

## **The Asia-Pacific Pivot and Growing Dangers of Great Power Wars**

Jackie Cabasso, Executive Director, Western States Legal Foundation

August 6, 2014, Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab

Here we are, at a fully functioning, obscenely well funded United States government nuclear weapons research and development lab, 69 years after the United States unleashed the nuclear age, dropping a single atomic bomb on Hiroshima, which indiscriminately incinerated 10s of thousands of children, women and men in an instant – a tiny and crude nuclear weapon by today’s standards – justified by a lie of historic proportions that the bombing ended World War II and saved American lives. Over 90% of the doctors and nurses in Hiroshima were killed or injured by the bomb.<sup>1</sup>

It is also the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of World War I. No one expected that war, but it is estimated that there were over 16 million deaths and 21 million wounded. The War to End All Wars, brutal and barbaric as it was, took place before there were nuclear weapons, largely among combatants. Nearly 60 percent of the dead were military personal.<sup>2</sup>

With conflicts raging around the world, and the post World War II order crumbling, we are now standing on the precipice of a new era of great power wars – the potential for wars among nations possessing nuclear weapons is growing; nations which cling to nuclear weapons as central to their national security.

In 2011, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a major foreign policy shift: a long-term strategic pivot, with diplomatic, economic and military dimensions -- to Asia and the Pacific. The pivot is a plan to contain and encircle China, a rising U.S. competitor. The U.S. has been expanding its military alliances with many of China’s neighbors, including Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Australia, is building new military bases, and has committed to deploy 60% of the Navy and Air Force to Asia and the Pacific. A new “Air-Sea Battle” warfighting doctrine has been developed in the case of war against China.

But nuclear-armed China is also a provocative actor, claiming sovereignty over 80% of the South China Sea, with sea beds believed to contain massive reserves of oil and natural gas. China and Japan are involved in a frightening standoff over the contested Senkaku islands. President Obama, meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Abe this spring, said that these islands fall within the U.S.- Japan alliance, and that the U.S. would back Japan if it came to war between Japan and China. China is challenging the Philippines over islands *it* claims, and the United States is establishing a new military base there.

In March of last year, U.S. B-52 bombers carried out simulated nuclear bombing raids on North Korea as part of ongoing U.S.-South Korean military exercises. And in December, as tensions over the Senkaku Islands rose, the U.S. provocatively flew a pair of unarmed B-52 bombers over airspace claimed by China, as a demonstration of its commitment to defend Japan. These are just a few examples of a much larger, very complex and dangerous trend.

As the only nation so far to have experienced nuclear weapons in war, it is tragic that Japan – like other U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region, relies on the U.S. nuclear umbrella as the

ultimate guarantor of its defense. Regrettably, since 1952 the U.S.-Japan military alliance has served a similar role in Asia that NATO has served in Europe, where its post Cold-War expansion has contributed to growing U.S. - Russia tensions. The U.S.- Japan Alliance, with more than 100 U.S. military bases across Japan, led former Prime Minister Koizumi to describe his nation as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier for the United States.”

The U.S. is pushing hard to relocate Futenma Air Station from a heavily populated area of Okinawa, to an offshore area in the smaller city of Nago. Anti-base sentiment runs deep in Okinawa, which hosts the bulk of U.S. military forces in Japan. Mayor Susumu Inamine of Nago, a member of Mayors for Peace, has been heroically opposing the new base, citing dangers such as accidents, aircraft noise and environmental damage, including threats to an endangered marine mammal called a dugong – similar to a manatee. Mayor Inamine visited Washington, DC in May to make his case to the U.S. State Department and rally international support.

In Gangjeong village on Jeju Island in South Korea, where the Korean government, with U.S. support, in building a new naval base, a similar better-known struggle is going on. There too, the villagers were not consulted before construction began, and there are daily protests by locals, religious groups, and international human rights and environmental organizations. Mayor Kang Dong-kyun, also a member of Mayors for Peace, was arrested in 2011 for supposedly ‘obstructing business’ at the construction site and detained for 90 days.

Japan’s turn to the right is another matter of great concern, with U.S. support for the recent decision of Prime Minister Abe’s Cabinet to change the interpretation of war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution – a decision that substantially eviscerates the clause of its principles, and steps away from some of the country’s longstanding peace policies. The Global Council of the Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons has just issued a statement in solidarity with our Japanese colleagues and members, calling on Japan not to abandon Article 9 of its Peace Constitution and to lead efforts for negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons. With the U.S.- Russia conflict over the Ukraine and the U.S. “strategic pivot” to the Asia-Pacific we have entered a new era of confrontation among nuclear-armed powers and dangers of great power wars. Nuclear tensions in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and on the Korean peninsula remind us that the threat of nuclear war is ever present.

In a time of twin global economic and environmental crises and growing competition over natural resources, the dangers of conflicts among nuclear-armed states are increasing. There is good reason to believe that the potential escalation of conflict among nuclear-armed states leading to a nuclear war is much more likely than the potential use, by a state, of nuclear weapons which do not yet exist, or by sub-national terrorist groups that do not yet have them. Yet this very real threat is largely dismissed. We can’t afford to wait decades more for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Mayors for Peace 2020 vision is the right vision.

In his August 6, 2014 Peace Declaration, Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui, President of Mayors for Peace, declared:<sup>3</sup>

“Each one of us will help determine the future of the human family. Please put yourself in the place of the hibakusha. Imagine their experiences, including that day from the depths of hell, actually happening to you or someone in your family. To make sure the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki never happen a third time, let’s all communicate, think and act together with the hibakusha for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons and without war.

We will do our best. Mayors for Peace, now with over 6,200 member cities, will work... in conjunction with NGOs and the UN to disseminate the facts of the bombings and the message of Hiroshima. We will steadfastly promote the new movement stressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and seeking to outlaw them. We will help to strengthen international public demand for the start of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention with the goal of total elimination by 2020.”

It’s *our job* to hold our government accountable for its failure to disarm.

---

I would like to thank my colleagues Andrew Lichterman, Western States Legal Foundation and Joseph Gerson, American Friends Service Committee, whose work I drew upon in drafting this speech.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomic\\_bombings\\_of\\_Hiroshima\\_and\\_Nagasaki#The\\_bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomic_bombings_of_Hiroshima_and_Nagasaki#The_bombing)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/World\\_War\\_I\\_casualties.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/World_War_I_casualties.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/www/contents/0000000000000/1317948556078/activesqr/common/other/53e196c3002.pdf>

---

Jackie Cabasso, Executive Director  
Western States Legal Foundation  
655 – 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 201  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 839-5877 • [wslf@earthlink.net](mailto:wslf@earthlink.net)  
[www.wslfweb.org](http://www.wslfweb.org) • [www.facebook.com/WesternStatesLegalFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/WesternStatesLegalFoundation)  
Follow me on Twitter@JackieCabasso