

On the Anniversary of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

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August 6 and August 9 mark the dropping of atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an act that launched the perilous era of nuclear weapons and nuclear power. After the first atomic blast, which killed 100,000 residents of Hiroshima immediately, the grievous radiation sickness of survivors was not anticipated, nor was it believed when reported. Without any reconsideration, the United States dropped a second bomb – this one plutonium – on Nagasaki, killing 70,000 citizens outright.

The American military censored all documentation and photo images of the two bombs' unparalleled human devastation, sheltering Americans from the horrors of what our government perpetrated on Japanese civilians: women, men, and children instantly reduced to ash. Likewise, the post-war U.S. occupying authority forbade Japanese citizens, under penalty of law, to own pictures of the atomic bomb destruction of both cities.

American military leaders from all branches of the armed forces, among them Generals Eisenhower, Arnold, Marshall and MacArthur; and Admirals Leahy, Nimitz, and Halsey strongly dissented from the decision to use the bombs – some prior to August 1945, some in retrospect – for both military and moral reasons. Japan was already defeated and in peace negotiations with the Soviet Union; surrender was imminent. Moreover, the Soviet Union was willing to enter the war against Japan, if necessary. Bombing dense human settlements was barbarous and would shock world opinion; and a demonstration bombing away from residential areas (also suggested by many atomic bomb scientists) could be used instead to force immediate surrender. The top military commanders concurred that the decision to use the atomic bomb was political, not military.

Dropping the atomic bombs in World War II launched an arms race in nuclear weapons, now spread to nine countries, with the ever-present specter of their use or their theft by terrorists. In the May 2012 Vienna meeting on the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the nuclear-armed countries explicitly stated their intention to maintain a nuclear arsenal for security. The same month, NATO countries convening in Chicago pronounced,

“Nuclear weapons are...essential...for defense and dissuasion.”

And yet, paradoxically, the threat of nuclear weapons in North Korea and Iran brings some nuclear-armed countries, namely the U.S. and Israel, to the brink of war – as if the

existential threat is not the weapons themselves but the hands they are in.

Stepping away from aggressive power politics of nuclear nations to the real security needs of their citizens, the June 2013 U.S. Conference of Mayors, including Mayor William Martin of Greenfield, unanimously adopted a resolution calling for U.S. leadership in eliminating nuclear weapons globally and for redirecting excessive military spending to the needs of cities and towns. The mayors' statement contrasts the cuts to Section 8 housing vouchers, Head Start, federal grants to cities and towns, food stamps and delayed infrastructure projects with the \$682 billion military budget in 2012 and the Administration's request for a 23 percent increase for nuclear weapons research, manufacture and maintenance over the next 5 years.

They cited President Obama's 2009 speech in Prague declaring that,

"as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act...to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."

Indeed, the mayors implored the Administration to reduce nuclear weapons and military spending and to redirect those monies to create jobs, retrain displaced workers, invest in new technologies for a sustainable energy future, and restore and maintain vital public services.

More than 30 mayors sponsored this resolution for a nuclear weapons-free world; and 197 U.S. mayors are members of Mayors for Peace, the leading international organization with 5600 member cities in 156 countries devoted to protecting cities from the scourge of war and mass destruction. As their citizens' first responders, we honor their public commitment to a genuinely secure world.

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