

Tokyo Governor: Japan Should Build Nukes to Counter China

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

By David McNeill -- Tokyo's outspoken governor Ishihara Shintaro says his country, which suffered history's only nuclear attack, should build nuclear weapons to counter the threat from fast-rising China.

In an interview with The Irish Times, Ishihara said Japan could develop nukes within a year and send a strong message to the world. "All our enemies: China, North Korea and Russia - all close neighbors - have nuclear weapons. Is there another country in the world in a similar situation?"

"People talk about the cost and other things but the fact is that diplomatic bargaining power means nuclear weapons. All the (permanent members of the United Nations) Security Council have them."

The comments from the leader of Japan's second-most powerful political office come amid rising Japanese concerns about China's growing military muscle. Beijing announced

last week that its 2011 defense budget will be hiked by 12.7% to 601.1bn yuan (¥56.2bn) up from 532.1bn yuan last year. Most experts say that those figures are an underestimate.

China officially overtook Japan as the world's second largest economy last month. Despite booming bilateral trade, the relationship has regularly been shaken by disputes over territorial and historical issues. Ties are still shaky following a maritime clash last year over the Senkaku Islands, which are held by Tokyo but claimed by Beijing.

Ishihara said the clash, which ended when police released the captain of a Chinese ship accused of ramming a Japanese coastguard vessel, had exposed his country's weakness in Asia. "China wouldn't have dared lay a hand on the Senkakus (if Japan had nuclear weapons)."

The governor added that a nuclear-armed Japan would also win more respect from Russia, which seized four Japanese-owned islands at the end of World War II. And he advised his constitutionally pacifist nation to scrap restrictions on the manufacture and sale of weapons. "We should develop sophisticated (yuushuu na) weapons and sell them abroad. Japan made the best tanks in the world before America crushed the industry. We could get that back."

Ishihara's right-wing politics and persistent warnings about the rise of China have earned

him the sobriquet "Japan's Jean-Marie Le Pen." But there are signs that the national consensus has moved closer to his brand of nationalist politics since he took office in 1999. A stunning 78 percent of respondents in the last annual survey on [Japanese attitudes](#) toward China said they did "not feel friendly" towards their neighbor, the highest figure since the poll began in 1978.

Conservatives have long demanded that Tokyo ditch its postwar constitution, which was written during the American occupation of the country and renounces war as a sovereign right. Japan's so-called nonnuclear principles, produced during the long reign of Prime Minister Minister Sato Eisaku 1964-72, later committed the country to never produce, possess or allow the entry of nuclear weapons. The principles were partly a response to popular revulsion over the deaths of over quarter of a million mostly civilians in the 1945 US bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and hundreds of thousands of others in the firebombing that destroyed 64 other Japanese cities.

Ishihara claimed that Sato, who won the 1974 Nobel Peace Prize for his opposition to plans for a nuclear-weapons program, was at the same time secretly approaching the US for help in developing an atomic bomb. "Japan asked the US (Lyndon B.) Johnson administration for help in developing nuclear weapons but America refused. If the Sato administration had unilaterally developed weapons then, for a start North Korea wouldn't have taken so many of our citizens," said the Governor, referring to Pyongyang's abduction of an unknown number of Japanese people.

Sato had in any case undermined the no-nuke rule by [striking a backroom deal](#) struck with

President Richard Nixon in 1969. The pact allowed nuclear-armed U.S. ships and aircraft to traffic anywhere through or over Japanese territory and was confirmed by a senior Japanese Foreign Ministry bureaucrat in 2009.

Ishihara also suggested that US President Barack Obama's 2009 pledge to rid the world of nuclear weapons was not genuine. "Obama said 'yes we can' when he promised to abolish nuclear weapons, then followed it with 'But we don't.' The US is still making computer simulations of new weapons. Japan should do the same," he said.

He added that Japan's unique history gave it more reason than most to change its non-nuclear stance. "Japan is the only country with legitimate reason to hold nuclear weapons because it was the only country attacked by nuclear weapons," he said. "I have a good journalist friend in Washington and he heard (former US Secretary of State Henry) Kissinger say off record: We want Japan to have nukes. If Japan had nukes, it would be a favorable era for America. I agree with that."

"All our enemies: China, North Korea and Russia - all close neighbors - have nukes. One kidnaps hundreds of our people. Another snatched the Northern Territories from us after the war. And another lays claims to our island (The Senkakus). In this day and age is there any other country in the world in a similar situation? The people of this country are very uneasy about what's going on."

Ishihara is expected to step down this year after 12 years governing the capital of 13 million people, though he is not obliged to

declare his candidacy till until March 11, the final session of the city's government. His term in office has been marked by a string of controversial bon mots and often harsh criticism of his political contemporaries. In his latest interview, Ishihara called former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio "an idiot" for pinning his diplomatic strategy toward Beijing on the philosophy of yuai, or "fraternity."

"Of course all countries prefer to be friends with other countries. But Hatoyama was an idiot. He didn't understand power politics. He's just a sentimentalist. There's no point in even

discussing him. It's a sign of Japan's weakness that he was elected."

David McNeill is Japan/Korea correspondent for The Chronicle of Higher Education, a regular contributor to The Irish Times and The Independent, and an Asia-Pacific Journal coordinator. A similar version of this What's Hot appeared on the [Tokyo Notes blog of The Diplomat](#) on March 8.