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Robert Parry 1949-2018
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HISTORY, JAPAN, MILITARISM, NUCLEAR BOMBS, NUCLEAR WEAPONS, WAR CRIMES

HIROSHIMA 81: The Looming Risk of Nuclear Disaster

August 6, 2026

Despite the heroic struggle of the people of Hiroshima, 81 years ago today, and of Nagasaki, the horrors of 1945 have too often been forgotten or ignored, says Peter Kuznick.

An atomic cloud hangs over the Japanese city of Nagasaki after the U.S. dropped a second nuclear bomb on the country on Aug. 9th, 1945. (Hiromichi Matsuda / Wikimedia Commons / Public domain)

The following is the text of a keynote address the author delivered in Nagasaki on July 25 at an international peace conference sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun*, the Nagasaki city government and the Nagasaki peace movement.*

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By Peter Kuznick

On June 10, 2025, Tulsi Gabbard, who was then U.S. Director of National Intelligence, released a brief but poignant video that began with devastating scenes of atomic-bombed Hiroshima. She stressed, however, that the bombs used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were primitive compared to the weapons we have today. She then warned that we were "closer to the brink of nuclear annihilation than ever before."

Sadly, we are even closer to nuclear annihilation now than we were when she made that chilling statement a year ago — much closer. Two days after she issued that warning, Israel began bombing Iran. She must have known that was coming as she decried the "political elites and warmongers" who had put us in that position. Soon the U.S. would also join the attack on Iran in a futile attempt to destroy its nuclear sites.

But her truthful words infuriated Donald Trump who marginalized her throughout the rest of her tenure as DNI.

Then last October 20th, Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency, warned, "The world is now experiencing the most fragile moment for international security since World War II."

It has been 13 and 10 months since the two intelligence chiefs rang the alarm and we've only gotten closer to nuclear annihilation. It is fitting that we meet here today in Nagasaki — the last city to be directly attacked with nuclear weapons.

I feel honored to be in the presence of Tanaka-san and my other Hidankyo friends, whom I had the privilege of nominating for the Nobel Peace Prize, which they long deserved and finally won in 2024. I was further privileged to be part of their delegation to Oslo and to hear Tanaka-san deliver his profound and powerful Nobel acceptance speech.

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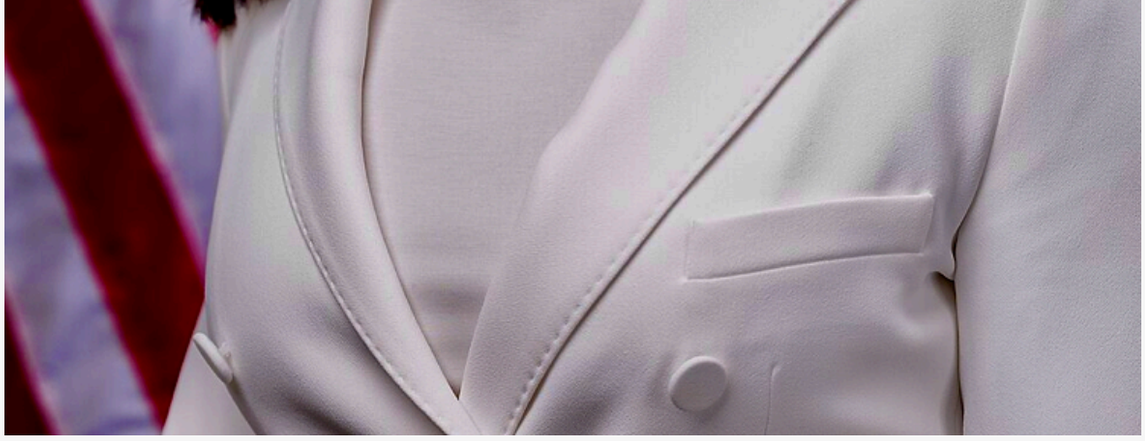

Official portrait of Gabbard as Director of National Intelligence, taken in March 2025. (Office of the Director of National Intelligence / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)

I said in my nominating letters, and have expressed many times since, that Nihon Hidankyo has been the conscience of the world. Its members have fought valiantly and tirelessly to make sure that they are the last victims of nuclear warfare and that Nagasaki will be the last city to suffer such horrific brutality.

But I wrote in *The Nation* Magazine upon hearing the news that the honor was a bittersweet one both because so many of those who had devoted their lives to eradicating the nuclear threat had already passed away and couldn't share in that special moment and because the world not only had failed to eliminate nuclear weapons but that nuclear weapons had become more powerful, more lethal, and more useable.

In fact, as I said earlier, we are closer to nuclear war than we have ever been.

And despite the heroic struggle of the Hibakusha and of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the horrors of 1945 have too often been forgotten or ignored.

As Kurosawa Akira, the great Japanese filmmaker, said in a voiceover in his beautiful movie about Nagasaki — *Rhapsody in August* — as sightseers walked around Nagasaki's peace park pushing strollers, holding balloons, eating ice cream and photographing monuments, "Nowadays, for most people… Nagasaki happened once upon a time. As the years pass, people are apt to forget…even the most dreadful things." But we must not people forget.

For 25 years, I brought American University students on a study-abroad class to Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. We traveled with Japanese students and professors from Ritsumeikan University and Meiji Gakuin University.

And together we studied the devastation wrought and the horrors committed by all sides in the last world war. The students got to spend time with leading Nagasaki Hibakusha, including Taniguchi-san, Shimohara-san and Yamada-san, and learn from leading Hiroshima Hibakusha, Koko Tanimoto Kondo, who traveled with us the entire time we were in Japan. Many students said it was a life-changing experience.

This summer, I'm accompanied by six American University students who have been studying the history firsthand.

I've written and spoken extensively about the atomic bombings in books and television documentaries coauthored with Oliver Stone, Kimura Akira, Tanaka Yuki and former prime minister Hatoyama Yukio and in dozens of articles. I've tried to convey the message not only about the evils of nuclear weapons today but about the fact that the atomic bombings in 1945

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were militarily unnecessary and morally reprehensible.

An infant killed by the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, Aug. 10, 1945. (Yamahata Yosuke / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)

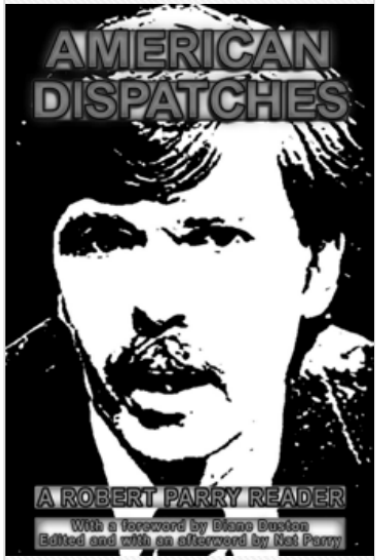
Americans are falsely taught that the bombings were necessary to avoid an invasion and even humane because they saved a half million American and millions of Japanese lives. That lie was reinforced by Barack Obama when he finally visited Hiroshima in May 2016 and said in front of the Cenotaph that "World War two reached its brutal end in Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

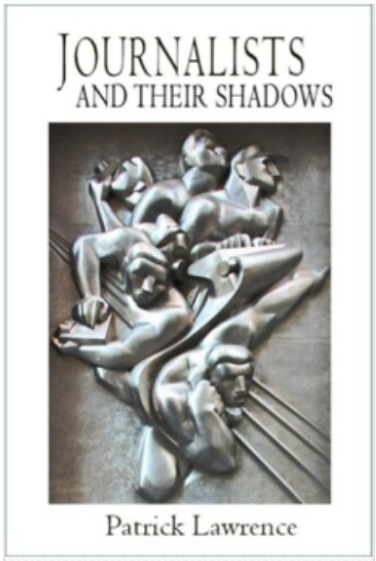
NHK, Japanese public television, had brought me to Japan to do commentary and I condemned Obama's falsehood. It was the Soviet invasion and not the atomic bombings that forced Japanese leaders to surrender. The truth is that the Japanese knew they were defeated and were trying to surrender and the main purpose of the bombs was to threaten the Soviets with even worse annihilation if they interfered with U.S. plans in Europe or the Pacific.

As General Leslie Groves who headed the Manhattan Project said, "there was never from about two weeks from the time I took charge of this project any illusion on my part but that Russia was our enemy and that the project was conducted on that basis." And that was exactly how Stalin and other Soviet leaders reacted to the bombings.

In Memoriam:Robert Parry, 1949-2018

AMERICAN DISPATCHES: COLLECTED JOURNALISM OF ROBERT PARRY





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President Harry S. Truman in 1948. (National Archives / Public Domain)

In fact, the U.S. had eight five-star admirals and generals in 1945, seven of whom said and wrote that the bombs weren't needed to end the war, including Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur. Admiral William Leahy, who was Truman's Chief of Staff and chaired the meetings of the Joint Chiefs, said that the atomic bombings put the U.S. on the moral level of "the barbarians of the dark ages."

Truman, who referred to the intercepted July 18 cable as the "telegram from the Jap emperor asking for peace," authorized using the bombs even though he knew Japan was defeated. As he wrote in his diary from Potsdam on July 25, 81 years ago today, upon receiving word of how powerful the July 16 bomb test in Alamogordo had been,

"We have discovered the most terrible bomb in history. This may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley Era after Noah and his fabulous ark."

Not, in Truman's mind, a bigger and more powerful bomb but the fire destruction — the end of life on our planet. And he used it despite knowing, as U.S. intelligence had been saying for months, that the imminent Soviet invasion would convince all Japanese that further resistance was futile.

He himself had written in his journal after having lunch with Joseph Stalin in Potsdam on July 16, that Stalin "will be in the Jap war by August 15. Fini Japs when that occurs." He wrote home to his wife Bess the following day, "The Russians are coming in. We'll end the war a year sooner now. Think of all the kids who won't be killed." But he chose to use the bomb.

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A father searching for a doctor for his baby who is too weak to cry after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Aug. 10, 1945. (Yamahata Yosuke / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)

One of the best things to come out of the Pacific War was the inclusion of Article 9 in the Japanese constitution. But now even that has been badly eroded.

It makes me sad to see Japan leading the militarization of the Pacific — doubling its military spending, selling weapons abroad, bolstering its self-defense forces, indicating that it will go to war with China if fighting breaks out over Taiwan, flirting with abandoning its three non-nuclear principles and even, as Defense Minister Koizumi just said, considering building or housing nuclear arms.

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It saddens me to see Japan refusing to join the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

And to see Prime Minister Takaichi come to the United States and debase herself in front of Donald Trump, telling Trump how handsome his son Baron is and that she knows where he got his good looks, that only Trump can bring world peace, despite the fact that he bombed seven countries his first year back in office, and offering him billions of dollars in bribes.

It was a stunningly humiliating and degrading performance.

Trump and Takaichi deliver remarks in the the State Dining Room of the White House, Thursday, March 19, 2026. (White House Photo by Joyce N. Boghosian / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)

We need leaders who will not grovel before Donald Trump — the same Donald Trump who bombed seven countries his first year back in office, kidnapped the president of Venezuela, deployed armed thugs to the streets of U.S. cities to terrorize the foreign born, committed extrajudicial killings of hundreds of alleged drug runners, imposed tariffs on the world, lies every time he opens his mouth, protects the most vile sex offenders, made over $2 billion in 2025 in the most flagrant and open corruption in U.S. history, surrounds himself with vicious warmongers like Stephen Miller and Pete Hegseth, calls for nuclear testing and increasing the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, supports genocide in Gaza, and is now back at war with Iran.

Trump may be the worst of the worst, but he is far from alone in today's world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues unabated. It may have been provoked by NATO expansion, but it was still unwise and illegal and has lowered the threshold for subsequent invasions.

It is worth remembering the final judgment of the Nuremberg military tribunal, which concluded: "War is essentially an evil thing....To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime."

And the consequences have been disastrous for both Russia and Ukraine. While Russia continues to make incremental gains on the battlefield at an enormous cost, Ukraine has been striking deep inside Russia.

Putin is under unrelenting pressure from the hawks in his inner circle to respond more aggressively. Some even want him to use tactical nuclear weapons. So far he has resisted, but

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who knows how long that will last as Ukraine strikes Russian energy infrastructure and targets Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Crimea. is under extreme deprivation.

This war must end even if Russia fails to achieve its goal of securing the entirety of the Donbas.

And European leaders, who are increasing military spending to 5 percent of GDP by cutting social services that people desperately need, keep trying to frighten their citizens by warning that if Russia wins in Ukraine, it will come after Europe next and gobble up one country after another.

Putin himself has pointed out the absurdity of thinking that a Russia that can barely defeat Ukraine will choose to go to war with NATO. But saying that over and over again is the way to get European citizens to accept massive increases in arms sales.

As France's highest military officer Gen. Fabien Mandon told French mayors, the problem with the French is that they don't want to lose their children in a war with Russia. But, he insists, they need to change their thinking.

As Donald Tusk, the Prime Minister of Poland argues, it's dollars today or blood tomorrow. And European leaders like Macron, Merz, and Starmer, before he was ousted, all of whom had approval ratings barely above single digits, keep saying, "if Russia wins, Europe is next," and they show their willingness to fight to the last Ukrainian.

Russian President Vladimir Putin addressing a military parade on Red Square on May 9, 2026, to mark the 81th anniversary of victory for the eastern front in World War II. (President of Russia / Public Domain)

In all my in-person and online talks in Russia and the almost 200 interviews I did last year with Russian media, I urge Putin to end the war even without victory.

I'm reminded of a comment by one of the Hibakusha toward the end of the 1989 Japanese Academy Award-winning film Black Rain when he hears that the U.S. is considering use of the atomic bomb again in Korea that "An unjust peace is better than a just war."

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But it's even more frightening than that. On August 20, 2024, two terrifying articles appeared. *New York Times* foreign policy expert David Sanger wrote that the United States was preparing to fight a simultaneous three-front nuclear war against Russia, China, and North Korea.

That same day, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists reported that nuclear strategists are divided between those who believe in deterrence — the idea that maintaining a sufficient arsenal of retaliatory nuclear weapons can forestall an attack since both the attacker and the victim would be destroyed — and those who believe that a nuclear war can be fought and won.

The latter argue that if the U.S. strikes first, it can render its adversaries defenseless. They believe that modern warfare, using advanced sonar and other technology and artificial intelligence, could allow the U.S. to pinpoint the location of all enemy submarines — the most stable and reliable part of the triad — and destroy them in a preemptive strike that would also take out ICBMs and shoot down bombers.

Titan II ICBM at the Titan Missile Museum in Tucson, Arizona, 2012. (Steve Jurvetson / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY 2.0)

We can assume that these views are advocated by people like Miller and Hegseth. We've seen this before when a similar case was made by Lieber and Press in 2006 in *Foreign Affairs* magazine and, according to *The Washington Post*, had heads exploding in the Kremlin because Russian leaders believed that this was official U.S. policy since it was published in the prestigious establishment journal of the Council on Foreign Relations.

And more recently, in 2023, Gen. Mike Minihan predicted the U.S. and China would be at war by 2025, Admiral Philip Davidson pushed the date back to 2027, and Admiral Thomas Buchanan declared that the U.S. could win a three-front nuclear war and still keep enough nuclear weapons in reserve to maintain its global hegemony.

I recently became a columnist for Al Jazeera and have coauthored a half dozen articles with Professor Ivana Hughes, who spoke here two years ago. Our first piece there was titled

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"Breaking the Nuclear Taboo."

We argued that Donald Trump has broken every norm, every rule, every tradition, international law, U.S. law, every taboo except one — the nuclear taboo. And with people like Netanyahu, Hegseth and Miller whispering in his ear that he'll go down in history as the only president brave and powerful enough to break that taboo, all things are possible.

More recently, we called for establishing a nuclear free zone across the Middle East, which may be the only way to ensure that Iran forgoes a nuclear weapon and that Israel can live in peace with its Muslim neighbors.

In January, the expert panel of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 85 seconds before midnight, the closest it has ever been to Armageddon. Many of us think it should be much closer to midnight than that.

But as long as we are still here, we have the power to change things. Many in the Global South are trying to lead the way to a different world — one based on peaceful development and diplomacy — not arms and warfare.

We hear such calls from the BRICS, Pope Leo, Antonio Guterres, Brazil's Lula, and sometimes Xi Jinping when he speaks of win-win rather than Trumpian zero-sum game diplomacy in which we win and everyone else loses.

As President Kennedy said so wisely on August 3, 1963, "According to the ancient Chinese proverb, 'A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.'... Let us, if we can, step back from the shadows of war and seek out the way of peace. And if that journey is a thousand miles, or even more, let history record that we... at this time, took the first step."

It is time for Japan to give up its remilitarization and lead in this effort. And where better to begin than here in Nagasaki so that we can realize the Hibakusha dream that this city be remembered as the last one to ever experience the horror of nuclear warfare.

Peter Kuznick is professor of history and director of the Nuclear Studies Institute, American University.

This address was delivered on July 25th in Nagasaki at an international peace symposium titled "The Road to the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons — The 70th Anniversary of Nihon Hidankyo, Returning to the Origin: Nagasaki,"held at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum Hall.

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HIROSHIMA 81: An Appeal to Pope Leo on Nuclear War →

8 comments for "HIROSHIMA 81: The Looming Risk of Nuclear Disaster"

wildthange
August 6, 2026 at 20:38

If anything we prolonged the war for fire bombing cities and a two prototype bomb test we probably were anticipating with an early onset WWII in anticipation of renovating the world instead we had to build the Cold War paranoia due to more losses to communism than when it started.

Reply

Francisco Simancas
August 6, 2026 at 13:06

Muy acertada toda la propuesta del ilustre ponente de la conferencia

Reply

Casey VanSise
August 6, 2026 at 11:58

"[Truman stated that 'we] have discovered the most terrible bomb in history. This may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley Era after Noah and his fabulous ark.' Not, in Truman's mind, a bigger and more powerful bomb but the fire destruction — the end of life on our planet. And he used it despite knowing, as U.S. intelligence had been saying for months, that the imminent Soviet invasion would convince all Japanese that further resistance was futile."

It is worth emphasizing that Truman made at least one decision that was more cavalier and risky for the ongoing survival of all life on earth than even the sinister Führer himself did when faced with the same choice, courting the potential (if ultimately disproven) possibility of complete oblivion via atmospheric ignition by proceeding with the Trinity test near Alamogordo, New Mexico:

"[Albert] Speer, the head of armaments production in Germany [...] was revealing to Hitler [in June 1942] that yes, an atomic bomb was possible. But probably not

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in the short timetable that Hitler wanted to end the war, within three years. And it would take longer than that and more uranium than turned out to be necessary. And he also explained what [Werner] Heisenberg, the [...] great German physicist, had explained to him about the possibility of what was called atmospheric ignition. And Speer reports Hitler was not at all thrilled by the idea that he would preside over the ending of life on earth. [... T]he British were scouring Germany for nuclear physicists and any evidence there had ever been a [nuclear weapons] program. By the end of, by actually the late summer of 1944 and early fall, [James] Chadwick, head of the British program, visited Los Alamos and told his former worker, colleague, Joseph Rotblat, a Polish immigrant, that the British had decided there was no German program. And that was true. There had not been since 1942. That's the fall of '44."

Source:
"Hitler Wouldn't Risk Doomsday, But The United States Did – Daniel Ellsberg on RAI (2/13)," The Real News Network (TRNN), Oct. 31, 2018

Reply

Casey VanSise
August 7, 2026 at 21:14

In the interest of fairness, I will amend my statements to note that President Truman appears to have made the decision to proceed with the Trinity test (and subsequently the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) with only a vague awareness that even just one atomic explosion could hypothetically "destroy the whole world," when the potential for "atmospheric ignition" from an atomic explosion had already been determined to be a very implausible scenario to the nth degree by Manhattan Project participants such as Hans Bethe and Emil Konopinski, but remained a source of concern for the likes of physicist Arthur Compton (John Horgan, "Oppenheimer, Bethe and the Doomsday Hypothesis," July 28, 2023) – that being said, Truman's apparent incuriosity about the particulars of such a significant matter as a non-specialist who nevertheless occupied a position of immense authority, then being so willing to gamble with humanity's future on the basis of such incomplete information, might actually be a worse indictment of Truman's ultimate decision:

"In his personal narrative 'Atomic Quest,' Nobel Prize-winning physicist Arthur Holly Compton, who directed atomic research at the University of Chicago's Metallurgical Laboratory during the Second World War, tells of receiving an urgent visit from J. Robert Oppenheimer while vacationing in Michigan during the summer of 1942. Oppenheimer and the brain trust he assembled had just calculated the possibility that an atomic explosion could ignite all the hydrogen in the oceans or the nitrogen in the atmosphere. If

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- Israel (1,862)
- Italy (63)
- Japan (57)
- Jordan (34)
- Kazakhstan (4)
- Kenya (21)
- Korea Peninsula (21)
- Kuwait (9)
- Laos (6)
- Latin America (151)
- Lebanon (183)
- Liberia (3)
- Libya (95)
- Mali (33)
- Mexico (59)
- Middle East (518)
- Moldova (2)
- Montenegro (2)
- Morocco (6)
- NATO (285)
- Netherlands (15)
- New Zealand (22)
- Nicaragua (20)
- Niger (19)
- Nigeria (21)
- North Korea (49)
- Northern Rhodesia (2)

such a possibility existed, Compton concluded, 'these bombs must never be made.' As Compton said, 'Better to accept the slavery of the Nazis than to run a chance of drawing the final curtain on mankind.' Certainly, any reasonable human being could be expected to respond similarly. Three years later, with Hitler dead and the Nazis defeated, President Harry Truman faced a comparably weighty decision. He writes in his 1955 memoirs that, on the first full day of his presidency, James F. Byrnes told him the U.S. was building an explosive 'great enough to destroy the whole world.' [...] Truman recalled [Secretary of War Henry] Stimson 'gravely' expressing his uncertainty about whether the U.S. should ever use the bomb, 'because he was afraid it was so powerful that it could end up destroying the whole world.' Truman admitted that, listening to Stimson and [Brigadier General Leslie] Groves and reading Groves's accompanying memo, he 'felt the same fear.'"

Source:
Peter J. Kuznick, "The Decision to Risk the Future: Harry Truman, the Atomic Bomb and the Apocalyptic Narrative," Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus (APJJF) 5, no. 7 (2007)

Reply

Stephen Zelnick
August 6, 2026 at 11:53

Professor Kuznick writes. "Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues unabated. It may have been provoked by NATO expansion, but it was still unwise and illegal and has lowered the threshold for subsequent invasions" and cites the Nuremburg judgment forbidding invasions ... this after 80 years of US subversions, coups, and aggressive wars and the collapse of the international institutions to support peace and security, largely accomplished at the hands of the West.

Professor Kuznick knows the history of the West's plans to dismantle Russia, against wise counsel of its best thinkers. He knows the EU coup against an elected government and Kyiv's civil war against Ukrainians of the east. He knows Putin's reluctance to enter that war and of the Minsk II Accords ... and later the Istanbul perfidy.

Does Professor Kuznick imagine his "middle position" allows him freedom to condemn the US bombings without seeming to be a Soviet agent? Old habits die hard. Recreating the image of an implacable Russian aggressor is a good way to justify the rearmament of Japan and standing firm against the imagined Russian/Chinese foe.

Reply

Enola Gay
August 6, 2026 at 10:57

The BAS are incurable optimists. They think we've got a whole 85 seconds left, therefore we can hit the snooze button even while we push closer to war with nuclear powers in our attempt at world domination.

- (3)
- Norway (20)
- Pakistan (59)
- Palestine (1,380)
- Panama (10)
- Philippines (16)
- Poland (36)
- Portugal (11)
- Qatar (37)
- Romania (9)
- Russia (1,287)
- Rwanda (24)
- Saudi Arabia (198)
- Scotland (32)
- Senegal (2)
- Slovenia (7)
- Somalia (20)
- South Africa (94)
- South America (5)
- South Korea (34)
- South Pacific (1)
- Soviet Union (133)
- Spain (51)
- Sudan (26)
- Sweden (56)
- Switzerland (6)
- Syria (236)
- Taiwan (48)
- Thailand (7)
- Timor Leste (4)
- Tunisia (12)
- Turkey (94)
- Ukraine (947)
  - Uruguay (1)
- United Arab Emirates (67)
- United Kingdon (587)
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- Yugoslavia (24)
- Zambia (5)

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America shot President Kennedy for daring to make that "Peace Speech." We also shot Dr. King for saying we should all live in peace with justice towards all, and Sen. Bobby Kennedy for winning the CA primary and threatening that some real change might occur. America has been firmly committed towards this path ever since it waged an assassination campaign against those who wanted to change the path we were on.

The 'Liberals' in America now reject anything that JFK or Dr. King stood for, and instead follow Richard Nixon and Malcolm X down the aggressive path towards world war for world domination. The McCarthyist Nixon became the role model for the Russiagate Liberals, and Malcolm X's militancy became the role model for the Identity Politics that fools the ordinary people with functioning souls into voting for getting to Doomsday even faster.

Reply

Enola Gay

August 6, 2026 at 10:41

Happy Mass Murder Day to everyone! The day when we celebrate when America was Great and a Democrat President ordered the mass murder of tens of thousands of civilians in a war crime.

" Don't murder me, I beg of you
Don't murder me, please, don't murder me
Don't murder me

In the backwash of Fennario
The black and bloody mire
The dire wolf collects his due
While the boys sing 'round the fire

Don't murder me, I beg of you
Don't murder me, please, don't murder me"

-'Dire Wolf' by the Grateful Dead

"

Reply

James Keye

August 6, 2026 at 09:22

These are laudable goals, but until world leadership (of necessity it seems of a new kind) recognizes and acts with humane responsibility on the consequences of the vast material requirements of consumer economics and economic growth, the incomprehensible and out of control technological behemoth and the consequential damages to the biophysical systems that support all of life on this planet, then there will be no 'journey of a thousand miles' to take the first step toward.

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That first step in our longer journey, while also needing to be in the direction of reducing the danger of nuclear conflagration, must and equally be in the direction of reducing the forces driving us toward intractable conflicts. Not enough food, not enough water, air that sickens, empowering xenophobia for personal and political gain and more will overwhelm the cautionary actions of treaties and good intentions.

Reply

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