

Hiroshima Round Table 2023

Chair's Statement

The risk of the use of nuclear weapons

The 2023 Hiroshima Round Table was held at a time of deteriorating international relations where the actual use of nuclear weapons is no longer a distant possibility. The war in Ukraine rages on, along with the risk of use of nuclear weapons. President Putin's statement in September 2022 that there was a "precedent" for using nuclear weapons was an alarming reference to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, running the risk of normalizing the unthinkable. The risk of nuclear use in the Korean peninsula has increased with the government of DPRK repeatedly stating that it will preemptively strike ROK with nuclear weapons.

Such alarming statements have been made in the broader context of arms control agreements being either dead, such as ABM, INF, and Open Skies, or endangered like New START, and prospects for new negotiations to revitalize mechanisms for arms control being poor. We now face the risk of actual use of nuclear weapons, a development not seen since the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A major and long-lasting land war in Europe in our lifetime had become unimaginable to most of us. So was the threat of use of nuclear weapons. That both these unimaginable occurrences have turned into harsh reality is a stark reminder of the urgency of reducing grave nuclear risks and eliminating all nuclear threats.

The Hiroshima Round Table noted the ground breaking contribution made by the Japanese government to host the G7 summit in Hiroshima, which gave the leaders the opportunity to experience first-hand the horrifying reality of any use of nuclear weapons. The G7 Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament was the first G7 Leaders' document with a particular focus on nuclear disarmament, with a commitment "to achieving a world without nuclear weapons." Recalling the statement of January 2022 from the leaders of the five nuclear weapon states and the statement in G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration of November 2022, leaders of the G7 underscored the importance of upholding the firmly established norm of non-use of nuclear weapons.

The G7 Hiroshima Vision, however, must be followed by concrete measures that reduce the possibility of nuclear risks. Those measures need to go beyond the limited steps, important as they are, proposed in the G7 Hiroshima Vision statement, namely transparent disclosure of nuclear activities, and substantive engagement in relevant multilateral and bilateral dialogue forums.

Measures for nuclear risk reduction

The basic goal for global policymakers must remain the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Without prejudicing that objective, given the fragility of the present regional and

global environment, the immediate need is for a serious commitment by all nuclear-armed states, and those who believe themselves sheltering under their nuclear umbrella, to nuclear risk reduction. That commitment must be not just rhetorical, but real and substantive, and involve many specific concrete measures.

A world with low numbers of nuclear weapons, with very few of them physically deployed, with practically none of them on high-alert launch status, and with every nuclear-armed state explicitly committed to never being the first to use them, and never using or threatening them against non-nuclear-armed states, would still be very far from perfect. But a world that could achieve these objectives would be a very much safer one than we live in now.

No First Use

As an important step to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national security policy and dependence on nuclear deterrence, all the nuclear armed states should seriously consider committing themselves to a policy of No First Use of nuclear weapons, or at least a declaratory statement that the ‘sole purpose’ of nuclear weapons is to deter and, if necessary, retaliate against nuclear attack.

The 2009 Australia-Japan International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament proposed the minimization of the risk of nuclear weapons starting with doctrinal restraint, emphasizing NFU. The Hiroshima Roundtable urges all the nuclear weapon states to commit themselves to a policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons.

US allies and partners can make a major contribution to nuclear risk reduction by encouraging, rather than discouraging as they have in the recent past, Washington to make a NFU (or at least ‘sole purpose’) declaration. In the North East Asian region, the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan area remain potential flashpoints. Declarations of nuclear no-first use between North Korea and the U.S., and between China and the U.S. in the context of potential conflict concerning Taiwan would do much to defuse geopolitical tensions.

Negative Security Assurances

A further important risk reduction measure would be for all the present nuclear-armed states to give Negative Security Assurances (NSAs) that they will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states as measures to maintain and strengthen the norm against the use of nuclear weapons.

Towards that end and in support of the objectives of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the five nuclear weapons states of the NPT should reaffirm and act consistently with their assurances not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states. This pledge should also be made by nuclear armed states not members of the NPT.

Although the five nuclear weapons states have made various pledges regarding NSAs in the past, each has been either non-binding, limited in scope, or qualified in some way. Non-nuclear weapons states have long sought NSAs in the form of a free-standing treaty or as a part of a nuclear weapon free zone, and their views should be respected.

Reviving arms control

While the G7 Hiroshima Vision refers to multilateral frameworks such as the CTBT and NPT, the Vision is short of measures that will revitalize bilateral arms control. And the harsh reality we face is that the United States and Russia are not currently engaging in a bilateral arms control today, nor is China participating in such dialogue with the United States. The possibility of bilateral and multilateral arms control dialogue and negotiations must be explored, for the lack of action will only lead to further security fragility and instability.

Russia and the U.S. must continue to abide by the numerical limits of the New START treaty in their respective countries, and ideally would both return to full implementation of inspections and data exchanges. At a minimum, remaining under the treaty's limits provides an important foundation for mutual dialogue and resumption of arms control discussions. Furthermore, Russia and the US should look for an early opportunity to resume talks about further limitations and reduction of strategic arms beyond New START, while continuing their efforts to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security policies.

The meetings of the five nuclear-weapon states (N5) have continued despite the tectonic shifts in international relations. The Hiroshima Roundtable calls on the N5 states to recommit to and act on the principles of the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Race issued on 3 January 2022, and continue to strengthen the N5 dialogue.

The so-called tactical or non-strategic nuclear weapons are the most likely type to be used first in conflict. These weapons, although sometimes described as “small”, are often actually more destructive than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima seventy-eight years ago. Arms control efforts must therefore focus not only on strategic nuclear weapons, but also on low-yield and non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Dialogue with China is yet in a pre-arms control phase, where the security dilemma and an arms race could provide further escalation of conflict as in the days of the cold war. Current use of words such as “de-risking” and “guardrails” indicate that concern about the possibility of escalation and the need to avoid it is recognized by policy makers. Such perception should lead to dialogue and confidence building measures. Emerging technologies and cyber security can accelerate geopolitical competition and nuclear risks, but may also provide opportunities for dialogue and confidence building measures, important first steps well before arms control measures become a more realistic possibility.

Greater efforts are needed to stabilize the two main military flashpoints, the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula, in order to reduce the risk of general war and the potential escalation of a conventional conflict to a nuclear exchange. Nuclear weapon states must promote measures of self-restraint to minimize escalation risks, such as NFU, building reliable crisis communication mechanisms, maintaining low alert status for nuclear forces, and avoiding launch-on-warning nuclear postures. Nuclear weapon states should also pursue responsible ways to employ new military technologies to avoid inadvertent nuclear escalation. Good examples of responsible behaviors include efforts to reduce the entanglement between nuclear and nonnuclear weapon systems and to keep humans in the nuclear command, control, and communications loop.

The global norm against nuclear testing is under pressure. If any one state were to resume

nuclear testing, others would likely follow suit, accelerating the growing arms race and imperiling the NPT regime. There is an urgent need for dialogue and transparency measures about sustaining support for the moratorium and bringing into force the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Rethinking Nuclear Deterrence

We know that deterrence can fail, and deterrence based on nuclear weapons runs the inherent risk of nuclear war, threatening the very existence of life on this planet as we know it. The only solution to avoid such tragedy is to eliminate all nuclear weapons and to establish international mechanisms to assure a nuclear free world is maintained.

The case for the decisive deterrent utility of nuclear weapons has regularly been asserted but never conclusively proven. Even if it were to be accepted that 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 risk of deterrence breaking down, including through accident, error or miscalculation.

These considerations should weigh heavily on the minds of policymakers in the umbrella states relying on US extended nuclear deterrence. They should closely consider whether present conventional military capability is not amply sufficient to deter potential adversaries – i.e., to rely on extended deterrence, but not extended *nuclear* deterrence.

Hiroshima Watch

The Hiroshima Roundtable welcomes the commitment made in the G7 Hiroshima Vision to nuclear disarmament and a world without nuclear weapons. But this vision remains an opportunity to be further developed. As it stands, it falls short of the necessary measures to reduce the risks of nuclear weapons, reactivate and expand existing arms control agreements, and provide credible security that is not dependent on nuclear deterrence.

When we only observe international relations as between states, we may find it difficult to see a non-nuclear future. If we observe global politics with a focus on the role of a civil society and NGOs, a different picture emerges. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) has won support from a wide number of people around the world: while it may not immediately provide a path toward a world free of nuclear weapons as such, but the support it enjoys from civil society in both non-nuclear weapons states and nuclear armed states affirms the need to observe international politics from a broader scale that encompasses civil society.

Starting in 2024, the roundtable will produce a new document called "Hiroshima Watch." Inspired by both the Helsinki Watch reporting during the Cold War and the iconic watch frozen in time at 8:15 a.m. on August 6 1945, Hiroshima Watch will provide an assessment of how well or poorly the major states of the world have met the over the past year obligations they have made related to nuclear risk reduction and disarmament. Unlike the many NGO reports on what the governments of the world should be committed to do to reduce nuclear risks, Hiroshima Watch will remind readers of what the governments have actually committed to do, including their G-7, P-5, G20 and NPT Review Conferences declarations, and how well they have met their commitments.

Hiroshima Watch will identify the extent to which each government has kept, or not kept, its

promises. The annual Hiroshima Report, commissioned by the Hiroshima Prefecture as a project for “Hiroshima for Global Peace” plan, has already evaluated the performance of 34 countries in nuclear disarmament, nuclear proliferation, and nuclear security. Hiroshima Watch, based on the extensive collection of information provided by the Hiroshima Report, will present a succinct assessment of the performance of major states in nuclear disarmament. Presented at the annual Hiroshima Roundtable, this new annual review will hold governments of the major powers responsible for implementing the commitments that they have made.

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.