

Topic of Research: US Nuclear Politics

Introduction:

Since January, I have been researching American nuclear politics to assist Dr. Lauren Sukin's preparations to write a book, which will be published in a few years' time. While I began this research considering the history of Franco-American nuclear relations primarily, my role developed to later consider both Taiwanese American and Japanese-American nuclear relationships. My work mainly included perusing archives available online (such as those of NATO, the French government, and presidential archives), as well as keeping a record of other non-virtual archives which Dr. Sukin would be able to visit in-person at a later date.

Methods:

My work mainly consisted of researching archives and recording relevant information, names, dates, quotes and statistics which were relevant to Dr. Sukin's work. While much traditional scholarship considers that most non-nuclear states elect to 'go nuclear' when they feel the credibility of their allies' nuclear assurances is fickle, Dr. Sukin's book posits that this should be reconsidered. Dr. Sukin asserts that non-nuclear parties' fear of potential 'nuclear entanglement' (being drawn into a conflict outside their sphere of influence or interest by their nuclear ally) can also act as a driver for nuclear development. Therefore, in the case of France, much of the most pertinent research I conducted focussed on President Charles de Gaulle's post-war fear of being drawn into conflicts by America which held potential for nuclear escalation, and how this positioned French politicians to feel inclined to create their own nuclear arsenal. This focus was then translated to my research concerning Taiwan and, subsequently, Japan. Upon having taken notes and made recordings of the archives that I had used for my research, I synthesised my research findings into three broader literature reviews which offered an overview of the critical themes considered in the literature. This was then sent to Dr. Sukin, who offered advice on any areas which may be useful for further research. This work was also overseen through weekly meetings online between myself, Dr. Sukin, and the two other research assistants involved in the project.

Findings:

My findings were thought-provoking and left me with a personal interest in the power of nationalism as a catalysing factor involved in nuclear developments. In many situations, it is true that a non-nuclear party's fear of being drawn into nuclear conflict catalysed nuclear developments. However, there were also many other factors at play which drive countries to seek nuclear independence:

- France has a long history of nuclear technological developments, and "was well advanced in nuclear science before WWII, but researchers were relocated during World War II due to fears that Axis powers may access French security data. However, after the war, burgeoning international anti-proliferation commitments shaped by the US were regarded spitefully by de Gaulle's France, which held itself in high esteem for the contributions of its scientists to Allied nuclear developments. As a middle power seeking to reassert itself on the global stage after the humiliations of the Vichy regime, France sought to join the 'nuclear club.' Relations improved after the ascent of President Pompidou, who disregarded much of de Gaulle's defensive doctrine in favor of US collaboration to avoid resource wastage on research replication.
- In Taiwan, leaders have historically demonstrated an interest in developing a nuclear arsenal. The history of nuclear proliferation in Taiwan is one undergirded by the pervasive fear of China's nuclear power. These anxieties were triggered most overtly in October 1964, with the first nuclear test carried out by China, which left Taiwan's political establishment in a state of

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emergency. Although the ROC signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty when it was still recognised as the official representative of China in 1968, the increasing international recognition of China (PRC) over Taiwan (ROC) from 1971 onwards, particularly by the USA and the UN, resulted in even further impetus amongst the Taiwanese political elite to develop nuclear programs in secret. In the 1970s, the US rapprochement towards the PRC was viewed as a risk of abandonment – a fundamental justification underpinning Taiwan's attempts to proliferate. However, over the coming decades, all such attempts were terminated under American pressure. Although multiple attempts at rolling out a nuclear program between 1964 and 1988 took place under the auspices of exclusively 'civilian uses', the US' expansive spy network, international intelligence on the ROC's pleas for support abroad, and significant power and economic asymmetry in the American-Taiwan relationship allowed the US to forcefully quash Taiwan's program by 1988.

- In Japan, 'nuclear hedging' remains a popular policy. While Japan's aversion to nuclear weapons is deeply rooted in its traumatic experiences with Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Fukushima disaster, as well as its constitutional and international commitments to non-proliferation, it maintains a latent capability to develop nuclear arms quickly due to its extensive nuclear energy program. Historically, there were covert debates in the 1960s and 1970s about pursuing nuclear armament, and post-Cold War reconsiderations have emerged due to regional nuclear developments by India and Pakistan. Contemporary geopolitical challenges, including disputes with Russia and China and China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific, further strain Japan's non-nuclear stance. The potential consequences of Japan acquiring nuclear weapons include severe economic sanctions and destabilization of regional stability, possibly triggering a proliferation domino effect among smaller states. Japan's non-nuclear policy remains fundamentally tied to the credibility of the US extended nuclear deterrent.

Summary and implications:

Within the broader scope of this project, my literature reviews will equip Dr. Sukin with a comprehensive overview of existing research on Franco-, Taiwanese-, and Japanese-American nuclear relations. My work will support Dr. Sukin to write sections of her book focused on the catalysts for nuclear project development. Collaborating with Dr. Sukin has significantly enriched my personal and academic growth. Through this research position, I was invited to an exclusive seminar on U.S. politics and international relations, where I engaged with several leading scholars and like-minded students. Interacting with expert scholars profoundly boosted my confidence in my academic abilities. I am sincerely grateful to all those at the U.S. Phelan Centre, and especially to the wonderful Dr. Sukin, for making this experience possible and opening my mind.