

The Japanese Approach to Nuclear Weapons 2012-2018: The Role of the Nuclear Umbrella

トーマス・クーブランド

Thomas Coupland

Literature on the Japanese approach to nuclear weapons commonly has two themes: the debate on whether Japan is likely to build a weapon, and the apparent contradiction between its pro-disarmament stance and its support of the US nuclear umbrella. Interest in these two has increased in the second nuclear age, but the consensus remains that a Japanese bomb is very unlikely, and that Japan continues to pursue the two contradictory aims. This paper looks at the years 2012-2018, in particular at the security reforms under Abe, the election of Trump in the USA, and the renewed global disarmament movement culminating in the 2017 Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty, and assesses whether there was any change in approach. It concludes that there was not, with the nuclear umbrella remaining central to Japanese policy, and that the dilemma between disarmament and the nuclear umbrella became increasingly untenable.

Key Words : Nuclear Umbrella, Extended Nuclear Deterrence, Nuclear Disarmament

Introduction

Within the literature on Japan's approach to nuclear weapons there are two prominent themes. The first is the debate on how likely Japan is to build a weapon. The second focuses on the apparent contradiction between Tokyo's desire for a world without nuclear weapons and its reliance on the US nuclear umbrella. This paper focuses on the years 2012-2018 and argues that regarding the first question Japan remains unlikely as ever to go nuclear. In terms of the second issue, 2012-2018 witnessed the increasing tension in Japan's 'dual track' (Kase 2001: 55) approach of nuclear approval and denial, with Japan favouring deepening of the US alliance to the expense of its disarmament diplomacy.

The years 2012-2018 were chosen because 2012 saw the return of the LDP under Abe and the start of a period of relative domestic stability compared to the previous six Prime Ministers in six years. Abe is also regarded as having a distinctly militaristic approach

to Japan's security policy, which may have an impact on Japan's nuclear thinking. The election of Trump in the USA and the effect of his approach to the Japan-US alliance is worth considering. Finally, this period also saw the humanitarian-driven global disarmament movement which culminated in the 2017 Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty (NWPT), and Japan's continued rejection of this in 2018 serves as a convenient end point for the analysis. First, the paper will outline the two themes in the literature and their development up to 2012, before outlining how events 2012-2018 affected them in the second part.

The 'Will Japan Go Nuclear?' Debate

The idea that Japan could go nuclear has its basis in the works of realist IR thinkers (Hymans 2006: 155). According to realist logic, Japan has motivation to build a nuclear weapons programme because it faces threats from nuclear armed rivals in China, North Korea, and Russia. It cannot depend long term on

the nonproliferation regime nor protection from the USA, due to self-interest of states (ibid: 156). The 'latent' ability Japan has from its developed nuclear power industry (Hughes 2007: 80; Fitzpatrick 2015: 82) could be seen as support for this analysis.

However, the fact that realist predictions clearly overstated the likelihood of global proliferation has meant alternative explanations have become more prominent (Hymans 2006: 456-459). There is now a greater recognition that countries' thinking on nuclear weapons must take into account the domestic prism the leadership view them through (Hymans 2011: 154). Accordingly, many writers have focused on the Japanese domestic political taboo and national 'nuclear allergy' as constraints on a weapons programme (Ruble 2010: 57). Political, financial, and reputational costs (Kase 2001: 65; Hughes 2007), Japan's geographic and demographic weaknesses under a MAD type arrangement (Hughes 2007: 78), and domestic bureaucratic 'veto players' (Hymans 2011) also represent significant disincentives and constraints.

The post cold war period brought prominent politician's statements suggesting weakening of the domestic political taboo, and 'nuclear allergy' (Mochizuki 2007: 303), the increased threat from the DPRK, undermining of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by India, Pakistan and North Korea, and increased concerns over the credibility of the Extended Nuclear Deterrence (END) (Roehrig 2017: 9-10) from the US. As a result, writers began to reassess the prospects of Japan building a weapon (Mochizuki 2007; Hughes 2007).

The consensus was that it was very unlikely for the foreseeable future (Hughes 2007: 68), due to the factors mentioned above. Particularly relevant were the evaluations of the *1968/70 Internal Report* and the *1995 JDA Report*. Both reports were made in similar, if not more severe security environments to Japan faced in the 2000s. The 1968/1970 was written in the context of the 1964 Chinese test, NPT coming into force and US negotiations over the reversion of Okinawa (Kase 2001: 56) and 1995 after the North Korean 1993 missile test and subsequent crisis, and Japanese concerns about the indefinite extension of the NPT (Hughes 2007: 77). Neither the 1968/70 nor

1995 report believed that a nuclear weapon would be in Japan's interest. Importantly, the 1995 report also considered a "worst-case scenario" in which neighbouring countries seek a nuclear capability and neither the US END nor NPT longer existed and concluded the geographical and population constraints meant a nuclear weapon programme would still be unadvisable (Hughes 2007: 78-9). In addition, in Kurosawa's survey of the Japanese elite positions on the main nuclear questions, the vast majority of those who did believe Japan should build a nuclear weapon assumed this would be done with the support or permission of the US, and the vast majority of opinions on the issue in general believed it was "unthinkable that the US would allow a nuclear Japan" (2006: 132). Continued support of the nuclear umbrella was seen as a far better alternative (Mochizuki 2007: 304) to the new uncertainties surrounding Japanese security in the second nuclear age.

The conclusion that Japan would not build a bomb was borne out in events leading up to 2012. In the aftermath of the 2006 North Korean test, analysts saw no move towards a weapon (Schoff 2009: viii; Shankar and Onishi 2006) and commented on the 'restrained' (Howe and Campbell 2013: 101; Izumi and Furukawa 2007) nature of Japan's response. The 2011 Fukushima nuclear reactor accident reignited the public revulsion for 'all things nuclear' (Samuels and Schoff 2015: 491) and increased the number of veto players in the industry (Windram 2014). In addition, the 2006-2012 governments were too unstable to bring about many major policy changes, with six prime ministers in six years, the end of 50 year rule of the LDP and a brief ideologically different, but ineffective rule from the DPJ.

2012-2018 though, saw the return of a pro-military, pro-nuclear power Abe with large majorities, intent on security reform. In 2016, the US elected Trump, who had made several comments suggesting he valued alliances less than previous presidents and may be favourable to a Japanese nuclear bomb. This paper argues, however, that this remained as unlikely as ever, and that the period saw ever greater Japanese interest in the nuclear umbrella as the superior policy choice.

Japan's Dilemma: A World Without Nuclear Weapons versus Reliance on the Nuclear Umbrella

Japan is regarded as being a leading proponent of global disarmament and makes considerable international efforts to this end (Ruble 2010: 57-9). However, to many observers, this is undercut by the continued support of the US END. One example of this was when Japanese criticism of India's 1998 test was dismissed by India on the basis of Japan relying on the nuclear umbrella (Kurosawa 2006: 140).

Japan's ability to maintain this dual track approach became under strain in the 2000s. On the one hand the LDP under Prime Minister Fukuda jointly established the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Nuclear Disarmament (ICNND) with Australia, which had a specific focus on the responsibilities of US allies for a nuclear free world and recommended support for NFU (Evans and Kawaguchi 2009: xx). In part influenced by this document, the left-leaning DPJ under Hatoyama attempted to "tilt the balance between the two policy goals of nuclear disarmament and deterrence further in favor of the former" (Satoh 2009). On the other hand, the decay of the 1955 system had been accompanied by a growing interest in the workings of nuclear deterrence and steps to move from being a passive recipient of the nuclear umbrella to an active partner (Satoh 2009: 25; Satoh 2014; Roehrig 2017: 35) through initiatives like the Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD). The strong desire to maintain the nuclear umbrella in its full form was occasionally at the expense of disarmament measures, for example the Japanese officials opposition to US Non First Use (NFU) (Satoh 2009: 27; Cossa and Glosserman 2011: 132) and pressuring the US not to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) (Fruhling and O'Neill 2017: 17) and to keep the TLAM/N as a "crucial symbol of US credibility" (Roehrig 2017: 110-1). Despite the significant credibility concerns surrounding END, it appeared that it remained vital to the Japanese leadership, both for its security guarantee against North Korea and China and for the political symbolism of the overall health of the alliance (Roehrig 2017: 9-10).

2012-2018 was to see the humanitarian-driven disar-

mament movement resulting in the 2017 Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty, which was on one hand an opportunity for Japan's disarmament diplomacy, but on the other, intensified the dilemma, due to the US opposition to the treaty. This paper argues that in this period Japan favoured strengthening the END at the expense of its disarmament diplomacy, and contrary to the global disarmament cause.

2012-2018: Security Reforms, Trump, NWPT

1. The Return of Abe and Security Reforms

Abe's second term is regarded as pursuing security-oriented realist thinking, often to much opposition from the pacifist attitude in the general public (Auslin 2016: 125), in what is known as 'the Abe Doctrine' -that Japan's military should be expanded into an international role to better defend the country's national interest (Envall 2018: 2). This was in the context of the domestic change from away from the 1955 system, with particular emphasis on centralising security decision making power in the Prime Minister's office.

From 2012, Abe's government pushed through several institutional, legal, diplomatic, and military reforms (Auslin 2016: 125) Some particularly important changes to Japan's approach to security under Abe were firstly the creation of a National Security Council in 2013 as a centrally controlled body to manage security crises. Secondly, Abe increased spending on the military from 4.71 trillion yen in 2012 to 5.17 trillion in 2017 (Envall 2018: 12). While this was arguably still rather modest, it was an increase which contrasted with previous years' stagnation (Auslin 2016: 130). Third was the controversial law to allow Japan's military to act overseas, a reversal of a 70 year pacifist stance (ibid: 125).

The reforms should not be seen as signs of Japan turning to a greater conventional military capability to compensate for less focus on the nuclear umbrella's ability to ensure Japan's security. In fact, it can be argued that the 2013 NDCG released under Abe placed the nuclear umbrella in greater importance than previous documents, (Roehrig 2017: 102),

with stronger language describing “extended deterrence provided by the US with nuclear deterrence at its core (as) indispensable” and declared that Japan would support this through close co-operation with the US and measures of its own, such as Ballistic Missile Defence (Japan Ministry of Defense 2013: 6). Japan - US dialogue continued in the EDD talks and the US let Japanese officials visit aspects of specific weapons systems to enhance credibility (Roehrig 2017: 109), such as the control centre for an ICBM in Montana in 2013 and the Sandia laboratories in 2014. Much of the focus has been enabling Japan to cooperate with its allies, such as the 2014 Diet approval of changing the type of arms Japan is able to export to the US to enable coordination on defence technology (Auslin 2016: 130). Moves towards greater collective defence ability would also enable work on the nuclear umbrella with South Korea. Thus, while significant security changes were made under Abe, they represented continuation of a growing role as a partner with the US in extended deterrence, with supporting the nuclear umbrella an important aspect of this.

2. The Trump Shock

The election of Trump in the US initially brought with it fear that Japan would not be able to continue the arrangement it had with the US. He made references to wanting to renegotiate terms with allies so that they were more favourable to the US and claimed to be prepared to walk away if this did not happen (Jackson 2017: 35). It thus seemed that under Trump, ‘America-first’ thinking would be dominant, with the nuclear umbrella regarded as a private good the US could choose to provide, based on the leadership’s perceived short term interests. This also suggested an end to the trend of increasing partnership over the nuclear umbrella since the advent of the EDD talks. Trump had also reignited speculation that Japan could go nuclear. Specifically, he had made suggestions during the election campaign that Japan should build its own nuclear weapons and that the US could abandon its allies if they were attacked by North Korea (Finnegan 2016). As earlier suggested in this paper, the US appearing to accept a Japanese nuclear weapon would remove one of the strongest reasons for not developing one in the eyes of the Japanese elite. The result for some observers was that

there was “more than enough reason to begin seeking alternative ways to ensure Japanese security” (Hikotani 2017: 21).

This section, however, argues that Japan was not motivated to move away from reliance on the nuclear umbrella towards a nuclear weapons programme by the election of Trump. The argument will be demonstrated by first explaining that the extent to which Trump’s campaign rhetoric might have motivated change by Japan to its nuclear thinking ought not to be overstated. He arguably had neither the intent or capability to change the US’s long term commitment to deterring attacks on Japan and the Japanese did not take his rhetoric as indicating such. Second, in practice, the Trump administration showed commitment to Japan and the nuclear umbrella once in office. Third, this section will outline the main explanations in the literature for this continuation. Fourth will be the caveat that Trump’s approach does not make it easy for Japan to ally itself with the US on nuclear issues.

From the outset, Trump’s campaign rhetoric was likely to have limited effect on Japanese opinion. Trump himself quickly rejected the claim he had suggested Japan should develop a nuclear weapon (LoBianco 2016) and his thoughts were further ‘clarified’ by a campaign adviser, who stated that Trump would “not ask Japan or South Korea to invest in building nuclear weapons” (as cited in Carroll 2016). In general, while much has been made of controversial statements by Trump in many countries, it is doubtful that the Japanese public attached the same level of importance to them (Hikotani 2017: 24). At the level of officials, several aides to the President were reported to have advised the Japanese not to put too much meaning into the appearance of radical change to policy Trump’s public rhetoric (Brunnstrom 2016). In fact Michaels and Williams demonstrate that the substance of Trump’s statements on nuclear weapons has been reasonably consistent with previous Republican Presidents when viewed over the past few decades (2017: 54).

Regarding Trump’s attitude towards the END, it is doubtful that he actually saw it as easily disposable. As discussed earlier, the US had a long-standing view that preventing Japan from developing a nuclear

weapon was a priority. In order, to actually enact a policy change away from this, Trump would have needed to make foreign policy a bigger priority and spend political capital on it rather than other concerns such as health care or the Mexican border wall, in the face of likely bipartisan opposition (Lind 2018: 243).

It is more convincing Trump's statements during this period should be seen as part of his perspective on positioning in negotiating strategy. For instance Lind (2018: 244) argues that a trend in interaction between the US and Japan was that Trump wanted to pay more for its defence but Japan was reluctant to do so and concludes that "(u)nder Trump, the two countries have thus settled into their longstanding pattern since World War II, in which Washington seeks, and Tokyo accepts, minimal and gradual increases in Japan's capabilities and roles". It is more than possible that Trump viewed negotiations in this way. For instance, another key takeaway from Michaels and Williams' survey on Trump's long-term rhetoric was a strong linguistic theme of being someone with belief in the merits of uncompromising negotiating stances. At least part of his combative language towards allies could be explained by a desire to present an identity as a tough talking 'dealmaker' (2017: 71).

In addition to this point about the theme of positioning and bargaining running through Trump's interaction with Japan, in much of the literature on Trump's effect on alliances, it was recognised that "Trump the President will be under very different public, political, and personal constraints than Trump the candidate" (Michaels and Williams 2017: 56). In fact, following on from this, much of the actual rhetoric from the Trump administration once in power was supportive of maintaining the status quo with Japan. In contrast to pre-election demands that Japan contribute more to the alliance or face abandonment, US Defence Secretary Mattis called the alliance with Japan 'a model of cost-sharing' in a 2017 visit which was well received by Japan (Lind 2018: 242). The meeting between Abe and Trump soon after that was regarded as particularly positive (Jibiki and Moriyasu 2017), with the reaction to a sudden North Korean nuclear test being a statement by Trump that the US stood "100%" behind Japan (ibid). Similarly, a Joint Statement proclaimed that "(t)he US commit-

ment to defend Japan through the full range of US military capabilities, both nuclear and conventional, is unwavering" (Joint Statement 2017). Japan was also pleased to receive written confirmation that the Senkaku islands were protected under the security treaty.

Overall, rather than Trump causing radical departure from Japan's approach to nuclear weapons, the transition represented more continuity than change in the US attitude to the nuclear umbrella. From Japan's side, Abe clearly prioritised maintaining the credibility of the US promise to defend Japan. In particular, the effort Japan put into managing Trump in order to maintain the alliance is commented upon (Jibiki and Moriyasu 2017; Hikotani 2017: 22-3), with Hikotani describing the particular strategy as being one of careful disarming and disengaging Trump from policies which could damage the nuclear umbrella's credibility (2017: 22-23).

From Japan's point of view, in terms of turning towards creating a nuclear weapon, it might have been possible that a minority within Japan would speak out in favour of such a policy, but as with earlier in the decade, this would not have been advantageous for Japan (The Trump Administration 2017: 3) and there is no reason to believe this was not still a well accepted view within the Abe government. This logic stands even if the government had interpreted the Trump administration's behaviour as being both enough of a damage to END's credibility and enough of an approval of a Japanese weapon programme to outweigh its other political and financial costs and constraints. As discussed in the previous section, there are many problems with the idea that Japan could easily change its latent status to possession of an actual weapon. 'Nuclear breakout' would not be easily achieved in a short period, and Japanese proliferation would far more likely to be in "slow motion" (Holmes and Yoshihara 2012: 129), meaning it prudent to wait for a change in regime in the US, rather than explore the financially and politically costly alternative of a nuclear programme (Knopf 2017: 31). Careful diplomacy playing up to the latent capability would be a satisfactory alternative and not a departure from previous strategy. Overall, it makes sense to conclude that Trump's election made little difference to the Japanese approach to nuclear

weapons 2016-2018.

This, however, is not to say that 2016-2018 was worry-free for Japan regarding Trump and nuclear weapons. Japan's concerns about the two North Korean issues of abductions (Mori and Nobuhiro 2018) and lack of success in multilateral approaches to nonproliferation appeared to be bypassed by Trump's bilateral meetings with Kim. In a longer term sense regarding nonproliferation, Trump's use of media often meant sending confusing nuclear signalling to allies and adversaries (Michaels and Williams 2017: 67). In addition, the removal of the JCPOA in Iran raised the possibility of proliferation in the Middle East (Knopf 2017: 32), which would be a blow to the international regime, a further concern for Japan. All this has been leading to calls for Japan to take a lead in the maintenance of the global liberal order due to Trump's reluctance to do so (Hikotani 2017: 20). Finally, as will be discussed in the section to follow, Trump's attitude to disarmament was much more at odds with the Japanese public than the previous administration (Michaels and Williams 2017: 62). Evidently, there is much potential for the Trump administration to cause difficulties for Japan, especially in nuclear weapons policy. However, the main point in this section is that in 2016-2018 there was little reason for or evidence of Japan turning away from close co-operation with the US and commitment to the nuclear umbrella, or any sign of change in attitude to developing a nuclear weapon. Initial international concern among allies and beneficiaries of the nuclear umbrella did not translate into any consideration of alternative options. Instead, most of the government's energy was spent on making sure the credibility of the US commitment remained unaffected by Trump's diplomatic unpredictability.

3. The Disarmament/END Dilemma: NWPT Negotiations

The dilemma reconciling the gap between steps towards global nuclear disarmament and support of the nuclear umbrella continued to be an issue under Abe 2012-2018. One illustrative episode was the government's decision to be the only country to sign two similarly worded statements on the humanitarian

consequences of nuclear weapons, one emphasising that nuclear weapons must not be used because of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and the other recognising that security concerns were also important (Akiyama 2015: 444 Fitzpatrick 2015: 76-7). However, it was the movement to create NWPT based on an effort to refocus the disarmament movement on a humanitarian argument, rather than security (Potter 2017: 75) which suggested that Japan could no longer sit uncomfortably on the fence on this issue, and in the end as with the NFU NPR issue under the DPJ, showed Japan would favour support of the END to the expense of disarmament.

There are a great deal of reasons why the NWPT would appeal to Japan's national-psyche driven desire to realise its long-term goal of global disarmament. Firstly, one main premise of the treaty was that nuclear weapons were fundamentally inhumane (Fihn 2017: 44) and the disarmament argument should focus on rejecting them because of their humanitarian consequences (Potter 2017: 75). This fits very well with the constructivist interpretation of Japanese thinking on nuclear weapons. For example, Rublee quotes a senior Japanese nuclear expert in saying: "the first entry point of any conversation on nuclear weapons is Hiroshima and Nagasaki—not the role of weapons in terms of security or strategy, but the atomic devastation Japan suffered" (2009: 57). In addition, the aim of the treaty was to strengthen the international norm against nuclear weapons (Fihn 2017: 47). Again, as Rublee demonstrated, the Japanese leadership is regarded, at least to some extent as having absorbed international norms against nuclear weapons (2009: 98). From a liberal institutionalist perspective, the NWPT offered a seemingly attractive alternative framework to the NPT (Thakur 2017: 72), a treaty which Japan and other states are not entirely satisfied with. Indeed, as discussed earlier, although Japan has been a strong supporter of the NPT in contributions, accepting inspections and rhetoric, neither its joining nor acceptance of indefinite extension in 1995 were straightforward. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the potential for Japanese reconsideration of its nuclear policy in the mid 2000s is at least in part regarded as being caused by dissatisfaction with the NPT being unable to prevent North Korea becoming a nuclear threat. What is more, Japan believes its role in global disarmament

diplomacy is important and there was a sense that Japan would be key to realisation of this vision and could play a leading role. According to Thakur, “Japan is the emotional touchstone of nuclear weapons policy” (2018b: 12) and the treaty would gain significant weight from it switching sides to the side of the majority of states, including those in its immediate region (Thakur 2018a: 84). In sum, the treaty offered the clearest definition yet of how Japan’s pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons could manifest in a more immediate coherent strategy and there was motivation for Japan to pursue it.

Fundamentally, though, the logic of the NWPT attempted to delegitimise nuclear deterrence (Thakur 2018b: 13), which was plainly incompatible with Japan’s long-standing support of the nuclear umbrella, which had been reiterated a number of times in the past decade by a variety of governments, including the pro-disarmament DPJ. Another important premise of the argument behind the NWPT was Tannenwald’s nuclear taboo (1999), in particular that it was the international non-nuclear norm, rather than deterrence which had prevented their use (Thakur 2018b: 21). Again, Japanese policymakers clearly did not agree with this interpretation. In the event, Japan declined to take part in the negotiations and justified it much along the lines of the argument of all other states under the nuclear umbrella. These states all stressed that deterrence was necessary due to the reality of security conditions, reiterated their belief that the “step by step” approach they had outlined (A Progressive Approach 2016) was superior and believed that the NWPT undermined the NPT, which although imperfect, was necessary to prevent proliferation. These were all long held views by the nuclear umbrella states and it was therefore unsurprising that Japan would reject the treaty at that time and should not by itself be seen as a change in policy against a global disarmament agenda.

Although Japan’s rejection of the Treaty is compatible with its, and umbrella states’ more generally, thinking on nuclear weapons, it is noticeable that Japan refused to take part in negotiations when it could have done, or make a statement as an observer, which would have been permitted by the NWPT (Yoshida 2018: 481). This was especially notable as the domestic disarmament audience expected more

(Hiroshima Mayor Questions Nuclear Nations 2018). The symbolically important hibakusha for instance declared themselves ‘heartbroken’ by Japan’s decision (Hibakusha ‘Heartbroken’ 2017). In addition, in the rejection of the treaty, Abe claimed a future role of acting as a bridge between Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and Non-NWS (Hurst 2018). However, by not participating in the negotiations on a treaty overwhelmingly supported by the Non-NWS, it is difficult to see how Japan could fulfil such a role when taking such a strong stance alongside the NWS. For example, Thakur argues that “along with other umbrella allies, Japan sits uncomfortably between the NWS and non-NWS. This could be turned to advantage by acting as an intermediary between the concerns of the non-NWS and the policies and practices of the NWS” (2018b: 27-8) and explains that examples of such would be asking the US and Russia to take weapons off high alert and support a NFU stance. Strikingly, Japan’s refusal to take part was in contrast to the Netherlands, also an umbrella state, which did take part in the negotiations (Yoshida 2018: 481). That Japan refused to sign the treaty was unsurprising, due to the radical rejection of END it would have meant, something that no other NWS or umbrella state was anywhere near prepared to do. However, it is particularly important to note that Japan not only was against signing the treaty, but refused to take part in the negotiations, something that the Netherlands, another umbrella state, was prepared to do.

Evidence suggests that desire to avoid upsetting the US under Trump played at least some part in this decision. Ota (2017: 206), quotes a senior Japanese official of the National Security Secretariat:

(With respect to potential Japanese participation in the negotiation,) there have been different opinions inside the Japanese government. Some have argued that it still may be possible for Japan to participate in the treaty negotiation. But, others said that Japan would be accused of deceiving the US by the (Donald) Trump administration, if Japan decides to participate. If this is the case, the Japan-US relationship would be hurt in the long run.

The idea that Japan might be seen as deceiving the US referred to the statement that Trump had

supported the US backing Japan with the nuclear umbrella (Ota 2017: 206). It is conceivable that a meeting between Tillerson and Kishida, in which the US is believed to have told Japan it opposed Japan participating in the talks, may have been influential in Japan's decision (Trump administration opposes Japan's participation 2017).

Furthermore, the comparative lack of support for Japan's 2017 annual disarmament resolution was reportedly due to the unpopularity of weakening of the language from the previous years' "Reaffirming its commitment towards a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons" to "Reaffirms, in this regard, the unequivocal undertaking of the nuclear weapon states to fully implement the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," alongside the lack of reference to the NWPT. In particular, there was reportedly a feeling among the critical NWPT states that Japan had changed the wording due to pressure from the US (Japan criticized 2017).

Japan's refusal to take part in the negotiations thus did indicate that when steps towards a world without nuclear weapons could possibly be taken in accordance with its stated intention-to act as a bridge between NWS and Non-NWS-but would upset the US under Trump, Japan would avoid taking them. While Abe giving into Trump was a reversal of the previous occasions where the US under Obama had been pressured by a nervous Japan not to reduce the role of nuclear weapons, it similarly demonstrated recognition by Japan of the politically symbolic importance of the nuclear umbrella.

As a result, 2018 ended with a growing feeling among some observers, that Japan's stated intent to be supportive of global disarmament measures no longer carried much meaning and that it was a distinct second priority to the US END (Thakur 2018b: 24; Japan's weakened UN draft 2017). For instance, former DPJ Foreign Minister Okada reflected in a 2018 interview:

Looking back, I wonder what Japan has been doing to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. Not too many activities occur to my mind. It is true that Japan has broadcast its message as the only nation that has suffered the aftermath of

atomic bombings, but the country has committed almost nothing towards the creation of a world without nuclear weapons... I estimate that Japan is not very trusted as a champion of nuclear disarmament because of its obsession with the US-Japan alliance or the nuclear umbrella (Yoshida 2018: 481-484).

Conclusion

In contrast to the idealist thinking of the DPJ under Hatoyama and the Obama drive for a world without nuclear weapons between 2009-2012, the post 2012 period of nuclear thinking was dominated by the two hard-headed nationalists Abe and Trump. Nonetheless, the basic direction of Japanese nuclear thinking remained the same. Except for some slight concern over the US commitment to the umbrella at the beginning of Trump's Presidency, there was no incentive in this period for Japan to consider thinking about how to negotiate the practically insurmountable obstacles to a nuclear weapon. The US umbrella clearly remained attractive to Japan, with Abe risking significant public backlash to improve Japan's military's ability to cooperate with the US, at least in part in order to supplement the END. In addition, the lack of interest in the NWPT negotiations suggested the political symbolism of the nuclear umbrella was becoming a more influential factor than the desire for global nuclear disarmament in Japan's perennial deterrence-disarmament dilemma, at least with Trump in the White House.

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