

Nuclear weapons in Japan? Not now

By [Selig S. Harrison](#)

Region: [Asia](#)

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Global Research Editor's Note.

Below is the opinion article published in USA Today by a distinguished analyst of US foreign policy. The relationship between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons is crucial to an understanding the broader the nuclear issue and the threat of radiation.

There are indications, in this regard, that Japan has a nuclear weapons program which is functionally related to Japan's nuclear energy facilities. For further details see the article by Yoichi Shimatsu



[Secret Weapons Program Inside Fukushima Nuclear Plant?](#)

U.S.-Japan security treaty fatally delayed nuclear workers' fight against meltdown
- by Yoichi Shimatsu - 2011-04-12

The specter of self-destruction can be ended only with the abrogation of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, the root cause of the secrecy that fatally delayed the nuclear workers' fight against meltdown.

Michel Chossudovsky, April 15, 2011

Japan was one of the last countries to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1970, and finally ratified it six years later only after the United States promised not to interfere with Tokyo's pursuit of independent reprocessing capabilities in its civilian nuclear-power program.

When the U.S. first circulated drafts of the projected treaty in early 1966, Vice Foreign Minister Takeso Shimoda told a news conference that "Japan cannot agree to such a big power-centered approach, implying as it does that the nuclear powers would not be required to reduce their capabilities or stockpile, while the non-nuclear powers would be barred in this treaty from having nuclear weapons."

Lifting limits on nuclear

Shimoda's comments reflected the widespread sentiment in the ruling [Liberal Democratic Party](#) that Japan should not foreclose its nuclear option, and that it was time for the Japanese public to get over the trauma of Hiroshima.

Japan did finally ratify the treaty in 1976 after protracted negotiations with the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) and the U.S. The [IAEA accepted a safeguards agreement](#) that limited its inspection to "strategic points" in the nuclear fuel cycle.

Equally important, the Nixon and Ford administrations gave assurances that the U.S. would not interfere with Japan's acquisition of plutonium and its development of an autonomous fuel cycle. Under the [1968 Japan-U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement](#), the U.S. provided the enriched uranium used in Japanese reactors. Japan had to get case-by-case U.S. approval in order to have the resulting spent fuel reprocessed in Europe and to build its own reprocessing facilities and breeder reactors.

As Japan had feared, once it ratified the treaty, the U.S. promptly reneged on promises not to interfere with the plutonium program. Invoking the 1978 Non-Proliferation Act, the [Carter administration](#) pushed Japan to abandon its plans for an autonomous nuclear program and to rely instead solely on U.S.-supplied uranium to operate its reactors.

U.S. constraints

As Japanese Ambassador Ryukichi Imai has recalled, "It was a bitter irony for us that American officials were telling us not to produce plutonium at the very time that the U.S. was optimizing its nuclear weapons."

Japan successfully resisted American pressures during the Carter period. Then [President Reagan](#) went even further than Nixon and Ford to accommodate Japanese wishes, agreeing in 1987 to a [revised nuclear accord](#) that gave blanket American approval in advance for Japan to reprocess U.S.-origin spent fuel during the ensuing 30 years.

This accord comes up for renewal six years from now, time enough for the United States and Japan to reassess how to make Japan's reactors safer, whether so much dependence on nuclear energy should continue to govern Japanese policy, and whether the U.S. should continue to encourage such heavy dependence given the lessons of the present tragedy.

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