

Hiroshima Round Table 2022 Chair's Statement

The Crisis of International Order

A sense of extreme urgency pervaded our 2022 Hiroshima Round Table. The unprovoked attack by the Russian government on Ukraine has upended the core norms of international order. The invasion of Ukraine offends the most basic principles of the UN Charter – respect for sovereignty and peaceful settlement of disputes. The massive attacks against civilian population that have accompanied it are blatant violations of the laws of war under the Geneva Conventions. And the economic consequences of the invasion, particularly its impact on energy and food prices, are causing suffering not only in Ukraine but worldwide.

Raising the prospect of nuclear weapons use, as President Putin and his colleagues in the Russian leadership have done, can only be interpreted as a threat that violates all the principles and agreements, bilateral and multilateral, that have evolved over the decades to counter such horrifyingly dangerous behavior. This follows a retreat from the major nuclear arms control agreements of the past, either now dead like the INF and Open Skies Agreement, or nearing their expiration like New START.

Most troubling of all, we have observed a worldwide resurgence of belief in the utility of nuclear deterrence, and – in the case of ‘nuclear umbrella’ states, extended nuclear deterrence. All the presently nuclear armed states are modernizing or expanding their arsenals. There has been an unprecedented call for nuclear sharing by members of the Japanese parliament. And all this has placed new pressures on an already struggling global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

We fear that the normative structure of international politics is under deeply damaging stress, and that world is slipping towards a winner-takes-all anarchy, where dependence on nuclear deterrence will be increasingly seen as a necessary reaction to geopolitical uncertainties, increasing the likelihood of actual use of nuclear weapons, whether by intention, miscalculation, or accident.

There must be alternatives to this dystopian future. Although we have made many of the points below in the past, we find it necessary to reiterate them in the following call to action by all states, both nuclear and non-nuclear.

A Call for Action

Nuclear weapons are the most indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever developed and pose an existential risk to life on this planet as we know it. In the present fragile and dangerous global environment that we are now experiencing, the task for policymakers worldwide is to steadily decrease reliance on nuclear weapons.

Leaders must redouble efforts to reinforce the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons; reduce their salience in national security policies and the risks they could be used; stop the erosion of and strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime; and take serious collective steps toward their reduction and ultimate elimination.

It is time once again for all policymakers to embrace the wisdom, and to take meaningful steps to implement the principle embodied in the pathbreaking Reagan-Gorbachev statement that ‘A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,’ as reaffirmed by the five NPT nuclear weapon states in January this year.

Our response to the four biggest nuclear challenges the world now faces is as follows:

1. *Rethink reliance on nuclear deterrence – and extended nuclear deterrence*

The claims of those who believe in the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence – including in restraining the West’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – should be subjected by policymakers everywhere to strong analytical scrutiny. It is at least as plausible that what is making for caution here, just as what most stopped the Cold War becoming hot, was fear not so much of nuclear war but of the horror and misery associated with any major contemporary conventional war. The case for the decisive deterrent utility of nuclear weapons has regularly been asserted, but never conclusively proved.

We know that deterrence can fail, and deterrence based on nuclear weapons runs the inherent risk of nuclear war, the most destructive of all. New technologies including cyber only increase the risks that nuclear deterrence could fail catastrophically. With US and Russia modernizing their nuclear capabilities, and China significantly expanding its nuclear arsenal, we are in the midst of an arms race that will increase regional and global instability, and risks resulting in the very outcome that nuclear deterrence is intended to avoid.

Even if it were to be accepted that the possession of nuclear weapons by an adversary may add an additional layer of caution to a state’s diplomatic and military calculations, that has to be weighed against the extraordinary risks posed by the likelihood that eventually, at some point, somewhere, deterrence will break down due to accident, error, or miscalculation resulting in a catastrophic use of nuclear weapons.

All these considerations should weigh heavily on the minds of policy makers in the umbrella states relying on US extended nuclear deterrence. While it is perfectly reasonable, in the present volatile environment, for states to want to reinforce rather than walk away from their present alliance relationships, they should closely consider whether present conventional military capability is not amply sufficient to deter potential adversaries (i.e., rely on extended deterrence, but not extended *nuclear* deterrence).

This is not the time for any umbrella state to be increasing rather than diminishing its reliance on nuclear weapons by entering into a nuclear sharing agreement or developing an indigenous latent or actual nuclear weapons capability.

2. *Take seriously nuclear disarmament – as well as non-proliferation*

As the Reagan-Gorbachev statement made abundantly clear, the elimination of nuclear weapons is not a utopian dream but a sane policy that every responsible country should be working steadily to realize, however long the process might take.

The disappointment of non-nuclear weapons states with the manifest continuing failure of the nuclear weapons states to make steady progress in fulfillment of their obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, continues to put a strain on the NPT regime and hinders consensus outcomes at NPT Review Conferences including the upcoming 10th NPT RevCon next month. – These divisions contribute to the erosion of the nuclear nonproliferation regime and call into question the survival of the global non-proliferation system itself.

The coming into force last year of the TPNW is a major normative step forward, reflecting a deep concern with the humanitarian dimension of nuclear weapons use, and should be recognized as such by the nuclear-armed states and nuclear-umbrella states.

While there are legitimate arguments about technical weaknesses – not least in relation to verification and enforcement – that would make it difficult for many of them to sign and ratify the treaty as it stands, they should all participate as observers in the meetings of TPNW states parties and offer recommendations there for ways of improving its operational effectiveness. Some umbrella states like Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Norway are now so engaging, and we call on Japan to follow suit.

Doing so would help bridge the divide between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states which has long afflicted the NPT regime and inhibited its necessary revitalization. We call upon all member states to confirm their commitment to the NPT regime, for continuing efforts by relevant states to resolve the impasse over the Iranian JCPOA, and for a renewal of talks to address North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

3. Revitalize Nuclear Arms Control Negotiations

The US and Russia must resume the negotiations for a successor to the New START treaty in a way that extends limits on strategic nuclear weapons and includes nonstrategic nuclear weapons. The US, NATO and Russia must find urgently some form of mutual restraint in the deployment of short- and medium-range nuclear-capable missiles in Europe.

Implied use of so-called small nuclear weapons in Ukraine is reckless. The nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima in fact meets the definition of a small nuclear weapon, although its effects on people, infrastructure and the environment were anything but small or short-lived. We should therefore redouble arms control efforts on capping and eliminating the deployment of low-yield and non-strategic nuclear weapons, especially those on dual-capable delivery platforms including cruise missiles.

4. Embrace Nuclear Risk Reduction

While the risk of nuclear weapons use, with catastrophic implications for the sustainability of the planet, will always remain so long as nuclear weapons exist, a great deal can be done to reduce that risk. In particular we urge renewed attention to the 'minimization' agenda articulated by the 2009 Australia-Japan International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, including in particular embrace of doctrinal restraint ('No First Use'), de-alerting, reduced active deployments, and decreased overall stockpile numbers.

Fear of a first nuclear strike exacerbates international instability. A declaration of no first use of nuclear weapons can therefore be expected to limit the possibility of conflict by reducing the role of nuclear weapons. We call upon all the nuclear armed states to commit themselves to a no-first-use policy of nuclear weapons, and urge all nuclear umbrella states to support this policy.

There is a particular case to be made for a no first use commitment at least by the US and China that they would never use nuclear weapons to settle any of their differences, including over Taiwan, under any circumstances. As a confidence-building step the US and China should also agree on mutual identification of nuclear/non-nuclear nature of their delivery vehicles to avoid inadvertent escalation into nuclear confrontation.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of the actions that need to be taken to enhance peace and security worldwide. We strongly support, for example, the resumption of serious dialogue, regionally and globally, based on common and comprehensive security principles, the absence of which has contributed significantly to the escalation of tensions and weakening of the global institutional order in recent years.

We hope that our call to action will contribute to the restoration of the normative and institutional control of conflict that has been severely damaged after Russia's attack on Ukraine, and lay the foundations for a safer and saner, and ultimately nuclear weapons free, world.

The views expressed herein are those of the chairperson—while attempting to capture the richness of the discussion during the Hiroshima Round Table—and do not necessarily reflect the opinions and views of each individual participant.