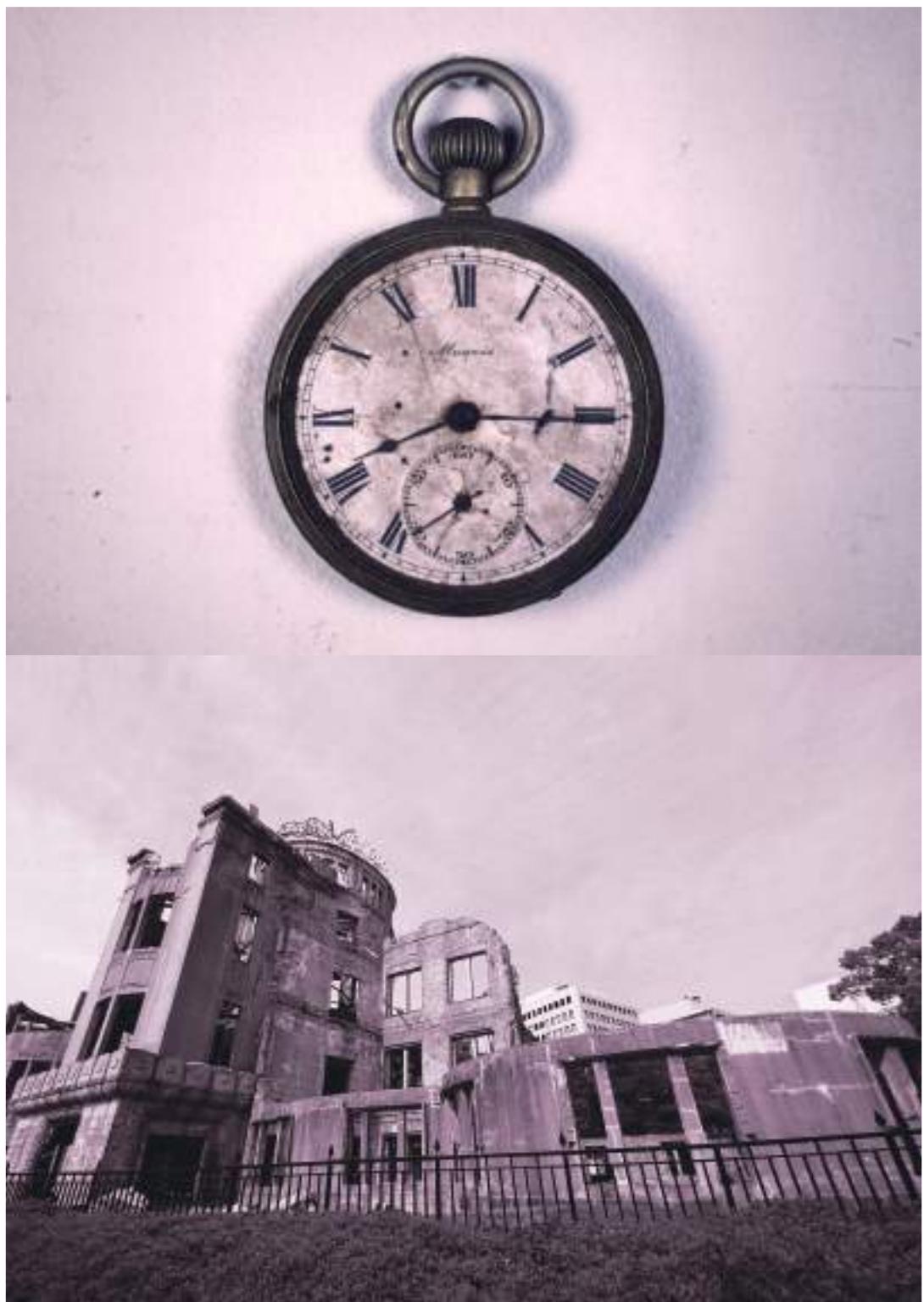


Hiroshima Watch 2025



18 November 2025

Hiroshima Watch 2025:

Beyond Nuclear Deterrence

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*1 Photo of Cover Page: "Pocket Watch"
Donated by Kazuo Nikawa, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

The Watch of Hiroshima

At 8:15 AM, August 6, 1945 — the very time of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima — a watch stopped working, leaving a world in fear of nuclear war. The watch of Hiroshima remains a powerful image of the destruction that will occur once the bombs are used again.



This document is the second Hiroshima Watch, following the first report presented in 2024. Drawing inspiration from Helsinki Watch and the symbolism of Hiroshima in the history of the development and use of atomic weapons, the Hiroshima Watch aims to keep watch on the progress — or lack thereof — toward a nuclear-weapon-free world by presenting the most important developments each year in nuclear disarmament, and nuclear non-proliferation. Furthermore, the Hiroshima Watch presents alternatives to a world dependent on nuclear weapons and proposes actions that must be taken immediately.

The Hiroshima Watch is informed by the discussions at the Hiroshima Roundtable, a group of international nuclear arms control and disarmament experts convened by Hiroshima Prefecture, which has met annually since 2013. The Hiroshima Watch is distilled by the Chair of the Hiroshima Roundtable and also draws on the annual Hiroshima Report, which has been published since 2013.

The Age of War

In 2025, as the world marks 80 years since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the 12th Hiroshima Roundtable convened under a profound sense of crisis. We are living in an era of war.

The persistent use of force by nuclear-armed states underscores this reality. Two wars—in Ukraine and Gaza—involve states with military nuclear capabilities, resulting in massive civilian casualties. The Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities under the IAEA safeguards in June 2025 were another instance of coercive force by nuclear-armed states. The direct military conflict in May 2025 between India and Pakistan constitutes a conflict involving nuclear-armed states themselves.



*2 "Mushroom Cloud"
Photo by US Army, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

*3 "Pocket Watch"
Donated by Kazuo Nikawa, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

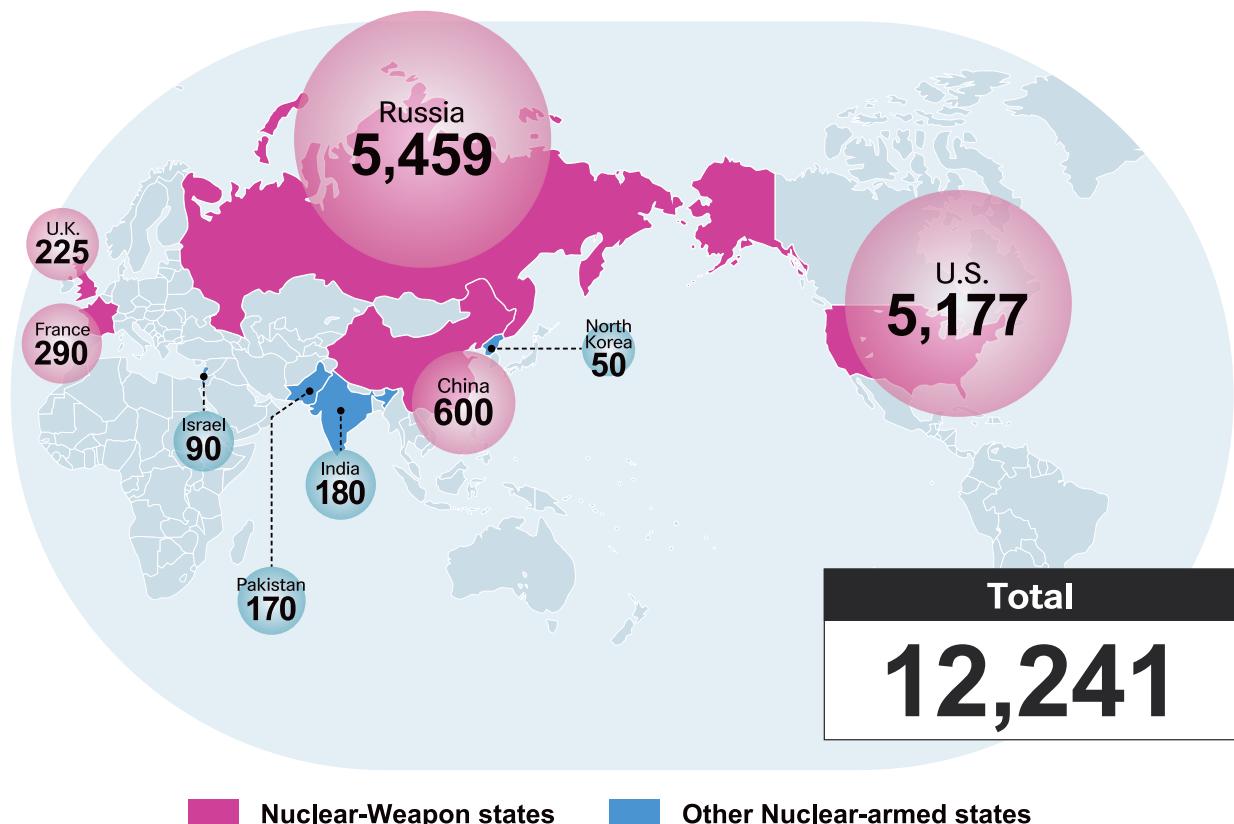
Reliance on Nuclear Weapons and the Arms Race

Ongoing conflicts have further eroded the nuclear taboo—a norm shared by the world that nuclear weapons will not be used—raising fears that nuclear weapons may one day be employed in actual combat. For the first time for almost 20 years, in 2025, the U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons have reportedly been re-deployed in the U.K., a development as alarming as the Russian deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus in 2024. States under the U.S. extended deterrence system—the so-called “nuclear umbrella”—have

deepened their reliance on nuclear weapons for security, while the forward deployment of nuclear weapons continues to expand.

Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding extended nuclear deterrence has opened the possibility of the pursuit of independent nuclear capabilities. Discussions about nuclear proliferation risks are no longer limited to the Middle East region but have spread to Europe and East Asia. This age of war has intensified dependence on nuclear weapons, exacerbated proliferation pressures, and heightened the risk of nuclear use.

Number of Nuclear Stockpile (As of January 2025)



Source: SIPRI YEARBOOK 2025

The Erosion of Law and Norms

The legal and normative foundations of international order are under severe strain. The U.S. and its allies have frequently blamed Russia and China for their challenges to the rules-based international order, but the U.S. is neglecting international norms today. The second Trump administration has weakened the rule of law in U.S. domestic politics and acted with disregard for international law abroad, seeking to dismantle the very order that the U.S. itself helped to build after the end of World War II. The U.S. missile strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities exemplify the reliance on force in international relations.

In the field of arms control and disarmament, regression from international norms and agreements has been stark. In 2025, the U.S. announced the "Golden Dome" strategic missile defense project, which creates additional challenges to nuclear disarmament progress because of the interrelationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty has been dismantled, and with no substantive negotiations between the United States and Russia, the New START Treaty will expire in February of 2026. Meanwhile, nuclear-armed states and those under nuclear umbrellas continue to reject the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The pursuit of disarmament and arms control through international law and norms has reached a critical impasse.

Misguided "Lessons" of History

Participants of the Hiroshima Roundtable expressed deep concern about the misuse of history to justify nuclear armament. A

widely held view that Russian assault of Ukraine started because Ukraine renounced nuclear weapons has been used to legitimize reliance on nuclear deterrence, although the causal link here remains unproven from a scholarly perspective. These misguided 'lessons' of history are employed to further strengthen dependence on nuclear weapons.

Similarly, the persistent belief that the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended World War II continues to dominate popular understanding. Historical research suggests, however, that the Soviet Union's entry into the war was a significant, if not decisive, cause for Japan's surrender.

Both in the case of Ukraine and in the narrative of 1945, inaccurate "lessons" from history reinforce the myth of nuclear weapons' effectiveness. It is the duty of the academic community to challenge the misuse of history that justifies the supposed utility of nuclear weapons.



*4 "Peace Memorial Park vicinity"
Photo by US Army, Courtesy of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

A World Free of Nuclear Weapons

Wars continue, and reliance on nuclear weapons grows—yet neither brings peace. On the contrary, both intensify global tensions and place the nuclear taboo under threat. What, then, are the alternatives?

The first necessary step is to recognize that there cannot be sustainable peace without nuclear disarmament. With growing awareness of the weakening of the nuclear taboo, the danger of nuclear war is now recognized by a wider public.

The TPNW has been in effect since 2017. Both ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) and the Hibakusha organization Nihon Hidankyo have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The G7 nations, many of which are nuclear-armed states, adopted the G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament at the Hiroshima G7 Summit in 2023, sharing a commitment to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all.

The international recognition of the need to abolish nuclear weapons as a tool to strengthen global security must be welcomed. Nuclear-armed states, however, still remain dependent on nuclear weapons as part of their security policies, even when they agree on the need to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons in the future. The call for nuclear disarmament in the future is accompanied by acceptance of nuclear weapons in the present. If we wish to achieve a world without nuclear weapons, we need concrete actions that reduce dependence on them.

From Nuclear Deterrence to Conventional Deterrence

At the center of this paradox lies the idea of

nuclear deterrence. The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence cannot be conclusively proven. While it may produce temporary stability, it is fragile and carries the catastrophic risk of collapse. Whatever limited benefits nuclear possession might appear to confer, they pale in comparison to the existential danger posed by failure; the risks associated with the continued possession of nuclear weapons far outweigh any utility that nuclear weapons may be expected to serve. How, then, can we overcome the dangers that accompany nuclear deterrence?

One alternative lies in strengthening conventional deterrence. The need to deter nations from armed assault does not necessitate deterrence based on nuclear weapons, and reducing dependence on nuclear deterrence need not expose nations to armed aggression. Deterring adversaries through conventional capabilities—particularly if paired with nuclear arms reductions—can significantly reduce the risk of escalation to nuclear use.

Far from impossible, conventional deterrence is the most common tool in the conduct of international conflict. It is true that conventional deterrence is unstable and can lead to new uncertainties and wars. The transformation toward conventional deterrence, therefore, must be accompanied by confidence-building measures and risk management in order to prevent the outbreak and escalation of military conflicts.

This is a field that deserves further research and policy innovation—separating nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence—and leading us to a credible alternative to strategic thinking that puts nuclear weapons at the center. At the very least, military strategies that integrate nuclear and non-nuclear arms must be opposed, as they cause misperception and increase the inadvertent risk of catastrophic escalation.

Upholding the Nuclear Taboo

The nuclear taboo—and the 80-year history of non-use of nuclear weapons—must be upheld, but the world is moving in the opposite direction. The 2024 Hiroshima Watch highlighted three developments—or backslidings—of grave concern: (1) increased reliance on nuclear weapons in the national security policies of many states; (2) a growing risk of significant increase in the number, types, and deployment of nuclear weapons; and (3) the risk of resumption of nuclear testing by major nuclear-weapon states. The past year has accelerated these three backsliding trends, while the uncertainty of extended deterrence under the second Trump administration has led to further deployment of nuclear weapons and the possibility of nuclear proliferation.

Here, the proposals made in the Hiroshima Watch last year must be reiterated: (1) Excessive reliance on nuclear deterrence and extended nuclear deterrence increases the prospect of actual weapons use; no-first-use policies and negative security assurances should be upheld to minimize nuclear risks. (2) The production and deployment of a new generation of nuclear weapons must stop immediately, for new deployment of nuclear weapons further erodes the nuclear taboo. At the very minimum, numerical limits of the New START Treaty must be upheld and observed. (3) The moratoria on nuclear testing must be maintained, and the resumption of nuclear weapons testing must be prevented.

continuing war in Ukraine, arms control has been put on the back burner, while the New START Treaty is about to expire in February 2026.

Dialogue between Russia and the U.S. must resume, and at the very least, the numerical limits of the New START Treaty must be upheld and observed. Russia's proposal from September 2025 to continue observing the central quantitative restrictions of the Treaty for one year could serve as a basis for that. Arms control agreements must also extend beyond the U.S. and Russia and develop into a multistate process that includes China, along with France, the U.K., and other nuclear-armed states.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review process continues to play a key role as the only multilateral institution for nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The achievements of the preparatory committees for the 2026 review conference, however, have been limited. All efforts must be made to revive and sustain the NPT regime.



Resuming Arms Control and Disarmament

Of particular importance is the resumption of arms control negotiations. With the

Message from Hiroshima

The pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons requires strong and sustained messages from Hiroshima. As the first city to experience a nuclear attack, Hiroshima holds a unique moral authority that resonates worldwide. It is essential to communicate this message not only within Japan but also to policymakers, experts, and civil society around the world.

It was Governor Hidehiko Yuzaki who took the initiative in starting the Hiroshima Roundtable in 2013. The Roundtable has challenged political leaders who assume nuclear weapons are indispensable while empowering civil society and younger generations to envision and pursue alternatives. Across its 12 sessions, the

Roundtable has issued a Chair's Summary each year and, since 2024, has disseminated its discussions and policy recommendations through the Hiroshima Watch.

The Hiroshima Roundtable has fostered dialogue across nations, presented visions for peace without nuclear weapons, sent messages to both policymakers and civil society, and encouraged younger generations to envision and pursue alternatives. It has affirmed Hiroshima's enduring role as a moral beacon in the pursuit of non-nuclear peace.

When Hiroshima speaks, the world listens. In this age of war, advocacy from Hiroshima plays a critical role in making the world free of nuclear weapons.



Those who cooperated in the creation of the Hiroshima Watch 2025 at the Hiroshima Roundtable are as follows:

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Gareth EVANS (Distinguished Honorary Professor, Australian National University / Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia)

G. John IKENBERRY (Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University)

KIM Youngjun (Professor, Dean of Academic Affairs of National Security College at the Korea National Defense University / Advisor for Arms Control and Verification at the Ministry of National Defense)

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(In alphabetical order)

The views expressed herein, while based on the shared principles and ideas of the participants of the Hiroshima Roundtable, are those of the Chairperson and do not necessarily reflect the opinions and views of each individual participant.



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