

Dangers & Opportunities As We Mark the 75th Hiroshima & Nagasaki Anniversaries
2020 World Conference against A and H Bombs
Joseph Gerson - August 2

I wish that we could be meeting in person. I am thrilled that Gensuikyo persevered and created this World Conference to mark and build from the 75th Hiroshima and Nagasaki Anniversaries. With the aging and passing of Hibakusha, this anniversary provides humanity with a unique opportunity to hear the Hibakusha's testimonies, to learn from the horrors they witnessed and their truth that humans and nuclear weapons cannot coexist, and to be inspired by their courage, vision and steadfastness.

If the U.S. had an enlightened government, this anniversary would provide the opportunity for the nation to face the cruel realities of the atomic bombings which were targeted against "densely packed workers homes", and to formally apologize for the crimes against humanity that were the atomic and fire bombings that indiscriminately killed hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

I have long had the extraordinary privilege of knowing and working with Hibakusha and many Gensuikyo activists. You have educated and inspired me and have made critically important contributions to the U.S. and international movements for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. I am tempted to name each of you, but time and Japanese culture will save you that embarrassment Let me just name three of the founders of the Hibakusha movement to whom I am deeply indebted, but there are others, and you know who you are: WATANABE Chieko, YAMAGUCHI Senji, and TANAGUCHI Sumiteru.

This past year, many of us worked closely in organizing what became the online April World Conference that we arranged when the NPT Review Conference was postponed. Together we initiated Global Peace Wave actions across the U.S., and we brought the English translation of Tanaguchi-san's extraordinary memoir "The Bomb on My Back" into print.

But we live in an era of existential threats: renewed and highly dangerous arms races, the climate emergency, pandemics, and authoritarian governments from Trump, Xi and Putin to Duterte, Orban and Bolsonaro.

I thus begin with a sense of urgency. Two weeks ago, Lawrence Wilkerson, formerly Secretary of Defense Colin Powell's chief of staff, reported that during the first years of the Trump tyranny, Secretary of Defense Mattis ordered that no significant military actions be taken without his express approval. He did this to prevent Trump from launching nuclear attacks midst one of his rages.

Mattis is no longer Secretary of Defense. We cannot assume that his successor has erected a similar firebreak against nuclear catastrophe. Wilkerson also warned that Trump is poking his finger in China's eye with aggressive aircraft carrier deployments and could initiate a war with in his desperate effort to rally support for the election that he appears destined to lose or to steal. Secretary of State Pompeo's recent aggressive statements have deepened the dangers of a U.S.-Chinese armed conflict.

RESTORING NUCLEAR PRIMACY

These provocations take place midst the U.S. campaign to restore U.S. primacy – nuclear and otherwise - in part by destroying the nuclear arms control architecture built over the past 60 years. It began with Bush II's abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile

Treaty, their campaign to deploy first-strike related missile defenses, and their evisceration of the meaning of deterrence.

Pentagon spokesmen were clear that “Deterrence has never been U.S. policy.” Their Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations stated that the focus of US deterrence “is ... to influence potential adversaries to withhold actions intended to harm US’s national interests.” This can include protecting our oil under their sand, as was the case in the Iraq wars, President Obama’s “all options are on the table” threats against Iran, and Trump’s Fire and Fury threat.

Earlier, U.S. Secretary of Defense Brown testified that with nuclear weapons, U.S. forces become ‘meaningful instruments of military and political power.’ Noam Chomsky explained that this means that “we have succeeded in sufficiently intimidating anyone who might help protect people who we are determined to attack.”

President Obama was unwilling to expend the political capital needed to transform the nuclear weapons-free world vision of his inspiring Prague speech into policy. Kowtowing to the Pentagon and not wanting to weaken the military alliance with Japan, he extended the U.S. first-strike doctrine. And, to win the Senate votes for the New START Treaty, he committed to what has become the \$2 trillion upgrading of Washington’s nuclear arsenal and replacing its triad of delivery systems.

Now Trump has withdrawn from the INF Treaty, violated the U.N. treaty with Iran, is permitting the New START Treaty to expire, shattered the Open Skies Treaty and is resisting the Treaty for Prevention of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW.)

Trump’s Pentagon reiterated the first strike nuclear war fighting doctrine, stating that nuclear weapons “could be brought into the campaign as a result of perceived failure in a conventional campaign, potential loss of control or regime, or to escalate the

conflict to sue for peace on more-favorable terms.” It is deploying “more usable” battlefield and strategic nuclear weapons to Europe, intermediate range nuclear weapons to the Asia-Pacific, and they are now threatening to resume nuclear weapons testing, possibly in the Pacific. All of this increases the danger of nuclear war.

CONFRONTING HISTORY

History is a contested battlefield. We see this in racist campaigns to reverse the victories of the U.S. civil rights movement, in futile efforts to reinforce U.S. hegemony across the Pacific and Asia, and in the continuing influence of President Truman’s lies about the use and consequences of the atomic bombings. As the novelist William Faulkner observed, “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.” Ignorance and distortions of history, as we saw in President Trump’s dishonest celebration the 75th anniversary of the Trinity A-bomb test, make our societies vulnerable to those who would manipulate us and removes the possibility of human freedom.

Time doesn’t allow for detail, but some things need to be said. In time, the Pacific theater of World War II will be understood as the war between competing imperial powers: primarily Japan, Britain, the United States. Inspired in part by the Monroe Doctrine, by which Washington enforces its neo-colonial domination of the Western Hemisphere, Japan’s elite sought to conquer and create its colonial Co-Prosperity Sphere at terrible cost to Asian and the Pacific peoples (not to mention the U.S., British and Dutch empires). Pearl Harbor was attacked to buy time to prosecute Japan’s war for empire, especially to seize Indonesian oil needed for the war against China.

In the ultimate expression of full spectrum dominance, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were savaged by nuclear weapons. To escape the moral judgement of the U.S. people and history, President Truman lied about the reason he ordered the nuclear attacks,

saying that they were necessary to prevent the U.S. troops being prepared for the invasion of Japan from suffering casualties.

In fact, for months, Japanese diplomats had been suing for peace on terms Truman accepted AFTER the A-bombings: that Emperor Hirohito be allowed to remain on his throne. All of the senior U.S. military leaders opposed the A-bombings, which were politically, not militarily motivated. The A-bombings were inflicted to bring the war to an immediate end, so that the U.S. would not have to share influence with the Soviets in Manchuria, northern China or Korea. Secretary of War Stimson had advised Truman that Japan's surrender could be arranged "on terms acceptable" to the U.S. and that he "did not want to have the United States get the reputation of outdoing Hitler in atrocities.". General (later President) Eisenhower opposed the A-bombings saying, "The Japanese were ready to surrender, it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing." [And] Admiral Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed, saying "The use of this barbarous weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance to the war." And General LeMay, who led the firebombing campaign, was convinced that without a group invasion Japan would surrender by November when there would be no targets left to attack.

OPPORTUNITIES & ORGANIZING

We take courage knowing that it is darkest before the dawn, from the wisdom of the 19th century abolitionist Fredrick Douglass's admonition that "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.", and from the vision and steadfastness of the Hibakusha and the Japanese movement.

You have long led the struggle to eliminate nuclear weapons. Your campaigning helped to bring the TPNW into being. We hope that by the time the NPT Review

Conference finally convenes in January enough governments will have signed and ratified the Treaty, to bring it into force. Article XII of the Treaty requires governments that have ratified the treaty to press others to sign and to ratify it. If they have the courage and imagination, that over time they could exercise the political, diplomatic economic power and moral suasion needed to universalize the Treaty. That's a big but essential if, but if even a few "umbrella" states break ranks with the nuclear powers, the thread of nuclearism can be unraveled.

Given the majority support for the TPNW by the Japanese people, it will only be a matter of time before Japan's government is forced to sign the treaty. This could also prove to be a major step toward Japan reclaiming its independence from the U.S.-Japan Military Alliance.

Here in the U.S., our first priority must be unseating the despots who would rule us. A Trump reelection will spell the end of U.S. constitutional democracy. And, though Biden is a deeply flawed candidate, his election would provide us time and space for essential organizing and advocacy, including pressing the demand that he and other leaders of nuclear weapons states declare that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, which can serve as the foundation for disarmament negotiations.

With the devastations caused by the pandemic, the U.S., and likely other nuclear powers will not be able to simultaneously reinvigorate their economies and spend trillions of dollars for their nuclear arsenals. A profound debate over U.S. national budget priorities – including spending for nuclear weapons - is thus inevitable next year, regardless of the election outcome.

Despite the pandemic, we have been marking and using the 75th anniversary for movement building. Recently, with Gensuikyo and Hidankyo we held a nationwide

webinar to share the Hibakusha's experiences and commitments, to shatter the myths about the A-bombings, to promote the Hibakusha Signature Appeal and the Global Peace Wave. Many other webinars and local actions are being held to build on the anniversaries, Nationally, a unique coalition of nuclear weapons abolitionists and arms controllers will hold eight-hour webinars on August 6 and 9, In my home state of Massachusetts, our coalition has issued a call for self-distancing August 6 & 9 local events, webinars and more, to build our movement for the longer term. Back from the Brink campaigning continues with its five demands. And the coalition that organized the past April's World Conference, is in the early stages of preparing for the rescheduled NPT Review that may be held in January.

None of this is enough. Yet, just as we have seen with the unexpected anti-racist uprising across the U.S. in the wake of George Floyd's murder, as we make our demands and build our forces, the way to a nuclear weapons-free world can open more suddenly, forcefully, and successfully than any of us now imagine.

May we persist and prevail. No More Hiroshimas! No More Nagasakis! No More Hibakusha! And for a peaceful, just and sustainable world!