

Abstract

*Nuclear Nonproliferation:
A Controversial Issue in U.S.-Japan Relations during the Carter Administration*

by

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Many foreign policy experts believe that the current nuclear threat in North Korea is a bigger national security threat than terrorism. The tension over nuclear nonproliferation issues in Asia goes back many years and threatened to derail the relationship between the U.S. and Japan during the Carter Administration. Mike Mansfield, Ambassador to Japan at the time said, "Unless a compromise is reached — there will be profoundly adverse effects on the future of U.S.-Japan relations....Prime Minister Fukuda has publicly called this a 'life and death' issue for Japan."

This paper will draw on over 380 recently declassified documents obtained from the National Archive Records Administration and the Jimmy Carter Library. It will focus on how nuclear technology and weapons-grade plutonium impacted the U.S.—Japan relationship during the Carter years. Among the issues to be discussed will be how Japan's nuclear energy development impacted the relationship between the two countries and the broader issues of nuclear non-proliferation in Asia and how it relates to the current North Korea crisis. The paper will also examine Carter's relationship with the Japanese prior to becoming President. Carter already had strong personal ties with the Japanese while Governor of Georgia and went on to consider Japanese Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira one of his closest personal friends.

Those who fail to examine history are doomed to repeat it. It appears to some extent that this is what the United States has done in the current North Korean crisis. Just as Jimmy Carter was accepting his well-deserved Nobel peace prize in October of 2002, the North Korean nuclear crisis began to escalate.

In a time when the public's attention is riveted by almost daily acts of terrorism around the world, the looming threat of nuclear arms proliferation often slips into the background. Yet this issue is often cited as an even greater threat to national and global security than terrorism. This paper offers an in depth examination of this issue during the Carter years.