

# Japan and America's Nuclear Posture

*An Update*

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## A Tale of Two Japans

This update to a 2010 report on *Japan and America's Nuclear Posture* by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) clarifies previously unresolved questions about Japanese government input into the formulation of the Obama administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). UCS interviewed knowledgeable U.S. and Japanese participants in the process the administration used to collect and evaluate Japanese views on the NPR. We also consulted available open sources for additional information on Japanese views on U.S. nuclear weapons policy and the Obama administration's NPR.

The information UCS obtained for this update demonstrates:

- The Obama administration made an unprecedented and well-organized effort to solicit Japanese views on the NPR and to accommodate those views in both the language and the implementation of the NPR.
- Two contradictory Japanese views on the NPR were presented to the Obama administration. It accepted one view and accommodated it in the NPR while interpreting the other—that of elected Japanese officials—as a threat to U.S. interests.
- This accommodation could increase the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy in Asia. The opposing Japanese view, if adopted, would have decreased the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy in Asia.

The administration's response to Japanese input to the NPR raises several concerns. It appears inconsistent with the commitment President Obama made in Prague to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy (Obama April 5, 2009). It raises questions about the Obama administration's influence over an internal Japanese dispute over who controls Japan's national security policy. Finally, the accommodations granted to Japan in the NPR—accommodations that could increase the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy—are unlikely to reassure those Japanese who may have doubts about the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.

### The Obama Administration's Nuclear Posture Review

The U.S. Department of Defense describes the NPR as “a legislatively mandated review that establishes U.S. nuclear policy, strategy, capabilities and force posture for the next five to ten years” (“Nuclear Posture Review” 2010). In August 2009 the department held briefings on the NPR for various stakeholders, including U.S. arms control experts (Lewis September 23, 2010). In his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2009, President Obama indicated that his administration's deliberations on the NPR were already underway (Obama September 23, 2009).

A Pentagon fact sheet issued on 6 August 2009 stated that the United States had begun “extensive engagement” with U.S. allies that would continue throughout the NPR review process (Lewis August 06, 2009). Bradley Roberts, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Ballistic Missile Defense Policy at the time and a co-chair of the NPR review process, said the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the State Department had formed an interagency team that “began the review with

extensive international consultations” intended to provide an opportunity for “international stakeholders in American nuclear strategy to express their views” on the NPR. Mr. Roberts noted, “One of the countries most eager to seize this opportunity was Japan,” which “came early and often to the State/DOD process and to my office.” He described the consultations with Japan on the NPR as “path breaking” since “it had been a long time since the United States had spoken with its allies outside of Europe” about U.S. nuclear policies and capabilities” (Roberts August 26 2013).

One of the key issues confronted during the NPR review process was the question of whether or not the United States should declare that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter and, if necessary, respond to the use of nuclear weapons by another country. Proponents of the “sole purpose” declaration, including UCS, argued that making clear the United States will not use nuclear weapons first would reduce the military role of nuclear weapons and help reduce the incentive for other nations to acquire nuclear weapons. The Obama administration ultimately decided the United States was “not prepared at the present time to adopt a universal policy that deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons” because of “a narrow range of contingencies in which U.S. nuclear weapons may still play a role in deterring a conventional or CBW attack against the United States or its allies and partners” (“Nuclear Posture Review” 2010).

One of those contingencies appears to be a conventional war in East Asia. According to the co-director of the NPR review, the U.S. nuclear weapons policy that emerged from the NPR calls for “tailored” U.S. nuclear options that can be used to “signal resolve” in support of Japan at a critical moment in such a war. Mr. Roberts identified this option as “dual-capable [conventional and nuclear-armed] aircraft that can be globally deployed.” The planning and preparation associated with making this capability available for use in East Asia could signal an increased role for U.S. nuclear weapons in the region. During a period of heightened military tension in March 2013, the United States sent two nuclear-capable B-2 stealth bombers to the region as part of a military exercise with South Korea. U.S. commanders told the New York Times the gesture was intended to demonstrate an ability to “provide extended deterrence to our allies in the Asia-Pacific region.” Press reports noted this was the first time the United States announced the use of the B-2 in military exercises in the region (Shanker et al. March 28, 2013).

## **Japanese Participation in the Nuclear Posture Review**

An important part of the debate over the NPR that has not been widely discussed is which Japanese voices the United States was hearing and how it responded to them.

Historically there have been two sets of Japanese voices on U.S. nuclear weapons policy. The first is the voice of a solid majority of the Japanese public, expressed both in law and the public statements of Japan’s elected representatives. That voice is strongly opposed to the use of U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan and strongly in favor of existing Japanese government public policies banning U.S. nuclear weapons from entering Japan’s sovereign territory. The second is a small and secretive group of bureaucrats in Japan’s defense and foreign policy institutions who may have different views. In the past, these bureaucrats concluded secret agreements with the United States that allowed U.S. nuclear weapons to enter Japanese territory without the approval of Japan’s elected representatives and in violation of Japanese law. Their views on nuclear weapons policy, like the secret agreements, are intentionally hidden from public view because of the potential domestic political consequences.

U.S. policy-makers often argue that the views of these Japanese bureaucrats indicate Japan might develop its own nuclear weapons if the U.S. does not strengthen U.S. commitments regarding the possible use of U.S. nuclear weapons in Japan’s defense.

The tension between the public positions of elected Japanese officials and the private practices of unelected Japanese bureaucrats became an issue in the ascendancy of the new political coalition that came to power in Japan around the time of the beginning of the Obama administration’s NPR review. Although not confined to national security or nuclear weapons issues, the tensions between these two domestic Japanese political forces played out in a contest for influence with the Obama administration over the NPR and its provisions regarding extended nuclear deterrence for Japan.

In 2008 the U.S. Congress created a commission—commonly known as the Perry-Schlesinger commission’s after its chairs, former U.S. secretaries of defense William Perry and James Schlesinger—to prepare an advisory report for the upcoming nuclear posture review. The commission report, released in early 2009, contained references to testimony given by four political officers from the Japanese Embassy in Washington. Their testimony contained a specific request to retain the TLAM/N, a nuclear cruise missile removed from U.S. submarines in 1992, placed in storage, and scheduled for retirement in 2014. The four Japanese political officers reportedly made other requests to the commission regarding the need for additional U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to ensure the credibility of the nuclear deterrent the United States extends to Japan, sometimes referred to as the “nuclear umbrella.”

Bradley Roberts was a Senior Researcher and the Lead Writer of the commission report. In a recent presentation at the Stimson Center, Mr. Roberts explained that although the Obama administration decided to retire the TLAM/N, the policy decision to substitute the “tailored” nuclear option of “dual capable aircraft that can be globally deployed” was an “accommodation” made, in part, to Japanese concerns raised during consultations on the NPR. This implies the input provided by the Japanese government during the NPR review process was consistent with the testimony of the four Japanese political officers to the Perry-Schlesinger commission.

However, this was not the case. High-level government officials in Japan were concerned about the information the Obama administration was receiving about Japanese views on the NPR from people not who did not represent the newly elected Japanese government. As a result, the offices of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Japanese Diet made extraordinary efforts to communicate a dramatically different Japanese perspective on the NPR and America’s nuclear posture to the Obama administration and the relevant committees of the U.S. Congress.

For example, in a December 2009 letter to the U.S. secretaries of State and Defense, Japanese Foreign Minister Okada wrote that extended deterrence does not require the maintenance of policies, strategies or weapons that conflict with the U.S. President’s goal of a moving towards a world without nuclear weapons. Okada also informed the United States that the Japanese government supported a new U.S. declaratory policy and posture where “the role of nuclear weapons (would) be restricted to deterrence of the use of nuclear weapons and that the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon state members of the NPT (would) be banned.” In effect, the new Japanese government asked the U.S. to adopt a “sole use” policy and to reduce the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan. Mr. Okada repeated the government’s support for these changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy in an address to the Japanese Diet the following January.

A month later Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama expressed his support for the same changes to U.S. nuclear weapons policy in public remarks to the Diet. In his address he noted these changes were also recommended by the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), a joint commission whose recommendations were approved by the preceding government of Japan (Evans et al. November 2009).

Finally, 204 of the 467 sitting members of the Diet signed a letter supporting these reductions in the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan. They presented the letter in person to U.S. Ambassador John Roos shortly after the Prime Minister’s remarks. The letter was addressed to President Obama and copied to the vice president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the national security advisor, and the chairs and ranking members of the House Armed Services Committee, the Senate Committee on Armed Services, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

In an interview with former Foreign Minister Okada conducted for this update, he told UCS that at the time both he and Prime Minister Hatoyama believed the United States would see these actions as demonstrations of Japanese support for the new U.S. President and the policies he articulated in Prague (Okada 2013). That is not how they were received in Washington, however.

## **The Obama Administration’s Response**

The communications on the NPR from the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Japanese Diet clearly disturbed the Obama administration, in part because of other steps the new Japanese government was taking.\* Jeffrey Bader, the senior director for East Asian affairs on the National Security Council at the time, strongly criticized the Japanese government for suggesting “ideas that would have reversed decades of U.S. nuclear doctrine and shaken the alliance” (Bader 2012). In an interview conducted for this update, Mr. Bader confirmed the Obama administration interpreted these Japanese statements—intended as signs of support for the President’s nuclear disarmament policies—as part of a broad and “unwelcome” shift in Japanese foreign policy that was “tilted towards China” (Bader 2013).

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\* The Hatoyama government wanted to renegotiate an agreement with the United States on the relocation of a U.S. military facility in Okinawa. The existing agreement was opposed by the local population of the southern Japanese island, which wanted the base closed, not just relocated. Hatoyama campaigned on closing the base. He also wanted to create a new East Asian regional trading block, similar to the European Union, which did not include the United States as a member. His government discussed the proposal with China and sent a large delegation of Japanese legislators on an official visit to China. According to Mr. Bader, the Obama administration viewed all of these developments as signs of a more independent Japanese foreign policy.

The contributions of Japan's elected representatives to the U.S. NPR debate are sometimes overlooked. In a lengthy public briefing in which he discussed the NPR consultative process with Japan in detail, Bradley Roberts failed to mention the different views presented by Japanese representatives in the NPR process. He presented the views he personally obtained through Japan's "early and frequent" participation in the consultative process—views consistent with those given to the Perry-Schlesinger commission—as the views of "Japan" rather than as the views of one constituency in Japan. Because these views, rather than the views of the sitting elected government of Japan, were accommodated in the NPR, it seems clear the Obama administration made a choice about which set of Japanese views it believed carried greater weight.

The Obama administration's choice may be connected to longstanding U.S. concerns about the possibility of a nuclear-armed Japan. Bradley Roberts obliquely suggested this possibility in his recent remarks at the Stimson Center, and Kurt Campbell, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs at the time of the NPR review, once argued that Japan could reach a nuclear "tipping point" without sufficient reassurances from the United States. (Campbell et al. 2004)

However, in our 2010 report on *Japan and America's Nuclear Posture*, UCS presents evidence that even Japan's most conservative defense analysts are on record stating, unequivocally, there is no imaginable scenario, including a complete collapse of the U.S. –Japan alliance, in which developing nuclear weapons would be considered advantageous to Japanese national security. (Kulacki 2010)

## Three Concerns

### A QUESTIONABLE CHOICE

In his Prague address President Obama made clear that although he was re-committing the United States to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, he recognized it would be a long process and difficult to achieve as long as other nations possessed these weapons. He did, however, promise to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy and to urge other nations to do the same when it was possible to do so.

UCS and many other U.S. and international organizations working to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons argued that one of the most important steps the Obama administration could take to reduce the role of nuclear weapons was to limit their use to the sole purpose of deterring, and if necessary responding, to the use of nuclear weapons by others. UCS was encouraged that the newly elected leadership of Japan supported such a declaration, and surprised that the Obama administration's nuclear posture review stated that it was not yet prepared to commit to a sole purpose declaration in part because of the perceived need to use nuclear weapons in some conventional contingencies, including a conventional conflict that might threaten Japan.

This apparent inconsistency raises questions about who speaks for Japan on the question of the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in its defense. The Obama administration discounted the views of the newly elected Japanese government, some of which it viewed as threatening to U.S. interests. Although it claims to have engaged in unprecedented consultations with Japan over the NPR, the outcome and subsequent discussion of those consultations reflected only one set of Japanese voices. U.S. officials close to the NPR claim these voices called for an increased role for U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan, but the Japanese officials themselves said nothing in public to contradict the statements of the elected Japanese government. Yet, the Obama administration chose to accommodate these silent and secretive Japanese voices.

The Obama administration's choice between two clear and opposing Japanese perspectives contributed to a U.S. NPR unwilling to commit to a sole purpose declaration, and which includes plans for a "tailored" nuclear deterrent employing nuclear weapons carried on dual-capable aircraft that can be deployed on Japan's behalf in a conventional conflict. This choice was made despite, not as a result, of the views on the NPR contributed by Japan's highest elected officials. Presented with an opportunity to select a new nuclear policy and posture that would have decreased the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in the region with the support of the highest elected officials in the Japanese government, the administration chose instead to place greater emphasis on the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in the region based on input it received from other Japanese government sources. We discuss this decision further below.

## CONTINUING SECRECY

Unfortunately, because of the secrecy surrounding the NPR consultations with Japan, it remains unclear, except in the case of the four Japanese political officers identified in the Perry-Schlesinger report, which Japanese sources participated in the NPR consultations or how they were able to convince the Obama administration their views on the NPR were more legitimate than those of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and a sizable constituency in the Japanese Diet. UCS interviewed several Japanese defense experts advising the consultations and was told the U.S. threatened to shut down the NPR consultation process if there were leaks from the Japanese side. Direct requests to U.S. officials for a list of the names of the Japanese participants in the NPR consultations were denied on grounds the consultations were classified.

Lack of transparency about U.S. nuclear weapons policy as it relates to Japan is nothing new and remains established U.S. practice. Since 1971 Japan's public national policy—expressed in its *Three Non-Nuclear Principles*—explicitly forbids U.S. nuclear weapons from entering Japan's sovereign territory (Sato 1974). U.S. policy, however, is to neither confirm nor deny the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons on U.S. military facilities located in Japan or on U.S. naval vessels and aircraft that transit through Japan. Declassified U.S. government documents reveal that during the Cold War U.S. nuclear weapons were regularly introduced into Japan on U.S. Navy vessels visiting Japanese ports (Wampler 2010).

Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Edwin Reischauer stated this was permitted under agreements between the two governments. Previous Japanese governments denied the existence of what came to be known as the “secret agreements” on nuclear weapons policy between the U.S. and Japan. Foreign Minister Okada launched an investigation into the existence of the agreements and uncovered documents in the ministry's archives that validate Reischauer's statement (Kuhn March 11, 2010)

The Obama administration interpreted Mr. Okada's investigation in the same anti-American context it placed his statements of support for a sole purpose declaration. Senior Director for East Asia on the National Security Council Jeffrey Bader identified the investigation as one of two “unwelcome” and “disturbing” Japanese ideas that would “shake the alliance” (Bader 2012). U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Kurt Campbell and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Chip Gregson traveled to Japan to pressure the Japanese Foreign Ministry to end what they perceived as a challenge to the continuation of the “non-confirm, non-deny” policy regarding U.S. nuclear weapons in Japan (Wikileaks 2009). Okada continued and concluded his investigation despite the pressure, but there was no statement indicating any change in U.S. policy regarding notification.

In an interview conducted for this update, Mr. Okada explained that his investigation was not directed at the United States. He launched the investigation as part of a broader effort by the new Japanese government to fulfill its campaign promise to reign in the ability of unelected bureaucrats to make public policy without the knowledge or consent of many of Japan's elected representatives (Dickie 2009). It was part of a domestically focused effort to reform Japanese public policy making (Okada 2013). As UCS documented in our 2010 report, the Japanese public has a deep historical commitment to nuclear disarmament that plays an influential role in Japanese domestic politics (Kulacki 2010). The agreements between Japanese bureaucrats and the U.S. government on the introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons into Japan, which violated Japan's stated public policy, were kept secret for domestic political reasons in Japan.

The Obama administration's decision to attempt to halt the Foreign Ministry's investigation of the secret agreements and its apparent success in preserving the “non-confirm, non-deny” policy runs counter to the administration's stated interest in greater transparency regarding U.S. nuclear weapons policy in East Asia.

## UNNECESSARY COMPROMISE

The Obama administration may have believed it needed to emphasize the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan to relieve anxieties among some members of the Japanese defense bureaucracy— anxieties the administration believed might lead Japan to develop its own nuclear arsenal. It may have seen this as consistent with the President's promise to encourage other nations to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security strategy.

But there is ample evidence to suggest that while these anxieties may exist in Japan they are unlikely to precipitate a Japanese decision to develop an independent nuclear arsenal. Moreover, the U.S. accommodation in the NPR is not likely to give those Japanese officials calling for a strengthening of the U.S. nuclear umbrella enough to change their minds if they believed Japan needed its own nuclear option, as discussed below.

The Japanese public overwhelmingly opposes the idea of Japan developing a nuclear arsenal. In addition, a high-level 1995 Japan Defense Agency (JDA) study—made public for the first time by UCS in our 2010 report—documents a consensus among Japanese defense experts that there is no imaginable scenario, including a complete collapse of the U.S.–Japan alliance, in which developing nuclear weapons would be considered advantageous to Japanese national security. The study was conducted by several of Japan’s more conservative defense experts at the request of the Japanese government in advance of its consideration of a vote on the permanent extension of its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Interviews conducted for this report confirm that these assessments still hold among Japanese defense experts. Why then, did the Obama administration fail to take advantage of an historic opportunity to reduce the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan with the full and vocal support of a new Japanese administration and a majority of the Diet?

Many Japanese defense analysts told UCS they thought China might attempt to use its nuclear capabilities to coerce Japan to concede on bilateral disputes, such as the sovereignty of the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands or economic rights in the continental shelf. But Mr. Roberts, who directed the consultations with Japan on the NPR, made it clear to the concerned Japanese defense officials that any threat to use U.S. nuclear weapons to counter Chinese coercion would not be credible in these scenarios. This indicates these particular Japanese concerns about attempted Chinese coercion were not responsible for the Obama administration’s decisions on the NPR.

According to Mr. Roberts the accommodations given to Japan in the NPR—a “tailored” nuclear option consisting of dual-capable aircraft that can be deployed in a moment of crisis and the refusal to include a sole purpose declaration—are both meant to address Japanese concerns about “decoupling.” Decoupling refers to enemy threats that successfully blackmail an ally into withdrawing support, in this case removing the U.S. nuclear umbrella over Japan.

It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the United States could be compelled by foreign threats to withdraw support from Japan in a military crisis, especially given U.S. treaty obligations to Japan. It is also not clear how a declaration that the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons was to deter the use of nuclear weapons by another state would contribute to such a withdraw or how the availability of U.S. dual-capable aircraft would prevent it.

One leading Japanese figure in the NPR debate was Mr. Takeo Akiba, one of the four Japanese political officers mentioned in the Perry-Schlesinger report. He is now the Japanese director of the U.S.–Japan Extended Deterrence Dialog, which was initiated in the wake of the NPR. Mr. Akiba told UCS he believes the only effective nuclear deterrent option for Japan is an arrangement similar to the “nuclear sharing” arrangement the United States provided during the Cold War to several members of the NATO alliance who do not have their own nuclear weapons. U.S. nuclear weapons stationed in Europe were under U.S. control during peacetime, but control could be handed over to an ally in a crisis. This was seen as a way of increasing deterrence by solving the potential “decoupling” problem that might arise if the U.S. was unwilling to use nuclear weapons to protect an ally. Mr. Akiba told UCS he believes Japan, like Europe, needs a similar arrangement. In his words, “China and North Korea need to know the decision to use lies with Japan, not with the United States.”

In his presentation at the Stimson Center, Mr. Roberts agreed this approach “has a very strong appeal” among the Japanese he consulted about the NPR. But if control over the decision to employ U.S. nuclear weapons is necessary to satisfy this particular constituency in the Japanese defense community, the accommodations provided by the Obama administration in the NPR do not provide the necessary reassurance.

Determining what is required for deterrence and linkage is an enduring question that plagued planners throughout the Cold War. It led the U.S. and Soviet Union to build up huge nuclear arsenals and increasingly sophisticated nuclear weapons for deterrence. And it led the U.S. to deploy battlefield nuclear weapons in Europe. This approach is increasingly seen as dangerous and unnecessary. The Prague speech indicated the U.S. was moving away from this type of Cold War thinking about deterrence, and there seems to be no compelling justification for compromising that intention in the case of Japan.

## **Recommendations for Future Engagement with Japan on the U.S. Nuclear Posture**

Although the NPR did not include a sole purpose declaration, it did commit the administration to “work to establish conditions under which such a policy could be safely adopted.” Those conditions already exist in Japan.

Instead of continuing to pursue a futile effort to reassure unidentified officials in the Japanese defense bureaucracy with “tailored” nuclear weapons options and policies even they find unsatisfactory, the Obama administration should focus its efforts on



mobilizing the support of the large constituency of Japan's elected political leadership that is in favor of a sole purpose declaration and a decreased role for U.S. nuclear weapons in the defense of Japan.

These efforts will be more effective if the individuals in the Japanese defense bureaucracy who oppose a sole purpose declaration and support an increased role for U.S. nuclear weapons are publicly identified. These nameless Japanese officials are reluctant to express their true opinions in public because they are aware that a broad majority of the Japanese population and their elected representatives oppose them. U.S. nuclear weapons policy should not be held hostage to the secretly expressed opinions of foreign defense officials who are unwilling to be held accountable to their own citizens.

The Obama administration can honor U.S. treaty commitments to defend Japan, including providing an effective nuclear deterrent, without compromising the principles President Obama articulated in Prague. It can and should use the Extended Deterrence Dialog it initiated with Japan as a result of the NPR as a vehicle to realize those principles, rather than allowing that dialog to be used by others as a vehicle to undermine them.

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