



80 YEARS AFTER NUCLEAR USE: FOCUSING ON 'NEVER AGAIN'

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14 August 2025

Global politics, diplomacy, the pursuit of international peace and security, by whichever means, are all processes of challenge and response. Those who are engaged in these disciplines identify the challenges – or more accurately a hierarchy of challenges – as well as the means available at hand to address those challenges, the outcomes they seek, and the problems that may be disregarded or left for later.

One common belief that has been shared by all participants in the international system after the 6th of August 1945 is the conviction that any use of nuclear weapons would be a calamity, and therefore even the threat of such use should be averted. This principle has been unquestioned including by those that maintain nuclear weapons, even while we all recognise that the pace of progress towards the ultimate goal of universal nuclear disarmament has been glacial.

Why do things appear different today?

Here we are in 2025 - 80 years after nuclear use - and we seem to be staring into an abyss which suggests that either we have chosen not to remember the lessons of events – within living memory and not distant centuries ago - or we have willfully decided to ignore the past and are prepared to be condemned to relive it – in a ‘double quick’ tempo version.

The use of the atom bombs in August 1945 marked a paradigm shift in history, and as its horrific implications came to be absorbed by people, and not just those who engage professionally with such matters, the nuclear taboo became a universally shared value. In the years that followed, diplomats and others associated with international affairs and nuclear policy, shared the aspiration of giving a concrete shape to the nuclear taboo. This meant averting any circumstance or crisis that might lead to even contemplating the use of nuclear weapons – an indication of the seriousness with which even those countries that possess nuclear weapons, have focused on never needing to use them.

We all know that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was preceded by the horrors wrought by the Second World War and the Holocaust. The stench of the attendant death and destruction created a ‘never again’ sentiment. Even while those who possessed or

were driven to acquire the unbottled genie and to devise ways to maintain military nuclear capabilities, the broadest shared consensus was that a nuclear war had to be avoided at all costs. There were instances of nuclear brinksmanship, of dangerous adventurism and of near nuclear misses, and fortunately these were attended by individuals of great courage and sobriety, who did not dilute that general commitment to ‘never again’. Diplomats who have been associated with these issues have pursued their nations interests - to preserve, and in some cases to limit - their national options, but again with never an intent to push the global order in the direction of war that might unleash nuclear weapons. The last several years, however, have seen a stunning and saddening reversal. The convergence of several crises at this time – active wars; conflicts that have with deliberation placed civilians in the very centre of unceasing and unspeakable violence; a prolonged humanitarian crisis; and the unmistakable impact of climate disasters to name only a few, have brought us to the edge of a precipice. There is a profound disharmony and for those who follow developments relating to peace and security matters this is exacerbated by the almost casual conversation on nuclear deployment in a manner that hadn’t been seen in several preceding decades.

We ought to be able to look to the past to be able to imagine and realise a better future, a more peaceful and more equal future, rather than one in which the possible unleashing of the destructive power of the atom is one among several competing crises. This is the most profound danger that faces us, and yet this is one that is completely within our will and capacity to prevent. We need to heed the message of the Hibakusha who are living testimony to the horrors of nuclear weapons use. At this moment when we are in the midst of a global poly-crisis, our foremost challenge is to maintain focus on the pursuit of universal nuclear disarmament through serious and constructive diplomatic engagement. This is a problem that cannot be postponed. We need to reaffirm in words and in practice our common commitment to never again.

The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.

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of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



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