

Seventy Years After Hiroshima and Nagasaki Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons

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Next year marks the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which will coincide with the upcoming Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference. This important occasion will offer a unique opportunity to advance the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

After the Cold War, a nuclear-free world appeared to be within reach. However, the lack of a collective sense of ownership allowed the issue to fade from the public consciousness. Despite the establishment of a peaceful post-Cold War order, proliferation continued. Nuclear risks became more diverse. Now the world faces three key challenges.

First, under article VI of the NPT, the fundamental international framework for nuclear issues, parties pledge to “pursue negotiations in good faith” for nuclear disarmament. Yet the world has experienced a massive buildup of nuclear capabilities in a non-transparent manner. Today, there are over 16,000 nuclear weapons in existence -- more than enough to destroy mankind. Many of these weapons systems are said to remain on high alert, and the risk of accidental or unauthorized use continues to represent a tremendous concern.

Second, the world faces a myriad of regional proliferation challenges. In 2003, North Korea unilaterally declared its withdrawal from the NPT. Pyongyang conducted nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013, and it still continues to develop its nuclear and missile programs. Iran’s nuclear program also remains a matter of concern for the international community, although there has been some progress since last year toward a resolution.

Third, terrorist groups and other nonstate actors are increasingly engaging in illegal proliferation activities through ever more sophisticated means. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), more than 100 cases of illicit trafficking and other unauthorized activities and events involving nuclear and radioactive materials are recorded annually, with 146 such cases in 2013. Nuclear terrorism is a risk that the world must tackle with the utmost resolve.

Meanwhile, instability in parts of Asia and the Middle East has only heightened nuclear risks. And unilateral attempts to change the status quo through force or coercion threaten to raise tensions even further.

In light of these circumstances, the government of Japan welcomed U.S. President Barack Obama’s speeches on nuclear disarmament in Prague, in 2009, and Berlin, in 2013, and has closely cooperated

with Washington to advance a common vision of a nuclear-free world. As Japan's foreign minister, hailing from Hiroshima, I have [proposed](#) that nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation be based on two principles: first, a clear understanding of the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons; and second, an objective assessment of the state of the international system, which is facing increasingly diverse nuclear risks. I have also proposed that the world work toward three types of reductions: in the number of nuclear weapons, the role they play, and the incentive to possess them. And toward three kinds of prevention: of the emergence of new nuclear weapons states, the proliferation of nuclear-weapons-related materials and technologies, and nuclear terrorism.

In order to reduce today's nuclear risks, I propose four specific steps in the near term:

First, reinforce multilateral processes for nuclear disarmament negotiations. Tokyo strongly supports the systematic and continued reduction of all types of nuclear weapons, and it welcomed U.S. President Barack Obama's June 2013 speech in Berlin, in which he pledged to seek negotiations with the Russian Federation on the reduction of deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third and to pursue a bold reduction of tactical nuclear weapons. Additionally, freeing the entire world of nuclear weapons will eventually require multilateral negotiations involving all countries possessing these arms.

Second, increase the transparency of information about global nuclear forces and efforts to reduce nuclear weapons. Tokyo welcomes, as an initial step, the fact that NPT-designated nuclear weapons states have reported on their nuclear forces and nuclear disarmament efforts based on a unified structure to the Third Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference in New York last April and May (in response to the requirements of the 2010 NPT Action Plan). At the same time, some gaps exist among these reports in terms of the quality and quantity of information, and further efforts are required to ensure transparency. At the 2015 NPT Review Conference, Japanese representatives will pursue an agreement requiring all nuclear weapons states to continue to produce regular reports with greater transparency including more numerical information based on a standard reporting form.

Third, the Japanese government will continue to coordinate closely with its partners in the six-party talks with North Korea to ensure that Pyongyang abandons all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs. It goes without saying that the objectives of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions will only be fulfilled through concerted multilateral efforts.

Multilateralism has already played an important role in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue, leading to more constructive approach by Iran. Whatever the outcome of the current negotiations, the IAEA and its safeguards will no doubt play a decisive role in institutionally ensuring implementation of the agreement. Japan will ceaselessly continue to strengthen multilateral cooperation on these regional proliferation challenges. Additionally, Tokyo will continue to call on countries not party to the NPT to accede to the treaty as non-nuclear weapons states.

Reinforcing export control systems as well as multilateral cooperation in this field are also essential for preventing the proliferation of sensitive technologies, materials, and equipment. In recent years, economic development has enabled Asian countries to acquire the capacity to produce sensitive materials and technologies. Japan will work tirelessly to explain to these countries how strengthening international export controls will promote further economic growth. At the same time, each individual state is unquestionably responsible for bolstering nuclear security to prevent the theft and use of nuclear materials by terrorists. Tokyo will urge each country to conclude related international agreements, implement IAEA guidance, and pursue greater collaboration with its partners and allies on this front, including through the Nuclear Security Summit.

Fourth, Japan will leverage discussions of the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons to help unite the international community behind the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. Given its history, the country has a deep understanding of how destructive nuclear weapons can be. Increasing awareness of the humanitarian aspects of such technology could be a driving force for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the immediate commencement of Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty negotiations, and the universalization of the IAEA Additional Protocol. It is in this context that I hope the Third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna, set to take place in December 2014, will be inclusive and attract broad international participation, including from nuclear weapons states.

The NPT has long served as the key multilateral legal framework for addressing nuclear risks. In March 1963, U.S. President John F. Kennedy expressed his concern that there could be between 15 and 25 nuclear powers by the 1970s. The NPT has helped ensure that this has not come to pass. Although the NPT regime plays a vital role in supporting peace and stability in the international community, it also demonstrates vulnerability because the regime bases the grand bargain involving nuclear disarmament, nuclear nonproliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy on the trust between nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapons states. It will thus be critical to maintain the NPT regime.

Japan will make its utmost efforts to reach a consensus at the 2015 NPT Review Conference on a new plan of action based on the above principles. [The Hiroshima Statement](#) issued at the Eighth Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative last April, to which Japan and 11 other non-nuclear weapons states belong, should also serve as a useful benchmark for the NPT review conference next year. As the statement says, Tokyo will call on political leaders from around the world to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to observe the reality that resulted from the bombings with their own eyes, and to promote a shared vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

I sincerely hope that in 2015, seven decades after the atomic bombings, the world can take decisive action to prevent history from repeating itself.