kase echoed Neuffer’s thoughts in 1999: "Public opinion has changed dramatically since August of last year, when North Korea shot off its missile. More and more, people are getting apprehensive." Some argued or speculated explicitly that it would be a natural reaction for a country like Japan to acquire nuclear weapons vis-à-vis Pyongyang’s ambitions: in March 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney claimed North Korea could trigger a regional "arms race" and that "others, perhaps Japan, for example, may be forced to consider whether or not they want to readdress the nuclear question."

12 The new provision of the basic law on atomic energy states “The safe use of atomic power is aimed at contributing to the protection of the people’s lives, health and property, environment conservation and national security”, Tokyo Shimbun, “Genshiryoku no kenpō”, kossori henkō (Atomic energy basic law, secretly altered), June 21, 2012; Asahi Shimbun, “‘National Security’ Amendment to Nuclear Law Raises Fears of Military Use”, June 21, 2012
14 SF Gate, “Japan Rattling Its Rusty Saber – North Korean threat tests Pacifism”, August 3, 1999
Should the burgeoning of nuclear statements by Japanese policy-makers after 2002 simply be interpreted as a reflection of their own perception of rising sense of strategic regional vulnerability? Does this trend indicate a sudden waning of the long-standing nuclear allergy and postwar peace culture?

This paper argues that despite coinciding with the breakout of the second North Korean nuclear crisis, the phenomenon was not triggered by the perception of the North Korean threat itself, but rather by the tension between the urgency to find a defined role within the alliance in the uncertain post-9/11 era, and the realization that Japan had not yet found a normal identity in the post-Cold War world.

The paper will first explain why this sudden surge of nuclear statements at the turn of the century does not represent a break from the past but rather indicates a continuity. It will then analyze the relationship between the phenomenon and Japan’s post-Cold War identity crisis. Lastly, the paper will study the more recent trend in the nuclear narrative, and look at the relationship between the recent rising nationalism and the value of nuclear weapons in Japanese conservative thinking.

**An intensified debate, but not quite an erosion of the nuclear taboo:**

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17 “Normal” (in Japanese futsū) is used here as a technical term specific to Japanese politics, which indicates the debate opened in Japan in the aftermath of the Cold War about the possibility of finding a new type of security arrangement for the country, including questioning the US-Japan alliance.

18 In this paper the use of the phrase “nuclear taboo” does not refer to Nina Tannenwald’s famous phrase
According to a December 2010 poll by the newspaper *Sankei Shimbun*, 96 percent of 2,873 participants answered that Japan should at least publicly debate the nuclear option. Moreover, 85 percent of the participants favored the nuclear option, and 78 percent responded that US extended nuclear deterrence remains unreliable. Since the *Sankei Shimbun* is a major conservative newspaper with strong ties to the entrepreneurial world, and the poll respondents (2422 men and 451 women) were only *Sankei Shimbun* readers, the results would not be a representative sample of the Japanese public as a whole, which might explain the tilt in these figures towards a nationalist view. Some Japan watchers, however, have associated this recent Japanese tendency to discuss a domestic nuclear option with a possible erosion of the nuclear taboo, or at least with a new willingness to talk more openly about it.

Elizabeth Bakanic, for example, mentions the “end of Japan’s nuclear taboo”, arguing that the recent Japanese elites’ shift in attitude towards a nuclear Japan is evident, as is the public’s growing tolerance vis-à-vis such change. Although stating that Japanese leaders are aware that a nuclear option for their country would not be an optimal choice, Sheila Smith also observes that the turn of the century has seen a diminished sense of surprise or shock at the idea of a debate over the nuclear option.

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19 *Sankei Shimbun*, “Nihon no kakbusō – ‘giron dake demo okonau beki’ ga 96%” (Japan’s Nuclear Option: “we should at least discuss it”: 96%), December 16, 2010
20 Ibid.
While it is possible to talk about a sudden explosion of public statements since 2002, however, it would not be completely correct to talk about an erosion of the nuclear taboo. The turn of the 21st century is hardly the first time that Japanese elites have made statements in favor of Japanese nuclear weapons: in other words, Japan’s hedging stance had already started in the late 1950s, and these statements are sometimes accompanied by a questioning of the US-Japan alliance and U.S. credibility.

In May 1957, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi was the first high-ranking official to publically state, during a Diet session, that the postwar pacifist Constitution did not explicitly forbid Japan from possessing nuclear weapons if they are small, causing several different Dietmen to investigate on his intentions. In fact, Kishi had been asked in the previous days by different Dietmen to clarify his views on nuclear weapons and the Constitution. On May 7, Kishi answered to a question by Dietman Hōsei Yoshida with a very long, complicated and confusing phrasal structure, that although the Constitution would not permit Japan to possess nuclear weapons, depending on the interpretation of the Constitution and on the definition of “nuclear weapons,” the constitutional text does not exclude entirely the possibility that Japan could possess them. The following year in November, lieutenant-general Kumao Imoto suggested during a visit to the United States that Japan would be better off with nuclear weapons if it were to fight against an enemy possessing such weapons. Kishi, moreover, after a visit to the Tōkai-mura nuclear facility in 1958, wrote in his memoirs that:

Nuclear technology could be used both as weapon and for peaceful purposes. The use of nuclear technology is a political decision. Given that it has decided not to

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use nuclear technology for weapons, Japan can only use it for peaceful purposes, which would reflect the will of the nation and of the people. However, with technology automatically advancing, so is the possibility of building weapons. Japan does not have nuclear weapons, but by showing that we possess the technology to build them, we can increase our political leverage at the international level when it comes to disarmament issues and nuclear testing.\(^{26}\)

In May 1959, Defense Agency Director General Shigejirō Inō publically considered the option for Japan to develop nuclear-armed missiles in the future.\(^{27}\)

The 1960s and 1970s also saw statements by Japanese elites that were at odds with the country’s non-nuclear policy. At the 1965 US-Japan summit, for example, Prime Minister Eisaku Satō told President Lyndon Johnson that he thought Japan should acquire nuclear weapons if China possessed them.\(^{28}\) At a Diet session on April 4, 1968, State Minister Kaneshichi Masuda responded using an elaborate and complex rhetoric to a question by Dietman Seiichi Inaba on the relationship between the Constitution and the Three Non-Nuclear Principles. Masuda stated in fact that the Constitution, indeed, does not forbid Japan to acquire nuclear weapons; however, the Three Non-Nuclear Principles automatically intervene to cover that loophole, which makes it not possible for the country to possess such weapons.”\(^{29}\)

In a January 14, 1969 telegram to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Alexis Johnson referred that Eisaku Satō blurted out that the Three Non-Nuclear Principles

\(^{26}\) Yoshitaka Yamamoto, *Fukushima no genpatsu jiko wo megutte – iktsu ka manabi eta koto* [Studying the Fukushima nuclear accident – a few things we have learnt], Misuzu Shobō, 2011

\(^{27}\) Ibid.


were “absurd.” Incidentally, one year later, Satō had also stated at a press conference that the Mutual Security Treaty signed with the United States on January 19, 1960 might be revised “after two or three years.” The “gaffe,” as was called by the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, was quickly denied by a “shocked” Foreign Minister Kiichi Aichi who reassured the United States that the Treaty was still the cornerstone of Japan’s security policy and of the alliance.

Further, according to an airgram from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to the Department of State, in 1971 Shintarō Ishihara, then a promising young Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) politician, claimed “a Japanese nuclear system was necessary in order to trigger the American deterrent in case Japan was attacked or seriously threatened because the American nuclear umbrella, as presently constituted, was not, for Japan, a reliable deterrent.” Interestingly, the U.S. Embassy comments in the airgram that Ishihara has little political influence in his own party, and he is literally the only one who publicly advocates nuclear weapons for Japan. However, it is possible that “Ishihara’s popularity as a culture hero will enable him to convince his large following among Japanese youth that Japan should go nuclear. Should he be able to do so, others competing politicians might also find it politically profitable to advocate such a program or, failing that, to argue against closing Japan’s options by ratifying the NPT. (…) Ishihara’s doubts about U.S. credibility are another matter. They are considerably more widely held, even though few Japanese would articulate them as frankly as Ishihara did.”

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30 *The Japan Times*, June 11, 2000
31 Telegram from US Embassy in Tokyo to Department of State, Subject: “Sato’s Gaffe Re MST”, May 20-21, 1970, Record Group 59, Declassification Review Project NND969023, Box 1753, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD
32 Airgram from US Embassy in Tokyo to Department of State, Subject: “LDP Dietman Shintaro Ishihara’s arguments for a Japanese nuclear force”, February 19, 1971, NND 969023, Box 1752, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD
33 Ibid.
Tanaka Kakuei, who succeeded Satō as Prime Minister in 1972, reaffirmed the Three Non-Nuclear Principles on March 20, 1973, but also added that “while we are not able to have offensive nuclear weapons, it is not a question of saying we will have no nuclear weapons at all.”[^34] Although these statements did not represent the views of the whole LDP[^35], they are a good indication of the nuclear option being discussed within the ruling party and in Diet sessions during the Cold War, sometimes accompanied by feelings of mistrust in U.S. credibility.

In October 1999, just before the turn of the century, newly appointed Vice Minister of the Defense Agency Shingo Nishimura shocked the public when he stated in an interview with *Play Boy Japan* that Japan should acquire nuclear weapons. Asked about the likelihood of war between India and Pakistan, Nishimura answered in the Osaka dialect: "It’s unlikely that there will be war: as long as two sides have nuclear weapons, there is no chance of nuclear war. The risk is much higher when a country does not have nuclear weapons. Japan is therefore in the most dangerous situation. The Diet should really look into finding a way to arm Japan with nuclear weapons."[^36] Nishimura went on to compare nuclear deterrence to rape laws: "if there were no punishments for rape, then all men—including myself—would be rapists. We do not become rapists because there is the deterrent of punishment."[^37]

[^34]: *New Scientist*, Vol. 57, No. 839, March 29, 1973
[^35]: Airgram from US Embassy in Tokyo to Department of State, Subject: “LDP Dietman Shintaro Ishihara’s arguments for a Japanese nuclear force”, February 19, 1971, Record Group 59, Declassification Review Project NND 969023, Box 1752, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD
[^37]: Ibid.
His nuclear remarks, as well as his most inappropriate rape analogy, ignited a firestorm of criticism in the country. Following heavy pressures, Nishimura was immediately forced to resign.

Some have compared the reaction this incident caused with the one triggered by the statements made in late May early June 2002 by Shinzō Abe (at the time Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary in the Koizumi Cabinet), Prime Minister Koizumi, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda.38 Abe told students at Waseda University in Tokyo that the use of nuclear weapons would not necessarily violate the Japanese constitution.39 Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda then backed up Abe’s claim, stating that he believed Japan was entitled to acquire nuclear weapons. Prime Minister Koizumi tried to reassure the confused public, insisting that his Cabinet would keep the Non-Nuclear Principles, but specified nonetheless, “it is significant that although we could possess [nuclear weapons], we don’t.”40 Robyn Lim points out that despite a public outcry, neither Abe nor Fukuda were at risk of losing their jobs, indicating that the nuclear taboo was clearly eroding.41

These two different outcomes, however, can hardly be placed on the same level and cannot be indicators of a sudden erosion of a nuclear taboo. The public’s outrage following Nishimura’s provocative statements was mainly driven by the combination of his view on nuclear weapons and his highly offensive and disturbing comments on women. One of the most vocal reaction came indeed from the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan’s War Responsibility,

39 See, for example, The Wall Street Journal, “Abe’s World View: In His Own Words”; December 18, 2012
40 Associated Press, “Koizumi denies change in non-nuclear policy amid reports of officials suggesting a switch”, May 31, 2002
41 Lim, op. cit., p. 184
who condemned the official’s words of extreme hate and discrimination towards women. Moreover, the *Asahi Shimbun* op-ed that spoke up against his words started with “The women’s fury will not calm down,” and went on to reflect on the parity between genders, as well as reporting on the petition to remove Nishimura from his job started by prof. Yasutaka Machimura of Asia University. The nuclear remark was mentioned once in a sentence that read “It goes without saying that [Shingo Nishimura] completely neglected our country’s postwar non-nuclear policy that we made sure to protect for a long time and with great effort,” before continuing to focus on the gender issue again.

In fact, Nishimura had made a similar statement earlier in 1999: in an interview with the *Washington Post* on August 2, he stated: “Japan must be like NATO countries. We must have the military power and the legal authority to act on it. We ought to have aircraft carriers, long-range missiles, long-range bombers. We should even have an atomic bomb!” This statement went rather unnoticed in Japan, which explains Nishimura’s emboldenment later on in his interview in *Play Boy Japan*.

Moreover, although the public seemed to react with confusion to Shinzō Abe’s and Yasuo Fukuda’s statements, the idea of a hypothetical nuclear option allowed by the Constitution was certainly neither new nor surprising. As mentioned earlier, Shinzō Abe’s own grandfather Nobusuke Kishi had already given that interpretation of the Constitution in 1957, which signals a strong consistency in the country’s conservative leadership – especially if coming

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42 *Center for Research and Documentation on Japan’s War Responsibility*, “Letter of protest against Vice Minister of the Defense Agency Shingo Nishimura’s statements”, November 9, 1999

43 *Asahi Shimbun*, October 23, 1999 (evening news)

from a dynastical political thinking – throughout the decades following the end of World War II.

Scholars also started to take part in the public debate over the nuclear option. In August 2003, *Shokun!*, a former major conservative monthly magazine, featured a special section that debated the nuclear issue. The section gathered forty-five essays by prominent security experts, journalists, and writers who discussed the pros and cons of Japan’s nuclear option. Six of them explicitly favored the acquisition of nuclear weapons, while others observed that while a time may come for Japan to possess such weapons, it might not be a wise move to acquire them right away. Journalist Yoshiko Sakurai, for instance, insisted that the most important thing to do is “not to deny the Japanese capability to acquire nuclear weapons.” According to her, it is paramount for Japan to “maintain its nuclear card.”

Terumasa Nakanishi, professor at Kyōto University, who strongly supports the nuclear option, pointed out in the magazine that the extended deterrence provided by the US would always remain unreliable. On the other hand, other experts, like Professor Hiroshi Nakanishi of Kyōto University, advised against acquiring nuclear weapons, emphasizing that such a decision would in fact produce more costs than benefits for Japan. Astrophysicist Satoru Ikeuchi also commented, “demilitarization and promotion of culture, rather than nuclearization, are proof that a nation wants to survive.” Nonetheless, most of the authors, shared the view that there was no harm in discussing a nuclear option; Hideo Hosoi, editor in chief of *Shokun!*,

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45 Yoshiko Sakurai, *Shokun!*, August 2003, p. 51
46 Terumasa Nakanishi, “Nihonkoku Kakubusō he no Ketsudan” [Decision to Arm Japan with Nuclear Weapons], *Shokun!*, August 2003, p. 22-37
47 Hiroshi Nakanishi, *Shokun!*, August 2003, p. 60
48 Satoru Ikeuchi, *Shokun!*, August 2003, p. 95

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also noted, "[i]f people had voiced such opinions a few years ago, they would have been branded ‘weirdos’. We’re starting to be able to talk about it in a rational and normal way."\textsuperscript{49}

The August 2003 edition of \textit{Shokun!} is the first magazine that featured a whole section on the nuclear debate, but it was not the first time that Japanese press dedicated a space for the topic. In fact, as of May 31, 2016, it is possible to count 571 Japanese articles appeared in political, science, technology, and economic magazines that mention or debate Japan’s nuclear option.\textsuperscript{50}

The new characteristic of the widening of the 2002 nuclear debate in Japan is not a change in Japan’s nuclear policy, or a growing tolerance vis-à-vis these statements, but their increasingly public nature, as well as public opinion’s new interest in security issues. Rather than a break from the past, Japanese elites’ effective behavior therefore suggests a continuity in their thinking. It would therefore be more correct to talk of a renaissance of the nuclear debate, rather than an erosion of the nuclear taboo. While not indicating a rift from the past, however, are these new traits of Japan’s nuclear attitude a symptom of an important shift in Japan’s identity vis-à-vis a newly challenging strategic environment?

\textbf{The post-Cold War identity dilemma:}

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Washington Times}, “Japan Rethinks Nuclear Taboo”, August 15, 2003
\textsuperscript{50} Author’s research at the National Diet Library, Tokyo, spring 2016
As mentioned above, this recent wave of security debate around nuclear weapons started in 2002 seems to have exploded at the same time of the second North Korean nuclear crisis. The timing of Japan’s renewed and more provocative nuclear narrative seems to naturally imply that Japanese elites were responding to the North Korean aggressive nuclear posture by attempting to deter the North Korean and the Chinese perceived threats.

For instance, on April 6, 2002, Ichirō Ozawa, at the time leader of the Liberal Party, made a controversial statement at a conference in Fukuoka. Ozawa was quoted saying, "it would be very easy for us to produce nuclear warheads. We have enough plutonium in our nuclear plants to make several thousands of them." He then mentioned China's military buildup, commenting, "If China gets too inflated, the Japanese people will get hysterical." Predictably, the Chinese government harshly condemned Ozawa’s words, labeling them as “provocative and representing an outdated Cold War mentality.” Brian Bremner, writing from Tokyo for Bloomberg BusinessWeek, reported that “not much” had happened in Japan following Ozawa’s speech, and commented that, in fact, it was “refreshing to hear a Japanese leader speak in very stark terms about the country's national security interests.” In response to Ozawa’s remarks and the aforementioned statements by Abe, Fukuda, and Koizumi; Shingo Nishimura, who had resigned from the Defense Agency in 1999 but was still a lawmaker in 2002, commented on the new willingness of the Japanese to finally debate the nuclear issue:

53 John de Boer, “Reaction to Ozawa’s statement on Japan’s Nuclear Capability”, Japanese Institute of Global Communications, April 15, 2002
"people are clearly waking up to the idea. They feel something is wrong with Japan." It is significant that Nishimura’s comment seems to attack Japan’s established postwar pacifist identity, rather than focusing on the looming external threat. The notion of national identity, broadly defined, is indeed at the heart of the issue of Japan’s nuclear policy. Japan’s complex and multilayered nuclear policy has been heavily influenced by the way Japan has been seeing her political role at the international level in the postwar world. The perceived shift in the nuclear debate therefore reveals a frantic quest for a more defined identity in the new multipolar world, and a practical reaction to the realization that a new identity cannot be found overnight.

The shift in the nuclear debate, indeed, is not only a consequence of the way Japan has placed herself in the postwar era, but is also the result of the way the U.S.-Japan relationship evolved since the late 1980s.

The shocking defeat in 1945 had obviously already had a first deep impact on Japan’s national identity. The emperor’s first radio address on August 15, 1945, as well as his Humanity Declaration on January 1, 1946 were immensely confusing for the Japanese people as a whole, who were stripped of their sole purpose in their lives. The perception of having lost a purpose and a divinity instantly made Japan an extremely vulnerable and unstable country, and the U.S.-Japan alliance quickly became the most vital pillar of Japan’s postwar foreign and security policy. As Timothy Temerson argues, indeed, the main objective of the U.S.-Japan alliance was, for the United States, a double containment: on the one hand, against

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55 Associated Press, “Building Atomic Arsenal on Japan’s Mind”, August 9, 2003
the communist bloc, and on the other hand, against the return of a militarist Japan.\textsuperscript{56} This would in fact be the core meaning of the Security Treaty signed by the United States and Japan on September 8, 1951: by sealing a formal agreement, the United States sought to simultaneously defend themselves against a communist encroachment as well as controlling the future path of Japan.\textsuperscript{57} Further, Richard Samuels points out three scenarios that the United States feared at the time: firstly, the possibility of Japan’s rapid remilitarization which could escalate into a military attack; secondly, a deeply unstable Japan that would have needed strong U.S. attention for years to come, and finally, the United States feared that Japan could secure a separate peace with communist countries and allow them easy access for political and industrial influences.\textsuperscript{58} As former government official Yoshinori Ihara commented with an embarrassed smile, “the United States knew Japan was such a weak and vulnerable country at that time. After such a horrible defeat in 1945, Japan would have followed literally anyone…I am grateful that it was the United States, and not someone else, who took care of us!”\textsuperscript{59}

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought about another major change in Japan’s role in the eyes of the United States, freeing the country from the bipolar strategic constraints of the Cold War. While throughout the Cold War, Japan served as a crucial ally for the United States in Northeast Asia, after the main rival of the United States disappeared, Japan found herself in a state of deep disorientation, questioning for the first time since 1945 her role as an international actor.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Yoshinori Ihara, interview by the author, May 29, 2016
The issue of Japan’s identity was first explicitly introduced into the literature in the mid-1990s, when Thomas Berger, Nobuo Okawara, and Peter J. Katzenstein drew attention to the concept of political culture and identity of Japan. Their ‘norm constructivist’ approach, indeed, focuses on how Japan’s domestic factors construct a certain type of identity, and how that influences the country’s foreign policy, as opposed to the ‘relational’ approach, which studies the way a country constructs itself in relation to others. Their work was published at a timely era, when Japan was trying to adjust to the new world order after the Cold War came to an end.

Challenging the view that Japan is an economic superpower that would someday grow into a political and military one as well, these authors extensively analyzed what they have called “peaceful cultural norms” and “anti-militarist culture,” and have attributed to Japan a “pacifist” and “anti-militarist” identity, emphasizing the well-rooted and stable nature of this characteristic. However, once the Cold War came to an end, Japan’s international role and its role within the US-Japan alliance started to be less taken for granted, and her reactive foreign policy had to be reassessed. Not only her place on a global level was uncertain, but also her relationship with the United States was souring in some aspects, which had consequences in a delicate transitional moment for Japan. The phrase “Japan bashing” was born in the late 1980s to refer to the sudden widespread Japanophobia in the United States with regards to the assertion that Japan was not behaving as a fair trading partner. Cartoons describing these feelings appeared in magazines and newspapers, depicting Japan as a fat but clever samurai that was kindly cheating Uncle Sam or President Ronald Reagan with a katana sword. The United States seemed too focused on the problems in their economic relationship to notice.

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Japan’s identity dilemma was a mixture of political and security issues. During his Premiership in the late 1980s, Yasuhiro Nakasone emphasized the glaring gap between Japan’s and her ally’s statuses, stating that while the United States were “at university” in defense matters, Japan was “still in kindergarten.”61 This feeling was widely echoed in the early 1990s by Ichirō Ozawa, who in his *Blueprint for a New Japan: the Rethinking of a Nation* (1993), claimed that Japan could not stay a “political dwarf” any longer.62 Many among the former Japanese officials whom I interviewed in the spring 2016 have agreed that the elites have always considered Japan as a country that had not fully grown, an “underage country.”63

Another similar term, “Japan passing”, was used in the late 1990s, and referred to the deep anxiety that Japan felt vis-à-vis her senior ally, the United States. Japan felt the weight and the political limitations of her status as second global economic power, and because many other countries in Asia were growing, Japan feared a security abandonment by the United States. An example of “Japan passing”64 could be President Bill Clinton’s visit to Asia in 1998, where he visited Beijing for nine days without stopping by the United States’ closest friend and ally, their “unsinkable aircraft carrier,”65 Japan. Japan had indeed seen herself merely as a security protégé, and the First Gulf War in 1990-1991 had shown how poorly the country could

63 Interviews by the author, March-May 2016
64 For further reading, see Takahashi Kōsuke, *Asia Times*, “Geithner a balm for Japan’s Clinton Trauma”, 26 novembre 2008
65 The term was used by Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1983, when he pledged that Japan would be its ally’s “unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Pacific”
perform in international security crises, opting for a “checkbook diplomacy” and being bashed for being a “security free-rider.”

One of the main reasons why Japan could not bounce back quickly from her early 1990s uncertainty was a severe lack of academic experts in the security field. Throughout the Cold War, international security studies remained underdeveloped in Japan with no universities offering security studies programs. The end of the Cold War led a growing number of Japanese scholars to study security issues because Japan was expected to play a more proactive role in the new era and, as Akio Watanabe points out, because security was no longer perceived as “dangerous” by Japanese intellectuals. The early 1990s saw for the first time the emergence of the notion of “normal nation” (“futsū no kuni”), prompting the Japanese political debate to reflect on the necessity to reform the postwar foreign and defense policy of the country. The transitional decade from 1991 to 2001 made it difficult for Japan to gain a deep knowledge in security issues in time for the turn of the century. In the early 1990s, indeed, the Japanese government was divided in two main factions: the pragmatists and the revisionists. The former believed that national interests were to be calculated only in terms of costs and benefits, which made them strong supporters of the US-Japan alliance. The latter believed that the first step towards a normal Japan was a revision of the country’s pacifist

69 For further reading on a “normal” Japan, see Yoshihide Soeya, Japan as a normal country? A nation in search of its place in the world, University of Toronto Press, 2011
constitution, specifically of Article 9, which limited Japan’s military capabilities.\textsuperscript{70} The existence of the two camps and two different ideas for Japan, therefore, turned the first decade that followed the end of the Cold War into a precarious and politically unstable moment for Japan.

Considering this deep anxiety and political instability Japan was coming from, it is indeed more natural to think of Ozawa’s April 2002 comments not as an exhortation to go nuclear, but as a message directed to the United States. The public nuclear narrative explosion started in 2002 seems like a way to draw the senior ally’s attention in order to remind the United States to honor their security commitments toward Japan, because of Japan’s lack of choice. The same Ichirō Ozawa, who now leads the Liberal Party, said indeed in a July 2013 interview that he completely rules out nuclear weapons as a valuable option for Japan.\textsuperscript{71} The North Korean and Chinese threats may therefore have had an indirect impact on Japanese nuclear hedging stance, but it is relevant to note that its “political dwarf” position did not leave any choice for Japan but to eventually strengthen the security alliance with the United States. Although some statements might sound bold, this proliferation of nuclear comments by Japanese elites, which stemmed from an unclear post-Cold War identity, are a sign that Japan was not ready to leave its status of reactive state that was so comfortable and convenient during the Cold War. While some of the provocative nuclear statements might serve as a deterrent narrative towards China and North Korea, they may especially be a sign of Japan’s

\textsuperscript{70} According to Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

\textsuperscript{71} Ichirō Ozawa, \textit{Independent Web Journal}, July 12, 2013; the video version of the interview is available on the \textit{Independent Web Journal}’s Youtube channel: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9-_bfY38Ek}
weakness and fear of abandonment, which would then translate into an expression of their desire for continuity and stability of the Cold War security arrangement with the United States.

Another sign that deterring North Korea’s nuclear threat was not at the forefront of Japanese leaders’ calculations is the nature of the quiet negotiations between the Koizumi government and Pyongyang. In September 2001, Kim Jong-Il’s special envoy and Director of the Asia-Pacific Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Hitoshi Tanaka engaged in a series of twenty meetings as groundwork for the normalization of the Japan-DPRK relations. Keiji Hiramatsu, Director of the Northeast Asian Affairs, who was aware of the meetings, recommended that Tanaka “break the traditional pattern of Japan-DPRK negotiations.”

Journalist Yōichi Funabashi interviewed Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda, who stated that the main motivation behind the secret negotiations with Pyongyang was in fact domestic, i.e. a credibility boost for the MOFA within Japan. In the last few months, indeed, the Ministry was at the heart of several scandals, and many within the organization were critical towards Minister Makiko Tanaka, who was deemed “too authoritarian.”

Fukuda is quoted saying:

Looking around, Japan’s foreign relations were deadlocked everywhere. The stalemate situations included the Takeshima Island issue with the Republic of Korea, the rise of China and the feud with China over Yasukuni Shrine, the Northern Territories issue with Russia, and on and on and on. That’s why I wanted to advance the normalization of relations with North Korea, which would provide Japan with a great opportunity to contribute to the stability of Northeast Asia. I believe that the prime minister’s visit to Pyongyang made the

73 Ibid., p. 68
Japanese feel that something was moving and Japan might be overcoming its deadlock with North Korea.\textsuperscript{74}

The NHK broadcasted a documentary titled “Hiroku Nicchō Kōshō – Shirarezaru “Kaku” no Kōbō” (“The Secret Report: the secret negotiations between Japan and North Korea over the nuclear question”) on November 8, 2009, reconstructing the negotiations and the two meetings between Jun’ichirō Koizumi and Kim Jong-Il in 2002 and 2004. However, we can note that the actual nuclear question was not the most urgent one for Japan. As Anthony DiFilippo notes, it would have been a political suicide for any Japanese politician to ignore the abduction issue by the year 2000. According to a survey conducted by the Cabinet, 68\% of the respondents had selected the abduction issue as the most urgent one, 52\% had indicated the North Korean missile program as their primary concern, and only 39\% were worried about the North Korean nuclear program.\textsuperscript{75}

During the Japan-North Korea normalization talks, on October 29, 2002, for example, the DPRK threatened to break the missile moratorium. The news was completely ignored by the Japanese media, who continued to focus solely on the abduction issue. The DPRK, frustrated by the lack of attention, made the same threat the following day, but the Japanese media

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 69
ignored it again, which in turn frustrated some MOFA officials, who complained about the public’s lack of attention in security matters.\textsuperscript{76}

These instances highlight the Japanese distortion in the perception of the North Korean threat, discrepancies even within the government, and a lack of resources and creativity with regards to defense matters. Further, in the wake of the 2006 North Korean nuclear test, and even after Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had publically reassured Japan of the solidity of the extended nuclear deterrence provided to Japan by the United States in October 2006, more Japanese politicians felt the need to test the alliance. Shōichi Nakagawa, for instance, at the time policy chief of the LDP, stated in a television appearance in November 2006 that Japan should at least discuss the nuclear option because North Korean nuclear-tipped missiles could reach Japan before the US could help their ally.\textsuperscript{77} Foreign Minister Tarō Asō and then Prime Minister Shinzō Abe also sparked a controversy as they offered their support to Nakagawa’s statements and called for a more open debate on the nuclear option because of the threatening environment.\textsuperscript{78} These statements are a sign that, despite coming to the conclusion that the only possible security option at the moment is strengthening the alliance with the United States, Japan could not fully and completely rely on their senior ally to protect her. This constant and underlying mistrust towards the United States, fomented since the late 1980s by the bitter feelings of Japan bashing and Japan passing, is a leitmotiv in the U.S.-Japan security alliance that can be found in more recent years as well. When Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and Adm. Harry Harris, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, met in Tokyo after North Korea’s

\textsuperscript{76} Katsuhisa Furukawa, “Japan’s Future Strategic Options and the US-Japan Alliance”, in Japan’s Nuclear Option – Security, Politics, and Policy in the 21st Century, Self & Thompson, 2003, p. 113
\textsuperscript{77} Reuters, “INTERVIEW-Japan policy chief wants China ‘discipline’”, November 13, 2006
nuclear test in January 2016 and a ballistic missile launch in February, Abe stated that “[t]he missile launch by North Korea was not only a direct threat to Japan but also a challenge to the United States.” Shōgo Imoto writes on political blog Agora, “it is clearly an exaggeration to state that Mr. Abe is thinking of nuclear weapons for Japan. However, I interpret [Mr. Abe’s quote] as the following: ‘If the United States abandons Japan now and runs away from the North Korean threat, Japan will seriously consider a shift in its policy and acquire nuclear weapons. I would like you to be fully aware of this as you tackle the North Korean issue.’

The new awareness for a public nuclear discussion by Japanese politicians is therefore not only closely linked to the failed quest for a new identity, but the level of mistrust towards the United States adds an additional layer to the meaning of the Japanese nuclear debate. The lingering mistrust towards their ally, in fact, not only indicates a fear of being abandoned by the United States, but also a low level of confidence in successfully building a renewed and more proactive identity. This element of mistrust towards the United States, combined with their strong dislike towards neighboring Asian countries, however, has always been a central argument of the most conservative fringes of Japanese politics, who use it as a valid reason to lobby for a shift in the country’s nuclear policy.

**Rising nationalism and nuclear weapons**


While the nuclear option had been discussed in the past, the nuclear debate has been accompanied, in the 21st century, by a sharp rise of nationalism in Japan. A number of conservative politicians, in fact, have been seeing the nuclear debate as an excellent opportunity to prepare the ground for accustoming the public opinion to a nuclear future for Japan, thus a new and more independent identity. In other words, the advocates of a nuclear option may be using the current strategic instability in East Asia to try to appeal to the public sense of strategic vulnerability in order to justify the acquisition of nuclear weapons. As it will be shown later on, the rise of Japanese nationalism at the turn of the century marks a departure from the perceived “lack of a healthy nationalism” of the postwar era, and is often associated with the widening of the domestic nuclear debate. The publication in 2007 of the booklet Bokura no kakubesō-ron – tabū chō toppa! Ima dakara ronjiru. Kangaeru [Our own nuclear debate – piercing the taboo! We need to think and debate about it now] edited by journalist Kōyū Nishimura is an example of how the idea of widening the nuclear option debate in Japan meets a call for a new independent identity and the urgency to act now because of a threatening environment: according to the booklet, Japan should consider the nuclear option not in spite, but precisely because of its status as a hibakukoku (nuclear victim).

On April 16, 2013, the same Shingo Nishimura who had to resign from the Defense Agency in 1999 for his disturbing remarks, stated during a session at the Diet that Japan needed to finally realize the project of acquiring nuclear weapons because “while everyone in Japan is fussing

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over our nuclear energy program, no one is actually thinking of Japan’s defense,” while, at the same time, bizarrely interpreting Prime Minister Abe’s electoral slogan, “Nippon wo torimodosu,” as a call to bring back the pre-war Meiji Emperor national holidays.

Conservative journalist and member of the nationalist group Nippon Kaigi Yoshiko Sakurai, has also been voicing her opinion on a domestic nuclear option in a consistent and rather provocative fashion: on August 6, 2015, on the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, she organized an event at a hotel in Hiroshima that condemns the “failure of 70 years of a non-nuclear Japan”, claiming in the flyer that Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution failed to prevent the Chinese military buildup or the North Korean nuclear program.

Another noteworthy phenomenon is the emergence of street demonstrations favoring the Japanese nuclear option. On August 6, 2013, on the very same day of the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, Zaitokukai, a nationalist group founded in 2006, marched through the streets of Tokyo and Hiroshima to call for an indigenous nuclear arsenal. Interviewed during the demonstrations, Makoto Sakurai, who leads the group, questioned the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella, stating that it was time for the Japanese to provide for their own security. Zaitokukai is supported by a party called Shinpū (Restoration Political Party – New Wind),

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82 The ambiguous meaning of the slogan will be explained later on in the paper (p.34)
83 The video of Nishimura’s statement at the Diet can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvjLoZ5YmxY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvjLoZ5YmxY); the double interpretation of the slogan will be discussed later in this work (p. 33)
84 Sankei News, “9 jō de sensō yandaka – Nihon kaigi ‘8.6 Hiroshima Heiwa Meeting’ de Sakurai Yoshiko-shi ra kōen”, August 8, 2015
85 Groups like Zaitokukai are often dubbed “Internet far-right” by the Japanese media, because their members use the Internet to spread their xenophobic messages across the country. Moreover, most members are unemployed men who struggle to find a place in society, reflecting a social and economic malaise that has been very common in Japan in the past decade. Zaitokukai’s full name is Zainichi Tokken wo Yurusu Shinmin no Kai, which literally translates into “People’s Association Against Privileges for Korean-born Japanese citizens.”
The cover of the brochure promoted by Ishin Seitō – Shinpū (Restoration Political Party – New Wind): the large title reads: “Quick! Let’s get nuclear weapons;” the young man in the middle says “let’s think about it,” the taller one holding a book comments “I’m not really interested;” the old man on the right says “I feel safe because America will be there for me” and the young woman shouts “Wow, we really are surrounded by nuclear-armed states!” (2012) (source: Ishin Seitō – Shinpū official website: http://shimpu.jpn.org/)

whose candidate, Nobuyuki Suzuki, explicitly includes the nuclear option in his political agenda, claiming that Japan is surrounded by dangerous countries.  

Beside the threat posed by regional proliferation, one of the main arguments of those who advocate the nuclear option is that nuclear weapons are a valid card to play for political and diplomatic leverage. Tadae Takubo, professor of international politics at Kyōrin University and Chairman of Nippon Kaigi, stated that “Japan must start saying right now that it might go nuclear”, arguing that “forsaking nuclear weapons is like taking part in a boxing match and promising not to throw hooks.” In 2013 Takubo co-authored with Kimindo Kusaka and Ronald A. Morse a book called “Tsuyoi Nippon” wo torimodosu tame ni ima hitsuyō na koto [What we need to bring back a “strong Japan”], where he explains why it is crucial for Japan to part ways with a United States who thinks of Japan as a “weak” country, and this transformation into a “strong Japan” will need the acquisition of a domestic nuclear weapons program.

Suzuki, who is supported by other political figures like Tamogami, also claims that Japan should cut off its diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea.

Tadae Takubo, quoted by Yuri Kageyama, “North Korea threat makes Japanese think the unthinkable: Going Nuclear”, Associated Press, August 11, 2003
Shintarō Ishihara, successful novelist, Tokyo Governor from 1999 to 2012 and still a very influential figure in Japanese politics, has always been one of the staunchest and most consistent supporters of the Japanese nuclear option, as shown earlier in the paper. In an interview with *The Independent* in March 2011 when still in office, Ishihara observed, "(…) diplomatic bargaining power means nuclear weapons. All the [permanent] members of the [United Nations] Security Council have them." He reiterated those arguments in July 2011 and in November 2012, when he noted, “States that do not possess nuclear weapons do not have any diplomatic power.” Around the same time, LDP Diet member and current Minister of Defense Tomomi Inada also spoke in favor of a nuclear option for Japan, stating in her interview with the magazine *Seiron*, that “Japan should explore possessing nuclear weapons not only as part of a merely theoretical discussion, but rather adopting it as national strategy.”

In recent years, another prominent figure of Japanese politics caused an uproar in Japan for advocating an indigenous nuclear arsenal for Japan: Toshio Tamogami. Former Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) Chief of Staff Tamogami was forced into retirement in 2008 for denying Japan’s militarist past in an essay. However, instead of retracting any of his claims, he remarked that his opinions are in fact widely shared by many lawmakers and Self-Defense Forces personnel, then calling for Japan to possess nuclear weapons in order to increase its

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88 *The Independent*, “Japan must develop nuclear weapons, warns Tokyo governor”, March 8, 2011
89 *News24 Japan*, “Nihon wa Kakuheiki shимyureishon wo – Ishihara Daihyō”, November 20, 2012
90 *Seiron*, March 2011 issue, interview with Inada Tomomi and Satō Mamoru
international standing and become a major power. Tamogami lost the race for Tokyo governorship in February 2014, finishing fourth out of sixteen candidates, but the nationalist group Ganbare Nippon he chaired up until March 2015 is still raising tides of revisionist nationalism across Japan. Tamogami is also backed up by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe; the former ASDF Chief of Staff has indeed declared at a press conference: “Probably, my policies (...) have the highest affinity to the Abe administration’s. In regard to how we view history, how we view the nation, I believe that fundamentally we share the same idea.”

The emergence of this aspect in nuclear statements indicates that the nuclear debate is increasingly linked to the growing Japanese nationalism and populism that goes hand in hand with the shift to the right of the current Abe government. An interesting peculiarity of the LDP that ruled Japanese politics during the Cold War, and for most of the post-Cold War era, lies precisely in their original ambivalence: their strong support and loyalty to the US-Japan alliance as well as their deep feelings of humiliation and resentment about the postwar system imposed by the US. Those conflicting feelings, also reflected in the split between the pragmatists and the revisionists in the 1990s, have always clashed together, and have been colliding with Japan's nuclear policy that symbolizes both the country’s nuclear victim status (through its non-nuclear policy and its recent assertiveness in disarmament and nonproliferation) and its acceptance of the new world order set at the end of the war (through its reliance on the US nuclear umbrella). The renaissance of the nuclear debate in 2002 has

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92 "I think there should be debate about this, because nuclear deterrence would be enhanced as a result," Toshio Tamogami told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, December 1, 2008, “Ousted Japan Air Force chief Calls for Nuclear Weapons Debate”, Bloomberg.com, December 1, 2008; The Japan Times, “Essay judges defend Tamogami”, December 9, 2008; The Telegraph, “Japan should develop nuclear weapons”, December 1, 2008

93 International Business Times, “Japan’s Far-Right: Nostalgia for Imperial Past, Or Dire Threat To Future?”, March 19, 2014
therefore an additional populist dimension that speaks to the heart of die-hard conservatives. This postwar lack of national identity is also lamented by Shintarō Ishihara who argues that Japan suffers from a “passivity complex” due to the lack of a national consciousness. Political scientist Shin’ichi Kitaoka had indeed already argued in 2001 that the “recent mounting evidence of nationalism in Japan is merely a backlash against the excessive oppression of these feelings since the country’s defeat in WWII,” echoing his colleague Tatsumi Okabe’s view that Japan has suffered from a weak sense of collectivity and an absence of healthy nationalism in the postwar era.

Prime Minister Abe's nationalistic agenda, indeed, aims to revive those resentful feelings that have long been considered politically-incorrect in postwar Japan. Tamogami’s comment that outside of Japan, “people are taught how great and wonderful their country is” whereas in postwar Japan “speech that was anti-Japan (...) was free” perfectly illustrates that the frustration of some politicians could overshadow the perceived necessity of maintaining the US-Japan alliance. Tamogami is a very prolific writer and has published at least a book a year since his 2008 forced retirement – all dealing with Japan’s unfair suppression of its legitimate patriotic feelings and the country’s natural choice of the nuclear option.

94 Shintarō Ishihara, “Pekin gorin wo danko boikotto seyo, Senkaku ni jieitai wo jōchū saseyo, Chūgoku bunretsu wo nerae” [Let’s firmly boycott the Beijing Olympics, keep our Self-Defense Forces on the Senkaku Islands permanently, and break up China], 2005, Bungei Shunju, pp. 94-103
96 Tatsumi Okabe, Chūgoku no taigai senryaku [China’s external strategy], Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2002
Shinzō Abe cleverly chose his aforementioned campaign slogan in 2012: “Nippon wo, torimodosu”, which can either mean “restore/rebuild Japan”, or “let’s take Japan back.” While the former interpretation clearly refers to the country’s stagnating economy, the latter strongly hints at Abe’s intention to somehow drift away from the postwar security system. In fact, the current regional volatility and the emergence of new threats could be a way the Prime Minister and his staff are promoting the nationalistic views that they believe will give Japan enough political leverage to gradually distance the country from the alliance with the United States. Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 might have been indeed a defiant message to Washington rather than to Japan’s Asian neighbors. In an official note, the United States stated that they were “disappointed” in Japan’s behavior that would exacerbate tensions with other East Asian countries. The term, translated in Japanese as “shitsubō,” was subject to many analyses by newspapers and personal blogs that interpreted it in different ways and tried to gauge any changes in U.S.-Japan relations.98

Moreover, the current government rushed to pass the so-called “secrecy act” in December 2013 to strengthen Japan's defense policy by giving the government the power to define what constitutes a state secret and stiffening penalties for officials who leak secrets and journalists who publish them. Abe clarified that this move was designed to strengthen the cooperation between Japan and the United States, but the new law legitimizes the government to conceal to the public anything that it does not intend to disclose, including a hypothetical nuclear weapons program.

98 For an example of analysis of the U.S. reaction to the Prime Minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, see http://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2013/12/31/yasukuni-us-department-of-state_n_4522937.html, or http://ottyanko.at.webry.info/201312/article_1.html
August 2015 also saw another episode that seems to confirm a political willingness to subtly break away from tradition: Shinzō Abe’s decision to omit the Three Non-Nuclear Principles in his Hiroshima speech on August 6th. The omission caused anxiety among many citizens, prompting some angered responses from the hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) community. Activist Toshiyuki Mimaki’s comment is particularly striking as he stated that while listening to the speech, he was not aware that the Prime Minister had left out the principles, noting: “It is truly sad that it seems like the government is not taking seriously the Three Non-Nuclear Principles. (...) It is frightful that the words went missing from the prime minister’s public speech while we were not paying close attention. The principles may be emasculated in the eras of my children or grandchildren while they are not aware.”

The choice of words, as well as omissions, are always fundamental in politics, as they often indicate the underlying mentality of a specific government. Prime Minister Abe’s deliberate choice to omit the non-nuclear principles in his Hiroshima speech, while keeping them in his Nagasaki speech three days later, seems to support the idea that there is indeed an attempt to test the waters of the public perception vis-à-vis nuclear weapons, if not an attempt to gradually accustom the public to the idea of a nuclear future for Japan.

Conclusion:

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99 Asahi Shimbun, “Anxiety rises over Abe omitting non-nuclear principles from Hiroshima speech”, August 7, 2015
Since the beginning of the 21st century, most scholars have predicted that it is unlikely that Japan will go nuclear in the near future mainly because of the major costs that such a decision would entail and the domestic obstacles that the government would face. It is difficult to certainly predict whether Japan will or will not join the nuclear club, and this paper does not aim to offer any prediction. However, it does attempt to highlight the relevance of Japan’s identity in the nuclear question.

The contradictions underlying in Japan’s nuclear policy have indeed deep historical and cultural roots, and are not easy to disentangle. On the one hand, Japan poises itself as a nuclear victim and a leader for nonproliferation, and considers the Three Non-Nuclear Principles as the pillar of its non-nuclear policy. On the other hand, however, those Principles were never made into law, which has allowed very loose interpretations of the third one (i.e. not to permit the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japanese territory). Moreover, the country’s dependence on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence is often criticized as a double standard and keeps representing a major sticking point in Japan’s efforts for disarmament. While the heavy reliance on the nuclear umbrella had a clear and undiscussed strategic purpose in a bipolar world, the end of the Cold War emphasized the lack of Japan’s independent identity. The shift in the Japanese nuclear debate at the turn of the 21st century did not stem directly from a willingness to deter the new and urgent looming military threats, but was rather the result of a very limited security role that collapsed after the end of the Cold War, and took the shape of a disoriented and shaky Japanese identity. It is therefore not surprising that when the mechanism of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence became theoretically less justified in an evolving security context, Japan, as a survival mechanism, decided to seek reassurance that the United States would not abandon her and, therefore, to strengthen the alliance.
However, the current resurgence of a pre-war nostalgia and nationalism and Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's constitutional reforms may ease a hypothetical reevaluation of Japan's nuclear policy. The line between the rethinking of a Japanese security identity and pushing a nationalist agenda into the current nuclear policy is very thin.

In the aforementioned July 2013 interview, Ichirō Ozawa observed that the rising revisionist nationalism is a normal and unsurprising reaction to the “faithful dog Hachikō status” that Japan has endured since the end of World War II. The politician then explicitly stated that the LDP’s ultimate plan behind its insistence on restarting the nuclear power plants even after Fukushima is Japan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Moreover, although the nuclear allergy has deep roots in Japan's history and culture, it has its flaws and contradictions. Nuclear engineer and assistant professor at Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute Hiroaki Koide stated in a February 2014 interview that, without any doubt, since it first started to develop nuclear power in the 1950s, Japan has been preparing for the acquisition of nuclear weapons while hiding its true intentions behind the mask of “nuclear power for peaceful purposes.” That might have been true at the very beginning, but nuclear power has become an incredibly strong lobby, informally called “Genpatsu-mura” (“The Atomic Village”) with close ties with the government. In other words, as Jacques Hymans has skillfully showed, Japan’s nuclear power program has started with a strong political vision and an interest in converting peaceful to military uses, however that aspect rapidly faded to grow

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100 Ichirō Ozawa, Independent Web Journal, July 12, 2013; the video version of the interview is available on the Independent Web Journal’s Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9--bfY38Ek
101 Ibid.; Expressing his views on the matter, Ozawa ruled out a nuclear option for Japan, describing it as “completely unrealistic” because of the uselessness of such weapons.
102 Hiroaki Koide, Independent Web Journal, February 3, 2014; the video version of the interview is available on the Independent Web Journal’s Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5Ni4n13zP4
into nothing more than a profitable and convenient business.\textsuperscript{103} The sharp line drawn by the government during the Cold War between peaceful and military uses of nuclear power\textsuperscript{104} has indeed made the government's intentions all the more opaque: in fact, although the link between the two faces of nuclear power is becoming increasingly clear,\textsuperscript{105} many in Japan still do not see them as two sides of the same issue.

This distinction turns the nuclear allergy at the core of the Japanese anti-nuclear movement into a selective allergy that rejects nuclear weapons but embraces nuclear power for peaceful purposes. Fukushima is a perfect example of how the distinction between the two sides of nuclear power has had a direct effect on the controversy over the restarting of the nuclear power plants in Japan. Following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster in March 2011, awareness on energy issues started to increase in Japan, with many people questioning the necessity of maintaining such a dangerous source of energy. However, although the 2012 polls reveal that the majority of the Japanese favored the phasing out of nuclear power,\textsuperscript{106} Shinzō Abe’s victory in December 2012 showed that economic recovery, rather than nuclear energy, was in fact the top priority for the Japanese. This trend was also confirmed in 2014: Morihiro Hosokawa and Jun’ichirō Koizumi, two former Japanese Prime Ministers, tried to challenge Abe’s pro-nuclear power policy at the 2014 Tokyo governorship elections by entirely focusing


\textsuperscript{105} Hitoshi Yoshioka, professor of social and cultural studies at Kyūshū University, \textit{The Washington Times}, “Japan revisits nuclear weapons ban”, August 2, 2012

their campaign on opposition to atomic energy. Hosokawa and Koizumi were eventually defeated by pro-nuclear candidate Yōichi Masuzoe, showing once again that the citizens’ top priority was not a change in the country’s energy policy but rather economy and employment.

The peace culture and anti-nuclear movement that were born from the experiences of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Lucky Dragon incident did not wane with the turn of the century. The constant and consistent work of peace associations and the massive organized demonstrations against Prime Minister Abe’s security reform plans that took place across Japan during the entire summer in 2015 are a relevant sign that public opinion is still very sensitive to a change of pace. However, while the nuclear allergy has kept a steady presence in Japan’s political culture, the discrepancy between public opinion and the elites keeps increasing, forming two levels that do not speak the same language and are heading in different directions. In other words, if this gap widens further between the still alive anti-nuclear sentiment of public opinion and the government, the nuclear allergy that has shaped Japan’s history and culture for so many decades could eventually be overpowered by a government that has slowly been creating the right political and cultural conditions to work towards the goal of a nuclear weapons program.

107 Reuters, “Japan’s Koizumi back fellow ex-PM in opposing nuclear power”, January 14, 2014: http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/01/14/uk-japan-politics-idUKBREA0D09C20140114

108 Asahi Shimbun conducted a telephone survey on January 25-26, 2014, two days before the official beginning of the campaign, on 2,557 randomly selected voters: the survey showed that only 14% selected “nuclear power plants and energy” as the policy they valued most in the election, the two top priorities being “economy and employment” (29%) and “healthcare and welfare” (25%). (Asahi Shimbun, “ASAHI POLL: Masuzoe in the lead of Tokyo governor election”, January 27, 2014: http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201401270064 ). Abe, who supported the candidate who eventually won the race, stated his concern that the campaign would focus on the nuclear issue at the expense of other important problems. (Asahi Shimbun, “Abe shushō, ‘datsu genpatsu’ sōtenka ni keikaikan – tochiji sen’” [PM Abe concerned about anti-nuclear campaign – Tokyo governorship elections”], January 13, 2014)
The study of the nuclear debate in Japan is therefore a very useful tool in order to gauge the relationship between Japan and the United States and the level of trust that Japanese élites feel towards their ally. The turn of the century brought a new strategic environment in which Japan was forced to question its own post-Cold War identity, without eventually succeeding in an actual change. It is therefore especially relevant to keep monitoring Japan’s nuclear debate following the major political shift in the United States caused by the November 2016 presidential elections, which will have an impact on Japan’s own perception of her role and position within the U.S.-Japan alliance.