"The 'Imminent' Nankai Trough Mega Quake": Myth or Reality?

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Robert J. Geller

Biography

- US citizen; permanent resident of Japan
- B.S. (1973, Geophysics), Ph.D. (1977) from Caltech
- First tenured non-Japanese faculty member at Univ.
 of Tokyo (1984-2017; retired, but continuing research)

Research interests

- seismic wave propagation, Earth structure, earthquake sources
- predictability/non-predictability of earthquakes

Refereed publications

Google Scholar

Part I

SCIENCE

"Prediction" (予知) vs. "Forecast" (予測)

- Prediction = a <u>deterministic statement</u> that a future earthquake will or will not occur in a particular geographic region, time window, and magnitude range
- Forecast = gives a probability (greater than zero but less than one) that such an event will occur

Examples:

- Prediction: The Tokai earthquake (M8) will occur in the next 3 days
 - → useful to society if feasible unfortunately not feasible
- Forecast: The "Nankai Trough Mega Quake" (M9) has an 80% chance of hitting in the next 30 years
 - → of questionable value to society even if feasible
 - unfortunately not feasible

Reprint Series 14 March 1997, Volume 275, pp. 1616–1617



Earthquakes Cannot Be Predicted

Robert J. Geller, David D. Jackson, Yan Y. Kagan, and Francesco Mulargia

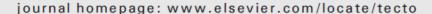
Our 2012 paper

Tectonophysics 562-563 (2012) 1-25



Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Tectonophysics





Review Article

Why earthquake hazard maps often fail and what to do about it

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Hazard maps are unreliable!

Summary of Part I

- Short-term quake prediction impossible
 - "Chaos," no reliable precursors
- Long-term quake forecasting impossible
 - Quakes don't repeat in cycles
- Can't "prove" impossibility
 - But no progress in the last 130 years
 - As research proceeds, the goal recedes

Part II

JAPANESE GOVERNMENT QUAKE PREDICTION AND FORECASTING PROGRAMS, 1978-PRESENT

"Scenario Quakes"

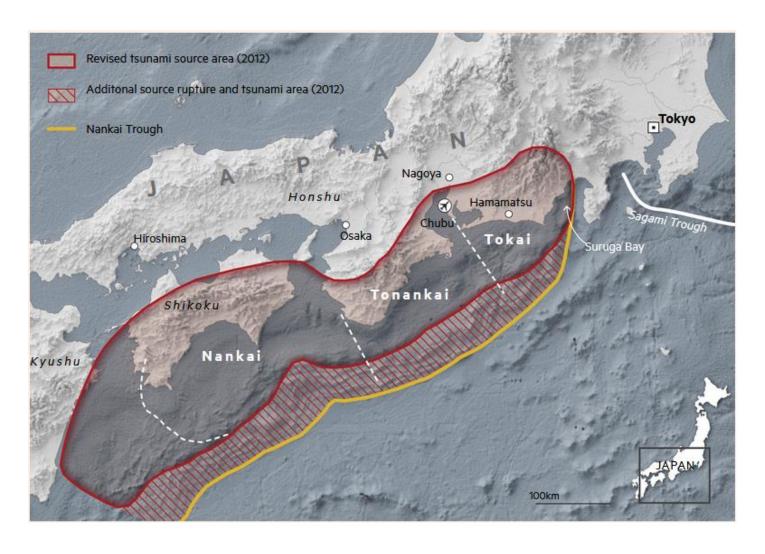


Figure: Financial Times (https://ig.ft.com/sites/japan-tsunami/)

The "Tokai Earthquake"

- In mid-1970s (based on arguments about quake periodicity) it was asserted that a large quake is imminent in the Tokai region (around Shizuoka)
- A law was passed in 1978 setting up an operational system for issuing a quake alarm (Note: This is not research.)
- Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) monitors data.
- If a "precursor" is detected, Prime Minister issues an alarm that the quake will hit Within 3 days.



石橋東大助手、学会で異例の警告へ

M8級。対策を急げ



- Magnitude 8 quake expected in Suruga Bay
- Preparation urgently needed

でも、効果的な多数分類をとれない。 でも、効果的な対象を受けるはか、かなり のさわらて、石機助中のモデル計算では、数 のさわらてのただれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。既らからその大だれに舞われて動 がした。なりでは多を受けるはか、かなり のさわめて後しいばれに異知われ る。としている。 そして、石機助手は、東海地方 は地震機能の後化が返びを投げる。 なりのながりが薄い点を投げる。 たものの、気象庁など名機関、「別 でも、効果的な多数分類をとれな

Large-Scale Earthquake Countermeasures Act (LECA) = the law authorizing prediction of "Tokai earthquake" = was enacted **in 1978**; it's still in effect.



大規模地震対策特別措置法(抜粋)

第四条 国は、強化地域に係る大規模な地震の発生を予知し、もつて 地震災害の発生を防止し、又は軽減するため、計画的に、地象、水象等の常時観測を実施し、地震に関する 土地及び水域の測量(以下この条及び第三十三条において「測量」という。)の密度を高める等観測及び測量 の実施の強化を図らなければならない。

第九条 内閣総理大臣は、気象庁長官から地震予知情報の報告を受けた場

合において、地震防災応急対策を実施する緊急の必要があると認めるときは、閣議にかけて、地震災害に関する警戒宣言を発するとともに、次に掲げる措置を執らなければならない。

- 一 強化地域内の居住者、滞在者その他の者及び公私の団体(以下「居住者等」という。)に対して、警戒態勢を執るべき旨を公示すること。
- 二 強化地域に係る指定公共機関及び都道府県知事に対して、法令又は地震防災強化計画の定めるところにより、地震防災応急対策に係る措置を執るべき旨を通知すること。
- 2 内閣総理大臣は、警戒宣言を発したときは、直ちに、当該地震予知情報の内容について国民に対し周知させる措置を執らなければならない。この場合において、内閣総理大臣は、気象庁長官をして当該地震予知情報に係る技術的事項について説明を行わせるものとする。
- 3 内閣総理大臣は、警戒宣言を発した後気象庁長官から地震予知情報の報告を受けた場合において、当該地震の発生のおそれがなくなつたと認めるときは、閣議にかけて、地震災害に関する警戒解除宣言を発するとともに、第一項第一号に規定する者に対し警戒態勢を解くべき旨を公示し、及び同項第二号に規定する者に対し同号に掲げる措置を中止すべき旨を通知するものとする。

大規模地震対策特別措置法(抜粋)

Text of LECA:

Prime Minister authorized to declare a state of emergency if advised by the JMA that the Tokai earthquake is imminent (within 3 days).

This law is still on the books.

- 2 内閣心生人民は、言成日日で光したことは、回うに、日お心長了知情報の内容について国民に対し周知させる措置を執らなければならない。この場合において、内閣総理大臣は、気象庁長官をして当該地震予知情報に係る技術的事項について説明を行わせるものとする。
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Excerpt from Government Report (August 2018)

南海トラフ沿いの大規模地震の予測可能性

について (平成29年8月)

南海トラフ沿いの大規模地震の予測可能性に関する調査部会



"There are many different ways that a large Nankai Trough earthquake could occur, so reliable earthquake prediction is impossible."

「南海トラフで発生する大規模地震には多様性があり、地震の発生時期や場所・規模を確度高く予測することは困難である。」

The government gave up on earthquake prediction, but tried to fuzz up the issue by using the term "highly accurate forecasting" (確度高〈予測) rather than "prediction" (予知).

The bottom line

- Government and government scientists lied about prospects for quake prediction for 40 years (1978-2018)
- Domestic media, especially NHK, colluded by not clearly exposing the lies
- Even now the government has de facto given up on prediction, but continues to fuzz things up

Long-term forecasts

- In 2002 the government starting issuing its probabilistic ground motion forecasts
 - e.g., "80% chance of the "Great Nankai
 Trough Quake" in the next 30 years"
- Not successful in Japan
- Also unsuccessful overseas

REALITY CHECK

7.3 (272)

100 km

0.1

Government-designated probability of ground motion of seismic

intensity of level '6-lower' or higher (on a 7-maximum intensity

scale) in the 30-year period starting in January 2010

The Japanese government publishes a national seismic hazard map like this every year. But since 1979, earthquakes that have caused 10 or more fatalities in Eurasian Japan have occurred in places it plate designates low risk. 2018 Iburi 6.6(42)Fault plane 2011 Tohoku earthquake 2007 **6.8 (15)** Magnitude-9.1 (>27.000 dead or missing) 2004 **6.8 (68)** Pacific Pacific plate Hypothesized fault planes 2016 Kumamoto

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Geller, 2011

(Nature)

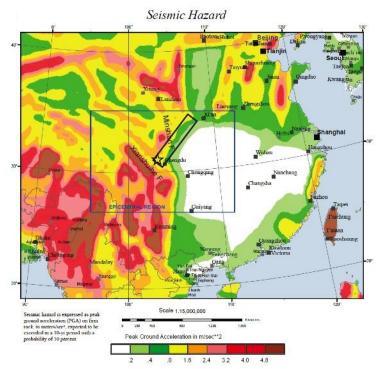
Base map (Japanese govt. hazard map) vs. actual seismicity since 1979

Regions rated as especially hazardous have been quiet

Regions with damaging quakes (1995 Kobe, 2011 Tohoku, 2016 Kumamoto, etc.) were not rated as at high hazard level

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Wenchuan (China, 2008)

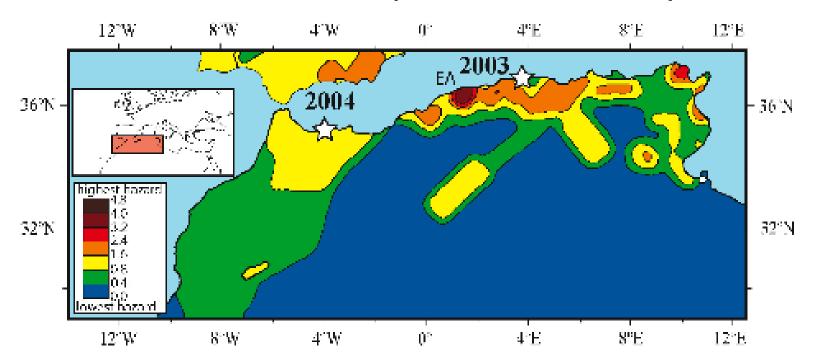


USGS seismic hazard map for China prior to 2008 Wenchuan quake on Longmenshan Fault (black rectangle). Hazard map showed low hazard on Longmenshan fault and

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higher hazard on other faults.

North Africa (2003, 2004)

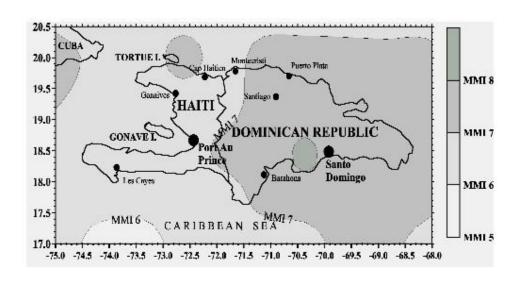


- Global Seismic Hazard Map (1999) for North Africa. Note high risk "bulls-eye" at site of 1980 Ms 7.3 El Asnam quake (EA).
- The 2003 Ms 6.8 Algeria and 2004 Ms 6.4 Morocco events (stars) occurred in supposedly low hazard regions.

Haiti (2010)

2001 hazard map

2010 earthquake shaking





| PRECINCO | Not fet | Week | Light | Moderate | Strong | Very strong | Severe | Violent | Extreme | PRECINCO | Note of the Control | Note of the Control

Left: 2001 hazard map (Modified Mercalli Intensity; 10% chance of being exceeded once in 50 years). Right: USGS map of shaking in the 2010 earthquake.

Hazard Maps aren't Working!

- Bad luck? → probably not
- Bad Physics? → almost certainly

- Hazard maps should not be used in public policy
- Hazard maps should not be reported as fact by the media
- Hazard maps should not be used to set quake insurance rates

What went wrong, scientifically?

- Past hazard map makers used the appealing (but unverified) quake cycle hypothesis
- They issued public forecasts without first conducting an objective hypothesis test
- Objective tests have now shown that hypothesis doesn't agree with the data, so it should be abandoned
- Thus the "imminent' Nakai Trough Mega Quake" is a myth

Conclusions

- Japan is an earthquake-prone country.
 - Quakes can happen anywhere, at any time, without warning
 - Present science can't say that one part of Japan (e.g., Nankai) is at either more or less risk than other geologically similar areas
 - Treating the purely conjectural "Nankai Trough Mega quake" as "real" should cease
- The media should inform the public that government quake forecasts are wrong!

Thank you for your attention