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# **“Super-Sizing” the DPRK Threat**

## ***Japan’s Evolving Military Posture and North Korea***

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### **Abstract**

Japan’s reemergence as a “normal” military power has been accelerated by the “super-sizing” of North Korea: a product of the North’s military threat multiplied exponentially by its threat to US-Japan alliance solidarity; views of the North as a domestic “peril”; and the North’s utilization as a catch-all proxy for remilitarization.

**Keywords:** Japan, North Korea, security, US-Japan alliance, remilitarization

### **Introduction: North Korea’s Multiple Threat Character as Existential Threat, Alliance Divider, “Terror State”, and All-Purpose Proxy**

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) (hereafter referred to as North Korea) has loomed increasingly large in the determination of Japan’s defense posture over the last decade and half. Just a cursory examination of *The Defense of Japan* White Papers over this period reveals how North Korea has elbowed itself to the front of Japan’s declared security anxieties, apparently relegating even China to a secondary position, and taking up a

role as the primary Japanese security concern once occupied by the USSR.<sup>1</sup> Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) of 2004 (the document that lays out Japanese defense doctrine alongside the necessary force structure) refers to North Korea as a "major destabilizing factor" for regional and international security, essentially oblique Japanese language for its presence as a threat, whereas China's military modernization is simply referred to as requiring "careful attention".<sup>2</sup> In turn, Japan's policy-makers have reacted increasingly strongly to North Korea's military provocations since the 1990s. The first North Korean nuclear crisis of the mid-1990s, the North's *Taepdong-1* missile test of 1998 and missile tests in July 2006, and the nuclear test of October 2006, coupled with bilateral tensions over North Korean incursions into Japanese territorial waters and the abductions of Japanese citizens, have led the way in contributing to perceptible shifts in the previously so-called "immovable object" of Japan's traditionally low-profile post-war security policy.<sup>3</sup>

The objective of this paper is to detail the type and degree of impact of North Korea on Japan's security policy in the post-Cold War period. It argues that Japan's defense posture has been significantly affected by the rise of the perceived threat from North Korea since the mid-1990s, and this has presaged an expanded regional and global security role for Japan. The paper examines the role of North Korea as a driver, *inter alia*, for the re-gearing of the Japan Self Defense Forces' (JSDF) conventional capabilities to respond to guerrilla incursions; in tipping Japan toward the introduction of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD); in forcing the pace

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<sup>1</sup> Bōeichōhen, *Nihon no Bōei 2006* [Defense of Japan 2006] (Tokyo: Zaimushō Insatsukyoku, 2006), pp. 28-47.

<sup>2</sup> Bōeichōhen, *Heisei 17nendo Ikō ni Kakawaru Bōei Keikaku no Taikō ni Tsuite* [Concerning the Defense Program Guidelines for 2005 onwards], December 10, 2004, <<http://www.mod.go.jp/j/defense/policy/17taikou/taikou.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Richard H. Friman, Peter J. Katzenstein, David Leheny, and Nobuo Okawara, "Immovable Object? Japan's Security Policy in East Asia," in *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism*, eds. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 85-107.

of US-Japan alliance cooperation in the East Asia and globally in “out of area” contingencies; and, after October 2006, in even precipitating some Japanese policy-makers’ talk of reconsidering their state’s non-nuclear stance.

In turn, the paper attempts to provide a sober assessment of how far ranging these changes are in terms of influencing Japan’s fundamental long-term strategic trajectory and moving toward becoming a more “normal” military actor and US alliance partner. It argues that the perceived threat from North Korea has indeed contributed strongly to propelling Japan toward becoming a state increasingly prepared to use force to deter security threats from other states and to some degree non-state actors. However, the paper also stresses that Japan continues to push forward its defense posture in an incremental fashion; that it remains wary of the risks of military confrontation with the North; and that as yet it sees the nuclear threat from North Korea as insufficient to force it to seriously reconsider its nuclear option.

Just as importantly, this paper seeks to explain why the perceived North Korean threat has impacted so significantly on Japanese security policy, despite the fact that its impact is arguably disproportionate to the magnitude of the actual threat posed to Japan militarily. The paper stresses that for Japan the North Korean threat is multiplied, or “super-sized”, in impact by its multilayered nature.

Firstly, Japan certainly faces a growing degree of *existential military threats* and legitimate security concerns from the North’s missile and nuclear capabilities. But, secondly, for Japan this threat is unduly accentuated by the fact that the North has repeatedly exerted an *alliance political-military threat* to the solidarity of the US-Japan alliance, thus threatening to undermine the very foundation of Japan’s post-war security policy. As explained in later sections, North Korea has shown itself adept at generating for Japan alliance dilemmas of entrapment and particularly abandonment by generating and exploiting differences of threat

perception between the bilateral allies.<sup>4</sup> In instances of feared entrapment, Japan has moved to strengthen its autonomous defense options. Japan's principal concerns of abandonment, however, have necessitated moves on its part to shore up political confidence in US-Japan bilateral security ties by indicating that it is prepared to undertake additional alliance commitments. In certain cases these alliance commitments are designed to directly counter the threat from North Korea. But in others they are designed to demonstrate a willingness to support the US in dealing with other regional and global contingencies that are of greater importance to the US than Japan, in the hope that this will ensure US reciprocation to support Japan against North Korea. Japan's motivations to support the US-led "war on terror" through the dispatch of the JSDF to Iraq between 2004-2006, and to thus take on a greater global security role, as will be argued below, can in large part be interpreted in the light of the need to strengthen alliance solidarity to respond to North Korea.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, changes in Japan's military posture in reaction to North Korea have been exacerbated by the North's increasing assumption of the guise of a *domestic security threat*. The North's suspected and then later revealed involvement in the abductions of Japanese citizens has led to its increasing labeling in domestic political discourse as a "terrorist" state.<sup>6</sup> The consequence has been to engender an increasingly hard-line approach toward North Korea amongst Japan's policy-makers and citizenry. Although Japan's policy-makers and citizenry have some legitimate grounds to fear the North's penetration of Japanese internal

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<sup>4</sup> Jitsuo Tsuchiyama, "Nichibei Dōmei no Kokusai Seiji Riron" [The theory of international politics of the US-Japan alliance], in *Kokusai Seiji* [International Politics] 115 (1997), pp. 161-170.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, "Not Quite the 'Great Britain of the Far East': Japan's Security, the US-Japan Alliance, and the 'War on Terror' in East Asia," in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20: 2 (June 2007) pp. 325-338.

<sup>6</sup> David Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 155-171.

security, it is also the case that anti-North Korean sentiment, stoked by Japanese conservative politicians such as former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and the mass media, has at times bordered on an irrational hysteria regarding the level of actual threat posed by the North. The consequence has been for Japanese policy-makers to enhance diplomatic, economic and military pressure on the North, even when other states are looking to turn toward engagement. Hence, even though Prime Ministers Koizumi Junichirō and then later Fukuda Yasuo have sought to engage the North in order for Japan not to fall behind its partners in the Six Party Talks (SPT) process, Japan in recent years has found it increasingly difficult to promote bilateral normalization talks.

Fourthly, North Korea's poor standing in Japan and internationally has meant that it has often been utilized by policy-makers as a convenient *proxy threat* to legitimize the pushing through of changes in Japanese security policy that are as equally or more directed toward dealing with other forms of potential and existential threats, but which are politically and diplomatically unacceptable to identify explicitly. In particular, Japanese policy-makers have manipulated the North Korean threat as a means to camouflage the fact that many of its military procurement activities and moves to upgrade the US-Japan alliance are actually designed at the same time to deal with the increasing and longer term threat from China. Hence, this paper argues that even if the military threat from North Korea is not sufficient *prima facie* to justify Japan's attachment of preeminence to it above all other extant threats, it has nevertheless succeeded out of all proportion in serving as the key driver for Japan's normalization agenda.

### **Japan's Post-War Security Trajectory**

Japan's security policy throughout the post-cold war period has involved the pursuit of "Comprehensive Security", consisting of an attempt to balance diplomatic, economic and

military components. In terms of military security, Japan's post-war policy-makers—consisting principally of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Defense (MOD; formerly the Japan Defense Agency until January 2007) and the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—have been obliged to pursue a traditionally low-posture role, as mandated by restrictions on the use of Article 9 of the so-called “peace constitution” of 1947 and the depth of anti-militaristic norms amongst Japan's citizenry.<sup>7</sup>

Japan's government has interpreted the Constitution as permitting the maintenance of military forces for the purposes of the defense of its own national territory, and during the Cold War built up a substantial military to counter the threat from the USSR. However, the JSDF has remained highly restricted in its activities and capabilities by a range of anti-militaristic prohibitions derived from interpretations of Article 9. Japan has elaborated a doctrine of “exclusively defense-oriented defense” which has meant that it has eschewed the acquisition of weaponry that might be used for offensive purposes and power projection capabilities such as inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM), ballistic missiles, long-range strategic bombers, in-flight refueling aircraft or aircraft carriers. In turn, Japan has argued that, even though it possesses the right of collective self-defense under the UN Charter, it is prohibited from exercising this right as this would exceed constitutional interpretations that limit Japan's use of military force to the minimum necessary for self-defense. In practice, this has meant that Japan has been reluctant to dispatch the JSDF overseas on anything other than non-combat logistical missions. Finally, Japan's military capacity has been restricted by a range of anti-military principles derived from the Constitution, including the 1967 and 1976 ban on the export of arms and military technology; a House of Councilors 1969 resolution on

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas U. Berger, “From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism,” in *International Security* 17: 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 119-150.

the exclusively peaceful use of space; the three non-nuclear principles of 1967 not to “produce, possess or introduce nuclear weapons”; and the one per cent Gross National Product (GNP) limit on defense expenditure.<sup>8</sup>

In turn, Japan’s limited national military capabilities have meant that it has in large part entrusted its defense to the mechanism of the US-Japan security treaty. Japan and the US have traditionally predicated their security treaty upon a grand strategic bargain: Japan accepting US military protection in return for its provision of bases to facilitate the projection of US military power in East Asia. Japan has attempted to temper its reliance on the US security guarantee, however, by the build-up of its own national defense capabilities and indigenous defense production, and by careful hedging against the dual alliance dilemmas of “entrapment” and “abandonment” in US regional and global military strategy. Regarding entrapment, Japan has long feared that it could become a proxy target in a nuclear exchange between the USSR or China and the US; and also that the US might look to in effect “press gang” Japan into assisting its military to once again fight wars on the Korean Peninsula or East Asian continent.<sup>9</sup> Regarding abandonment, Japan has known that the US as a superpower has global interests which supersede those of Japan, and hence that the US in the service of its wider strategic interests might look to reach an accommodation with states posing a threat to Japan, or downgrade alliance ties if Japan is no longer seen as an indispensable ally in its overall regional and global strategy.

Japan, during the Cold War period, was less concerned about abandonment, due to its provision of US bases essential for containing the USSR, China and North Korea, and

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<sup>8</sup> Glenn D. Hook *Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 45-73.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher W. Hughes and Akiko Fukushima, “Japan-US Security Relations: Toward ‘Bilateralism-Plus?’” in *Beyond Bilateralism: The US-Japan Relationship in the New Asia-Pacific*, eds. Ellis S. Krauss and T. J. Pempel (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 63.



because especially in the latter stages of the Cold War there was a close fit between Japan's national security interests and the US's regional and global security interests in resisting the growing Soviet military build-up in East Asia. Japan alternately hedged against entrapment in US military "adventurism" in a number of ways.<sup>10</sup> Japan's ban on the exercise of collective self-defense meant that it had no obligation to defend its US security treaty partner outside its own national territory. In addition, Japan's concerns about entrapment meant that it was highly cautious about any integration of JSDF capacities and missions with those of the US military. Japan balked at US pressure to engage in closer bilateral military planning during the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> Japan and the US did conclude the bilateral Guidelines for Defense Cooperation in 1978, in an attempt to specify joint cooperation in the event of contingencies in and around Japan and thereby flesh out the parameters of the security treaty, and Japan did undertake responsibility for the protection of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) up to 1,000 nautical miles from Japan. But Japan placed much greater emphasis in the Defense Guidelines on planning for Article 5-type contingencies under the security treaty designed to defend Japan itself, and failed to conduct research into Article 6-type contingencies designed to support the US to respond to regional contingencies in East Asia. Japan's military security role in the Cold War was thus geographically restricted to the area immediately surrounding Japan; limited functionally to providing a defensive "shield" around its own territory to assist the US offensive "sword" in Northeast Asia; and highly asymmetrical within the alliance in that Japan was not obligated to defend the US outside its own territory.

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, "Japan's Dual Hedge," in *Foreign Affairs* 81: 5 (September/October 2002), pp. 110-123.

<sup>11</sup> Sheila A. Smith, "The Evolution of Military Cooperation in the US-Japan Alliance," in *The US-Japan Alliance: Past, Present and Future*, eds. Michael J. Green and Patrick M. Cronin (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), pp. 79-84.

## Japan and the North Korean Existential Threat

Japan's incremental expansion of its military capabilities and the comfortable division of labor in the US-Japan alliance developed during the Cold War has been sharply disturbed by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of North Korea as a new existential threat.

During the Cold War it is fair to say that North Korea registered as only a minor threat to Japan's national security compared with the massive threat of conventional invasion and nuclear attack from the Soviet behemoth, or even compared to the threat of China's minimal nuclear force. Japan was only touched directly by the Korean War with US requests for the secret deployment of Japanese minesweepers to Korean waters, and indirectly through US pressure for Japan to speed its rearmament and to conclude the bilateral security treaty in order to consolidate its position as a bastion of capitalism. Thereafter, following the cessation of active hostilities in the Korean War, Japan's security interests vis-à-vis North Korea were largely ensured by the US's massive military presence in Japan and South Korea and its containment policy toward the North. Japan's principal security concerns with regard to North Korea did not revolve around a direct military threat, but instead the presence of North Korean residents in Japan and the perceived fear of their fomenting domestic communist insurgency.<sup>12</sup>

In the post-Cold War period, though, North Korea has gradually become transformed into Japan's security bugbear in place of the USSR. North Korea's motivations for railing against its international isolation and for leveraging its limited military assets in order to extract diplomatic, economic and security concessions from the US and its neighbors have been extensively debated, and will not be rehearsed here. Japan's policy-makers, like those of

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<sup>12</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), pp. 60-61, 199.

the US, have gradually come to the realisation that economic and regime insecurity is at the root of North Korea's provocative actions, and, in line with their concepts of comprehensive security, have shown a willingness to respond to the North's security threat through the offering of economic concessions, and through Koizumi's attempts to engage the North diplomatically through summitry in 2002 and 2004. Conversely, Japan has seen growing utility in the imposition of economic sanctions as a means to pressure the North over its military behavior, putting in place a raft of sanctions in response to the abductions issue, and in response to the nuclear and missile tests in 2006.<sup>13</sup>

But at the same time as Japanese policy-makers have searched for non-military means to moderate the origins of the North's confrontational behavior, they remain conscious that the North presents a range of direct existential military threats. Japan's conventional military concerns with regard to North Korea revolve around the threat of guerrilla incursions and attacks on sensitive facilities such as nuclear power stations on the Sea of Japan coastline. The abductions of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s have been taken as demonstrations of the North's ability to infiltrate at will Japanese territory, and in March 1999 and December 2001 the JSDF and Japan Coast Guard (JCG) intercepted and fired upon North Korean vessels (or *fushinsen*, suspicious ships) believed to be engaged in espionage activities.

Japan's second anxiety focuses on the direct threat from North Korea's ballistic missile programs. Japanese policy-makers have long been aware, especially since the May 1993 test launch of a *Nodong-1* in the Sea of Japan, that a significant part of Japanese territory is exposed to attack from the North's stock of 100 to 200 of these 1,000-1,300 kilometer medium range ballistic missiles. However, Japan's vulnerability to North Korean missile attacks was fully revealed to policy-makers and the Japanese public by the test launch of a

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, "The Political Economy of Japanese Sanctions Towards North Korea: Domestic Coalitions and International Systemic Pressures," in *Pacific Affairs* 79: 3 (Fall 2006), pp. 462-466.

*Taepodong-1* missile in August 1998 over Japanese “airspace”. For Japanese policy-makers the North Korean missile threat was then confirmed by the test of July 2006 of seven missiles, including the *Taepodong-2* with a potential range of up to 6,000 kilometers.<sup>14</sup> Japan is concerned that North Korea might deploy these missiles with conventional high explosive warheads, or mounting its known stocks of chemical and biological weapons, and that despite their relative inaccuracy the missiles would pose a significant threat to Japan’s civilian population concentrated in easily targeted dense urban areas.

Last but certainly not least, Japanese policy-makers fear that North Korea will eventually look to combine its missile capabilities with its newly acquired nuclear weapons technology. Japan has certainly looked on askance as the North has pushed forward its nuclear program since the mid-1990s, and reacted strongly to the nuclear test of October 2006. The ultimate Japanese fear is that North Korea may eventually learn to fully master and miniaturize nuclear weapons technology and use this as a means to exert “nuclear blackmail” on Japan.

Japan thus has genuine grounds for viewing North Korea as an existential threat to its security. But at the same time it is important to note that the North’s military threat to Japan and its neighbors *per se* is regarded by many analysts as still quite moderate, if not in decline in certain ways. Japanese analysts of a more critical disposition have pointed to North Korea’s declining conventional capabilities, resulting from the North’s reliance on ageing technologies and lack of funding to equip and train its military. The North’s ballistic missiles are a threat, but their actual capabilities, accuracy and reliability are highly questionable.<sup>15</sup>

The North Korean nuclear program is, of course, a major concern for the future, but Japanese

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<sup>14</sup> Bōeichōhen, *Nihon no Bōei 2006*, pp. 35-37.

<sup>15</sup> Taoka Shunji, *Senryaku no Jōken: Gekihen Suru Kyōkyūtō no Gunji Jōsei* [Conditions of strategy: the military situation in the rapidly changing Far East] (Tokyo: Yūhisha, 1997), pp. 165-212; Shigemura Toshimitsu, *Kitachōsen no Dētabukku* [North Korea data book] (Tokyo: Kōdansha Gendai Shinsho, 1997), pp. 172-186.

analysts and policy-makers entertain some confidence that the North is still far from fully mastering nuclear weapons technologies and from miniaturizing nuclear devices for mounting on ballistic missiles. Hence, on paper, North Korea's existential threat by most calculations is as yet moderate and not a fundamental threat to Japanese national survival, and its current capabilities are likely no match for the defensive capabilities of the JSDF, and no certainly no match for the overwhelming conventional and nuclear offensive retaliatory power of US forces in Japan and in the surrounding region. If the accentuated impact of the North Korean threat on Japan is to be fully explained, it is thus necessary to look beyond just the North's extant military capabilities and to examine how these capabilities, crucially in combination with other threat multipliers, have inflated the overall threat.

### **North Korean Threat Multipliers**

#### *North Korea's Threat to the US-Japan Alliance*

The combination of existential military threats that North Korea presents has been magnified unduly and pushed up the Japanese security agenda because it complicates the alliance basis of Japan's security policy and revives dilemmas of entrapment and abandonment. Once again, entrapment has been a generally lesser concern for Japanese policy-makers; although, as explained shortly, alarm bells were rung by the 1994 nuclear crisis and US requests to activate the security treaty to enable Japan to provide support in the event of a Korean Peninsula contingency, thus raising the risk of Japanese embroilment in a second Korean War. Similarly, the George W. Bush administration's initial identification of North Korea as part of the "Axis of Evil" in 2002 and the associated talk of regime change sparked Japanese fears that the US might attempt to precipitate a preemptive war to halt the North's nuclear program, and which might then again have threatened to suck Japan into an

unwanted Korean conflagration.<sup>16</sup> Hence, in large part Prime Minister Koizumi's summitry in North Korea in September 2002 was designed to demonstrate to the US the importance of exhausting diplomacy before turning to military options.

By and large, though, Japan's alliance security concerns have concentrated on North Korea's capability to threaten to drive a wedge between Japanese and the US interests, and to thereby raise fears of abandonment for Japan. North Korea first demonstrated this capability during the nuclear crisis of the mid-1990s. As noted above, the principal concerns of the US in contemplating military action to force North Korea to desist from its nuclear program were focused on preserving stability on the Korean Peninsula and halting the process of nuclear proliferation, and were therefore broadly regional and global in nature. By contrast, Japan's security priorities at this time were focused predominantly on its own national security. The divergence of security priorities was then to be revealed in the wake of US requests in mid-1994 for its Japanese ally to provide logistical support to US forces under the security treaty to respond to North Korea. However, as outlined earlier, Japan's largely exclusive focus up until that point on Article 5 of the security treaty and on Defense Guidelines planning for the defense solely of Japan, meant that it was unable to respond to the US's Article 6-based requests concerned with Japanese support for responding to regional contingencies that might impact upon its own national security. The consequence was that the US-Japan alliance was exposed by North Korea as a largely empty construct in responding to regional crises. Japan's failure to be seen to back its ally in the North Korean nuclear crisis, coupled with the eruption of domestic opposition to US bases on Okinawa in 1995, triggered a crisis of political

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<sup>16</sup> Yakushiji Katsuyuki, *Gaimushō: Gaikōryoku Kyōka e no Michi* [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the path to strengthening diplomatic power] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2003), pp. 16-22.

confidence in the alliance, and genuine Japanese fears that it might be abandoned as an untrustworthy ally.<sup>17</sup>

Although North Korea's capacity to shake the political foundations of the alliance was tempered somewhat by subsequent alliance restructuring, as outlined in later sections, the North has continued to highlight the oft paucity of a shared US-Japan alliance vision. North Korea's *Taepodong-1* test again demonstrated the potential divisions of interests. Japan reacted strongly to the test as a direct challenge to its national security, imposing limited sanctions and intimating that it would hold back on financial support for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), and thus threatening to undermine the US's approach based on the 1994 Agreed Framework to contain North Korean nuclear proliferation. Against this, US policy-makers, whilst concerned about how the *Taepodong-1* test was edging North Korea closer to obtaining a missile capability to strike the continental United States, were focused on trying to prevent the Agreed Framework from being derailed by the North's provocations. Hence, Japan found itself isolated and was cajoled back into supporting KEDO, even though its fundamental security concerns about the North's missiles were never addressed.

The unfolding of the second nuclear crisis, culminating in North Korea's missile and nuclear tests of 2006 and their aftermath have told a similar story of potential divergence between Japanese national and US regional and global security interests, and this has been in spite of constant efforts to strengthen the alliance. Japanese policy-makers since 11

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<sup>17</sup> Tanaka Akihiko, *Anzen Hoshō: Sengo 50nen no Mosaku* [Security policy: the post-war fifty year search] (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1997), pp. 332-334; Funabashi Yōichi, *Dōmei Hyōryū* [Alliance adrift] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997), pp. 310-326; Tanaka Hitoshi and Tahara Sōichirō, *Kokka to Gaiō* [State and diplomacy] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2005), pp. 27-29; Funabashi Yōichi, *Za Peninshura Kuesuchon: Chōsen Hantō Dainiji Kaku Kiki* [The Peninsula question: a chronicle of the second Korean nuclear crisis] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2006), pp. 134-140.

September 2001 have maintained the anxiety that the US's focus on the "war on terror" and global interests beyond the East Asia region might lead to a general denudation of their ally's resolve to arrest North Korea's inexorable move toward nuclear weapons acquisition and to defend Japan. Moreover, even after the US has returned to focus on the Korean Peninsula, especially since the start of the Bush administration's second term, from Japan's perspective the US has not always shown sufficient cognition of its ally's interests.<sup>18</sup> For sure, Japan and the US demonstrated considerable alliance solidarity in their UN diplomacy in 2006 to pass resolutions 1695 and 1718 condemning the missile and nuclear tests and imposing limited sanctions. Nonetheless, Japan's increasingly assertive attitude toward containing the North Korean threat, compounded by domestic anti-North Korean feeling over the abductions issue, has not always been matched by a similar US resolve and hard-line approach. In the wake of the North Korean nuclear test, for instance, Japanese policy-makers were considering utilizing legislation in line with the Defense Guidelines to back a US economic blockade of the North. But the US soon made it clear that, following its conclusion that it needed to pursue to a diplomatic solution to the North's nuclear program, it was not prepared as yet to exert military pressure on the North.<sup>19</sup>

In turn, the US's desire for a diplomatic solution has meant that since February 2007 it has pushed ahead with implementing the Six Party Talks' (SPT) agenda for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula over the head of Japanese concerns that the North has essentially been rewarded for its "bad behavior" in conducting the missile and nuclear tests. Indeed, Japan's major fear is that as part of the SPT process it could be bounced into normalization with the

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<sup>18</sup> Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007), p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> "Shōten no Kamotsu Kensa, Nihon wa? Keikoku Shageki wa Dame, Settoku Dake" [Focus on inspections of cargo, can Japan fire warning shots, or just use persuasion?], *Asahi Shimbun*, October 15, 2006, <<http://www.asahi.com/special/nuclear/TKY200610150064.html>>.



North without satisfactory progress toward a resolution to the abductions issue, and that the US might even extend a negative security guarantee to North Korea, and even be prepared to tolerate the North's continued maintenance of nuclear weapons as long as it did not proliferate beyond the Korean Peninsula. Certainly for Japan, any US security arrangement with the North would be an anathema as it would raise questions about how far the US is willing to defend Japan from nuclear attack.<sup>20</sup> In this instance, the US's concern with achieving overall regional stability and its global goals of non-proliferation, might conflict with Japan's more immediate goals of removing North Korea as a nuclear threat, so raising concerns of the decoupling of Japan's security from that of the US.<sup>21</sup> Japanese policy-makers have also expressed quiet concerns recently that the US might sacrifice a resolution of the abductions issue in the course of pushing forward the SPT, although the new administration of Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo looks set to acquiesce in subverting this issue in the interests of achieving a resumption of bilateral normalization talks with North Korea and rehabilitating Japan as an active player in Korean Peninsula diplomacy.

### *Japan and the "North Korean Peril"*

Japan's threat perception and the consequent severity of its reaction to North Korea have been compounded by the increasing perception of the latter as a "terrorist state", which is implacably and possibly irrationally bent on the destruction of Japan, and is willing to practice any military stratagem to achieve its end, including the general terrorization of the Japanese population. North Korea has acquired this reputation through its own complicity in

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<sup>20</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Tsuyoshi Sunohara, "Japan: Thinking the Unthinkable," in *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, eds. Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss (New Delhi: Manas Publications in collaboration with Brookings Institution Press, 2005), pp. 239-240.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher W. Hughes and Ellis S. Krauss, "Japan's New Security Agenda," *Survival: The IJSS Quarterly* 49: 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 165-166.

the abductions of Japanese citizens, probable state sponsorship or at least tolerance of narcotics smuggling to Japan, and its provocative missile and nuclear testing actions.<sup>22</sup>

The result has been to generate a sense of the “North Korean peril” in Japan, manifested externally in its *fushinsen* activities, missile tests and involvement in abductions, and internally through the presence of the North Korean community. Elements of the Japanese policy-making community, media and general public have bought into, and in many cases actively propagated, the image of North Korea as rightly part of the “Axis of Evil”, and Kim Jong-Il has an evil dictator somehow on a par, or perhaps in cahoots, with Osama Bin Laden and *al-Qaeda*.<sup>23</sup>

The image of North Korea as terror state is reflected in the periodic scares seen in Japan over the threat it poses. The summer of 1999 was notable for being replete with fevered speculation in the media of another *Taepdong-1* test. The bookshops at this time began to flood with accounts of the abductions issue, and other volumes outlining, often through the disdainful lampoonery of the person of Kim Jong-Il, the evil threat from the North Korean regime.<sup>24</sup> The missile tests of 2006 again repeated Japan’s capacity for near hysteria when it comes to bypassing more measured calculations of the true level of threat posed by North Korea.<sup>25</sup> Japanese policy-makers and the media were united in condemnation of the provocative nature of the test as the missiles splashed down in the Sea of Japan, somehow

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<sup>22</sup> Sheena Chestnut, “Illicit Activity and Proliferation: North Korean Smuggling Networks,” in *International Security* 32: 1 (Summer 2007), pp. 80-111.

<sup>23</sup> Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>24</sup> Lynn, Hyung-Gu, “Vicarious Traumas: Television and Public Opinion in Japan’s North Korea Policy,” in *Pacific Affairs*, 79: 3 (Fall 2006), pp. 488-502; Gavan McCormack, *Client State: Japan in the American Embrace* (London, Verso, 2007), pp. 96-95.

<sup>25</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “The Politics of Hysteria: America’s Iraq, Japan’s North Korea,” in *Japan in the World*, February 13, 2003, <<http://www.iwanami.co.jp/jpworld/text/politicsofhysteria01.html>>.

neglecting to mention that, even though the sea carries Japan's name (although the two Koreas would question this), it is not actually Japanese territory and the missiles fell far closer to China, Russia, and to North Korea itself, than to Japan.

#### *North Korea as a Catch-All Proxy Threat*

Japan's sense of imperilment has not only helped to intensify changes in its military posture in direct reaction to the need to face down the North Korean threat, but has also helped to generate a catch-all source of threat and a general sense of crisis in Japan's security policy that has provided the legitimacy for other changes in defense capabilities and doctrines only marginally connected to the North, or even completely unconnected.

A notable aspect of Japan's security policy planning in the last decade has been the refusal to acknowledge explicitly that, alongside the threat from North Korea, China is also playing a significant role as a driver of change. Japan's traditional diplomatic deference toward China has declined in recent years, to the point that policy-makers have produced random comments about its presence as a security concern, but Japan clearly still fears antagonizing China if it were to openly identify it as a threat. Consequently, North Korea has come to fill the position of serving as the prime public legitimization for nearly all major changes in its security policy that are as equally or more addressed toward the looming threat from China.<sup>26</sup>

Japan's reticence to avoid identifying China but eagerness to stress the threat from North Korea can be seen in its moves to revise the US-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation between 1996 and 1997. It is true to say that the initial impetus for revision was provided by the North Korean nuclear crisis and the essential emptiness that this revealed in

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<sup>26</sup> Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 149.

alliance planning and interoperability to respond to regional contingencies. Japan and US policy-makers thus sought to fill in the gaps in the Defense Guidelines by specifying for the first time the types of logistical cooperation that Japan could provide to the US in an Article 6-type regional contingency. Japan showed reluctance, as is usual in its security policy of exclusively defense-oriented defense, to identify explicitly the source of state threat forcing these upgrades to the alliance. However, Japanese official documents in their oblique language made it clear that they were in fact fixing on North Korea as the main threat to legitimate the way for these changes. The revised National Defense Program Outline of 1995, as the first step toward revising the Guidelines and in stressing the need for Japan to restructure its defense posture to deal with regional contingencies, named the Korean Peninsula (a codeword for North Korea) as an example of instability, but neglected, rather implausibly, to mention any concerns about China. Similarly, the April 1996 US-Japan Joint Declaration on Security which committed both states to revise the Defense Guidelines, stressed that these moves were necessitated by regional instability, but again only identified explicitly the Korean Peninsula and ignored all mention of China. The Joint Declaration's bypassing of mention of China strained all credulity, given that the previous month the US had deployed two aircraft carriers, including the *Independence* home-ported in Japan, to monitor the Taiwan Straits crisis.<sup>27</sup>

Japan's policy-makers during the period between the drafting of the revised Guidelines from 1996 to 1997, and the passing of Japanese legislation to enable the implementation of logistical support for the US in regional contingencies, continued to maintain the fiction that these measures were not in any way aimed at China. The Japanese

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<sup>27</sup> Soeya Yoshihide, "Nichibei Kankei no Kōzō to Nihon no Gaikō Senryaku" [The structure of US-Japan relations and Japan's diplomatic strategy], in *Gaikō Fōramu, Riniji Zōhan, Chūgoku* [Gaiko Forum special edition on China] 110 (2007), pp. 46-47.

government persisted in particular with its argument that the scope of the revised Defense Guidelines was “situational” rather than geographically specific, so as to leave ambiguous the position of Taiwan within the coverage of the US-Japan security treaty. However, Japanese policy-makers, despite their verbal contortions, eventually gave the game away. Katō Kōichi, having recently served as Chairman of the LDP’s Policy Affairs Research Committee, was reported to have told Chinese leaders on a visit to Beijing in July 1997 that the real concern of the revised Defense Guidelines was the Korean Peninsula and not China, but then Kajiyama Seiroku, as Chief Cabinet Secretary, countered this assertion a month later by stating that they did include Taiwan.<sup>28</sup> The Japanese government’s preparedness to manipulate the catch-all North Korean threat was also shown in the run-up to the passing of the Guidelines legislation in 1999. Although it is unlikely ever to be proved, but as figures such as former Chief Cabinet Secretary Nonaka Hiromu no less have argued, it was perhaps more than serendipity that Japan’s defense establishment felt itself forced to intercept a North Korean *fushinsen* at exactly the same time as the Defense Guidelines-related legislation was being debated in the Diet and to thereby highlight Japan’s threat environment and the need for a strong national response to potential security contingencies.<sup>29</sup>

North Korea’s serving as a convenient and sole threat to be manipulated for disguising the fact that changes in Japan’s defense posture are designed for dual purposes is also witnessed in justifications for BMD. Japan’s “clear and present danger” in terms of ballistic missiles is undoubtedly North Korea, and the BMD program is currently driven primarily by this imperative. Nevertheless, Japanese policy-makers have often been disingenuous in neglecting to indicate that China is also a potential long-term object of the development and

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<sup>28</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, “Japanese Policy and the North Korean ‘Soft Landing’”, in *The Pacific Review* 11:3 (1998), pp. 408-410.

<sup>29</sup> For Nonaka’s argument, see Maeda Tetsuo, *Jieitai: Henyō no Yukue* [JSDF: the direction of its transformation] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2007), p. 55.

deployment of BMD. Japan's government certainly intends to deploy BMD assets to defend JSDF and US bases in the event of both Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Straits' contingencies, and is aware that in the event of the former it may face US demands to deploy the system around Taiwan.

### **Japan's Evolving Defense Posture and North Korea**

Japan's ballooning threat perception of North Korea has subsequently triggered a range of changes to its defense posture, all of which indicate that both the substantial and accentuated perceptions of the threat from the North are contributing to its breaking away from the post-war constraints on its security policy.

#### *Japan's National Defense Capabilities*

As noted earlier, Japan since the first North Korean nuclear crisis has gone through two iterations in 1995 and 2004 of the revision of the NDPG. In terms of conventional military capabilities, Japan since the mid-1990s has begun to scale down the JSDF's force structure largely aimed to defeat a Soviet land invasion, and begun to acquire capabilities more suited to responding to the post-Cold war threats from North Korea and China, although still legitimized based primarily on the threat from the North. The Ground Self Defense Force (GSDF) in the 2004 NDPG moved to further reduce the number of its main battle tanks, and to instead emphasize rapid-reaction style forces through the establishment of a Central Readiness Group, able to respond to North Korea-type guerrilla incursions as well as to train for overseas international dispatch. The Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) is to reduce the quantitative number of its destroyers, and concentrate on its qualitative investment in six destroyers equipped with the *Aegis* sea-mobile BMD system, suited to intercepting North Korean and Chinese ballistic missiles. These are to be deployed between 2007 and 2010, on a

timetable accelerated by the North's missile tests of 2006. Japan, with US cooperation, conducted its first successful interceptor test of the *Aegis* BMD system off Hawaii in December 2007. The MSDF has also introduced 200-tonne high-speed missile patrol boats to respond to future *fushinsen*. It is further known to have considered the procurement of *Tomahawk* cruise missiles to provide Japan with a means to strike back at North Korean ballistic missile launches.<sup>30</sup> The Air Self Defense Force (ASDF) partly in reaction to the North Korean threat has moved to acquire in-flight refueling capabilities, and has begun to investigate the procurement of precision guided munitions that might be used to strike against North Korean missile bases. The ASDF has procured Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC) BMD systems, and practiced their deployment in central Tokyo in September 2007 and January 2008. Similarly, the JCG, a near second Japanese navy in terms of its tonnage and capabilities of its patrol vessels, has installed powerful 30mm long-range machine guns on its ships to counter North Korean intruders.<sup>31</sup> Japan has further beefed up its overall intelligence capabilities to respond to North Korean missile tests, launching four intelligence-gathering satellites (two using synthetic aperture radar, and two optical capabilities) between March 2003 and February 2007. Again, although Japan classifies these capabilities as "multi-purpose intelligence-gathering satellites", the decisive impetus for the initiation of Japan's own spy satellite program was provided by the North Korean *Taepodong-1* test, and their prime military use thus far has been to monitor preparations for North Korean missile launches.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ishiba Shigeru "Kōshi Ishiba Mae Bōeichōkan" [Former JDA Director General Ishiba as instructor], in *Nihon no Bōei Nanatsu no Ronten* [Seven debates on Japan's defense], ed. Kuroi Buntarō (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 2005), pp. 51-52.

<sup>31</sup> Richard J. Samuels, "New fighting power": Japan's Growing Maritime Capabilities and East Asian Security," in *International Security* 32: 3 (2008), pp. 84-112

<sup>32</sup> Andrew L. Oros, "Explaining Japan's Tortured Course to Surveillance Satellites", in *Review of Policy Research* 24: 1 (2007), pp. 32, 35-36.

### *Constitutional Prohibitions and Anti-militaristic Principles*

Japan's reaction to North Korea has also precipitated change in the fundamental prohibitions governing its use of military force. Japanese procurement of in-flight refueling capabilities and interest in precision guided munitions and *Tomahawk* missiles has raised the question of whether this is leading to a possible breach of the anti-militaristic principle on the possession of offensive weaponry. There has been active discussion of whether Japan is looking to lift its ban on the use of pre-emptive force to respond to North Korean missile attacks; although thus far it has adhered to its consistent position since 1956 that Japan is permitted to launch strikes only when an aggressor has embarked on definite steps to attack and not simply when it is feared to be about to attack, for Japan the latter being the definition of pre-emption.<sup>33</sup> Japan's temptation to transgress its anti-militaristic principles in order to respond to North Korea has also been shown by its intelligence satellite program, which has in *de facto* terms led to the use of space for military purposes. The Japanese government has increasingly shifted its interpretation of this anti-militaristic principle relating to the use of space from one defined in 1969 as peaceful (*heiwa no mokuteki*) and non-military (*higunji*) to one instead of the *defensive* military use of space. In May 2008, the LDP, with support from the opposition DPJ, passed through the Diet a new Basic Law for Space Activities. Article 2 of the law states that Japan will conduct activities in accordance with the principles of the

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<sup>33</sup> Tanaka Kōta, "Is Enemy Strike Capability Necessary for Japan?," Stimson Center, November 16, 2007, <[http://www.stimson.org/japan/pdf/Tanaka\\_StimsonCenter\\_fall2006.pdf](http://www.stimson.org/japan/pdf/Tanaka_StimsonCenter_fall2006.pdf)>; Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Reemergence as a "Normal" Military Power*, *Adelphi Paper 368-9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/IISS), pp. 88-89.



Constitution, thereby now permitting the use of space for defensive purposes, and finally breaching this anti-militaristic principle.<sup>34</sup>

Japan's embarkation on BMD is placing severe pressure on other anti-militaristic principles and constitutional prohibitions. In order to operate a BMD system which seeks to respond in real time to missiles that may reach their target in Japan within a matter of minutes, it is necessary to delegate greater authority on decisions on interceptor launches to commanders in the field in line with pre-planned rules of engagement. Japan has traditionally retained decisions on the use of military force in the hands of the prime minister in line with the post-war principles of civilian control. However, Japan in February 2005 revised its legal measures to dilute the principles of civilian control and to enhance the authority of the Minister of Defense and JSDF commanders for the purposes of BMD.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, BMD is placing extreme pressure on Japan's ban on collective self-defense. Japan to effectively operate the BMD system will need to engage in increased information-sharing and the integration of its command and control systems with those of the US, so as to draw on the US's superior infrared sensor systems for detecting and tracking missile launches. Japan and the US have already agreed since May 2006 to collocate their air defense systems for missile defense at Yokota air base near Tokyo. Japan's closer cooperation with the US and possession of an *Aegis* BMD system largely interoperable with that of the US, which has also deployed its first BMD-capable *Aegis* cruiser assets in Japan since the North's 2006 missile tests, should also increase expectations for Japan to assist the US in regional contingencies involving North Korea and Taiwan. US policy-makers, including US Ambassador Thomas Schieffer, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for

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<sup>34</sup> Suzuki, Kazuto, "Space: Japan's New Security Agenda," in *RIPS Policy Perspectives* 5 (October 2007), <[http://www.rips.or.jp/English/publications/rips\\_pp\\_5.html](http://www.rips.or.jp/English/publications/rips_pp_5.html)>.

<sup>35</sup> Bōeichōhen, "Bōeichō Secchihō Nado o Ichibu o Kaisei Suru Hōritsuan Kankei Shiryō" [Data relating to the bill for a partial revision of the JDA Law] (Tokyo: Bōeichō, 2005), pp. 11-13.

Asia-Pacific Affairs Richard Lawless, have also made it progressively clearer since 2006 that the US expects Japan to use its BMD assets to help intercept missiles targeted for the US, and that if the ban on the exercise of collective self-defense interferes with this, then it should be breached.<sup>36</sup>

### *US-Japan Alliance Relations*

As noted in earlier sections, North Korea's perceived threat to Japan has been multiplied by the fact that it has attacked the political basis of the alliance, so potentially prizing apart US and Japanese interests. Japan has thus reacted to the North Korean threat by seeking to strengthen political and military confidence in the US-Japan alliance so as to demonstrate its indispensability for Japanese and US interests regionally and globally. Japan in the wake of the first North Korean nuclear crisis thus sought to rehabilitate the alliance, through the revision of the NDPO and Defense Guidelines, so that it would function for Article 6-type regional contingencies which have become the US's prime interest in the post-Cold War era. Similarly, in the wake of the second North Korean nuclear crisis, Japan and the US have again moved, through the Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) of 2004-2006, to consolidate the alliance's regional contingency functions to respond to North Korea. Moreover, BMD in large part, despite inevitable tensions over constitutional restrictions, has served as a means to boost alliance cooperation in the face of North Korea through enhanced information-sharing, and sensor and interceptor deployments.

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<sup>36</sup> "Schieffer's Call for Missile Defense Help Raises Constitution Issue," *Japan Times Online*, October 28, 2006, <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20061028a7.html>>; "Collective Defense Ban Crazy: Lawless," *Japan Times Online*, December 7, 2006, <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn.20061207a3.html>>; "US Calls on Japan to Shield it From Missiles", *Japan Times Online*, May 17, 2007, <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn200070517a2.html>>.

North Korea's magnified threat can also be said to have magnified Japan's military role and US-Japan alliance ties by encouraging Japan to expand its security horizons to the global level. Japan's dispatch of the JSDF to Iraq between 2004 and 2006 was justified by then Prime Minister Koizumi on two rationales: firstly, that it would contribute to Iraqi reconstruction, and the "war on terror" on WMD proliferation; and secondly, and arguably most prominent for Japanese policy-makers and generally implicitly accepted by the Japanese public, even if not explicitly stated, was that it was the unspoken *quid pro quo* for securing US alliance support to defend Japan as an indispensable and loyal ally against the re-emerging North Korean nuclear threat.<sup>37</sup>

### *Japan's Nuclear Option*

Japan's possible exercise of its so-called "nuclear option"—moving to acquire an autonomous *force de frappe* nuclear deterrent to ward off a nuclear armed North Korea—is the other area of change in its security policy often speculated about in the wake of the North's 2006 nuclear test. For sure, certain Japanese policy-makers, including the then Foreign Minister Asō Tarō and then Chairman of the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) Nakagawa Shōichi, immediately following the test did attempt to initiate a debate on the value of Japan possessing nuclear weapons. However, few influential Japanese policy-makers

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<sup>37</sup> Kamiya Mataka, "The Evolution of an Actively Pacifist Nation," in *Gaiko Forum* 4: 2 (Spring 2004); Richard P. Cronin, "The North Korean Security Threat and the US-Japan Alliance: Perceived Interests, Approaches, and Prospects," in *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 29: 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 58-60, [http://www.stimson.org/southeastasia/pdf/Cronin\\_The\\_North\\_Korean\\_Nuclear\\_Threat\\_and%20the\\_US\\_Japan\\_Security\\_Alliance.pdf](http://www.stimson.org/southeastasia/pdf/Cronin_The_North_Korean_Nuclear_Threat_and%20the_US_Japan_Security_Alliance.pdf); Paul Midford, *Japanese Public Opinion and the War on Terrorism: Implications for Japan's Security Strategy*, *East-West Center Policy Studies* 27 (Washington D.C.: East-West Center, 2006), pp. 31-32; Natsuyo Ishibashi, "The Dispatch of Japan's Self Defense Forces to Iraq, Public Opinion, Elections, and Foreign Policy," in *Asian Survey* 47:5 (September/October 2007), pp. 779-783.

actually advocated that Japan should yet breach the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, and it appears that currently the drivers for Japan as a potential nuclear proliferator are too weak.<sup>38</sup>

Firstly, Japan retains sufficient confidence in the US extended deterrent to mean that it sees no overwhelming national security threat from the North. Indeed, any move by Japan to go nuclear might only serve to alienate the US from Japan and worsen its security situation. In addition, Japan's acquisition of BMD and possible acquisition of conventional deterrence means such as the ability to strike North Korean missile bases should mean that it can counter North Korea without resort to its own nuclear weapons. Secondly, the fact that Japan has derived considerable international kudos from adhering to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, coupled with still very strong domestic anti-nuclear sentiment, means that there is no incentive for Japan to go nuclear in terms of international prestige and becoming respected as a great power.<sup>39</sup> Thirdly, Japan's dependence on civilian nuclear and fossil fuels from overseas means that if it were to acquire nuclear weapons that this could lead to its economic isolation and extreme energy vulnerability. Fourthly, Japan may have the technological capacity over the medium to long term to acquire nuclear weapons, but the effort of acquiring delivery systems, submarines and command and control systems would be very costly financially, and in the interim period Japan might risk losing its US nuclear umbrella, and any *force de frappe* developed would likely be a poor substitute for the full panoply of US nuclear capabilities.<sup>40</sup> Hence, at present the relatively weak North Korean nuclear threat is only

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons: Implications for the Nuclear Ambitions of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan," *Asia Policy*, 2:1 (January 2007), pp 105-123.

<sup>39</sup> Llewellyn Hughes, "Why Japan Will Not Go Nuclear (Yet): International and Domestic Constraints on the Nuclearization of Japan," *International Security*, 31: 4 (Spring 2007), pp. 83-91.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson, "Nuclear Energy, Space Launch Vehicles and Advanced Technology: Japan's Prospects for Nuclear Breakout," in *Japan's Nuclear Option: Security, Politics and Policy*

sufficient to force Japan to saber rattle and question its anti-nuclear taboos, although in the future any potential for a growing North Korean nuclear capacity and perceived decline in the US defensive commitment might cause a more serious reconsideration of Japan's stance.

### **Conclusion: Super-Sizing North Korea Super-Sizes Japan Militarily?**

Japan's defense posture is growing in an almost exponential relationship with the North Korean threat. For sure, Japan is correct to entertain genuine concerns about the threat from the North, even as the actual degree of threat remains limited when measured in the cold light of day. However, for Japan the potency of the North Korean threat has come to be measured not simply in a straight calculation relating to the size and quality of its conventional forces and WMD, and the range of capabilities available to Japan and the US to deter it. Instead, Japan's perception of the threat is overly accentuated by the North's threat to the political basis of confidence in the US-Japan alliance; its ability to mesmerize, and to be exploited by, sections of Japanese policy-making opinion and the public as a "terrorist state"; and its role as a catch-all proxy threat to justify changes in security policy that are simultaneously driven by the greater long-term, but diplomatically unacceptable to articulate, threat from China.

Consequently, as North Korea has increasingly emerged as Japan's security bogeyman, Japanese policy-makers have reacted by upgrading their state's conventional military capabilities, challenging and breaching a number of anti-militaristic principles, and probing constitutional prohibitions. Added to this, they have moved to upgrade the regional and global security functions of the US-Japan alliance. However, North Korea as yet looks

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*in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson (Washington D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), pp. 162-166.

not to have approached a level of threat necessary to fully break all military constraints, and certainly not to force any reconsideration of Japan's nuclear option. However, North Korea is certainly beginning to test Japan's military constraints to their limits and to legitimate the pushing outwards the envelope of Japan's re-emergence as a "normal" military power.

Perhaps most significantly in thinking through the impact on Japan's security policy trajectory, North Korea has now led it to begin to breach not just the anti-militaristic principles but now the deeper anti-militaristic norms that have crucially constrained its use of force in the post-war era. The JCG's (as already noted occupying the position of a "para-navy") interception and then eventual sinking of a North Korean *fushinsen* in 2001 demonstrated Japan's resolve not only to use force to defend its national interests but also to use lethal force if necessary. In this sense, Japan's "immovable" security policy in reaction to North Korea is now gaining some trundling momentum.