

Japan and U.S. Nuclear Arms Control and Disarmament Policy Under the Trump Administration: A Look into the Cloudy Crystal Ball

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SUMMARY

Shifts in U.S. nuclear policies under the Trump Administration may affect Japan in significant ways. The demands of formulating a coherent set of policies and implementing them, and dealing with pushback from other states and domestic opposition make it hard to anticipate exactly what U.S. nuclear policies may look like under Donald Trump. President Trump, however, has been outspoken on nuclear policy issues, and even though the statements are often contradictory, they offer some insight. These statements form the basis of this analysis.

This essay looks at how United States nuclear arms control and disarmament policies may change over the next few years. It begins by looking at Trump's views on nuclear arms control issues, including the New START agreement and U.S. plans for modernization, the possibility of new nuclear weapons and a resumption of nuclear testing. It then looks at Trump's views on U.S. nuclear posture, including the question of the first use of nuclear weapons. The essay also examines how the President has viewed the challenge of nuclear proliferation, especially the case of North Korea and U.S. policy toward Japan. Finally, with talks to begin in March 2017 on a UN mandated treaty to ban nuclear weapons, the essay looks at the abolition of nuclear weapons.

1. Nuclear Arms Control

The Trump Administration will have to engage

with two key nuclear arms control issues in the coming four years. The first is the future of the U.S.-Russian bilateral New START agreement and the possibility of further reductions in nuclear arsenals. The United States and Russia are obliged under the NPT to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament."¹

A second and related issue is the question of the U.S. national missile defense program, which has emerged as a potential obstacle to further reductions.

New START and Arms Reductions. From the beginning, the Obama Administration (2009–2016) had placed a strong emphasis on nuclear force reductions and an updated nuclear posture. In 2010, the United States and Russia agreed to the New START treaty, which entered into force in 2011. It reduces the number of deployed strategic weapons to 1,550 for each party, with this limit to be reached by February 2018. The treaty expires in 2021 unless it is extended or superseded by another treaty.² New START was widely seen as a logical next step for bilateral nuclear arms control between Russia and the United States: it further lowers the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons, if not by a big margin, and it preserves the extensive and well-established verification regime of the original START Treaty, which expired in 2009.



Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev after signing the “New Start Treaty in Prague in April 2010

President Obama in 2013 announced the possibility of further reductions of “deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third,” i.e., down to 1000-1100 weapons, ideally in negotiated cuts with Russia.³ This language left open the possibility for unilateral cuts. It is worth recalling that, in 2000, President Putin had offered to cut to 1,000-1,500 warheads for each side, but U.S. President Clinton rejected it at the time.⁴

There is clearly room for deep reductions in nuclear arsenals. In January 2017, Vice-President Joseph Biden announced a cut in the U.S. reserve stockpile of nuclear weapons (which are active but not deployed):⁵

“After determining that we can safely reduce our nuclear stockpile even further—over the past year, President Obama set aside almost 500 warheads for dismantlement on top of those previously scheduled for retirement last year. That puts our active nuclear stockpile at 4,018 warheads in service and approximately 2,800 in line to be destroyed. And we have recommended that the next

administration conduct a comprehensive nuclear posture review to determine whether additional reductions may be undertaken.”

Independent estimates suggest Russia has, as of early 2017, about 4,300 operational nuclear warheads and about 2,700 retired warheads awaiting dismantlement.⁶ This stockpile includes tactical weapons: Russia today has about 1,850 tactical nuclear weapons in its arsenal compared to about 500 tactical weapons held by the United States.

In an interview with the *London Times* in January 2017, days before his inauguration as President, Trump indicated an interest in agreeing to further nuclear arms control with Russia. He said, “let’s see if we can make some good deals with Russia. [...] For one thing, I think nuclear weapons should be way down and reduced very substantially.”⁷

After taking office, however, President Trump called New START “a bad deal” in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, after Putin suggested extending the treaty.⁸ This could indicate that the Administration is willing (or planning) to let the treaty expire in 2021 and not prepare to exercise the provision to extend the treaty by up to five additional years, i.e., up to the year 2026. Any talks on the extension of New START would have to begin during the first term of the Trump Administration.

A failure to extend the New START agreement or agree on a follow-on treaty would have profound consequences for the international nuclear arms-control and nonproliferation regime. For many Western-European non-weapon states and for Japan in particular, which officially support nuclear disarmament as a way to balance their policy of wanting to be defended by U.S. nuclear weapons, this will be a problem.

When the New START agreement was signed, Japan's Foreign Ministry said the treaty "demonstrates that important progress has been made towards nuclear disarmament by both United States and the Russian Federation. [...] Japan strongly hopes that the efforts by both countries will lead to advancing global nuclear disarmament involving other countries possessing nuclear weapons than the United States and the Russian Federation. Furthermore, Japan anticipates that both countries will continue to make efforts toward the further reductions of their nuclear arsenals."⁹

If the arms-reduction process falters and breaks down, Japan and others will no longer be able to point to any positive element in U.S. nuclear policy that can be presented as contributing to nuclear disarmament.

Missile Defense. Any agreement on further bilateral reductions in nuclear stockpiles by the United States and Russia will require a resolution of Russian concerns about the U.S. ballistic missile defense program. Russia insists that solving this dispute is necessary for future arms-control discussions. Russian officials have repeatedly said that the next arms reduction treaty needs to deal with missile defenses and conventional strategic strike, especially cruise missiles.

U.S. missile defense systems have also caused concern for China and may limit its future participation in the nuclear arms control process.¹⁰ The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) theater ballistic missile defense system being deployed to South Korea has attracted especially forceful opposition from China.¹¹

By 2014, President Obama had apparently decided that the U.S. ballistic missile program to protect the U.S. mainland had failed, with *The New York Times* reporting "Mr. Obama concluded that the \$300 billion spent since the

Eisenhower era on traditional antimissile systems, often compared to hitting 'a bullet with a bullet,' had failed the core purpose of protecting the continental United States."¹²

Trump, however, like Republican leaders generally, appears committed to missile defense. He ordered a new Ballistic Missile Defense Review "to identify ways of strengthening missile-defense capabilities, rebalancing homeland and theater defense priorities, and highlighting priority funding areas."¹³

The proposed "rebalancing of homeland and theater defense priorities" may suggest an inclination to focus more on missile defenses to protect the continental United States rather than theater missile defense programs directed at protecting U.S. bases and allies in Europe and East Asia. U.S. Republicans in Congress are seeking a third national missile defense site on the East Coast of the United States,¹⁴ and the Trump administration may support construction of such a third site.

In the long term, the Trump Administration may also redirect ship-based missile defenses (based on Aegis destroyers) to be redeployed for homeland missile defense. Such a redeployment may have implications for Japan's plan to rely on U.S. theater missile defenses.¹⁵ President Trump has on more than one occasion expressed concern about the cost of the United States having to defend Japan, claiming that "we cannot afford to be losing vast amounts of billions of dollars on all of this. We just can't do it anymore."¹⁶

2. Modernization of the U.S. Nuclear Arsenal

Despite several arms-control efforts pursued by the Obama administration, the United States has launched a massive modernization program for its nuclear arsenal, involving nuclear warheads, delivery systems, and support infrastructure. The program envisions renewal

of the entire nuclear triad, i.e., new generations of ballistic submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles, bombers, and nuclear-armed cruise missiles (long-range standoff, LRSO). One area where nuclear modernization plans may have important repercussions is on the development and possible testing of new nuclear weapons.

The total cost for the modernization program is currently estimated at up to one trillion dollars (\$1,000,000,000,000) over a period of 25 years. Costs are expected to ramp up sharply by 2020 (Figure 1), and the current and next administrations will face enormous budgetary pressures to accommodate all elements of this program.

Trump has expressed the view that the U.S. arsenal is in urgent need of modernization. In early 2016, while campaigning for the presidency, Trump told the *New York Times*: “We have nuclear arsenals which are in very terrible shape. They don’t even know if they work.”¹⁷ He has expressed particular concern that the United States may be falling behind its modernization compared to Russia, claiming in September 2016 that “Russia has been expanding their—they have a much newer capability than we do. We have not been updating from the new standpoint. I looked the other night. I was seeing B-52s, they’re old enough that your father, your grandfather could be flying them. We are not—we are not keeping up with other countries.”¹⁸

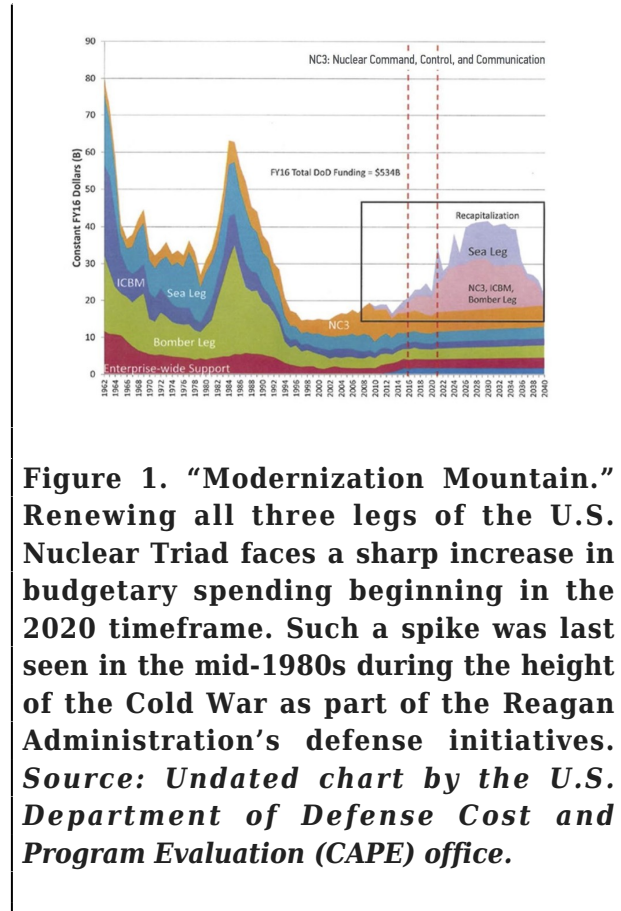


Figure 1. “Modernization Mountain.” Renewing all three legs of the U.S. Nuclear Triad faces a sharp increase in budgetary spending beginning in the 2020 timeframe. Such a spike was last seen in the mid-1980s during the height of the Cold War as part of the Reagan Administration’s defense initiatives. *Source: Undated chart by the U.S. Department of Defense Cost and Program Evaluation (CAPE) office.*

After winning election, in his December 2016 comments to MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” TV program, Trump reinforced that he sees U.S. nuclear weapon modernization as part of an arms race with Russia, : “Let it be an arms race;” and: “We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all.”¹⁹ Trump said the United States has “fallen behind on nuclear weapon capacity” and that he wants to ensure that the U.S. nuclear arsenal is “top of the pack.”²⁰ In a December 2016, Trump tweeted: “The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes.”²¹

The Trump commitment to nuclear modernization is reflected in an 11% increase for the National Nuclear Security Administration in the Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposal released by the White House Office of Management and Budget.²² The Budget outline

claims the proposed increase “demonstrates the Administration’s strong support for the United States’ nuclear security enterprise and ensures that we have a nuclear force that is second to none.”²³

The U.S. modernization program, like similar programs in other weapons states, is a challenge to the nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation regime. These programs involve long-term commitments to develop and deploy new nuclear weapons systems over the next decades. The new weapons once deployed will have operating lives on the order of 40–50 years. These new systems will be an obstacle to further reductions and make it harder to make progress toward nuclear disarmament. As such these modernization programs pose a major policy challenge for Japan and many Western-European non-nuclear weapon states in maintaining their support for nuclear disarmament while also defending U.S. nuclear policies that they view as central to their defense.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Testing of nuclear weapons on a large scale ended with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s.²⁴ Negotiated by 1996, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) banned all nuclear explosions in all environments. As of March 2017, the treaty has been signed by 183 states and ratified by 166 states, but it only enters into force when 44 “nuclear capable” countries have also ratified the treaty — only eight of these states—China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, and the United States, also known as the Annex 2 states, still need to sign or ratify. The United States has not ratified the treaty despite its leadership role in its negotiations. It is widely believed that if the United States were to ratify, the other countries would quickly follow.

There are indications that the Trump administration may consider resuming nuclear

weapon testing, with the *New York Times* reporting that the administration “is certain to receive pressure to resume low-yield underground tests to ensure that existing weapons will function, and to help create new bomb designs, which have been off-limits in the Obama administration.”²⁵ In 2014, John S. Foster Jr., former director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and chief of Pentagon research during the Cold War, said the labs should design, develop, and build prototype nuclear weapons that may be needed by the military in the future, including a very low-yield weapon that could be used with precision delivery systems, an electromagnetic pulse weapon that could destroy an enemy’s communications systems and a penetrating weapon to destroy deeply buried targets.²⁶

Similar arguments for new weapons were made under the Bush Administration. J. D. Crouch the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, in an official briefing on the Bush Administration Posture Review of 2002 noted, “at this point, there are no recommendations in the report about developing new nuclear weapons. [...] Now, we are trying to look at a number of initiatives. One would be to modify an existing weapon, to give it greater capability against ... hard targets and deeply-buried targets.”²⁷ Research and development of a nuclear bunker buster (the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator) intended to destroy deeply buried targets eventually was dropped in 2005 after opposition from Congress and a study by the National Academy of Sciences highlighting the large number of casualties that could follow from the use of such a weapon.²⁸ A large conventional explosive (the Massive Ordnance Air Blast, or the Mother of All Bombs) was first used in combat in 2017 in Afghanistan to destroy tunnels and may indicate continuing interest in this capability.²⁹

The Trump Administration has only hinted at its preferences concerning new nuclear weapons. A Presidential Memorandum from January 27,

2017, announced “a new Nuclear Posture Review to ensure that the United States nuclear deterrent is modern, robust, flexible, resilient, ready, and appropriately tailored to deter 21st-century threats and reassure our allies.”³⁰ It is worth noting that key terms in the memorandum explaining the role of nuclear weapons—robust, flexible, resilient, ready, and tailored—are absent from the Obama Administration’s 2010 Nuclear Posture Review report.

The possible willingness of the Bush and Trump Administrations to pursue new weapons is in sharp contrast to the position of the Obama Administration. On the first day of the new administration in January 2009, the White House website listed the new president’s objectives for various agendas including to “stop development of new nuclear weapons.” This was listed under the Foreign Policy objective, “Move Toward a Nuclear Free World.”³¹ This guidance shaped the Obama 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, which considered whether new warheads or warheads with new military capabilities were needed in light of the existing security environment and that expected over the next decade. The final Posture Review report said: “The United States will not develop new nuclear warheads. Life Extension Programs (LEPs) will use only nuclear components based on previously tested designs, and will not support new military missions or provide for new military capabilities.”³²

The Obama Administration also sought to buttress the logic of the CTBT, even though ratification of the treaty in the United States was impossible because of Republican opposition in the Senate. In 2016, the Obama Administration successfully managed to pass UN Security Council Resolution 2310 reinforcing the global norm against nuclear testing.³³ A separate statement by the five NPT nuclear weapon states in 2016 declared, “we take this opportunity to reaffirm our own

moratoria on nuclear weapons test explosions or any other nuclear explosions pending the CTBT’s entry into force, as such moratoria are an example of responsible international behavior that contributes to international peace and stability.”³⁴

A U.S. withdrawal from the CTBT could be followed by other nuclear weapon signatories. This would not only throw the entire arms control regime into crisis but create a major challenge for Japan, which is a close U.S. ally and at the same time a key member of the “Friends of the CTBT” Foreign Ministers’ group, which it helped found in 2002.³⁵ Japan would have to decide whether to defend U.S. policy or the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

3. Nuclear Posture

Another area of nuclear policy where there may be significant changes under the Trump Administration compared to the Obama Administration concerns U.S. nuclear posture as it covers the role and use of nuclear weapons. The extent of such changes will become clear when the Trump Administration releases its Nuclear Posture Review. This is a congressionally-mandated document produced by the Department of Defense that sets and explains the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. policy. Previous Nuclear Posture Reviews were conducted in 1994, 2002, and 2010.

The Obama Administration’s public report on the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review framed U.S. policy as to “seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” in order to overcome the “grave and growing threats” posed by “21st century nuclear dangers.” The report listed key objectives of U.S. nuclear weapons policies and postures, including: (1) reducing the role and numbers of U.S. nuclear weapons; (2) considering the use of nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances, and (3) not to develop new nuclear warheads, or new nuclear military missions or

capabilities.³⁶ These goals were to be met through reliance on non-nuclear (conventional) military capabilities.

At that time, Japan's government and many members of the Diet supported these goals. In a December 2009 letter to Secretary of State Clinton, Japan's Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada stated that "the GOJ highly regards the fact that the United States stands at the forefront of global nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, as exemplified by President Obama's call for "a world without nuclear weapons". Japan intends to work alongside the United States in striving towards the realization of this supreme goal."³⁷

Meanwhile, more than two hundred members of the Diet wrote a letter to President Obama, stating:³⁸

"As members of the Parliament of the only country that has experienced nuclear bombings, we believe we have "a moral responsibility" to support your efforts for the abolition of nuclear weapons with all our strength, and declare that:

We fully support the policy objectives of moving toward a world without nuclear weapons as outlined your speech in Prague in April 2009.

We strongly desire that the United States immediately adopt a declaratory policy stating the "sole purpose" of the U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter others from using such weapons against the United States or U.S. allies, in accordance with the recommendation of the ICNND Report.

We are firmly convinced that Japan will not seek the road toward possession of nuclear weapons if the U.S. adopts a "sole purpose" policy.

We strongly desire that U.S. nuclear policy should exclude any option that would violate Japan's "Three Non-Nuclear Principles."

The last months of the Obama Administration saw a renewed discussion of whether the United States can or should adopt a "no-first-use" policy. At that time, there was clearly a White House preference to move toward such a policy. Vice-President Joseph Biden announced in January 2017 that "the President and I strongly believe we have made enough progress that deterring—and if necessary, retaliating against—a nuclear attack should be the sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal."³⁹ Biden explained, "given our non-nuclear capabilities and the nature of today's threats—it's hard to envision a plausible scenario in which the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be necessary. Or make sense."

The shift to a formal U.S. policy of no-first use was opposed however in the National Security Council by the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Energy (John Kerry, Ashton Carter and Ernest Moniz). They argued that for various reasons some countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Japan, South Korea, and Germany, want the United States to maintain the threat of first use of nuclear weapons.⁴⁰ As weapon states, the United Kingdom and France seek to protect their first use of nuclear weapons policies from the enormous pressure that would surely follow if the United States were to shift to no-first use. For Japan, South Korea, and Germany, a U.S. no-first use posture would reduce the likelihood that the United States would wage nuclear war on their behalf. In all these cases, the role played by these

countries stands in contradiction with their official policies to support the goals of reducing nuclear dangers and supporting nuclear disarmament.

Defense Secretary James Mattis, who will be responsible for the Trump Nuclear Posture Review, has raised questions about the role of nuclear weapons, which in some ways align with those of the Obama Administration. In 2015 testimony to the U.S. Senate, before joining the Trump Administration, Mattis asked some critical questions about the role of U.S. nuclear weapons: “Do they serve solely to deter nuclear war? If so we should say so, and the resulting clarity will help to determine the number we need;” and: “Is it time to reduce the Triad to a Diad, removing the land-based missiles? This would reduce the false alarm danger.”⁴¹ Since land-based missiles are fixed targets (unlike submarines), they can be attacked in a preemptive strike and so are kept on a hair-trigger alert posture ready to be launched on the warning of a possible attack. This makes them vulnerable to the risk of launch on a false warning. For his part, Trump has made no mention of the danger of a policy of launch-on-warning or expressed concern about false alarms leading to nuclear weapons being launched.

Trump has, on more than one occasion, expressed views on the threat of use of nuclear weapons.⁴² In a 2015 interview, he claimed “It is highly, highly, highly, highly unlikely that I would ever be using them,” with the reason for such confidence being that “I will have a military that’s so strong and powerful, and so respected, we’re not gonna have to nuke anybody.”⁴³ In 2016, he said, “I would be very, very slow and hesitant to pull that trigger;” and: “I’d be the last one to use the nuclear weapon ... because that’s sort of like the end of the ball game.”⁴⁴ It would be, as he has said on a separate occasion, a “totally last resort.”⁴⁵

Trump also shows an appreciation of the

consequences of nuclear war. He told CNN that when it came to Russia: “We’re a very powerful nuclear country and so are they. I have been briefed. And I can tell you one thing about a briefing that we’re allowed to say because anybody that ever read the most basic book can say it, nuclear holocaust would be like no other.”⁴⁶ Despite this, there are indications, however, that Trump sees the threat to use nuclear weapons as a potentially winning move in a conflict.

In a March 2016 interview with *New York Times* journalists David Sanger and Maggie Haberman, Trump supported the U.S. threats of use of nuclear weapons during the Korean War. The question and answer went as follows:

SANGER: General MacArthur wanted to go use [nuclear weapons] against the Chinese and the North Koreans, not as a last resort.

TRUMP: That’s right. He did. Yes, well you don’t know if he wanted to use them but he certainly said that at least.

SANGER: He certainly asked Harry Truman if he could.

TRUMP: Yeah, well, O.K. He certainly talked it and was he doing that to negotiate, was he doing that to win? Perhaps. Perhaps. Was he doing that for what reason? I mean, I think he played, he did play the nuclear card but he didn’t use it, he played the nuclear card. He talked the nuclear card, did he do that to win? Maybe, maybe, you know, maybe that’s what got him victory. But in the meantime, he didn’t use them. So, you know. So, we need a different mind set.”

This exchange raises profoundly troubling questions about how likely President Trump may be to consider the use of nuclear weapons in a crisis or conflict. These questions become more acute when taken together with Trump’s repeated invocation of the importance of winning. The Trump fascination with winning was clearly on display in his February 2017 address at the Conservative Political Action Conference, where he said, “We don’t win anymore. When was the last time we won? Did we win a war? Do we win anything? Do we win anything? We’re going to win. We’re going to win big, folks. We’re going to start winning again, believe me. We’re going to win.”⁴⁷

If winning is in doubt, will Trump seek to emulate General MacArthur and threaten to use nuclear weapons? What happens if the threat fails? Asked directly by David Sanger “would you be willing to have the U.S. be the first to use nuclear weapons in a confrontation with adversaries?” Trump replied: “An absolute last step.”

The most likely place where Trump may threaten to use nuclear weapons would be against North Korea.

4. Nuclear Proliferation: North Korea

The Trump Administration sees North Korea as the most urgent nuclear policy challenge. Donald Trump has repeatedly referred to North Korea as a problem. Mr. Trump has talked about North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as a “total nut job” and a “madman playing around with the nukes.”⁴⁸ Trump also has expressed concern about possible use of nuclear weapons by North Korea, saying about Kim Jong Un: “We don’t know if he’s all bluster or is he a

serious maniac that would be willing to use it.”

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has declared that with regard to North Korea “the policy of strategic patience has ended. We are exploring a new range of diplomatic, security, and economic measures. All options are on the table.”⁴⁹ Tillerson explained that this includes the use of force: “Certainly, we do not want to—for things to get to a military conflict. [...] If [the North Koreans] elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe requires action, that option is on the table.”



The Military Parade in Pyongyang, North Korea. April 2017

The scale of the challenge has been described by Anthony Blinken, a deputy secretary of state in the Obama administration, “Much of North Korea’s nuclear complex is concealed underground, inside mountains or in places unknown to United States intelligence. Meanwhile, the country is making rapid progress with mobile missiles powered by solid rocket fuel that can be rolled out of hiding and prepared for launch in minutes.”⁵⁰ As for U.S. options, Blinken suggested, “even if we had an effective pre-emptive strike capacity, the consequences of using it could be prohibitive.”

Trump has suggested four approaches to North Korea. The first of these was Trump's declaration in 2016 that he was willing to talk directly to the North Korean leader: "Who the hell cares? I'll speak to anybody," Trump said, "There's a 10 percent or 20 percent chance I could talk him out of having his damn nukes, because who the hell wants him to have nukes?"⁵¹

The second approach is to get China to do more to press North Korea. Trump argues that "China should be talking to North Korea. But China's tweaking us. China's toying with us." He claims, "China has great power over North Korea even though they don't necessarily say that." He argues further that "we have tremendous economic power over China. We have tremendous power. And that's the power of trade." The implication appears to be a policy of using trade policy to force China to put more pressure on North Korea to halt and roll back its nuclear weapons program.

Trump also has embraced the use of theater missile defense to defend against North Korea: "We will also develop a state-of-the-art missile defense system to protect against missile-based attacks from states like Iran and North Korea."⁵²

Before becoming President, Trump had suggested that the use of nuclear weapons may be an option when it comes to North Korea, arguing that "every time North Korea raises its head, you know, we get calls from Japan and we get calls from everybody else, and "Do something." And there'll be a point at which we're just not going to be able to do it anymore. Now, does that mean nuclear? It could mean nuclear."⁵³

As to which of these options Trump might prioritize, he has said that "I don't have to tell you what I'm going to do in North Korea. [...] You know why? Because they shouldn't know."⁵⁴

In a statement that caused some consternation, Trump also advocated that he saw the logic of the United States leaving Japan to deal with North Korea, including through Japan getting nuclear weapons to counter North Korea rather than relying on the United States. In a question and answer with David Sanger of the *New York Times*, Trump offered his view in very direct terms:⁵⁵

SANGER: But with the North Korea threat you think maybe Japan does need its own nuclear ...

TRUMP: Well I think maybe it's not so bad to have Japan—if Japan had that nuclear threat, I'm not sure that would be a bad thing for us.

Trump's perspective that it would be "not so bad" for Japan to have nuclear weapons, given the concerns about North Korea, ignores what this would mean for Japan's constitutional obligation, its three nonnuclear principles (that reject the possession, production and import of nuclear arms), and Japan's obligations as a non-weapon state member of the NPT. The prospect of further proliferation also ignores the heightened danger of war in Northeast Asia and the Pacific. Such proliferation is technically possible, however, since Japan has 10 tons of plutonium in its domestic stockpile and 37 tons held abroad (in France and the United Kingdom). Moreover, Japan still plans to begin operating its Rokkasho reprocessing plant, which at full capacity could separate about 8 tons of plutonium per year - enough for over 1000 nuclear weapons.⁵⁶ It is expected Japan could quickly assemble a nuclear arsenal, perhaps with only a few if any nuclear weapon tests.

5. Charting a Path Forward: Japan, Nuclear Abolition and the Trump Administration

The most important insight into Trump's view

on the future of nuclear weapons may be how seriously he takes the power and danger of nuclear weapons. Trump has said: “Nuclear capability. I think it’s the single biggest problem. [...] Power of weaponry today is beyond anything ever thought of, or even, you know, it’s unthinkable, the power. You look at Hiroshima and you can multiply that times many, many times, is what you have today. And to me, it’s the single biggest, it’s the single biggest problem.”

He also has expressed a profound ambivalence to the need to ban nuclear weapons:

TRUMP: “I would like everybody to end it, just get rid of it.”

QUESTION: “So could we get rid of the weapons?”

TRUMP: “No, no, we wouldn't get rid of the weapons. Because you have so many people out there.”

QUESTION: “But if you're not going to use them, what's the point in having them?”

TRUMP: “The fact that other people have them. And unfortunately gaining more and more.”

The emerging nuclear arms-control policy of the new U.S. administration appears to be based on preserving its nuclear weapons arsenal, modernizing and upgrading it, and being prepared to threaten to use them. The administration also questions U.S. military assurances that have been in place since the end of World War II. All this is happening while there are tensions with Russia and while the North Korea crisis and others involving China, Japan, the Senkaku Islands and the South China Sea, all have the potential to escalate

into war. This should be a wake-up call for key U.S. allies, from Western European countries and NATO states to South Korea and Japan.

For decades, despite the failure of the United States and the other weapon states to live up to their obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to achieve nuclear disarmament, U.S. allies have avoided hard questions about their attitude toward nuclear weapons. Progress in nuclear arms control and some degree of U.S. nuclear restraint in recent years has enabled these countries to be active advocates of nuclear disarmament while continuing to rely on U.S. extended deterrence. This period may be coming to an end. Japan, like other U.S. allies, may have to choose to support either nuclear arms-control and disarmament efforts or the United States under Donald Trump.

If Japan is to choose nuclear arms control and disarmament, then Japan’s government and parliament could start by making clear that it rejects Donald Trump’s judgment about it being “not so bad” if Japan acquired nuclear weapons in the strongest possible terms. It could do so, for instance, by recalling the strong support expressed in 2009 and 2010 for the Obama policy goals of nuclear disarmament and rejection of the nuclear option, and reaffirming its commitment to Article 9 of the Constitution declaring that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” Prime Minister Abe has proposed amending this article of the constitution to allow Japan to go to war.⁵⁷

Japan could raise with the United States and other weapon states the need for (1) increased transparency concerning strategic and non-strategic weapons, (2) a reduced role of nuclear weapons in security strategies, and (3) de-alerting of nuclear weapons. Such efforts are critical for maintaining momentum toward nuclear disarmament and for strengthening the disarmament and nonproliferation regime more

generally. Japan also could take the lead in developing new approaches to nuclear verification.⁵⁸

Japan also could reaffirm its commitment to make progress in all areas relevant to nuclear arms control and nonproliferation, for instance, through the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) established in 2010. Japan has been one of the most visible and active members of this initiative, which recognizes “the need for a systematic and continued reduction in all types of nuclear weapons, including non-strategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons, by all States possessing nuclear weapons, with the aim of their total elimination.”

More important, Japan could join the United Nations negotiations on a treaty banning nuclear weapons due to begin in late March 2017. These negotiations were set up under Resolution L.41, adopted on October 27, 2016 “to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.”⁵⁹ The resolution passed with 123 countries voting in favor, 16

abstaining, and 38 voting against the resolution. Japan voted “no,” putting into question its decades of declarations of support for nuclear disarmament. This may have been the result of U.S. pressure, since the US did press its NATO allies to vote against the ban treaty resolution and not to participate in any ban treaty talks.⁶⁰

In 2016, President Obama became the first U.S. President to visit Hiroshima. During that visit, Prime Minister Abe declared: “We are determined to realize a world free of nuclear weapons. No matter how long and how difficult the road will be, it is the responsibility of us who live in the present to continue to make efforts. [...] This is the only way to respond to the feelings of the countless spirits—victims of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I am convinced of this.”⁶¹ The nuclear-ban-treaty process now underway at the United Nations and the response to President Trump’s emerging nuclear arms control and security policies will put Japan’s determination to support progress toward a nuclear-weapon-free world to an important test.

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Notes

- ¹ Article VI of the Treaty On The Non-Proliferation Of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), see [here](#).
- ² Article XIV of New START specifies: “This Treaty shall remain in force for 10 years unless it is superseded earlier by a subsequent agreement on the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms. [...] If the Parties decide to extend this Treaty, it will be extended for a period of no more than five years unless it is superseded earlier by a subsequent agreement on the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms.” [Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms](#).
- ³ [Remarks by President Obama at the Brandenburg Gate](#), Berlin, Germany, June 19, 2013.
- ⁴ John Isaacs, [Clinton-Putin Summit Meeting: A Summit Of “Might-Have-Beens,”](#) Council for a Livable World, April 25, 2000,
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- ⁶ Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Russian Nuclear Forces, 2017,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 73 (2), 2017.
- ⁷ [Transcript of Interview with Donald Trump](#), *Times of London*, January 16, 2017.
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- ¹¹ Gerry Mullany and Chris Buckley, [“China Warns of Arms Race After U.S. Deploys Missile Defense in South Korea,”](#) *New York Times*, March 7, 2017.
- ¹² David Sanger and Bill Broad, [“Trump Inherits a Secret Cyberwar Against North Korean Missiles,”](#) *New York Times*, March 4, 2017.
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- ¹⁴ The existing sites are Fort Greely, Alaska (26 interceptors with plans to increase to 40) and Vandenberg California (4 interceptors).
- ¹⁵ Ryo Ibara, [“Japan eyes 3rd prong in missile defense with THAAD system,”](#) *Asahi Shimbun*, January 14, 2017.
- ¹⁶ [Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views](#), *New York Times*, March 26, 2016.
- ¹⁷ [Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views](#), *New York Times*, March 26, 2016,
- ¹⁸ Debate moderated by Lester Holt, September 26, 2016; for a discussion, see Zack Beauchamp, [“Donald Trump’s very Confusing Thoughts on Nuclear Weapons, Explained,”](#) Vox.
- ¹⁹ Carrie Dann, [“Donald Trump on Nukes: ‘Let It Be an Arms Race’,”](#) December 23, 2016.
- ²⁰ [“Trump wants to make sure U.S. nuclear arsenal at ‘top of the pack’,”](#) *op. cit.*
- ²¹ See [here](#).
- ²² Office of Management and Budget, [“America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again,”](#) 16 March 16, 2017.

- ²³ *America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*, Office of Management and Budget, Washington, DC, March 2017.
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- ²⁵ “Rick Perry, as Energy Secretary, May Be Pressed to Resume Nuclear Tests,” *New York Times*, December 27, 2016.
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- ³⁸ “204 Japanese legislators call on President Obama to adopt ‘sole purpose’ doctrine,” *Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament*, February 19, 2010.
- ³⁹ [Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#), Washington, DC, January 12, 2017.
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- ⁴⁴ “[MSNBC Town Hall with Donald Trump Moderated by Chris Matthews](#),” MSNBC, March 30, 2016.
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⁴⁹ Rex W. Tillerson, Secretary of State, [Remarks with Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se Before Their Meeting](#), Seoul, Republic of Korea, March 17, 2017.

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⁵⁵ Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Masafumi Takubo and Frank von Hippel, "[Ending Reprocessing in Japan: An Alternative Approach to Managing Japan's Spent Nuclear Fuel and Separated Plutonium](#)," International Panel on Fissile Material, November 2013.

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⁵⁸ For example, Japan could help develop techniques of nuclear archaeology to establish and independently verify how much fissile material was made in nuclear weapon states. This technique could not only be used to verify more recently produced fissile-material stocks, such as in North Korea, but also provide confidence in declared historic production in those weapon states that have accumulated much larger stockpiles during the Cold War.

⁵⁹ [Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations, First Committee, United Nations General Assembly, A/C.1/71/L.41](#), October 2016.

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⁶¹ [Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Hiroshima Peace Memorial](#), Hiroshima, Japan, May 27, 2016.