Stanton Nuclear Security Fellows Seminar

PANEL 3: Extended Deterrence and Nuclear Latency

1. Abolghasem Bayyenat, BCSIA

The Logic and Political Dynamics of Iran's Nuclear Policy-Making

My project studies the logic and political dynamics of Iran's nuclear policy-making. Understanding how Iran defines its national interests on the nuclear issue and what kind of nuclear policies it pursues is of direct policy significance to various regional and global stakeholders. More specifically, Iran's nuclear choices have direct implications for peace and stability in the Middle East, US and other external actors' interests in the region, and the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The broad question that I seek to answer in this research is what drives the changing patterns of Iran's nuclear policy from 2002, when its nuclear issue became internationalized, until the present. More specifically, I examine why Iran's response to continuous international demands and pressures for the suspension of its nuclear fuel cycle activities and for its full cooperation with the IAEA since 2002 has oscillated between different forms of accommodation and resistance. In particular, I seek to explain why Iran pursued minimalist accommodation from 2003 to 2005, maximum resistance and nuclear expansion from 2005 to 2013, partial nuclear rollback from 2013 to 2019, and minimalist resistance from 2019 to the present. Accounting for the changing patterns of Iran's nuclear policy would highlight the conditions under which Iran is likely to exercise nuclear restraint and suspend or roll back the sensitive elements of its nuclear program, or pursue a strategy of defiance and nuclear expansion.

The existing theoretical and empirical scholarship on nuclear (non)proliferation and Iran's nuclear policy illuminate different aspects of Iran's nuclear choices but fall short of providing a full and nuanced account of the changing patterns of its nuclear behavior over time. Rationalist theories of international relations, including both neorealism and neoliberalism, have difficulty accounting for the variation in Iran's nuclear policy, the timing of the policy changes, and the nuances of the policies adopted. This stems in large part from the tendency of these theories to treat state preferences as objectively given, and "blackboxing" the state, or treating states as rational unitary actors. While problematizing state preferences, purely ideational approaches and some exclusively domestic-level explanations also have difficulty explaining how and when different competing policy discourses and preferences may become dominant and translate into policies. This limitation mainly results from these theories' neglect of the political dynamics and processes of policy making and the interaction of various domestic-level and systemic level variables.

By developing a synthetic analytic framework referred to as "Integrative Societal-Constructivism", I explain the changing patterns of Iran's nuclear policy in terms of the changing power dynamics between the two competing state identity discourses of "revolutionary-Islamic" and "moderate-Islamic" within

Iran's political space. In light of their constituent identities, I argue that these discourses promoted significantly divergent constructions of national interests and subscribed to different cost conceptions and levels of sensitivity to costs. I find that when the revolutionary-Islamic discourse was dominant, Iran resisted compromise with Western powers and exhibited a higher tolerance for economic and physical security costs. In contrast, when the moderate-Islamic discourse was politically empowered, Iran showed greater sensitivity to economic and physical security costs and was more inclined toward cooperation and compromise with Western powers over its nuclear program.

This research is conducted in three logically integrated stages, employing discourse analysis, content analysis and process tracing techniques. In the first stage, I apply a societal constructivist approach to recover the main rival state identity discourses operating in Iran's political space and infer broad foreign policy implications from them. In the second stage, I lay out the understandings of the respective Iranian political elites' of the foreign policy situation governing Iran's nuclear issue at various junctures and draw out their competing nuclear policy discourses. In the third stage, I examine the political dynamics of Iran's nuclear policy-making and trace out the processes in which competing nuclear policy discourses interact with situation-relevant systemic and domestic political, economic and institutional variables and translate into policies. I draw on a broad range of primary data sources (mostly collected through fieldwork in Iran) including speeches, interviews and memoirs of Iran's top and mid-level political elites, transcripts of parliamentary debates, popular media discourses, as well as Iranian and foreign government reports, documents, and news archives to carry out this research .

Besides presenting a more plausible and nuanced explanation for the changing patterns of Iran's nuclear policy, my research provides a coherent account of how different systemic and domestic-level political, economic, ideational, and institutional variables interact to shape Iran's nuclear policy. By bridging preferences with policies and integrating both structures and agency in the accounts of Iran's nuclear policy, my research redresses the shortcomings of purely systemic and exclusively ideational and domestic-level analyses of Iranian nuclear policy-making. This research also demonstrates that rather than having automatic and inevitable effects on Iran's nuclear choices, systemic variables became politically salient to Iran's nuclear policy only when situated in a favorable domestic socio-cognitive structure. More specifically, external military threats, the threat of referral to the UN Security Council, and rigorous Western economic sanctions became most relevant to Iran's nuclear policy only when the moderate-Islamic discourse was in control of elected political institutions. Furthermore, this research also reveals that without factoring the agency of Iranian political elites in mobilizing domestic political support for their favored nuclear policies and the impacts of systemic and domestic political, economic, and institutional variables on the power dynamics between competing discourses, a purely ideational account would not be sufficient to explain the changing patterns and nuances of Iran's nuclear policy-making.

There are multiple policy implications flowing form my research. The first policy implication derives from the understanding that a complex web of systemic and domestic-level variables interacted to produce changes in Iranian nuclear policy. Policy changes have often been the result of intense domestic political tug-of-war and the confluence of multiple favorable conditions at home and abroad. As such, the imposition and intensification of external military and economic pressures on Iran without regard to a

host of other necessary conditions and contributing factors are not only unlikely to succeed in bringing a desired change in Iranian nuclear policy but may also prove counterproductive and set off a chain of mutual escalation. Second, all else being equal, Iran is more likely to respond favorably to external pressures and inducements in revising its nuclear policy when moderate-reformist political groups are empowered, but this would not be automatic and inevitable. Third, because of the shared elements of the competing identity discourses in Iran and the entanglement of the nuclear program with Iranian identity politics, any nuclear demands from Iran that fall outside the range of an honorable and face-saving deal are likely to meet with resistance, regardless of which political groups dominate the Iranian political scene.

Given the contemporary and ongoing nature of my research topic, a major limitation of this study is my lack of access to classified archives and my reliance on open-source data. Although I have drawn on a diverse set of primary data sources including memoirs and published interviews and speeches of key Iranian policy-makers and have contextualized the data, lacking access to classified archives remains a limitation of this research. Personal interviews with key Iranian policy-makers could somewhat compensate this limitation and increase confidence in my open-source data, but this has also not been feasible at this point.

2. Brian Blankenship, CFR

The Causes and Consequences of Alliance Assurances for Nonproliferation

Subject of Study

My project aims to understand the causes and effectiveness of U.S. alliance assurances for nuclear nonproliferation. Alliances have long played a central role in American efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and the academic literature suggests that U.S. security assurances have a negative effect on the probability that a state will seek and obtain nuclear weapons. What is less clear, however, is which countries actually receive U.S. assurances, what types of assurances, and when; and under what conditions various types of assurances actually work.

These questions serve as the basis for my project, and their answers carry implications for understanding the role of alliance guarantees in discouraging nuclear proliferation. Understanding the forms and amount of assurances that are effective in actually reassuring allies – as well as the circumstances that make them more or less so – is central to understanding the best approaches that the United States can use to dissuade its partners from seeking nuclear weapons. In order to understand the effectiveness of security assurances, however, it is important to establish *when* the United States makes security assurances and *who* receives them, as these assurances are not randomly assigned and their effectiveness is likely to depend on the contexts in which they are used. Taken together, answering these questions can provide insight into what it actually takes to reassure allies and discourage the horizontal spread of nuclear weapons.

Argument

The argument I make is twofold. First, the United States prioritizes sending assurances of support to allies that are at greatest risk of seeking nuclear weapons, whether because of their latent capacity or because they have the motivation to do so. In particular, U.S. security assurances generally go to allies which: (1) have large economies and considerable conventional military potential; (2) have the latent ability to obtain nuclear weapons; (3) have security incentives to develop nuclear weapons due to their proximity to conventionally powerful or nuclear-armed adversaries; and (4) that have doubts about the United States' willingness or ability to defend them.

Second, U.S. assurances of support are effective to the extent that they actually address the reason why an ally might be dissatisfied with U.S. protection. In particular, I make a distinction between assurances of support that signal the United States' *willingness* and *capability* to defend its partners. Existing literature on costly signaling and extended deterrence tends to focus on the former. However, in cases where the nature of the threat an ally faces is at least partly conventional rather than nuclear, and where the United States relies on the possibility of conventional escalation to deter the adversary, signals of resolve – such as clear statements of support, high-level diplomatic visits, or small "tripwire" deployments of U.S. forces – are unlikely to be enough. Instead, signals of capability – such as adequate front-line troop deployments, military exercises, or demonstrations of power projection – are necessary to reassure allies.

While these two lines of argument speak to two distinct research questions – one focused on identifying the conditions under which assurances are provided, the other focused on identifying those under which they are effective – each one informs the other. For one, I would expect to see evidence that the United States to tailor its assurances based on the concerns that allies actually have. I would expect, for example, that the United States is more likely to send signals of capability in cases where allies are acutely concerned about the conventional balance of forces. Moreover, the effectiveness of a particular signal of support will depend on the context in which it is used.

Methodology

This study will employ a mixed methods approach that draws upon archival work for qualitative, historical case studies, interviews and surveys with policymakers in U.S. allied countries, and cross-national quantitative analysis. First, the qualitative case studies will focus on U.S. reassurance and nonproliferation policy toward West Germany, Japan, and South Korea during the 1960s and 1970s, drawing on archival materials from the John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford presidential libraries as well as secondary historical texts. In these cases, my goal is to provide evidence as to: (1) the motivations behind U.S. security assurances; and (2) what made them effective or ineffective in reassuring the recipients about the reliability of the United States as a security partner and in dissuading them from seeking nuclear weapons.

Second, I will draw on surveys and interviews with foreign and defense policy elites in U.S.-allied countries in order to assess which types of U.S. assurances of support would be most effective in reassuring them – and why. In Europe, these will include the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, and in Asia will include Japan and South Korea. These cases are useful because they face comparatively high levels of external threat among U.S. allies, and have thus sought and been the target of considerable assurances of support from Washington.

Third, I will use large-N quantitative analysis using an original dataset of U.S. reassurance including troop deployments, diplomatic visits, joint military exercises, and presidential statements. Here, my aim is to use statistical models to assess the determinants of U.S. reassurance, showing that the United States disproportionately reassures allies that have the capacity to seek nuclear weapons, as well as to assess the effects of these assurances on the likelihood that an ally will pursue nuclear weapons.

Contributions

This project aims to make a number of contributions to existing scholarship. The first is by offering what is to my knowledge the first attempt to systematically theorize about and empirically test the types of signals that are most effective at reassuring allies. Second, the project explores the relative importance of resolve and capability in reassuring allies. Whereas existing studies primarily emphasize the importance of signals of resolve as a means of reassuring partners and deterring adversaries, they tend to overlook the importance of signaling the capability to project power and meet particular combat needs. This is an especially important gap in contexts where the United States relies less upon the threat

of nuclear retaliation to deter adversaries and reassure allies, as has been more common since the end of the Cold War than was the case during the Cold War, when the reliance on nuclear escalation meant that Washington's capability to punish an adversary could be taken for granted but its resolve to use that capability was all-important. The contemporary era, by contrast, is defined by greater U.S. reliance on conventional forces for deterrence and reassurance by denial, as well as by the challenges to power projection presented by "anti-access/area-denial" capabilities.

Policy Implications

The primary goal of the project is to provide evidence on the conditions under which assurances of support are more likely to be successful in increasing allies' confidence in U.S. protection and in turn reducing their incentives to seek nuclear weapons. The findings of the project are thus likely to be of interest to policymakers who want to know which tools are best-suited to increase allies' confidence in the U.S. commitment to their defense, including but not only for the purposes of discouraging nuclear proliferation. In particular, the project aims to provide insight into the size and type of military footprint that is needed to reassure allies – and in particular the conditions under which a small footprint can be sufficient – as well as how this varies across contexts.

Challenges

The most notable challenge the project faces is parsing out the effect of U.S. assurances from other factors. Many of the same factors that are likely to affect allies' confidence in U.S. protection and their propensity to seek nuclear weapons are also likely to lead the United States to use assurances of protection proactively in order to discourage allies from doubting its protection and pursuing nuclear weapons. U.S. assurances are, in other words, endogenous to many of the same factors that affect the same outcomes of interest. These factors include the threat environment; allies' latent capacity for building nuclear weapons; and various factors that might lead allies to doubt U.S. commitments, such as the extent to which the United States domestic pressure to retrench. Indeed, somewhat counterintuitively it is the very cases in which U.S. assurances are most likely to be used – namely, instances in which an ally doubts Washington's willingness or ability to protect it – that assurances are least likely to be effective. If allies had full confidence in U.S. protection, no reassurance would be necessary. This makes actually measuring the effectiveness of assurances difficult. This challenge can be partially overcome by comparing cases that are similar in context but which receive varying types or amounts of reassurance, effectively "holding constant" other factors.

3. Mayumi Fukushima, RAND

How Does Nuclear Latency Embolden States and Create the "Stability-Instability Paradox"?

1. Research Questions and Their Significance

How do nuclear latent states, such as Iran, exploit their advanced enrichment and reprocessing (ENR) capabilities to their political advantage over their adversaries? How does the acquisition of nuclear latency – i.e. the technical capacity to indigenously produce nuclear weapons – affect state behavior? Does nuclear latency embolden state behavior toward other states?

The extant literature by and large focuses on whether nuclear latency deters or compels other states, and with few exceptions,[1] it has paid very limited attentions to how nuclear latency affects *state behavior*.[2] Whether or not nuclear latency deters certainly matters, but an equally important but understudied question is whether *state leaders believe* nuclear latency deters and, if so, how that belief might change their behavior. State leaders may assume, either correctly or incorrectly, that nuclear latency can deter and allow them to behave aggressively, which may lead to crisis escalation and other destabilizing consequences.

2. Big Questions I Seek to Answer

A larger question I seek to address is Whether and how nuclear latent states differ from nuclear weapons states in the way they utilize their advanced nuclear capabilities for security and political purposes. We all know that, empirically, the drivers of nuclear latency in most states are not just energy-based. Those with latent nuclear capabilities generally have not ruled out their acquiring nuclear bombs as a future option. Regardless of their current justifications for their pursuit of such capabilities, state leaders are aware that their ENR technologies are useful for deterring or compelling other, often more powerful, states.

Given all this, to what extent do existing arguments about the effect of acquiring nuclear weapons apply to states that have developed latent nuclear capabilities? If getting nuclear weapons has some effects on a state's foreign policy such as becoming more aggressive, expansionist or independent (Bell 2015; Bell 2019), does the acquisition of ENR capabilities have similar effects on state behavior? If state leaders believe that nuclear hedging deters or compels other states, moreover, does the Stability-Instability Paradox (Snyder 1965) apply to a state dyad where at least one is a nuclear-latent state?

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[1] See Mehta and Whitlark (2017).

[2] Virtual deterrence theory posits that nuclear latency can provide states with a standby nuclear capability – i.e. many of the benefits of an operational nuclear arsenal (Levite 2003; Sagan 2010). To deter a dangerous adversary, latent states can threaten to respond by acquiring nuclear weapons that they can then use to threaten their adversary; nuclear latency might also bolster a state's ability to compel others, as latent states involved in a dispute can threaten to rapidly acquire nuclear weapons if their terms are not met (Schelling 2008; Perkovich & Acton 2009; Gartzke and Jo 2009; Sagan 2010; Sechser 2011; Sechser and Fuhrmann 2013; Kroenig 2013; Volpe 2017; Fuhrmann 2018). Other scholars disagree, however, arguing that states may not use latent capabilities for deterrence or compellence; in particular, they cannot effectively deter until they acquire nuclear weapons *and* adopt a particular nuclear posture (Narang 2013, 2014). Nuclear latency may even create incentives for an adversary to preventively settle militarized interstate disputes (Gilpin 1981; Debs and Monteiro 2014; Mehta and Whitlark 2017).

3. Main Arguments

Drawing on previous work including Fuhrmann (2018), I argue that state leaders may believe their acquisition of ENR capabilities can deter a nuclear-armed adversary's military attack, not because they threaten to retaliate in the future with their own newly-developed nuclear bombs but because of the following assumption: the nuclear-armed adversary knows that its potential military attack would prompt the target's nuclear breakout and thereby undermine its own relative power position as a nuclear-weapons state. And this belief may encourage a latent state's leaders confronting a nuclear-armed adversary to take provocative actions they would otherwise refrain from taking. As an improvement over the extant literature, this argument introduces an intervening variable, which is *a latent state's belief* that a nuclear-armed adversary fears its current military superiority might deteriorate if the latent state acquires nuclear weapons as a response to a military attack. Take, for example, the dyad between China and Japan. Japanese leaders may feel emboldened to take risks in their diplomatic maneuvers if they believe that China would not respond to Japan's provocations with a full-scale military attack on Japan, given that such a Chinese attack might provoke Japan's nuclear breakout, which, in turn, would eventually undermine China's power position as the only legally sanctioned nuclear weapons state in Asia. In other words, Japanese leaders may believe that, even if China perceives U.S. security commitments to Japan to be much weakened, Tokyo's persisting nuclear latency still makes China cautious about resorting to war with Japan.

If state leaders get emboldened to take more risks than they would otherwise due to their belief that their nuclear latency can deter a nuclear-armed aggressor, this implies that they assume a version of the "stability-instability paradox": a latent state's emboldenment can exacerbate regional low-intensity conflicts, while the deterrent effect of nuclear latency helps keep interstate conflicts from escalating into war. If this assumption turns out to be wrong, however, that can lead to serious consequences.

The scope condition for this argument is an advanced nuclear latent state confronting a nuclear-armed adversary that desires to prevent the former from acquiring nuclear bombs. The argument does *not* apply to a dyad of states both having advanced latent capabilities but not nuclear bombs (e.g. Brazil-Argentina). It may apply, however, to a dyad where a latent state is defending against a challenger state that has neither nuclear weapons nor advanced ENR capabilities but does possess sophisticated conventional weapons (e.g. Iran-Saudi Arabia for now when Riyadh's nuclear capabilities are still limited). Also note that the defender's possession of advanced nuclear capabilities without bombs is an important component of the scope conditions, as insufficiently developed ENR facilities are more likely to invite preventive attacks. Syria, for example, attempted to build a nuclear reactor at al-Kibar, which was destroyed by Israel's airstrike in 2007.

The existing arguments that nuclear latency is likely to invite coercion or preventive attacks (Debs and Monteiro 2014; Mehta and Whitlark 2017) may underestimate the costs of such attacks and overestimate their benefits. In dyads between a nuclear weapons state and a nuclear latent state, the costs of preventive attacks should take into account the possibility that a military attack fails to fully destroy all ENR facilities but reinforces the target's interests in getting nuclear weapons. The latent state could construct underground ENR facilities, as did North Korea, lowering the success rates of adversary preventive attacks. The benefits of preventive attack, on the other hand, may be lower than often

assumed. Military strikes can destroy physical structures, but often cannot eliminate all nuclear researchers and their knowledge. Latent states can manage to reconstitute their nuclear programs after sustaining a physical damage at their ENR facilities, as Iraq did after Israel destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981.

4. Research Design, Methods, and Cases

Scholars working on the effect of nuclear latency on state behavior heavily rely on quantitative methods with a dataset of ENR facilities.[3] While the dataset is a useful tool, their quantitative approach has inherent limitations, since, when we discuss nuclear latency, we are primarily concerned with state leaders' *intentions to engage in nuclear hedging*, for which the number of ENR facilities is not a good proxy. To address this shortcoming, I plan to conduct case studies to investigate potential relationships between the *quality* of latent nuclear capabilities[4] and changes in state leaders' diplomatic and military activities.

The universe of cases includes, but is not limited to, the following major dyads: China–India between 1964 and 1974; the USSR (Russia)–Japan; the USSR–Sweden; the USSR–the FRG (West Germany); the USSR–Belgium; China–India before 1974; China–Japan; China–Taiwan; Israel–Egypt; Israel–Iraq before 1991; North Korea–South Korea after 2006; Israel–Iran after 2019. I select a few of them from the universe of cases to examine possible causality between nuclear latency and changes in state behavior. The unit of analysis is the country-year. Compared to cross-case comparisons, this approach, within-case longitudinal analysis, will help better control for confounding factors such as a state's conventional capabilities, rivalry with a great power or a regional peer, prior military conflicts, domestic political factors (Levy 1989), and great power security commitments that can embolden state behavior (Posen 2014). In addition to process-tracing, I also plan to conduct a computerized text analysis to systematically examine differences between state leaders' activities addressed to their adversary before and after the moment when they acquired advanced ENR technologies.

One candidate case for in-depth case study is the USSR (Russia)–Japan dyad. Although U.S. security commitments make it harder to estimate the net effect of nuclear latency on its leaders' behavior, Japan is otherwise a good candidate, as it is a prototype of a nuclear latent state and a self-proclaimed pacifist country – arguably the least-likely case for aggressive and risky behavior. Evidence suggests that Japanese leaders, such as Premier Yasuhiro Nakasone (1982-87), believed that it was important to demonstrate Japan's latent capabilities in order to deter aggressions from neighboring countries.[5] They regard Japan's nuclear fuel cycle project in Rokkasho as a signaling device reminding the world of its ability to quickly acquire indigenous nuclear bombs if necessary. While causal links have yet to be examined, Japanese leaders appeared to become more assertive and risk-tolerant after Japan's Tōkaimura Reprocessing Facility became ready for full operation in the late 1970s. Japan, for example, started conducting risky

[3] See Mehta and Whitlark (2017), which uses a Nuclear Latency Dataset (Fuhrmann and Tkach 2015).
[4] To measure the *quality* as well as quantity of latent nuclear capabilities, I will rely on previous research including Jo and Gartzke (2007), Montgomery and Sagan (2009), and Fuhrmann and Tkach (2015).
[5] See Yasuhiro Nakasone's oral history (2012). Subsequent leaders shared the same belief. In 2002, for example, Ozawa Ichirō, former Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, explicitly threatened Japanese nuclear breakout in his meeting with a member of the Chinese Communist Party Intelligence Bureau. Ozawa stated that China's recent military provocations "can make the Japanese hysterical; it's easy to manufacture nuclear bombs; once decided, Japan can quickly get thousands of nuclear warheads out of the plutonium discharged from Japanese nuclear power plants." See the Asahi Shimbun Newspaper, 7 April 2002.

anti-submarine intelligence operations against the Soviets in the early 1980s.[6] To make up for the weakness of the Japan case due to U.S. alliance commitments as a confounding factor, I also study cases where great power security commitments were uncertain or nonexistent such as the China–Taiwan and China–India (1964-72) dyads.

5. Contributions and Policy Implications

Most scholars see nuclear hedging as an alliance bargaining tool for compelling a proliferation-averse senior security partner's assistance or stronger commitments.[7] This research, however, aims to shed lights on a previously understudied aspect of nuclear hedging – its utility as a tool of crisis bargaining with a nuclear-armed adversary. It is also intended to encourage other scholars to conduct similar research on states that are currently nuclear-latent or were so in the past. It is expected to offer the following policy recommendations: policymakers should not focus on nuclear proliferation alone. Even before getting nuclear bombs, states that have access to advanced ENR capabilities, such as Iran, may get emboldened and exacerbate local conflicts, albeit not resorting to an all-out war.

6. Weaknesses

The project has yet to establish transparent rules for systematically collecting data on state activities as well as rules for coding changes in state behavior. Advice and suggestions on the project's case selection would also be particularly appreciated.

[6] In the early 1980s, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) began engaging in anti-Soviet undersea intelligence operations with top-secret vessels called "Ninmukan," which involved much higher casualty and escalation risks than any of the post-Cold War JMSDF activities overseas (Michishita et al., 2016).

[7] Some argue that, if allied with a security guarantor pursuing nuclear nonproliferation, a latent state may effectively compel a renewed security commitment by threatening to acquire nuclear weapons (Knopf 2012; Samuels & Schoff 2013; Bleek and Lorber 2014; Lanoszka 2014; Mehta 2016; Narang and Mehta 2016).

4. Sayuri Romei, RAND

Evolving Japanese Perceptions of US Extended Nuclear Deterrence

Overview and Research Questions:

This project examines the Japanese government's evolving perceptions of US extended nuclear deterrence (END) since the end of the Cold War and their impact on the future of the US-Japan alliance.

The extension of the US nuclear umbrella to Japan has been a cornerstone of deterrence in Northeast Asia for seven decades. This mechanism, known as extended nuclear deterrence, depends above all else on credibility, i.e. the ability to convince the adversary that a threat would be executed if certain redlines are crossed. The need for credibility of END vis-à-vis Japan and the United States' potential adversaries is well understood. However, for END to remain effective it must also be credible to those it seeks to protect. In the context of the US-Japan alliance, END must be credible and reliable in the minds of Japan's national security decisionmakers. If the Japanese do not deem it credible enough, there is a higher risk of alliance decoupling, which in turn leads to a reduced END credibility in the mind of adversaries. In fact, there is constant concern within the Japanese government that the kinds of weapon systems and deployments emphasized in the US Nuclear Posture Review and the Pentagon's force planning discussions do not align with Japan's deterrence needs vis-à-vis China, North Korea, and even Russia. Despite the long history of this bilateral security arrangement, 2020 marks only the tenth year since the United States and Japan initiated the Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD), a formal bilateral consultation mechanism that allows the Japanese government officials to exchange views with their American counterparts on how to enhance alliance deterrence as part of their overall security and defense cooperation. Prior to 2010, in fact, there was no formal bilateral discussion framework specifically on deterrence, as the security relationship was handled through ad hoc meetings between the US and Japanese political leadership.

Within the main research topic, the project will thus explore specific questions such as:

- How has Japan's threat perception evolved in the past thirty years and how relevant is the nuclear element of US extended deterrence to Japan?
- Where are the perception discrepancies between Japan and the United States, and why do they matter for the US-Japan alliance?
- Is the US-Japan alliance at a crossroads, and what adjustments are required in the US-Japan security relationship to ensure a higher level of deterrence credibility?

Why this topic matters and how to find answers to these research questions:

In August 2020, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo announced his premature resignation. Although he is leaving several of his goals and projects unfinished, Abe used his premiership to finally shift Japan's role in global affairs from a reactive state to a leader in the making. Even with this recent shift, Japan is still often taken for granted as an ally within the US policy-making community in Washington, DC. Abe

Shinzo's resignation, therefore, also offers an opportunity to analyze what the future of Japan's nonnuclear policy holds, and where the country's security policy is headed. Although Suga Yoshihide eventually emerged as Abe's successor, according to an August 2020 *Kyodo News* survey, former Defense Minister Ishiba Shigeru was voted as "most fit to be Abe's successor."[8] Ishiba, also dubbed the "military geek" candidate, has been quoted multiple times in the past questioning Japan's national nonnuclear policy and the nuclear guarantee provided by the United States. Ishiba is not the only voice in Japan's political world that has been rethinking the country's nonnuclear policy. The project will thus offer an analysis of the way the Japanese government has been perceiving US END in the last thirty years, with the objective of better understanding the direction these perceptions are heading and why they matter for the future of the US-Japan alliance. In fact, 2020 not only offers the opportunity to assess the first ten years of the formal extended deterrence dialogue between the two allies, it is especially a chance to think of its future direction as the two allies prepare to work together in light of potential leadership changes in both countries in the fall of 2020.

In order to fulfill this goal, the proposed research will first assess statements made by elected officials and military personnel in the United States and Japan in the past thirty years to identify divergences in deterrence and extended deterrence perception. It will also analyze relevant official documents issued by the US government, such as the Nuclear Posture Reviews, and will study the public (and private, when possible) reactions from the Japanese government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Self-Defense Force). The project will then examine how these divergences affect the US-Japan alliance by analyzing Japan's internal debate on how the nuclear option fits in within the recent trend of discussion that sees the potential acquisition of strike capabilities and changes in space and missile defense policy.

After conducting interviews with prominent former American officials involved in the EDD, I traveled to Japan in October 2019 for an intensive research trip. I gathered relevant material on the impact of changes in the security environment on Japanese perceptions and conducted twenty-one semi-structured interviews and off-the-record discussions with former and current Japanese government officials, academics, and flag officers. I plan to review that material in light of the recent changes in Japanese politics and gather more interviews both for the Japanese and the US side, which will complement the primary sources (government-issued documents) and the secondary sources (commentaries and analyses) that I intend to use for the completion of this project.

Possible answer and recommendations to US policymakers:

My preliminary research leads me to believe that the Japanese government still highly values the nuclear component of the US END not necessarily because the regional threats have grown more challenging, but because the Japanese government wants to ensure the short and medium-term preservation of the convenient original nuclear bargain that the government chose to establish in the

[8] *The JapanTimes*, August 30, 2020: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/08/30/national/politics-diplomacy/shigeru-ishiba-leads-post-abe-poll/

late 60s while it gradually prepares for a future scenario where the US-Japan alliance collapses or radically changes.

The Four-Pillars Nuclear Policy adopted by Japan in 1968 saw the reliance on US END as a balancing tool in order to maintain the Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not developing, and not introducing nuclear weapons. This balance in its nuclear policy that the Japanese government has crafted in the postwar era covers all the bases for Japan: it officially rejects indigenous nuclear weapons, which satisfies the domestic public's demands, while leaning on US nuclear weapons, which Japan considers vital for its defense. That is why the evolution of US nuclear doctrine through different administrations has created anxiety within the Japanese government. Whenever a US government mentions a possible adoption of a No First Use policy or omits the adjective "nuclear" in "extended nuclear deterrence," Tokyo feels that it chips away at the original meaning and purpose behind the national nuclear policy. Moreover, recent ambiguities in US foreign policy, along with shifts in the regional security environment, particularly North Korea's relentless effort to build nuclear forces capable of threatening the continental United States, may have undermined Japanese confidence in the US defense commitment and extended deterrence. However, these developments are not the only factors that drive Japanese perceptions of US END. As a country with a long-standing high nuclear latency and an increasingly sophisticated understanding of its security needs, Japan's internal debates on the direction of its security and defense policy will become crucial, in terms of the alliance, for the US government in the upcoming years. Some interviewees (particularly from the Self-Defense Force) lamented the fact that Japan still does not have a tangible grasp on the nuclear capabilities that are set to defend the country, advocating in favor of a nuclear-sharing system with the US for nonstrategic nuclear capabilities. With looming presidential elections in the United States and the unknown of a new post-Abe era, understanding the origin and trajectory of these underlying Japanese concerns will become increasingly important for the United States. The project thus intends to offer these tentative recommendations to US policy makers:

- Keeping a robust security alliance with Japan by maintaining and enhancing EDD consultations;
- Sending a consistent message to East Asian allies and to Japan in particular that the United States is a reliable partner that values its alliances in the region and intends to stay a major regional player; and
- Holding frank discussions with Japan about concrete shifts and nuances in the postwar "spear and shield" alliance model, which also engenders the need to discuss the broader role and objectives of the future of the US-Japan alliance.

Weaknesses and feedback needed:

- The US and Japanese governments do not disclose the content of their EDD sessions. That may limit the scope of my analysis on the impact that the EDD has had on the alliance in these first ten years since its establishment.
- The policy recommendations are provisional and need to be refined.

- Timing: the publications derived from this project will need to be carefully timed because of the imminent shifts in both Japanese and US politics that may cause rapid changes in the US-Japan alliance.