

the East China Sea and South China Sea, as well as Russia's war on Ukraine. But Japan's position starts to look thin, or even a double standard, in the face of its US ally's use of force.

The crisis over Iran and its challenge to the principles of international diplomacy that Japan advocates may have further spillover effects in key areas. Japan's long-term concern is that Iran, after enduring US and Israeli military attacks, will conclude that its only option is to accelerate its nuclear program and withdraw entirely from International Atomic Energy Agency oversight to develop a nuclear deterrent. This compounds the risks of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, further undermining international rules-based cooperative regimes.

Israel's de facto status as a nuclear weapons entity, standing free of International Atomic Energy Agency oversight, confirms for critics the contradictions of the rules-based international order. The spillover from the Iran crisis could extend to North Korea. Pyongyang may conclude from the US strikes that its strategy of acquiring nuclear weapons has been correct to prevent US coercion. This means it will insist on framing future negotiations as "arms control," rather than complete dismantlement of its nuclear program, with possible ripple effects for nuclear proliferation in East Asia.



Protesters hold a rally denouncing the US strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, near the US Embassy in Tokyo, Japan, on June 22, 2025.

● ISSEI KATO/REUTERS

Japan's inability to exercise significant influence over the United States or G7 regarding Iran brings into question its ability to act as a bridge between the Global South and the West. The US strikes and wider international reaction revealed that Iran was

in the end short on friends and allies willing to intervene on its behalf, limiting escalation of the conflict. Over the longer term, though, the United States and Israel's exercise of force against Iran, coupled with Israel's relatively untrammelled military ac-

tion in the region, may only embolden military action by states in other contexts and signify that the rules-based international order does not necessarily apply to the Global South.

In this climate, Japan's self-proclaimed stance and credibility

as one of the main proponents of the rules-based international order and its ability to promote the interests of the Global South appear hollow.

The article first appeared on the East Asia Forum.



Japan has carefully championed the rules-based international order, as seen in its Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision and condemnations of China's behaviour in the East China Sea and South China Sea, as well as Russia's war on Ukraine. But Japan's position starts to look thin, or even a double standard, in the face of its US ally's use of force.

# Hiroshima II

## Aggressive US policies driving world toward another nuclear catastrophe

By Greg Pence  
Researcher, columnist

OPINION

Eighty years ago, on August 6, 1945, the sky over Hiroshima, Japan, lit up with the cataclysmic explosion of the atomic bomb "Little Boy"; a light that was not a sunrise of hope, but a shadow of death and destruction, reducing over 140,000 people to ashes in an instant. This tragedy became a lasting symbol of nuclear horror, a permanent warning to humanity: The power of nuclear weapons can obliterate civilisations entirely.

Now, the United States, through attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities and escalating confrontations with Russia, is steering the world toward the precipice of a "Hiroshima II". These actions, which threaten the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and raise the risk of nuclear war to unprecedented levels, endanger global peace and reveal a dangerous shift in Washington's foreign policy; one that could imperil the very future of humanity.

**Blow to diplomacy**

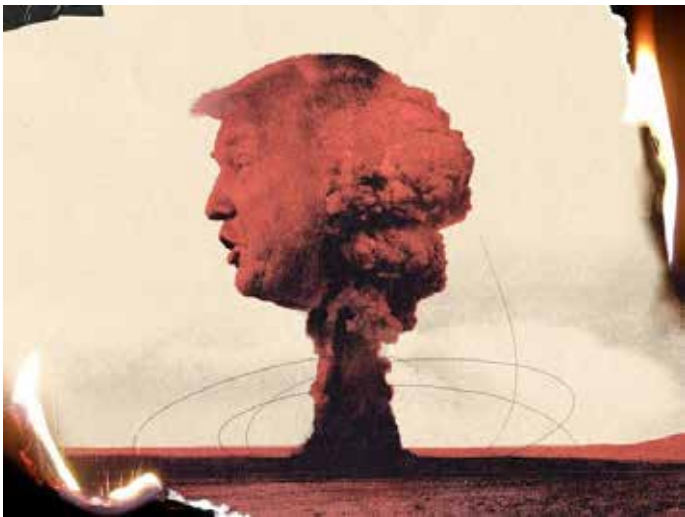
On June 22, 2025, the skies over Iran thundered with Tomahawk missiles and stealth B-2 bombers targeting the Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan nuclear facilities in an operation dubbed "Midnight Hammer". Occurring amid the short-lived Iran-Israel conflict from June 13 to June 24, 2025, this strike was described by US President Donald Trump as a "decisive victory" to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Yet reports tell a different story: The attack only delayed Iran's nuclear program by a few months as the country had already secured enriched uranium in safe locations. The roots of this aggression

trace back to the controversial US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) in 2018. Subsequent reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2025 indicated that Iran had enriched uranium to 60 percent, still below the 90 percent threshold needed for weapons-grade material. Pressure from Israel, especially information presented by Benjamin Netanyahu in February 2025, pushed Washington toward this military strike. But this first direct military assault on another nation's nuclear program since World War II had profound consequences: Iran temporarily suspended cooperation with the IAEA and mulled adhering to NPT restrictions.

The US attack on Iran's nuclear facilities didn't just torch years of diplomatic efforts; It has pushed the world to the edge of a nuclear abyss. Since 1968, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has stood on three shaky legs: stopping the spread of nukes, disarming those who have them, and ensuring nuclear energy stays peaceful. Now, Washington's unilateral move threatens to kick those legs out from under it. Rafael Grossi, head of the IAEA, didn't mince words: The strike could "bring the entire non-proliferation system crashing down."

**From collapse of nuclear order to human catastrophe**

The fallout from America's strike stretches far beyond the Middle East. By undermining the NPT, it has fanned the flames of global nuclear ambition. Allies like South Korea, Japan, and Poland, long sheltered under the US nuclear umbrella, might start questioning their reliance on Washington and consider



The illustration shows the side profile of US President Donald Trump over a mushroom cloud caused by a nuclear explosion.

● BRANDON RAYGO/THE CAP TIMES

going their own way. In the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and the UAE could hit the gas on their own nuclear programs, risking a full-blown arms race across the region.

At the 2025 Hiroshima memorial, Mayor Kazumi Matsui sounded the alarm, warning that "nuclear weapons are be-

coming normalized" amid crises in Ukraine and the Middle East. The Hiroshima Survivors' Association, known as Nihon Hidan-kyo and honored with a Nobel Peace Prize, slammed the US for ignoring the scars of Hiroshima's past. Pope Leo XIV and UN chief António Guterres issued a rare joint plea, urging a return



An operational timeline of the strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is displayed during a news conference with Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Dan Caine and US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth at the Pentagon on June 22, 2025.

● ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

to diplomacy and warning that nukes are once again tools of intimidation, not deterrence.

The stakes couldn't be higher. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports that 2025 has ushered in a new arms race, with defense budgets ballooning and nuclear stockpiles getting modern makeovers. In this tinderbox, one misstep, whether a rash decision or a simple miscalculation, could spark a disaster that wipes out millions and leaves the planet's ecosystems in ruins for centuries.

**Urgent need for multilateral diplomacy**

History proves that nuclear stability hinges on global cooperation, not cowboy bravado. Treaties like the NPT and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) only worked when big players respected each other's red lines. The US strike on Iran, coupled with escalating tensions with Russia, spits in the face of that principle, shoving the world toward chaos. The only way out is to swap bombs for talks. Urgent negotiations, pulling in Iran, Russia, China, Europe, and others, are the last hope for shoring up the non-proliferation system and cooling global tempers.

Eighty years after Hiroshima, the world faces a gut-check moment. The US, which unleashed the first nuclear horror, is now steering humanity toward another with its reckless policies. Hiroshima taught us that nuclear weapons don't bring security or triumph, only devastation. If this path continues, the next Hiroshima won't be one city but the entire globe, with no one left to bear witness.

The article first appeared on Middle East Monitor.



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