



Japanese Perceptions of Nuclear “Twin Commitments” Under the Obama Administration by Ken Jimbo

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How does Japan view President Obama’s “twin commitments” to the goals of nuclear abolition and maintaining an adequate deterrent as long as nuclear weapons remain? Obama believes in the commitment of nuclear weapon states (NWS) under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) to work toward eliminating all nuclear weapons. He supports reaffirming this goal, as called for by “the four horsemen” – George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn – and other proposals to move the United States in that direction. At the same time, he has made clear that “America will not disarm unilaterally” and as long as nuclear weapons exist, the U.S. will retain a strong deterrent. This deterrent will be pursued while the U.S. takes steps to decrease the importance and role of nuclear weapons.

Japan’s anticipated response to this “twin commitment” will reflect the dual identity of Japan’s nuclear policy. In a seeming contradiction, it wishes for the elimination of nuclear weapons while simultaneously seeking the maintenance of a credible nuclear extended deterrent. Members of the first school, mainly led by the disarmament community in Japan, are likely to respond with:

- Japan welcomes the U.S. becoming a signatory of the annual resolution at the UN General Assembly that follows up the “Renewed Determination towards the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons”; in the past, the U.S. has refused to sign, along with India and North Korea. Japan also welcomes Congressional ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- Japan basically supports the next Nuclear Posture Review that aims at greater reductions in the total number of nuclear warheads and stockpiles as well as deemphasizing the role of nuclear weapons in Pentagon military planning.
- Japan would be more assured if the U.S. pursues cooperative relations with Russia (with renewed START negotiations) and China (a U.S.-China dialogue on strategic nuclear weapons) in the nuclear context, to avoid a security dilemma and a possible arms race.
- Japan welcomes steps toward the goal of nuclear abolition that would help achieve positive outcomes in regional denuclearization negotiations, especially those concerning North Korea.

Japanese strategic-military specialists would caution the Obama administration not to rush to embrace plans for large-scale reductions of nuclear arms because:

- The central concern that a large-scale reduction of U.S. nuclear forces would result in weakening of extended deterrence in Asia.
- A smaller number of U.S. nuclear forces, as well as the deemphasis of nuclear weapons in U.S. military doctrine, may have a negative impact on the credibility of the threat of U.S. retaliation against North Korean aggression, especially if such reductions take place without reshaping the conventional deterrent. It may also have a negative impact upon crisis stability in the deterrence phase and upon U.S. negotiating power in the dissuasion phase. Japan would not welcome fewer U.S. nuclear forces if this results in diminished U.S. leverage in negotiations.
- Japan is concerned about a possible shift in Chinese deterrence doctrine as a result of reduced U.S. nuclear dominance between the U.S. and China. Japan does not want: 1) the U.S. to have nuclear parity with China, which leads to quasi-mutual assured destruction in U.S.-China nuclear relations; 2) to encourage China to shift its doctrine from minimum deterrence to limited deterrence, which gives China more options and freedom of maneuver in nuclear warfare; or, 3) to encourage China to increase its reliance on theater deterrence, which would include increasing medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) that could target Japan without fearing retaliatory forces.

To reconcile the disarmament and deterrence schools, Japan needs a clearer strategy on how to reshape the extended deterrent. How then should Japan respond to Obama’s “twin commitments”? Here are some tentative answers:

- Japan wants the U.S. to pursue its “twin commitments” without damaging the extended deterrent or its general security ties with Japan. Japan and the U.S. should prepare “tailored” deterrence options since the logic behind this sensitive (and somewhat fragile) balance could be changed by a shift in the U.S. nuclear capability relative to other nuclear weapon states.
- Japan wants a more visible nuclear commitment from the U.S. in terms of both doctrine and capability. The U.S. should share with Japan the basic doctrine regarding nuclear operations and targeting plans against North Korea and China. By doing so, both countries’ militaries should actively engage in contingency planning including nuclear and conventional warfare. The U.S. should offer more briefings to and consultations with a wider Japanese community (political leaders, experts, and journalists) while drafting the 2009 Nuclear Posture Review.
- The extended deterrent in the U.S.-Japan alliance will be further enhanced if the U.S. strategy shows clearer

principles, objectives, and conventional force postures in Asia. In this regard, a new report for East Asia should be prepared by the Department of Defense (a new East Asia Strategy Report or EASR) to encourage recognition of a firmer U.S. commitment to the region. The new EASR should specifically mention the U.S. commitment regarding extended nuclear deterrence.

- The U.S.-Japan joint effort on ensuring the credibility of extended deterrence should be enhanced by a visible U.S. force posture in East Asia. The core component of such credibility is the U.S. conventional military presence in Asia; therefore, it should be firmly maintained. Steady implementation of the realignment initiatives agreed by the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee in the May 1, 2006 “United States-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation” is critical to this credibility.
- The nuclear dimension of U.S. capability in Asia should also be considered in concrete terms. Possible ideas may include the introduction of regular stationing (or frequent positioning/war-time positioning) of nuclear forces in Guam with B-52/B-2 strategic bombers. Homeporting nuclear-equipped ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) and cruise missile submarines (SSGN) in Guam should be considered. Japan may be able to support construction of support/maintenance facilities in Guam in addition to support for the relocation of III-MEF personnel from Okinawa.
- Japan’s indigenous military capability is an essential component of the U.S. extended deterrent. Self-Defense Force (SDF) situational dominance against North Korean aggression (a missile or commando/special operations attack against Japanese soil) and the ability to maintain the bilateral conventional balance of power against China reinforce the joint deterrent structure. Japan should swiftly modernize and reform the SDF force structure to have such capabilities on its own. The procurement of F-X, C-X, and P-X to enhance Japanese air superiority in the East China Sea, and improving intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance (ISR) capabilities, especially for anti-submarine warfare, (ASW) is essential. Thus, U.S.-Japan cooperation on procurement, industry cooperation, and next-generation technology, such as in space, should be promoted. F-X procurement should not be politicized as an indicator of alliance status, but key decisions – such as whether the U.S. will sell Japan the F22 – should be swift.
- Japan may want enduring U.S. dominance over Chinese nuclear capabilities, but Tokyo wants dominance at a level that does not encourage Beijing to seek regional or theater dominance. In the medium- and long-term, if the U.S. seeks to end its denial doctrine and shift toward mutual balance with China, the optimal U.S.-China nuclear balance is asymmetrical. Ideally, it would mean: 1) Chinese strategic nuclear forces (DF-5/DF-31A) would be kept to a minimum to maintain a second-strike capability (counter-value) against the U.S. 2) Chinese MRBMs (those that can cover Japan) should

not undermine the deterrent of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Japan even welcomes a mutual balance, if U.S. recognition of the Chinese deterrent caps the number of Chinese nuclear warheads. Japan may be able to accept U.S.-China “mutual balance” if Japan obtains a missile defense capability that can deal with Chinese MRBMs and meet conditions 1) and 2). This logic should be pursued in a trilateral manner; thus it is important that Japan join the U.S.-China Dialogue on Strategic Nuclear Weapons when such decisions could be made.

- Regarding Japanese missile defense, the current benchmark is 2011, with the introduction of SM-3 (4 Aegis), PAC-3 (16 Fire Units), ground-based radars, and command and control systems. U.S.-Japan joint research/development of the next generation interceptor (SM-3 Block II/IIA – 21 inch) will have additional capability to deal with incoming missiles beyond the Nodong (whose maximum range is 1300km). This provides an opportunity for Japan to intercept missiles that fly over Japanese territory, including those that target the U.S. mainland. In this sense, as recommended by the Yanai Commission, Japan must revise its interpretation of the exercise of the right to collective self-defense so as to enable the SM-3 Block II system to engage in operations to defend the U.S.
- Japan is concerned by negative implications of U.S. missile defense installation plans in Europe. If the U.S. decides to delay, downsize, reconfigure, or even cancel the European deployments because of Russian hostility, this may create the belief that the missile defense program can be negotiated. China is closely watching these discussions and Japan does not want Beijing to get the impression that rollback of Tokyo’s missile defense plans are an option. Japan wants the U.S. to take a rigid stance on the missile defense plan in Europe.