Will Japan Go Nuclear?

On April 6, 2002 Japan's Liberal Party Head Ozawa Ichiro delivered an unusual resentment toward China's "overwhelming expansion." He claimed: "We have enough plutonium in our nuclear facilities to create three to four thousand nuclear bombs. Japan can create one thousand bombs at one night. Japan will not lose to China in military strength." The reason for his resentment was said to be a visit from a Chinese PLA official, who warned Ozawa the catastrophe to Japan should Japan be involved into a war against China because of Taiwan.

Once Japan's "king maker" controlling more than two hundred Diet members (who "made" three Prime Ministers Miyazawa, Hosagawa and Hata) in the early 1990s, Ozawa was welcomed and encouraged in Washington to manipulate the Japanese politics into a "two-parties" system (i.e., a Ozawa Party vs. the LDP), was feared however appeased from the PRC. When Ozawa visited Beijing and Jiang Zeming offered a "friendship" meeting with him, Ozawa arrogantly requested: "I am not interested in a ritual shake-hands. The meeting should be meaningful." This was a sharp contrast to his mentor Kanemaru, the original "king maker" of Japanese politics. When Kanemaru visited Beijing asking a meeting with China's "king maker"(Deng Xiaoping), before the Tiananmen Incident, Deng politely declined Kanemaru replying that he has retired and Kanemaru was not his personal friend. No need to say, it is the 1989 Tiananmen Incident that helped the post-Cold war Japanese politicians to face up their Chinese counterparts.

Now leading only 24 Diet members, Ozawa has lost his previous power influencing Japanese politics. Since the Japanese Socialist Party has completely been defeated, Ozawa is no longer so useful for the Japanese ruling class. The LDP has restored its ruling status without serious challenges from the opposition, first with the help of the corrupt Social Democratic Party, now by allying with Komei and Conservative parties. The PRC pays less interest in Ozawa, and Chinese media now correctly labels Ozawa a "rightist," which means a "militarist" with whom no need to appease. Ozawa thus calculated that it is worth to side distinctly with Japan's "China threat" advocates to attract public attentions.

As so many "misleading" statements repeated from the Japanese ruling politicians denying the Japanese atrocious history, Ozawa's nuclear statement also disclosed the real intention ("honne") among the Japanese ruling class to develop nuclear weapons, against Japan's "three non-nuclear principles" and the peace constitution. During the abortive conspiracy to destroy North Korea in June 1994 (when the Japanese Social Democratic Party was the largest part in the alliance government), Prime Minister Hata disclosed, "It is a piece of cake to create nuclear weapons for Japan. It only needs a few days by a few of Todai graduates."

It may take more than "a few days by a few Todai graduates" to make Japan a nuclear state. However, technically, there is no obstacle to prevent Japan from developing nuclear weapons within months with its nuclear related technology since Japan started to study it in the early 1930s. The "peaceful use" of nuclear energy has been one of the four taboo issues in Japanese politics since Japan resumed nuclear technology research and operation in the post-war period. Some of Japan's 39 nuclear reactors are operated beyond commercial terms.

For example, Japan spent 6 billion US$ for ten years to build the Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) Monju, because through FBR Japan could accumulate the key technology to develop nuclear weapons. Since 1988 the U.S. has authorized Japan to begin unlimited reprocessing of reactor fuel made from U.S.-supplied uranium (Washington Post, April 22, 1988); and over time, Japan alone stands to acquire more plutonium that is in the combined nuclear arsenals of the U.S. and the Soviet Union (Washington Post, June 6, 1988). As disclosed by Ozawa and other Japanese

sources, Japan reserves much more uranium and plutonium exceeding the capacity of existing nuclear facilities, so these nuclear material can be used to create thousands of nuclear bombs. Japan has also developed the transportation ability to deliver strategic as well as tactical nuclear weapons from its satellite, missile and jet fighter technology.

Kyoto University's Xinjun Zhang, majoring in Japan's nuclear policy, pointed out: "The Japanese government is now slowing down the Monju FBR operation for the unusual plutonium accumulation, because the cost is unbearable (which prevents many other counties from developing their FBRs) and the MOX technology enables plutonium recycling in other commercial reactors." "I do not think that Japan is now manufacturing any kind of nuclear weapons. However, it is also reasonable to doubt why Japan accumulated so much plutonium. FBR and MOX render a kind of justifications but it does not always sound plausible. Ozawa's speech about arming Japan with nuclear bombs, however, only made the Japanese fuel cycling looked more suspicious." "It is true that reliability of plutonium bombs requires nuclear test but it does not mean that a plutonium bomb must be reliable. Nuclear weapons are rather to be used as a tool of deterrence or threat. For uranium bombs, theoretically, their reliability does not require test."

However, to go nuclear publicly, there are several "obstacles" for the Japanese ruling class to "overcome."

Japan cannot go nuclear without first revising its current peaceful constitution. Although the Japanese ruling class now has effectively control over more than two thirds members in the Diet to revise (or reinterpret) the constitution and the Japanese Diet has revised, passed many defense related laws, the majority of Japanese people are still uncertain and feel insecure whether they should revise and how to revise the institution.

The U.S. has pushed Japan to rearm for decades and there is no excuse for the U.S. to prevent Japan going nuclear, even though the U.S. is not ready to deal with a nuclear Japan. From the new defense guidelines to a series of "Emergency Acts" Japan has been gradually transformed/mobilized to be able to participate global actions with the U.S. forces, and the ultimate goal of the U.S.-Japanese alliance is to conquer Korea and divide China permanently. Going nuclear becomes Japan's logic choice as long as Japan continues to be transformed along the current militaristic direction. It is likely a nuclear Japan would take a dependent U.K. model, rather than an independent French model, of its nuclear weapon policy.

The ending of Cold War in East Asia on June 4, 1989 sent the Japanese ruling class a misleading signal that they could (mis)lead Japan from an economic giant to a global political power. In more than one decade, they utilized the opportunity of China's isolation and oppressed the Chinese democratic movement; they succeeded in delimiting oppositions hence undermining the relative healthy Japanese democracy and independent foreign policy (for example, the single-member-district election "reform" enables the biggest party to obtain 80% Diet seats with 20% popular votes); they succeeded in sending the Self-defense forces abroad but failed in Japan's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council; and they showed no interest to study, adjust and improve Japan's stagnate economy. With Japan's deepening domestic conflicts among different classes, the Japanese ruling class has less and less options, except militarism.

Once a taboo for Japanese and remote nightmare for Asian people, the question "will Japan go nuclear" has reached a conclusion from the Japanese ruling class. How and when will Japan declare nuclear depend on the development of the international (especially in East Asia) political environment.

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April 2002

Responses From Readers

1. From: Shogo Suzuki, Australian National University <shogo.suzuki@anu.edu.au>

Jing Zhao seems to portray Japan's recent changes to its security policy (which, with the help of the U.S. apparently aims 'to conquer Korea and divide China permanently' - I would like to see convincing evidence of this) as primarily U.S. and Japanese rightist/militarist-driven. I believe the truth may be more complicated. For instance, China's missile firing exercises across the Taiwan Straits during Taiwan's elections did genuinely frighten the Japanese, who perceived China as a power still likely to resort to highly coercive military force, particularly in military and political matters. There are several further examples: China's defense spending remains intransparent, and is a cause of great anxiety to the Japanese. There was also a recent incident in which a Chinese naval ship was caught carrying out surveys in Japanese territorial waters.

Security policy decision-making cannot be a one-way process: Japan's security environment also plays an important part in determining the security policy choice the Japanese make. If the Japanese have seen their security environment as unstable and responded by strengthening their military (apart from domestic concerns, as discussed by Jing Zhao), China, and to a greater degree, North Korea have contributed to this to an extent. Uncertainty breeds dangerous security dilemmas. Despite the points I raised, I do agree with Jing Zhao in that there are worrying trends among the Japanese right, which quite understandably make the Chinese uneasy (and myself, for that matter) - but China has its part to play as well. Maybe the Chinese could make their military decision-making process more transparent, and abandon military options for their goal of reunification with Taiwan.

Hopefully, increasing economic and cultural interaction between the two countries will facilitate a deeper understanding of each other, and reduce unnecessary anxieties. In this, I am hopeful.

2. From: Todd Tilma, Univewrsity of Texas <ttilma@mail.utexas.edu>

As you say, Japan possess enough fissionable material to embark on the development of a nuclear deterrent, via some of its 39 reactors operating beyond commercial means. Unfortunately, having fissionable material available, as well as a viable delivery system does not mean one has the necessary industrial and technical infrastructure/capacity to create a sizable, usable, and safe nuclear deterrent. I only need to point to North Korea, who has both the capability to create enough fissionable material as well as the delivery system technology in order to develop usable atomic and/or nuclear weapons, as an example of the difficulty when one has the means, motives and possibly the methods at hand. If you believe there is no technical obstacle preventing Japan from "going nuclear", then would you please elaborate on who would do the refinement and construction of the nuclear package; where would the nuclear material be integrated into a usable weapon system; how would the integration and construction facilities be situated; and what would be the deployment method? Would Japan adopt a nuclear triad, vis a vis the U.S. and Russian Cold War model, or, as you suggest, a dependent U.K model, which is based on an asymmetrical triad, whereby most of the United Kingdom's nuclear contingent is sub based. Recall that one method for deployment of a strategic nuclear deterrent is land based ballistic missiles. Where, in your opinion, would that occur? On Honshu? Another deployment method is, of course, air delivered atomic and/or nuclear munitions that can be dead-dropped from aircraft already in the Japanese inventory. Yet physics and politics point to the fact that a modern nuclear strategic deterrence comes from the capacity for deploying stand-off attack munitions, such as sub-, air- or ground-launched guided and/or ballistic missiles and not dead-drop bombing. I refer you to the Indian and Pakistani deployment methods, Israeli deployment methods, as well as the regular suspects, as examples of this situation.

I agree with your colleague one only needs to say they have the bomb in order to achieve the necessary political effect. Actually testing a working device gives even greater force to the statement (Pakistan and

India). If my memory serves, the Israelis have never tested, nor said they have it, but it is an implied truth that they do, and thus they achieve the needed political gain. Atomic and nuclear weapons, in my humble opinion, are first and foremost political weapons, having a secondary military use.

I have similar thinking with you in that there are forces in Japan that, I believe, would like to have an Israeli option when dealing with perceived threats. I might not always agree with your political positions, but I must say, you do force me to not underestimate, and to critically look at, the rise of the right, not only in Japan, but throughout Asia and the world. So, I thank you for the posts.

BTW, in order to be fair about your "going nuclear" argument, you should know that NEC has recently built a supercomputer cluster with a processing power of 35.6 teraflops. ASCI White, which right now runs at 12 teraflops, but will hit 30 by next year, already has set off two e-bombs; simulations of nuclear explosions. Thus, Japan can do all the testing it needs to do (package design, yield measurement, etc.) on the computer, then build the components, BUT not integrate them. Since integration would only take a matter of days, if not hours, Japan can effectively go nuclear, just as India did in the mid-1970's but this time, without breaking any treaty nor setting off an explosion. One could argue that since the bombs are "de-constructed", they don't exist as a military weapon, and as such do not violate any part of the Japanese Constitution, or subsequent SOFA treaties, SDF laws, etc. But, Japan would then have the Israeli nuclear card, and as such, would fundamentally alter the political structure in East Asia. One could even see the LDP announcing that since the weapons aren't integrated, they only can be used to defend the nation, and are not offensive weapons.