
“SUPER-SIZING” THE DPRK THREAT

Japan’s Evolving Military Posture and North Korea

Christopher W. Hughes

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 extant military threat, multiplied exponentially by its undermining of U.S.-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, U.S.-Japan alliance, remilitarization

Introduction: North Korea’s Multiple Threat Character

*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 past decade and a half. Just a cursory examination of *The Defense of Japan* white papers published annually 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 preeminent role once occupied by the Soviet Union.¹ Japan’s National Defense Program Guidelines

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1. Bōeichōhen [Ministry of Defense], *Nihon no Bōei 2006* [Defense of Japan 2006] (Tokyo: Zaimushō Insatsukyoku, 2006), pp. 28–47.

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(NDPG) of 2004 lays out Japanese defense doctrine alongside the necessary force structure. The document 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.”² 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 Taepodong-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 spurred shifts in Japan’s low-profile post-war security policy, previously seen as an “immovable object.”³

The objective of this paper is to analyze the impact North Korea has had on Japan’s security policy in the post-Cold War period. The paper argues that Japan’s defense posture has been significantly affected by the rise of the perceived North Korean threat since the mid-1990s, presaging 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 of U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation in East Asia and globally in “out of area” contingencies; and, after October 2006, in precipitating some Japanese policy makers’ talk of re-considering 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 U.S. alliance partner. The study argues that the perceived threat from North Korea has indeed helped propel Japan toward being ready to use force to deter security threats from other states, and to some degree, from non-state actors. However, the paper also stresses that Japan continues to push forward its defense posture incrementally. The country remains wary of the risks of military confrontation with the

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

3. 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, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 85–107.

North, and as yet sees the nuclear threat as insufficient to force it to reconsider switching to a nuclear option.

Just as important, this paper seeks to explain why the perceived North Korean threat has had such an impact on Japanese security policy, despite the fact that its impact is arguably disproportionate to the magnitude of the actual military threat. The paper stresses that for Japan, the North Korean threat is multiplied, or “super-sized,” by its multilayered nature.

First, Japan faces growing *existential military threats* and has legitimate security concerns from the North’s missile and nuclear capabilities. But second, 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 U.S.-Japan pact, 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 creating for Japan alliance dilemmas of entrapment and, particularly, abandonment by generating and exploiting differences of threat perception between the bilateral allies.⁴ In instances of feared entrapment, such as U.S. demands for a Japanese military contribution in a second Korean Peninsula conflict, Japan has moved to strengthen its autonomous defense options.

Japan’s principal concerns about abandonment, however, have forced it to shore up political confidence in U.S.-Japan 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 U.S. in dealing with regional and global contingencies that are more important to Washington than to Tokyo, in the hope that this will ensure U.S. reciprocation to support Japan against North Korea. As will be argued below, Japan’s motivations to support the U.S.-led “war on terror” through the dispatch of the JSDF to Iraq between 2004–06, and to thus take on a greater global security role, can in large part be interpreted in the light of the need to strengthen alliance solidarity to respond to North Korea.⁵

Third, 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 later revealed involvement in the abductions of Japanese citizens has increasingly earned it

4. Jitsuo Tsuchiyama, “Nichibei Dōmei no Kokusai Seiji Riron” [The theory of international politics of the U.S.-Japan alliance], *Kokusai Seiji* [International Politics] 115 (May 1997), pp. 161–70.

5. Christopher W. Hughes, “Not Quite the ‘Great Britain of the Far East’: Japan’s Security, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the ‘War on Terror’ in East Asia,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20:2 (June 2007), pp. 325–38.

the label of “terrorist” state in domestic political discourse.⁶ This has engendered a growing hard-line approach toward North Korea among Japan’s policy makers and citizenry. Although both groups have some legitimate grounds to fear the North’s penetration of Japanese internal security, such anti-North Korean sentiment, stoked by conservative politicians such as former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and the mass media, has at times been irrational, bordering on hysteria. Consequently, Japanese policy makers have enhanced 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 Fukuda Yasuo have sought to engage the North so that Japan would not fall behind its partners in the Six Party Talks (SPT) process, Japan in recent years has found it increasingly difficult to promote bilateral diplomatic normalization talks.⁷

Fourth, North Korea’s poor standing in Japan and internationally has meant that the North has often been used by policy makers as a convenient *proxy threat* to legitimize pushing through changes in Japanese security policy. The changes are as much or more directed toward dealing with other forms of potential and existing threats that are politically and diplomatically unacceptable to identify explicitly. In particular, Japanese policy makers have manipulated the North Korean threat to camouflage the fact that many of Tokyo’s military procurement activities and moves to upgrade the U.S.-Japan alliance are actually designed 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 Japan’s making it preeminent, the threat 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,” an attempt to balance diplomatic, economic, and military components. In terms of military security, Japan’s post-war policy makers—principally, 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

6. David Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 155–71.

7. Japan has never maintained normalized diplomatic relations with North Korea, one-half of its former Korean colony. Japan and North Korea initiated normalization talks in 1991, but as of 2009, despite multiple rounds of talks, the two states have failed to establish diplomatic relations.

mandated by restrictions on the use of force in Article 9 of the so-called Peace Constitution of 1947 and the depth of anti-militaristic norms among Japan's citizenry.⁸

Japan's government has interpreted the Constitution as permitting the maintenance of military forces to defend its national territory; during the Cold War, Tokyo built up a substantial military to counter the threat from the Soviet Union. 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," eschewing the acquisition of weaponry that might be used for offensive purposes and power projection, such as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), 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 U.N. Charter, it is prohibited from exercising this right because 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 bans on the export of arms and military technology; a 1969 House of Councilors resolution on the exclusively peaceful use of outer space; the three non-nuclear principles of 1967 promising not to "produce, possess or introduce nuclear weapons"; and the limiting of defense expenditure to 1% of gross national product (GNP).⁹

In turn, Japan's limited national military capabilities have meant that it has in large part entrusted its defense to the mechanism of the U.S.-Japan security treaty. Japan and the U.S. have traditionally predicated their security treaty upon a grand strategic bargain: Japan gets U.S. military protection in return for providing bases to facilitate the projection of U.S. military power in East Asia. However, Japan has attempted to temper its reliance on the U.S. security guarantee by building up its own national defense capabilities and indigenous defense production, and by careful hedging against the dual alliance dilemmas of "entrapment" and "abandonment" in U.S. regional and global military strategy. Regarding entrapment, Japan has long feared that it could become a proxy target in a

8. Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism," *International Security* 17:4 (Spring 1993), pp. 119–50.

9. Glenn D. Hook, *Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 45–73.

nuclear exchange between first the Soviet Union/Russia or China and the U.S., and also that Washington might try to “press-gang” Japan into assisting its military to once again fight wars on the Korean Peninsula or in mainland East Asia.¹⁰ Regarding abandonment, Japan knows that the U.S. as a superpower has global interests superseding those of Japan. Hence, Japan understands that the U.S., 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 were no longer seen as an indispensable ally in Washington’s overall regional and global strategy.

Japan, during the Cold War period, was less concerned about abandonment because it provided the U.S. with bases essential for containing the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea. Another reason was that especially in the latter stages of the Cold War, there was a close fit between Japan’s national security interests and the U.S.’s regional and global security interests in resisting the growing Soviet military build-up in East Asia. Japan alternately hedged against entrapment in U.S. military “adventurism” in a number of ways.¹¹ Japan’s ban on the exercise of collective self-defense meant that it had no obligation to defend its American 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 U.S. military. During the Cold War, Japan balked at U.S. pressure for closer bilateral military planning.¹²

The two countries did conclude the bilateral Guidelines for Defense Cooperation in 1978, an attempt to specify joint cooperation in the event of contingencies in and around Japan and thereby to flesh out the parameters of the security treaty. Tokyo undertook responsibility for protecting Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) up to 1,000 nautical miles from the coastline. But Japan placed much greater emphasis in the Defense Guidelines on planning for contingencies under the security treaty that were designed for self-defense (Article 5) and failed to research those designed to support the U.S. response to regional threats in East Asia. Japan’s military security role in the Cold War was thus geographically restricted to the area

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

11. Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, “Japan’s Dual Hedge,” *Foreign Affairs* 81:5 (September/October 2002), pp. 110–23.

12. Sheila A. Smith, “The Evolution of Military Cooperation in the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” in *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Past, Present, and Future*, eds. Michael J. Green and Patrick M. Cronin (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), pp. 79–84.

immediately surrounding Japan. It was also limited functionally to providing a defensive “shield” around its own territory to assist the U.S. offensive “sword” of military power projection in Northeast Asia. Japan’s role was highly asymmetrical within the alliance: it was not obligated to defend the U.S. outside of Japanese territory.

Japan and the North Korean Existential Threat

Japan’s incremental expansion of its military capabilities and the comfortable division of labor in the U.S.-Japan alliance developed during the Cold War have 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, 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. In the Korean War period (1950–53), Japan was only touched directly when the U.S. requested the secret deployment of Japanese minesweepers to Korean waters, and indirectly through U.S. pressure for Japan to speed its rearmament and to conclude in 1951 the bilateral security treaty, in order to consolidate its position as a bastion of capitalism. Thereafter, following the cessation of active hostilities, Japan’s security interests vis-à-vis North Korea were largely ensured by the U.S.’s massive military presence in Japan and South Korea and the American 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 focused on the presence of North Korean residents in Japan and the perceived fear of their fomenting domestic communist insurgency.¹³

In the post-Cold War period, though, North Korea has gradually become transformed into Japan’s security bugbear, in place of the Soviet Union. 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 U.S. and its neighbors have been extensively debated and will not be rehearsed here. Japan’s policy makers, like those of the U.S., have gradually come to the realization that economic and regime insecurity is at the root of North Korea’s provocative actions. These policy makers, in line with their concepts of comprehensive security, have shown a willingness to respond to the North’s

13. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan’s Cold War* (Lanham, Md.: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), pp. 60–61, 199.

security threat by offering economic concessions. Under Koizumi, attempts were also made 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. Japanese officials have put into place a raft of sanctions in response to the abductions issue and in response to the nuclear and missile tests in 2006.¹⁴

But even as Japanese policy makers have searched for non-military means to moderate the origins of Pyongyang'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 coast. The abductions of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s have been taken as demonstrations of the North's ability to infiltrate Japanese territory at will. In March 1999 and December 2001, the JSDF and Japan Coast Guard (JCG) intercepted and fired upon North Korean vessels (referred to as *fushinsen*, suspicious ships) believed to be spying.

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 was fully revealed to policy makers and the public alike by the test launch of a Taepodong-1 missile in August 1998 over Japanese "airspace." The North Korean missile threat was confirmed by the July 2006 test of seven missiles, including the Taepodong-2 with a potential range of up to 6,000 kilometers.¹⁵ Japan is concerned that North Korea might deploy these missiles with conventional high-explosive warheads, or mount chemical or biological weapons; despite their relative inaccuracy, the missiles would pose a significant threat to Japan's civilian urban population.

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 looked on askance as the North has pushed forward its nuclear program since the mid-1990s; Tokyo reacted strongly to the nuclear test of October 2006. The ultimate Japanese

14. Christopher W. Hughes, "The Political Economy of Japanese Sanctions toward North Korea: Domestic Coalitions and International Systemic Pressures," *Pacific Affairs* 79:3 (Fall 2006), pp. 462–66.

15. Bōeichōhen, *Nihon no Bōei 2006*, pp. 35–37.

fear is that North Korea may eventually learn to master and miniaturize nuclear weapons technology and use this 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 country’s reliance on aging technologies and its 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.¹⁶ The North Korean nuclear program is, of course, a major concern for the future, but Japanese analysts and policy makers entertain some confidence that the North is still far from 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 thus far not a fundamental element for Japanese national survival. Pyongyang’s current capabilities are likely no match for the defensive capabilities of the JSDF, certainly not for the overwhelming conventional and nuclear offensive retaliatory power of U.S. forces in Japan and the surrounding region. If the accentuated impact of the North Korean threat on Japan is to be explained, it is necessary to look beyond the North’s extant military capabilities to examine how crucially these capabilities, in combination with other multipliers, have inflated the overall threat.

North Korean Threat Multipliers

North Korea’s Threat to the U.S.-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. 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 U.S. 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.

16. Taoka Shunji, *Senryaku no Jōken: Gekihen Suru Kyokytō 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. 172–86.

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 U.S. might attempt to precipitate a preemptive war to halt the North's nuclear program, which might have threatened to suck Japan into an unwanted Korean conflagration.¹⁷ Hence, in large part Prime Minister Koizumi's summitry in North Korea in September 2002 was designed to demonstrate to the U.S. 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 U.S. interests, raising fears of abandonment for Japan. North Korea first demonstrated this capability during the nuclear crisis of the mid-1990s. The U.S. was focused on preserving stability on the Korean Peninsula and halting nuclear proliferation; its concerns were therefore regional and global. By contrast, Japan's security priorities at the time were predominantly domestic. The divergence of security priorities was revealed after Washington's mid-1994 request to activate the security treaty and procure Japanese logistical support. Japan was focused only on self-defense under both Article 5 of the security treaty and Defense Guidelines. This meant that Tokyo was unable to respond positively to Washington's Article 6-based requests, with their regional scope. The consequence was that the bilateral alliance was exposed by North Korea as a largely empty construct for responding to regional crises. Japan's failure to be seen to back its American ally in the North Korean nuclear crisis, coupled with the eruption of domestic opposition to U.S. bases on Okinawa in 1995, triggered a crisis of political confidence in the alliance, and genuine Japanese fears that it might be abandoned as an untrustworthy ally.¹⁸

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 weakness of a shared U.S.-Japan alliance vision. North Korea's 1998 Taepodong-1 test again demonstrated the potential divisions of interests. Japan reacted to the test as a direct challenge to its national security, im-

17. 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.

18. Tanaka Akihiko, *Anzen Hoshō: Sengo 50nen no Mosaku* [Security policy: The post-war fifty year search] (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1997), pp. 332–34; Funabashi Yōichi, *Dōmei Hyōryū* [Alliance adrift] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997), pp. 310–26; Tanaka Hitoshi and Tahara Sōichirō, *Kokka to Gaikō* [State and diplomacy] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2005), pp. 27–29; Funabashi Yōichi, *Za Peninsura Kuesuchon: Chōsen Hantō Dainiji Kaku Kiki* [The Peninsula question: A chronicle of the second Korean nuclear crisis] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2006), pp. 134–40.

posing limited sanctions and intimating that it would hold back on financial support for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), thus threatening to undermine the U.S.'s approach based on the 1994 Agreed Framework to contain North Korean nuclear proliferation. Against this, U.S. policy makers, although concerned about how the Taepodong-1 test was edging North Korea closer to being able 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, told a similar story of potential divergence between Japanese national and U.S. regional and global security interests. This has been in spite of constant efforts to strengthen the alliance. Japanese policy makers since September 11, 2001, have remained anxious that the U.S.'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 U.S. returned to focus on the Korean Peninsula, especially since the start of the Bush administration's second term, from Japan's perspective the U.S. has not always shown sufficient cognition of its ally's interests.¹⁹ For sure, Japan and the U.S. demonstrated considerable alliance solidarity in their U.N. 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 U.S. resolve and hard-line approach. In the wake of the October 2006 North Korean nuclear test, for instance, Japanese policy makers considered the option of backing a potential U.S. economic blockade of the North, in keeping with Japan's Defense Guidelines. But the U.S. soon made it clear that it needed to pursue diplomacy and was not prepared as yet to exert military pressure on the North.²⁰

In turn, the U.S.'s desire for a diplomatic solution has meant that since February 2007 it has pushed ahead with implementing the SPT's agenda

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

20. "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>>.

for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, over the head of Japanese concerns that the North has 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 North without satisfactory progress on the abductions, and that the U.S. might even extend a negative security guarantee to North Korea. Washington might even be prepared to tolerate North Korean maintenance of nuclear weapons as long as there was no proliferation beyond the Korean Peninsula. Certainly for Tokyo, any U.S. security arrangement with the North would be anathema, raising questions about how far the U.S. is willing to defend Japan from nuclear attack.²¹ In this instance, the U.S.’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, raising worries that Japan’s security might be de-coupled from that of the U.S.²² Japanese policy makers have expressed quiet concerns recently that the U.S. might sacrifice a resolution of the abductions issue in the course of pushing forward the SPT. The administration of Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo did look set to acquiesce in subverting this issue in the interests of resuming bilateral normalization talks with North Korea and rehabilitating Japan as an active player in Korean Peninsula diplomacy. However, the new administration of Prime Minister Asō Tarō has again taken a harder line approach on the abductions and sought U.S. pledges not to abandon Japan on the issue.

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 view of the latter as a “terrorist state” implacably, and possibly irrationally, bent on the destruction of Japan. The perception is that Pyongyang is willing to practice any military stratagem to achieve its end, including terrorizing the Japanese population. North Korea has acquired this reputation through its own complicity in the abductions of Japanese citizens, its probable state sponsorship or at least tolerance of narcotics smuggling to Japan, and its provocative missile and nuclear testing.²³

21. 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. 239–40.

22. Christopher W. Hughes and Ellis S. Krauss, “Japan’s New Security Agenda,” *Survival: The IISS Quarterly* 49:2 (Spring 2007), pp. 165–66.

23. Sheena Chestnut, “Illicit Activity and Proliferation: North Korean Smuggling Networks,” *International Security* 32:1 (Summer 2007), pp. 80–111.

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.²⁴ 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 part of the “Axis of Evil.” North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il is portrayed as an evil dictator somehow on a par, or perhaps in cahoots, with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.²⁵

The image of North Korea as terror state is reflected in the periodic scares seen in Japan. The summer of 1999 was replete with fevered speculation in the media about another Taepodong-1 test. Bookshops began to flood with accounts of the abductions, and with other volumes outlining, often through the lampoonery of the person of Kim Jong-Il, the threat from the North Korean regime.²⁶ The missile tests of 2006 rekindled Japan’s capacity for near hysteria when it comes to bypassing more measured calculations of the true level of threat posed by North Korea.²⁷ Japanese policy makers and the media were united in condemning the provocative nature of the test as the missiles splashed down in the Sea of Japan. Somehow these observers neglected to mention that the sea is not actually Japanese territory and the missiles fell far closer to China, Russia, and North Korea itself.

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. This unease has also helped generate a catch-all source of threat and a general sense of crisis in Japan’s security policy that have legitimized 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 past decade has been the refusal to acknowledge explicitly that alongside the threat

24. The number of Koreans resident in Japan is estimated at around 630,000 of which roughly one-fourth would claim an affiliation with North Korea. For the current status of North Korean residents in Japan, see Kimu Chanjon, *Chōsen Sōren* [General association of Korean residents in Japan] (Tokyo: Shinchō Shinsho, 2004), p. 34.

25. Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local*, pp. 166–67.

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

27. 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/politicsof/hysteria01.html>>.

from North Korea, China is 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 made random comments about China as a security concern. But Japan clearly still fears antagonizing China by openly identifying it as a threat. Consequently, North Korea now fills the position as the prime public legitimization for nearly all major changes in Japanese security policy that are addressed toward the looming threat from China.²⁸

Japan's reticence to identify China but eagerness to stress the threat from North Korea can be seen in its moves to revise the U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation between 1996 and 1997. The initial impetus for revision was provided by two factors: the North Korean nuclear crisis and the consequent weakness revealed in both alliance planning and interoperability to respond to regional contingencies. Japan and U.S. 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 U.S. 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 officials, in the oblique language of their documents, made it clear that they saw North Korea as the main threat, legitimating the way for these changes. The revised National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) 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 code word for North Korea) as an example of instability but neglected, rather implausibly, to mention any concerns about China. Similarly, the April 1996 U.S.-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 the Korean Peninsula. The Joint Declaration's bypassing of China strained all credulity, given that the previous month the U.S. had deployed two aircraft carriers, including the *Independence*—home-ported in Japan—to monitor the Taiwan Strait crisis.²⁹

Between the drafting of the revised guidelines (1996–97) and the passage of legislation in 1999 enabling logistical support for the U.S. in regional contingencies, Japan's policy makers continued to maintain the fiction that

28. Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 149.

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

these measures were not aimed at China. The Japanese government persisted 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 U.S.-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 Chief Cabinet Secretary Kajiyama Seiroku countered this assertion a month later by stating that the guidelines did include Taiwan.³⁰

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 have argued—it was perhaps more than serendipity that Japan’s defense forces intercepted a North Korean *fushinsen* exactly when the Defense Guidelines-related legislation was being debated in the Diet.³¹

North Korea’s role as a convenient threat to be manipulated to disguise the dual nature of changes in Japan’s defense posture 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 deployment of BMD. Japan’s government certainly intends to deploy BMD assets to defend JSDF and U.S. bases in the event of Korean Peninsula or Taiwan Strait contingencies. Officials are aware that in the event of the former, it may face U.S. demands to deploy the system around Taiwan.

Japan’s Evolving Defense Posture and North Korea

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

30. Christopher W. Hughes, “Japanese Policy and the North Korean ‘Soft Landing,’” *Pacific Review* 11:3 (1998), pp. 408–10.

31. For Nonaka’s argument, see Maeda Tetsuo, *Jieitai: Henyō no Yukue* [JSDF: The direction of its transformation] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2007), p. 55.

Japan's National Defense Capabilities

As noted earlier, since the first North Korean nuclear crisis Japan has seen two iterations (in 1995 and 2004) of the revision of the Defense Guidelines. In terms of conventional military capabilities, since the mid-1990s Japan has scaled down the JSDF's force structure, largely aimed at defeating a Soviet land invasion. Japan has begun to acquire capabilities more suited to responding to the post-Cold War threats from both North Korea and China, although legitimized primarily via the threat from the North. The Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) in the 2004 Defense Guidelines 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 and to train for overseas international dispatch.

The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) is to reduce the 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. The MSDF began upgrading its ships for BMD in 2007 and should complete its deployments by 2011, on a timetable accelerated by the North's missile tests of 2006. Japan, with U.S. cooperation, conducted its first successful interceptor test of the Aegis BMD system off Hawaii in December 2007, and a second, less successful test in November 2008. The MSDF has also introduced 200-tonne [i.e., 196 long ton] high-speed missile patrol boats to respond to future *fushin-sen*. It is known to have considered procuring Tomahawk cruise missiles to provide Japan with a means to strike back at North Korean ballistic missile launches.³²

The Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF), partly in reaction to the North Korean threat, has acquired in-flight refueling capabilities and since 2008 has started to procure precision-guided munitions that could strike against North Korean missile bases. The ASDF completed the deployment of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC) BMD systems between 2006 and 2008 around Tokyo, and practiced their deployment in central Tokyo in September 2007 and January 2008.³³ Similarly, the JCG, a near-second navy

32. 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.

33. The ASDF between 2006 and 2008 completed the deployment of four PAC-3 terminal phase interceptor batteries, consisting of 16 fire units, at bases around Tokyo (Takeyama, Kanagawa; Narashino, Chiba; Iruma, Saitama; Kasumigaura, Ibaraki). The essential responsibility of these batteries is to defend the capital. The ASDF's PAC-3 drills in central Tokyo were held in September 2007 in Yoyogi Park and in January 2008 in Shinjuku Gyōen National Garden, and were designed to test the ability of the system to defend key government facilities. The ASDF successfully tested the PAC-3 system in New Mexico in September 2008.

in terms of its tonnage and patrol vessel capabilities, has installed powerful 30 mm long-range machine guns on its ships to counter North Korean intruders.³⁴ Japan has 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 with optical capabilities) between March 2003 and February 2007. Although Japan classifies these as “multi-purpose intelligence-gathering satellites,” the decisive impetus for its own spy satellite program came from the Taepodong-1 test; the satellites’ prime military use thus far has been to monitor preparations for North Korean missile launches.³⁵

*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 have raised the question of whether this is leading to a possible breach of the Constitution’s anti-militaristic principle barring possession of offensive weaponry. There has been discussion of whether Japan is looking to lift its ban on the use of preemptive force to respond to North Korean missile attacks. Thus far, the Japanese government has adhered to its consistent position since 1956 that strikes may be launched 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 is the definition of preemption.³⁶ 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 de facto has led to the use of space for military purposes. The Japanese government has increasingly shifted its interpretation of this anti-militaristic principle from one defined in 1969 as peaceful (*heiwa no mokuteki*) and non-military (*hi-gunji*) to one of the *defensive* military use of space. In May 2008, the LDP, with support from the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), passed through the Diet a new Basic Law for Space Activities. Article 2 states that

34. Richard J. Samuels, “‘New Fighting Power’: Japan’s Growing Maritime Capabilities and East Asian Security,” *International Security* 32:3 (Winter 2007/2008), pp. 84–112.

35. Andrew L. Oros, “Explaining Japan’s Tortured Course to Surveillance Satellites,” *Review of Policy Research* 24:1 (January 2007), pp. 32, 35–36.

36. Tanaka Kōta, “Is Enemy Strike Capability Necessary for Japan?” Stimson Center, November 16, 2007, <http://www.stimson.org/japan/pdf/Tanaka_StimsonCenter_fall2006.pdf>; Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan’s Reemergence as a “Normal” Military Power*, Adelphi Paper 368–69 (Oxford: Oxford University Press/IISS), pp. 88–89.

Japan will conduct activities in accordance with the principles of the Constitution, thereby now permitting the use of space for defensive purposes and finally breaching the anti-militaristic principle.³⁷

Japan's embarkation on BMD is placing severe pressure on other anti-militaristic principles and constitutional prohibitions. In order to operate a BMD system that 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 to launch interceptors to field commanders, 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, in February 2005, the government revised its legal measures to dilute civilian control while enhancing the authority of the minister of defense and JSDF commanders—for the purposes of BMD.³⁸ Likewise, BMD is placing extreme pressure on Japan's ban on collective self-defense. Japan, to effectively operate the BMD system, will need to boost information-sharing and also integration of its command-and-control systems with those of the U.S., to draw on the latter's superior infrared sensor systems for detecting and tracking missile launches. Japan and the U.S. 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 U.S. and possession of an Aegis BMD system, largely interoperable with that of the U.S., which has also deployed its first BMD-capable Aegis cruiser assets in Japan since the North's 2006 missile tests, should increase expectations for Japan to assist the U.S. in regional contingencies involving North Korea and Taiwan. U.S. policy makers, including Ambassador Thomas Schieffer, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Asia-Pacific Affairs Richard Lawless, have also made it progressively clearer since 2006 that the U.S. expects Japan to use its BMD assets to help intercept missiles targeted for the U.S. If the ban on the exercise of collective self-defense interferes with this, their view is that it should be breached.³⁹

37. Suzuki Kazuto, "Space: Japan's New Security Agenda," *RIPS [Research Institute for Peace and Security] Policy Perspectives* 5 (October 2007), <http://www.rips.or.jp/English/publications/rips_pp_5.html>.

38. 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.

39. "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," *ibid.*, December 7, 2006, <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn.20061207a3.html>>; "U.S. Calls on Japan to Shield It from Missiles," *ibid.*, May 17, 2007, <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20070517a2.html>>.

U.S.-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, potentially prizing apart U.S. and Japanese interests. Japan has reacted by seeking to strengthen political and military confidence in the U.S.-Japan alliance to demonstrate its indispensability for Japanese and U.S. interests regionally and globally. In the wake of the first North Korean nuclear crisis, Japan therefore sought to rehabilitate the alliance by revising the NDPO and Defense Guidelines to accommodate Article 6-type regional contingencies, which have become the U.S.'s prime interest in the post-Cold War era. Similarly, in the wake of the second North Korean nuclear crisis, Japan and the U.S. have again moved, through the Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) of 2004–06, 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 to boost alliance cooperation through enhanced information-sharing, and also sensor and interceptor deployments.

North Korea's magnified threat can also be said to have magnified Japan's military role and U.S.-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. The first was that it would contribute to Iraqi reconstruction and the "war on terror" on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation. Second, and arguably most prominent for Japanese policy makers and generally implicitly accepted by the public, was that the troop dispatch was the unspoken quid pro quo for securing U.S. alliance support to defend Japan as an indispensable and loyal ally against the re-emerging North Korean nuclear threat.⁴⁰

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

40. Kamiya Mataka, "The Evolution of an Actively Pacifist Nation," *Gaiko Forum* 4:2 (Spring 2004); Richard P. Cronin, "The North Korean Security Threat and the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Perceived Interests, Approaches, and Prospects," *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_U.S._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," *Asian Survey* 47:5 (September/October 2007), pp. 779–83.

often speculated about in the wake of the North's 2006 nuclear test. For sure, certain Japanese policy makers, including 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 policy makers actually advocated breaching the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, and it appears that currently the drivers for Japan as a potential nuclear proliferator are too weak.⁴¹

First, Japan retains sufficient confidence in the extended U.S. deterrent to believe 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 U.S. and worsen Japan's security situation. In addition, Japan's acquisition of BMD and possible acquisition of conventional deterrence capabilities, such as the ability to strike North Korean missile bases, should mean that it can counter North Korea conventionally. Second, the fact that Japan has drawn international kudos by adhering to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, coupled with very strong domestic anti-nuclear sentiment, means that there is no incentive to go nuclear in terms of international prestige and becoming respected as a great power.⁴² Third, Japan's dependence on civilian nuclear and fossil fuels from overseas means that acquiring nuclear weapons could lead to economic isolation and extreme energy vulnerability. Fourth, 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. In the interim, Japan might risk losing its U.S. nuclear umbrella, and any *force de frappe* developed would likely be a poor substitute for the full panoply of U.S. nuclear capabilities.⁴³ Hence, at present the relatively weak North Korean nuclear threat is only sufficient to force Japan to saber-rattle and question its anti-nuclear taboos. Still, in the future, any potential for a growing North Korean nuclear capacity and a perceived decline in the U.S. commitment might cause a more serious reconsideration of Japan's stance.

41. 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. 105–23.

42. 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.

43. 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 in the 21st Century*, eds. Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), pp. 162–66.

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 threat has come to be measured not simply in a straight calculation relating to the size and quality of North Korea's conventional forces and WMD, and the range of capabilities available to Japan and the U.S. to deter it. Instead, Japan's perception is overly accentuated by the North's threat to the political basis of confidence in the U.S.-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. They have moved to upgrade the regional and global security functions of the U.S.-Japan alliance. However, North Korea looks not yet 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 of 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 Japan to begin to breach not just the anti-militaristic principles but also the deeper anti-militaristic norms that have crucially constrained its use of force in the post-war era. The interception and sinking of a North Korean *fushinsen* in 2001 by the JCG (occupying the position of a "para-navy") demonstrated the country'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.