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But having spent 27 years at major papers, I also understand the competitive pressures that lead to hype in situations such as Fukushima

- Editors are exerting intense pressure on reporters to produce stories with *impact*
- Reporters don't want to disappoint editors, who have control over career paths, pay etc.
- Seeing shocking coverage in other media, both reporters and editors often feel pressure to match it
- Journalists want to avoid making factual mistakes—but they also want their stories on the front page, or leading a news broadcast, or well-displayed on a website's home page

It seemed obvious to me that those sorts of factors were causing the foreign media to blow the situation at Fukushima way out of proportion

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So I wrote this article, which was published a week after the disaster in the *Washington Post*. It argued that Japan remained an extraordinarily safe country—except for the area very close to the plant—but that hysteria about radiation could cause a lot of psychological and economic damage.



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?Why I'm not fleeing Japan?

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Fast forward >>>> to almost one year after the accident

This article, written by the Tokyo bureau chief of the *New York Times*, appeared at the **top of the NYT's front page** on Feb. 27, 2012

The New York Times

February 27, 2012

Japan Weighed Evacuating Tokyo in Nuclear Crisis

By MARTIN FACKLER

TOKYO — In the darkest moments of last year's nuclear accident, Japanese leaders did not know the actual extent of damage at the plant and secretly considered the possibility of evacuating Tokyo, even as they tried to play down the risks in public, an independent investigation into the accident disclosed on Monday.

The investigation by the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, a new private policy organization, offers one of the most vivid accounts yet of how Japan teetered on the edge of a nuclear crisis that could have been as bad as the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. A team of 60 university professors, lawyers and journalists spent

Based on a worst-case scenario of what might happen at Fukushima Dai-ichi, "Japanese leaders secretly considered the possibility of evacuating Tokyo," said the article, which disclosed the findings of the investigation by an independent group, the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation.

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That suggested that people like me, who stayed in Tokyo, had taken a huge risk.

But the article highlighted an odd theory about how Tokyo would be affected—a “devil’s chain reaction,” the name that Yukio Edano, then the Chief Cabinet Secretary, used to describe his fears during the crisis that TEPCO would abandon one plant after another, allowing a huge release of radiation.

“We would lose Fukushima Daini, then we would lose Tokai,” Mr. Edano is quoted as saying, naming two other nuclear plants. “If that happened, it was only logical to conclude that we would also lose Tokyo itself.”



Yukio Edano

The New York Times

February 27, 2012

Edano promptly acknowledged that the “devil’s chain reaction” was simply a frightening idea that had occurred to him, not a scientifically-based scenario. Even so, media all over the world, like the NYT, headlined the “devil’s chain”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

THE AUSTRALIAN

REUTERS

Los Angeles Times

NATIONAL POST

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Less than two weeks after the big stories about Tokyo’s alleged close call with evacuation, the journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article containing startling revelations on this issue.

The screenshot shows the top of the Foreign Affairs website. The header includes the logo, navigation links (Home, International Editions, Digital Newsstand, Job Board), and a search bar. Below the header is a menu with categories like New Issue, Archive, Regions, Topics, Features, Discussions, Video, Books & Reviews, and Classroom. The main article title is "Inside the White House During Fukushima" with the subtitle "Managing Multiple Crises" by Jeffrey A. Bader. The article text begins with "On March 11, 2011, I was awakened at 1:45 am by a call from the White House Situation Room reporting that an earthquake measuring 8.9 on the Richter scale (subsequently raised to 9.0) had struck northeast Japan, and that tsunami warnings had been issued. At the time I was senior director for East Asian affairs on the National Security Council, and immediately we formed an interagency group to address the situation. First, we mobilized relief efforts, and the U.S. Pacific Command provided indispensable support for remote and isolated towns. Those operations generated few difficult policy decisions." A "MARCH" graphic is visible on the right side of the article. Below the article is a "MOST VIEWED" section with the link "Foreign Policy Goes Local".



The author, Jeffrey Bader, had been Senior Director for East Asian Affairs on the National Security Council at the time of the Fukushima accident

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This article provided authoritative insight into the question of whether Tokyo had been endangered.

According to the article:

- In the week after 3/11, the US military—the Navy in particular—was urging an evacuation of Americans from the Tokyo area, based on models showing that unacceptably high levels of radiation might reach the Yokosuka Naval Base and Yokota air base.
- A heated debate raged within the Obama administration; diplomats were fearful about the national security consequences of evacuating Americans, especially military personnel.
- The big question was whether radiation levels might exceed U.S. government standards, set by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Obama’s chief science adviser, Dr. John Holdren, was skeptical of the relatively crude models used by the military. He wanted to apply the most sophisticated methods to determine what the worst-case scenario might be and whether radiation levels might exceed US government standards at military bases.



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The article's conclusion: Tokyo was never at risk

“Working with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Holdren developed a series of models based on plausible worst-case scenarios...The results...suggested that radioactive plumes in excess of EPA standards would not reach within 75 to 100 miles of Tokyo...In other words, there was no plausible scenario in which Tokyo, Yokosuka, or Yokota could be subject to dangerous levels of airborne radiation.”

--Bader, “Inside the White House During Fukushima”



Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, one of the U.S. government's premier research facilities



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The information in *Foreign Affairs* contradicted the stories about the alleged threat to Tokyo. So how would major news organizations handle it?

- Would the NY Times put it inside the “A” section?



The correct answer is: “None of the above.” The New York Times **did not see fit to print a word** about the information in Bader’s article concerning the US Government’s worst-case scenario.

- In the “Science Times” section?



Nor did any other news organizations provide coverage to these findings. The only exception I have found is Kyodo News, whose articles ran in a few regional Japanese papers.

- In the Business section?



This willful neglect of key information—by media that had given such prominence to the “devil’s chain reaction”—was evidence of blatant bias.

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The US government’s findings clearly merited much greater attention than they had received.

- I resolved to write an article myself on the subject.
- I interviewed people who played key roles, such as Holdren’s deputy, Dr. Steve Fetter.
- I went to Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, and learned about its 40-person unit—the National Atmospheric Release Advisory Center (NARAC), which uses advanced computing capacity and precise data about weather patterns and terrain to assess hazardous plumes.
- I examined thousands of pages of documents—memos, emails, transcripts, etc.—that were released under the Freedom of Information Act.



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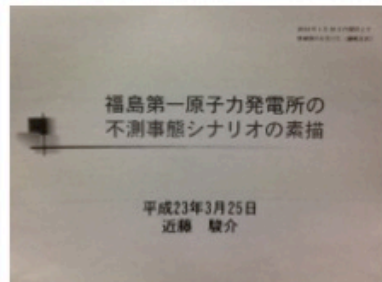
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I also researched a worst-case scenario that the Japanese government produced



- Drafted under the direction of Dr. Shunsuke Kondo, Chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, this scenario has been widely reported in the media as showing that an evacuation of Tokyo might have been warranted.
- But as I learned, Kondo-Sensei's scenario indicates no such thing.*
- In any event, his scenario was much less sophisticated than the one developed by Lawrence Livermore.

*The explanation is too complex to show here. Please see my articles in *Slate* and *Newsweek Japan*.

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??Fukushima's Worst-Case Scenarios????????????

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