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Resumo O presente artigo analisa as razões por que o Japão não adquiriu, ou desenvolveu, armas nucleares até à data, particularmente dado que já possui um dos maiores e mais avançados programas nucleares de natureza civil no mundo. Um dos argumentos a favor de possuir armamento nuclear é que o Japão teria argumentos adicionais em termos da sua segurança nacional. Significativamente, estaria menos dependente dos EUA para a sua segurança e defesa nacionais. No entanto, existem também argumentos contra, d...

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JAPAN AND THE NUCLEAR DILEMMA

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Abstract: This article analyses the reasons why Japan has not acquired, or developed, nuclear weapons to date, particularly given that it already has one of the largest and most advanced nuclear programs in the world for peaceful purposes. One of the arguments in favour of nuclear weapons is that Japan would have additional arguments for its national security. Significantly, in terms of defence and national security it would also reduce its dependency on the United States of America. However, there are also arguments against, both of a strategic nature but also ontological and not less important, that hinder nuclear proliferation. The reality is that the option since the end of World War II has been one consistent with what has been called the "Yoshida Doctrine".

Keywords: Japan; Nuclear Proliferation; Yoshida Doctrine; United States of America.

Resumo: O presente artigo analisa as razões por que o Japão não adquiriu, ou desenvolveu, armas nucleares até à data, particularmente dado que já possui um dos maiores e mais avançados programas nucleares de natureza civil no mundo. Um dos argumentos a favor de possuir armamento nuclear é que o Japão teria argumentos adicionais em termos da sua segurança nacional. Significativamente, estaria menos dependente dos EUA para a sua segurança e defesa nacionais. No entanto, existem também argumentos contra, de natureza securitária, mas também ontológica e não menos importantes, que dificultam a proliferação nuclear e a realidade é que a opção do Japão desde o fim da Segunda Grande Guerra tem sido uma que é consistente com o que tem sido designado por "Doutrina Yoshida".

Palavras-chave: Japão; Proliferação Nuclear; Doutrina Yoshida; Estados Unidos da América.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, when Japan established itself as an economic power we seem to be moving towards the "Asian Century" (Auslin, 2017: 1). This idea gained new impetus with the emergence of the People's Republic of China[1] and has continued over time. In fact, it is undeniable that Asia has acquired an increasing importance in recent years at various levels. Nevertheless, one of the most frequently heard arguments is that the 21st century will be quite unstable, particularly in East Asia, and there are, in fact, signs that support that idea.[2] The region has also been the stage of major changes in terms of balances of power, inequities regarding the distribution of power, political and economic, among the various nations, cultural heterogeneity, unfinished economic reforms in several countries, risks related to democracy to which are added issues related to postcolonial nationalism, violence within several countries, and even the possibility of war between some of them (Friedberg, 1993/94).

With the most recent tensions between China and the United States of America, some authors have even argued that China has acquired a size and a level of power that could call into question the current international order, with the possibility of war in the near future between these two countries seen as considerable (Allison, 2017). Japan's specific situation is interesting because any major event occurring in the East Asian region will hardly cease to have consequences for that country, particularly given its historical and geopolitical situation. The issue acquires even more prominence when it turns out that China has been gaining more military pow-

[1] Hereafter, China.

[2] The examples are multiple, *inter alia*, in terms of territorial disputes so I will abstain from referring to any particular case.

er, assuming an increasingly assertive stance in the international order and having geostrategic ambitions. China also has nuclear capabilities, as does the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.[3] Nevertheless, it is not a question of advocating that these countries are planning an aggression against Japan, but rather of stressing the complex nature of the region from a security point of view based on past and present tensions.

On the basis of these arguments, the question is to try to understand why Japan still has not acquired, or developed, nuclear weapons to date, particularly given that it already possesses one of the largest and most advanced nuclear programs in the world for peaceful purposes. In fact, Prime Minister Kishida has recently announced that he does not intend to change policy and aims for a gradual nuclear weapons disarmament.[4] Countering that, one of the arguments in favour of nuclear weapons is that, in this situation, Japan would have additional arguments for its national security in order to deal with present and future threats as those weapons would be a complementary deterrent to conventional forces and diplomacy. This paper argues that the main arguments against proliferation stem from security reasons, connected to the imperial history of Japan, but also from ontological reasons. The latter may well not be less important than the former.

Thus, the present work proceeds as follows: After a brief introduction to the theme, I review the position chosen by Japan in relation to the issue of its national security and nuclear weapons after the end of World War II—referring to the well-known "Yoshida Doctrine". Next, I examine the period until the 1960s when Japan decided to develop nuclear capabilities. Following that, I analyse the subsequent period until presently when demands for U.S. security guarantees coexisted with some debates on the need for Japanese nuclear autonomy for military purposes. Here, I also discuss some of the explanations for the current stance on nuclear policy by Japan and some of the main debates that still persist. The article ends with a brief conclusion.

[3] Henceforth, North Korea.

[4] https://thewire.in/world/fumio-kishida-japan-nuclear-weapons-stance.

Japan's basic position on nuclear defence policy

Discussions about nuclear capabilities in Japan for military purposes are not new. Nevertheless, its leaders have always chosen not to proliferate.[5] The main reason for this decision is linked, amongst other reasons, albeit not exclusively, to the fact that it has until and since the end of World War II benefited from U.S. protection for its national security. After wanting to dominate East Asia during World War II during its imperial period following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and particularly during the Showa Era, Japan became one of the defeated countries of World War II after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[6] Following that, Japan renounced nuclear weapons in its 1947 Constitution. Article 9 of Chapter II that states that:

> Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, 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.
> In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.[7]

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, who held office between 1946-47 and 1948-54, adopted a foreign policy strategy that became known as the "Yoshida Doctrine". This strategy was based on Japan not possessing, or introducing, nuclear weapons into its territory, even for national security concerns. With the agreement of the United States, it was then decided that Japan's national defence and security would be ensured by the United States. The renunciation of

[5] Specifically, nuclear proliferation is considered the acquisition of nuclear weapons by a non-nuclear state.

[6] On August 9, the 75th anniversary of the bombing in Nagasaki was marked. The bombing of Hiroshima took place on August 6, 1945.

[7] The text, promulgated on 3 November 1946 and that entered into force on 3 May 1947 is available in http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

nuclear weapons was founded on the idea that these weapons would not contribute to Japan's security. On the contrary, in view of its history if Japan were to possess nuclear weapons that could well suggest to other neighbouring countries that Japan could have aggressive and expansionary ambitions, which would be negative and counterproductive for its national security. According to Dower (1979: 383) the idea was that "The best security measure available to Japan was to defend itself by gaining the confidence of the rest of the world".

The logic of being able to suggest the existence of aggressive military pretensions towards other states is part of the well-known "Security Dilemma". Considering the specific case of Asia, that would mean that in the absence of significant U.S. presence in the region it would tend to become more insecure to the extent that mistrust between opposing countries would lead to the adoption of defensive precautionary measures by neighbouring countries. This kind of situation tends to lead to the adoption of countermeasures of the same kind, which causes tensions between countries to increase and to a reduction in international security (Jervis, 1976: chapter 3; Jervis, 1978). This is particularly important in East Asia given that it seems to meet several criteria and contain the variables that make the region particularly dangerous and unstable. But in addition, by ensuring U.S. security and allowing U.S. bases on its territory, Japan could focus on maximizing the much-needed economic growth in the aftermath of World War II (Schaller, 1985: 256).

Be that as it may, despite not having formally decided on possessing nuclear weapons at the time, Japan developed two separate plans for a nuclear program even before the end of World War II (Campbell and Sunohara, 2004: 219-220). This was considered useful at the time because Japan had conquered several territories abroad since the late 19th century, including Taiwan—after the First Sino-Japanese War between 1894 and 1895—Korea following the Russo-Japanese War between 1904 and 1905, and also Manchuria after 1931 (Barnhart, 1987: 27-33). The idea at the time was to establish an area of influence and control, absorbing a wide range of countries located in East Asia. According to Iriye (1987: 131), and the Defence Agency, War History Division (Ed.), Daihonei Rikugunbu (The army supreme command; Tokyo 1968: 184): "The idea was to establish Japan's 'com-

manding position' over the region as part of the Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, as it was noted in a 31 January decision". But all these plans were frustrated, following a long war with the United States and the Soviet Union in the Pacific, and the end of World War II after by the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

The period from 1945 to the 1960s

The adoption of the Japanese 1947 Constitution at the initiative of Yoshida Shigeru considered that Japan's security could be best ensured without the country resorting to proprietary weaponry. By choosing to renounce military capabilities, Japan considered that it was demonstrating to the rest of the world that its intentions were entirely peaceful. Prime Minister Yoshida's position on the matter was unequivocal when he announced it on 26 June 1946 before the House of Representatives (Dower, 1979: 379). In the negotiations that were held at the time, Yoshida Shigeru stated his intentions to maximize Japan's growth and development while allowing for some U.S. influence in the territory, namely with the presence of U.S. military bases to guarantee Japan's national security. Significantly, and following a policy initiated during the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese State guided what were judged to be the most important matters relating to economic development considering that it was too important a topic to be left entirely in the hands of the market and private interests (Henshall, 2004: 156). Following this reasoning, the well-known MITI—the Ministry of Industry and International Trade[8]—was created in 1949 having the role of strategic advisor and regulator of the Japanese interests held by the three major forces in Japan, more specifically, the State, the bureaucracy, and large enterprises.

Noteworthy, despite renouncing to nuclear weapons Japan developed a nuclear energy programme—uniquely for peaceful purposes—to meet its energy needs to maximise economic growth.

[8] Ministry of International Trade and Industry. It is a very prestigious and powerful institution in Japan. Since its inception, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry has played a key role in Japan's economic development over the years.

Through the Atomic Energy Basic Act of December 1955, the government created the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) to coordinate the country's efforts to develop its nuclear program, always insisting on its peaceful nature. To that avail, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) began to monitor Japan's nuclear activities in 1957 (Campbell and Sunohara, 2004: 220). The decision not to move forward with the development of a nuclear weapons program, according to the "Yoshida Doctrine", was not regretted in Japan. In fact, just under ten years after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks Japan's nuclear fears were confirmed when a nuclear accident occurred in the Bikini Atoll, which is part of the Marshal Islands (Gordon, 2003: 274). More specifically, on March 1, 1954, a Japanese fishing vessel—the Lucky Dragon—was the target of radiation motivated by a U.S. hydrogen bomb test. Supposedly, the vessel was outside the danger zone, well over a hundred kilometres from the test site, but the explosion was stronger than expected and, as a result, the vessel was severely affected by the shocks and the strong swell caused by the explosion. The entire crew of the vessel—consisting of twenty-three members—needed to be hospitalized and one of them even died (Buckley, 1992: 58-61; Kusunoki, 2008: 37). This led to significant discomfort between Japan and the U.S. policy of deterrence in the region. Nevertheless, Japan remained faithful to the "Yoshida Doctrine".

A week after the Bikini Atoll accident Japan and the United States signed an agreement on March 8, 1954—the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement[9]—in which Japan agreed to take greater responsibility for its defence. In fact, the United States wanted Japan to take some defence initiatives, not necessarily nuclear in nature, although they always seemed to have lagged U.S. expectations (Schaller, 1985: 293; Buckley, 1992: 50, 56-57). Ultimately, Japan created an army of about 165,000 men, which corresponded to approximately half of what the U.S. wanted. On 19 January 1960, the two countries agreed to a new agreement—the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security[10]—which stipulated that in the event of an attack on Japanese terri-

[9] The text referring to *the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement* can be found at http://japan2.usembassy.gov/pdfs/wwwf-mdao-mdaa1954.pdf.

[10] The text referring to *the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security* can be found https://

tory, each country would act as necessary to address common threats in accordance with its respective Constitutions.[11] The treaty stated that the U.S. would be allowed to operate military in Japan in order to be able to ensure Japan's security. According to the original text:

> To contribute to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan.[12]

The situation has basically remained unchanged since in terms of Japan's dependence on the United States for its security. But this time—and this is quite significant—the treaty allowed the transport and presence of nuclear weapons on Japanese soil without the Japanese government even being consulted, which was not without important consequences (Kusunoki, 2008: 38).

The search for security guarantees from the 1960s onwards

Importantly, in late 1967 Prime Minister Sato, who held office between 1964 and 1972, set out his "three non-nuclear principles". According to those, Japan decided not to produce, possess, or introduce nuclear weapons into its territory. And in February 1968, those three non-nuclear principles were increased to four pillars of Japan's non-nuclear policy. These added confidence in U.S. nuclear defence, the promotion of global disarmament, and the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Thus, Prime Minister Sato made it known that the fundamental reason why Japan renounced nuclear weapons was due to the existence of nuclear defence by the United States (Green and Furukawa, 2008: 350). In this own way, he also confirmed his support for the "Yoshida Doctrine".

www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html.

[11] Article V of *the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security*.

[12] Article VI of *the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security*.

Yet, despite that Prime Minister Sato decided that a cost-benefit study should be carried out on Japan's nuclear weapons as a deterrent, on the grounds that such a study had never been done. This report became known as the 1968/70 Internal Report, and consisted of two parts, one in September 1968 and another in January 1970 (Kase, 2001: 55-59). The first focused on technical and economic aspects and the second on strategic and political issues. However, shortly after the publication of the first part of the report and the four pillars being enunciated, Richard Nixon announced the 'Guam Doctrine'[13] in July 1969, and the willingness to withdraw some 20,000 U.S. military personnel from South Korea (Seth, 2011: 407). It should be noted that Nixon's announcement occurred not long after President Lyndon Johnson's assurances of a U. S. commitment to the Japanese four pillars enunciated by Prime Minister Sato. A year later, the desire for a rapprochement between the United States and China, between Presidents Nixon and Mao Zedong, was also announced further exacerbating the existing fears of a U.S. abandonment.

Following those events, Japan decided to reassess its situation in terms of defence and security in general terms—and nuclear in particular. Given the circumstances, all those who argued in favour of a more autonomous and independent Japan in terms of defence became more vocal and tried to change Japan's policy on nuclear weapons. This was particularly the case of the Director General of the Japanese Defence Agency, Nakasone Yasuhiro, appointed to the post in January 1970, who argued against the majority at that time that was in favour of a non-nuclear defence policy (Green, 1995: 55; Hoey, 2012: 58). The date of his appointment also coincided with the announcement of the results of the 1968/70 Internal Report, which caused some unrest in the government, albeit without causing any change to the previous foreign and defence policy (Kase, 2001: 56). In essence, this was because the report suggested maintaining the situation of a nuclear deterrent outside Japan. The first part of the report also stated that a nuclear programme would have a high cost, although it would be possible from a technological point of view.

[13] The so-called 'Guam Doctrine' was intended to limit the U.S. military presence in Asia and make Asian countries more accountable for their respective defence.

The most significant argument in favour of maintaining the external deterrent at the time seems to have been strategic. Compared to the case of France, it was argued that Japan's development of a military nuclear program would generate greater security concerns for its enemies—but also its allies—than the French programme had ever generated. However, given Japan's population density, there would be greater vulnerability to a nuclear attack, and for these reasons a Japanese nuclear military program would be counterproductive. Moreover, Japan's national security would be better served as long as Japan's enemies believed they would be retaliated against by the United States if they ever attacked Japan (Kase: 2001: 562-63). Given these reasons, Nakasone Yasuhiro was unsuccessful with his arguments for a more autonomous and independent Japan in terms of national security. In February 1970 Japan even signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Noteworthy, the real threat to Japan at the time came primarily from the Soviet Union (Schaller, 1997: 246-247). Even in 1972, China and Japan established diplomatic relations through Prime Minister Tanaka[14] and Premier Zhou Enlai.[15] Both pledged that none of their countries would pursue hegemonic ambitions in the region. They even planned the signing of a peace and friendship treaty, although that was only signed in 1978. Furthermore, at the time China made it known that it had no objections to the alliance between the United States and Japan, particularly as long as Japan did not possess nuclear weapons.

This was essentially because China eventually accepted the idea that the alliance between the United States and Japan, even including a U.S. presence in the region, would be regarded as less of a threat to China, and even possibly considered to be a guarantee against some potential aggression by Japan (Tucker, 2013: 35). In addition, Mao Zedong felt that this would put the United States on China's side if there was an aggression by the Soviet Union. Following that, the Japanese

[14] Prime Minister of Japan between July 1972 and December 1974.

[15] Premier of the Council of State of the People's Republic of China, commonly referred to as the Prime Minister, between September 1954 and January 1976.

Ministry of Defence[16] initiated a long-term defence plan in 1976 in view of the fact that there were no serious and immediate military threats, and that the alliance between the United States and Japan consisted of a security bloc in the East Asia region (Green, 1995: 75).

But that was not always China's position, and the outcome could have been very different at times. The situation was distinct previously, in particular during the first meetings when Henry Kissinger visited Beijing in 1971. The Chinese government's view until then was that the United States should withdraw from Vietnam—and, indeed, Asia in general—given that its influence was considered harmful. That is, the environment at the time was one of hostility. One of China's main fears was that, at some point in time, some sort of alliance would be created between the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and India to oppose China in the region. In fact, there was a similar fear on the part of the Soviet Union that a U.S.-sponsored coalition between China and Japan could be formed, including other countries, namely Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and some western European countries, to cooperate and limit Soviet expansion.[17]

Since China did not change its position in a relevant way at the time, matters could have turned out differently, particularly in terms of instability in the region and possibly a change in Japan's decision to proliferate. But despite China's initial opposition to a U.S. presence in the region, and in particular its support to Japan, Henry Kissinger's efforts ultimately convinced the Chinese leaders that the situation would be beneficial to China's national security as it would prevent a possible militarization of Japan and any possible hegemonic ambitions in the region (Tucker, 2001: 253).

It should be noted that the Chinese leaders were rather concerned about a more militarized and autonomous Japan in terms

[16] At the time known as Japan's defence agency.

[17] This situation of fears, on the one hand of China and, on the other, of the Soviet Union is not surprising because they were part of what is known as Nixon's "politics of détente" or "policy of de-escalation". President Nixon was aware of the influence of China and the USSR in Vietnam and thus initiated a policy of rapprochement with the USSR and, in particular, with China to try to reduce tension and 'unbalance' from a strategic point of view both of these countries. In effect, the closest approach was towards China to embarrass the USSR.

of defence in the early 1970s (Pan, 2007: 141). For this reason, the decision to bring the United States closer to China, and even the announcement of the Guam Doctrine in July 1969, could to some extent encourage Japan to proliferate, particularly if U.S. support for Japan was not guaranteed. Despite this, Japan's non-proliferation policy continued until the end of the Cold War, even at times when Japan feared a situation of U.S. abandonment, as happened following the 'Guam Doctrine' announcement. A similar situation occurred under President Jimmy Carter, when he threatened South Korea with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the territory because of the human rights violations that occurred at the time by President Park Chung Hee (Taliaferro, 2019: 195). Furthermore, this sentiment also existed after the end of the Cold War when fears of communism faded with the end of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Japan did not change its strategic positioning. Even after North Korea's nuclear tests in 2006, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reaffirmed Japan's adherence to the "three non-nuclear principles" (Hughes and Krauss, 207: 163-164).

Japan's nuclear future

Noteworthy, in light of the more recent circumstances and in order to alter the situation, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made great efforts to amend Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution between 2012 and 2020, during his mandate during his second term in office. His fundamental argument at the time was that, given the international environment then Japan needed more freedom to prepare in terms of armed forces to meet the challenges presented from a constitutional point of view (Nishimura 2020; Walton, 2020).[18] However, this amendment of the Constitution was, and still is, a controversial issue in Japanese society and, according to the polls, there still is no majority of the population that supports it.[19] This matter does not only concern nuclear prolifera-

[18] On several occasions, Shinzo Abe alluded to the North Korean threat, but in fact, China's rise worried him as much or even more.

[19] The polls have a relative value, but it is known that there is no consensus in Japanese

tion, and probably not even primarily, although it may give some indications on how the population considers the country's national security matters. But it is undeniable that an amendment of Article 9 could lead to a change in nuclear defence policy at a later stage.

However, the signs on nuclear policy under Shinzo Abe were often mixed. In 2017, Japan refused to sign the UN Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty, having even been accused of putting "itself on the wrong side of history, geography, legality, morality, and humanity" (Thakur, 2017: 2). That said, on August 8, 2020, the day that marked the 75th anniversary of the United States atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Shinzo Abe assured that Japan remained true to nuclear non-proliferation.[20] More recently, in 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine he suggested that Japan's could consider the development of nuclear weapons in the future[21], although he was no longer in office at that time.[22]

His successor, Yoshihide Suga, did not make any significant change to the previous policy although there has been a pro-nuclear posture in Japan for some time as Japan.[23] Much of the debate has often centred on allowing U.S. nuclear weapons in the country rather than developing them. But the current Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida is a clear supporter of disarmament and is vehemently against nuclear weapons. Recently, he has emphatically stated that while simultaneously supporting the U.S. nuclear support.[24] His

society on this matter, and the debate is transversal to the population. According to Japanese newspaper The Japan Times of June 22, 2020, over 60% of the population opposed changes to the Japanese Constitution's war-renouncing Article 9 at the time. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/22/national/japan-oppose-change-article-9-constitution/.

[20] Abe vows to stand by atomic bomb survivors, NHK World Japan, March 9, 2020. https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20200809_16/.

[21] https://jordantimes.com/opinion/mohammad-abu-ghazleh/five-reasons-why-japan-will-unlikely-go-nuclear.

[22] Shinzo Abe term ended in September 2021, but he resigned a year earlier for health reasons. He was assassinated on July 8, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53943758; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62089486.

[23] https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2019-10-03/how-japan-could-go-nuclear.

[24] https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Kishida-urges-more-global-

position does not only concern Japan. He argues for more transparency on nuclear weapons and for states to act responsively.[25]

The reality is that, given the controversy within Japanese society on the issue of nuclear weapons and the past experiences with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in addition to the various statements of Japanese leaders, many analysts believe that Japan will never opt for nuclear proliferation. A number of reasons and factors related to the national security of the country have been advanced in addition to others of a domestic nature (Campbell and Sunohara, 2004; Hughes, L., 2007; Solingen, 2007; Kusunoki, 2008; Rublee, 2009). More specifically, and on the domestic front, the 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima caused by a major earthquake, albeit related to nuclear power generation and not for military use, has also added to some distrust about nuclear.

However, the differences between the various arguments for and against proliferation seem to focus more on the relative importance of each element, with some arguing more through the security factor—perhaps the majority—and others more with reasons related to the country's domestic policy. Some of these arguments deserve to be highlighted, in particular, because they consider that the importance of U.S. security support has been overvalued in terms of being able to offer a justification for Japan's non-proliferation alone. One of the arguments put forward is that one of the key elements of the decision not to proliferate is regulatory values regarding security that go beyond existing U.S. security matters (Maria Rublee, 2009). More specifically, although there is a concern for national security, which is ensured by the US, the argument is that the security concern is not in itself sufficient for the decision for non-proliferation, which implies considering other factors also as important. Put differently, the existence of an external deterrent has been a necessary but not a sufficient factor. From this perspective, if Japan possessed nuclear weapons this would be seen as weakening the country's national security, not because there is some risk

transparency-on-nuclear-weapons; https://thewire.in/world/fumio-kishida-japan-nuclear-weapons-stance.

[25] https://www.reuters.com/world/japan-pm-kishida-urges-nuclear-states-conduct-themselves-responsibly-non-2022-08-01/.

of attack by other states, but because it would be considered that the existence of such weapons would destabilize the region. That is:

> Japanese decision-makers did argue that nuclear weapons would weaken their security. However, this was not due to becoming a nuclear target (I found no record of this being a particular concern; U.S. bases in Japan meant the Japanese already accepted that they could be a target) but rather because a nuclear weapons program would disrupt regional and international relations (Rublee, 2009: 87).

But this author does not exclude the importance of U.S. security support, considering that "... evidence points toward the conclusion that while U.S. security guarantees were not sufficient for Japanese nuclear forbearance, they were likely necessary" (Rublee, 2009: 89). The reasons why Japan's non-proliferation policy has lasted for so long also would seem to result from the fact that "As time went by, more people belonging to the political elite began to accept the international and national norm against the acquisition of nuclear weapons, which led to a greater percentage being persuaded (Rublee, 2009: 54). It is thus possible to consider that Japan's situation is, as Paul (2000: 77) points out, comparable to that of Germany in the sense of not possessing nuclear weapons so as not to generate fears and negative responses from other countries, whether they are just neighbours, allies, or adversaries. To some extent, it has almost become an ontological position.

But there are other authors who advance arguments of a different nature considering that the security concerns are also not the most fundamental. One of those arguments rest on the idea that Japan made this option in order to pursue growth and economic development after World War II, primarily through international trade (Solingen, 2007: 71). International trade requires good and healthy relations with other countries. Otherwise, "In an anarchic world with no fool-proof security guarantees, why would a major power relinquish the ultimate guarantee?" (Solingen, 2007: 59). If Japan had chosen to proliferate, it would in all likelihood have jeopardised the circumstances that allowed this development model to occur and continue over the years.

For that reason, it opted for an alliance with the United Stated, thus simultaneously ensuring its security (Solingen, 2007: 74).

Conclusion

It seems indisputable that Japan has chosen not to proliferate after World War II because, if it did, it would contribute to a reduction in its national security to the extent that this could be understood by other countries as a threat. Since then, its security has essentially been ensured by the United States. At any event, from an ontological security point of view the idea of proliferation was also considered by many in Japan to be incompatible and incoherent with Japanese post-war values. That situation still holds to a large extent by a significant part of the Japanese population. There have been moments when there were attempts to try to reverse the situation in terms of nuclear policy, but always without success. It is not obvious whether Japan will remain non-nuclear in the future in terms of military weapons and equipment, particularly in view of China's rise and the North Korean threat. This will in all likelihood depend on a number of internal domestic factors and developments in these countries, as well as U.S. policy in terms of wanting to continue to maintain an important presence in the region and maintain its commitment to Japan's security.

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