

THE HILL: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in our future?

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As the 76th anniversaries of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on Aug. 6 and 9 come and go, the obsolescence of U.S. nuclear capabilities increasingly appears to be eroding the foundations of deterrence.

For example, when Japan's Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso recently vowed to help the U.S. defend Taiwan, to protect Japan's own strategic interests and fulfill alliance obligations, an "unofficial" website affiliated with China's People's Liberation Army threatened a nuclear first strike. In her July 15 blog post, "Nuke and Eliminate Japan," author and human rights activist Jennifer Zeng provides a fuller account of China's nuclear threats, only partially reported by some Western media:

- “When we liberate Taiwan, if Japan dares to intervene by force, even if it deploys only one soldier, one plane and one ship ...we will use nuclear bombs first. We will use nuclear bombs continuously until Japan declares unconditional surrender for the second time.”
- “... We’ll join forces with Russia and North Korea. Three arrows (countries) shoot together to hit the Japanese mainland thoroughly and in full depth.”
- “... After defeating Japan, we must take more severe measures than in World War II to partition Japan ...by dividing the four Japanese islands into four independent states. ... China and Russia should each formulate its own Peace Constitution, and each of the four countries should be placed under the administration of China and Russia, with China and Russia stationing troops.”
- “Now the international situation has changed dramatically. ... In order to protect the peaceful rise of our country, it is necessary to make limited adjustments to our nuclear policy.”

The above — excerpts that Zeng translated from the video uploaded by a Chinese channel, Xigua Video — is consistent with longstanding thinking of China’s military, as when General Zhu Chenghu in 2005 threatened that U.S. defense of Taiwan could provoke a nuclear strike on Los Angeles.

Speaking louder than words, China is building 250 new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silos, probably for their 10-warhead DF-41, enough to deploy 2,500 strategic warheads in a few years — far eclipsing, with the DF-41 ICBM alone, the U.S. strategic deterrent of 1,400 operational warheads on all U.S. missiles and bombers. Until now, the DF-41 has been deployed on mobile launchers, making it difficult for the United States to count China’s ICBMs.

China's in-your-face silo-basing demonstrates to the world that the U.S. is outgunned.

"Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," President Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged in a joint statement following their June summit in Geneva. This nuclear equivalent of Neville Chamberlain's 1938 "Peace for our time" false promise is belied by Russia's numerous broken arms control treaties, massive nuclear build-up, and nuclear war-winning doctrine.

Just in April, NATO feared that Russia's "military exercise" might be mobilization for overrunning Ukraine and perhaps the frontline NATO states — a performance Moscow prepares to repeat in September with their next rehearsal for a potential World War III: Zapad 2021. Unprecedented Russian cyber attacks on U.S. critical infrastructures have been escalating. Washington appears to be helpless.

It is evidence of deterrence failing.

Yet all too many of America's political, media and academic elites seem to be unworried that war games by the Pentagon and RAND reportedly show the U.S. losing a World War III to aggression by Russia or China. They are reminiscent of elitist attitudes in the 1930s, described by Winston Churchill in "The Gathering Storm," about how the democracies blamed themselves, invented false narratives to justify appeasement, and ignored military threats from Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, resulting in World War II.

Today's comforting false narratives, contradicted by reality, include:

The nuclear build-up by Russia and China is provoked by U.S. nuclear modernization. The U.S. is a decade behind both adversaries in modernizing its nuclear delivery systems and is not "modernizing" but more accurately "recycling" its decades-old, antique nuclear weapons, untested in 30 years.

The nuclear build-up by Russia and China is provoked by U.S. strategic missile defenses. U.S. missile defenses (44 anti-missiles), existing and planned, pose no serious threat to Russia's or China's nuclear retaliatory capabilities. Indeed, Russia's thousands of anti-missiles, deep underground shelters for political-military elites, and civil defense for the general population, poses a serious threat to U.S. nuclear retaliatory capabilities.

Russia's and China's massive nuclear build-up is normal behavior for great powers. Yet their nuclear capabilities, doctrine and strategic posture far exceed the requirements of deterrence and are consistent with nuclear blackmail and war-winning.

Also reminiscent of the 1930s is the push by some congressional Democrats and earlier calls by the Arms Control Association to respond to growing nuclear threats with a “no first use” pledge — that would undermine extended nuclear deterrence to U.S. allies. Worse, they call for using the new Nuclear Posture Review, slated for January 2022, to adopt minimum deterrence by cutting U.S. nuclear forces to “a few hundred warheads.”

Not much better are Democrats and Republicans who support the current nuclear “modernization” program — by Cold War standards, minimum deterrence — that abandons the principle that U.S. nuclear capabilities should be “second to none.”

Perhaps a new bipartisan consensus can be forged to support space-based missile defenses, such as the “Brilliant Pebbles” ballistic missile defense proposed in 1987, which could be deployable in five years for \$20 billion; or much needed protection from electromagnetic pulse (EMP) and cyber attacks for life-sustaining critical infrastructures.

Thus, we would replace Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) with the principle of protecting life — call it “Strategic Assured National Existence” (SANE) — so there will be no Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in our future.

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