



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

JAPAN

Digest

August 2023

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A-bomb memorial events in Hiroshima, Nagasaki

The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki observed the 78th anniversary of the atomic bombing by the United States of America in the closing days of the Second World War, where the mayors of both cities criticized both the global nuclear arms race as well as Japan's stance on the issue of nuclear arms. The mayor of Hiroshima, Kazumi Matsui, [used](#) the platform provided by the official memorial event on 6 August to express his thoughts on nuclear arms. While welcoming the engagement of the G-7 leaders with the reality of nuclear weapons after their much-publicized visit to the Hiroshima Peace Park, Mayor Matsui attacked the concept of nuclear deterrence as a “folly”, given the “reality that nuclear threats [are] being voiced by certain policymakers”. He called on the national government to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (which came into effect in 2021), and to participate in the second meeting of the treaty parties in November, at least as an observer if not as a member. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also addressed the event, where he spoke of “the widening division within the international community” as the key factor behind the difficulty of realising nuclear disarmament. He also praised the Hiroshima Vision Document which emerged from the G-7 Leaders' Summit in May as a new motivating factor to restart discussion on nuclear arms control.

The memorial event in Nagasaki, [held](#) indoors instead of the traditional site of the Hypocentre Park where the bomb was exploded on 9 August 1945, saw Mayor Shiro Suzuki delivering a similar set of

remarks as his Hiroshima counterpart. The mayor also characterised nuclear deterrence as “folly” and urged nuclear weapons states and countries under their extended nuclear deterrence umbrellas to “show courage and make the decision to break free from dependence on nuclear deterrence”. While criticising Russia by name, Mayor Suzuki also indicated that it was not the only state over-reliant on nuclear deterrence, a veiled reference to the United States. Prime Minister Kishida, who delivered recorded remarks in lieu of personal attendance, chose to emphasize non-proliferation instead, while promising to work towards eventual denuclearisation across the world. He also promised to continue observing the three Non-Nuclear Principles of Japan, which prevent possession, production or maintenance of nuclear weapons.

US-Japan-South Korea trilateral meeting

The leaders of Japan, the United States and South Korea [held](#) a trilateral summit between 17 and 19 August where they agreed to institutionalise their cooperation and committed to consult each other in case of “provocations” from North Korea or China. The hour-long meeting, held at the presidential retreat at Camp David, Virginia, was followed by a working lunch and a press conference, where all three leaders addressed the media. The three parties described the meeting as a “new chapter” in their trilateral ties, and agreed on several new initiatives to take cooperation forward, such as the regularisation of the trilateral leaders' meet on an annual basis, along with joint multi-domain exercises to be held annually as well. The three parties also agreed on working out an early warning

system for supply chain disruptions in the supply of key industrial materials, as well as cooperating closely on emerging and critical technology such as artificial intelligence. The meeting also served as an occasion for President Joe Biden to reassure his counterparts that US extended nuclear deterrence was still “ironclad” and would remain so for the foreseeable future.

The outcome documents of the meeting, the “Camp David Principles”, the “Japan-US-ROK Joint Leaders’ Statement” and the “Commitment to Consult”, also referred to China’s maritime aggression clearly for the first time, despite some hesitation from officials in Seoul and inviting a swift reaction from Beijing. However, another key item on the agenda, namely the setting up of a hotline between the three countries, was not operationalised, as both Tokyo and Seoul were not keen on it. The Asian allies were also reportedly not happy with the strategic communication emerging out of Washington, which they felt was unnecessarily aggressive toward China, indicating a desire to balance economic ties against security cooperation with the US.

Japan, China discord over Fukushima wastewater

Japan on 24 August [commenced](#) the release of an initial instalment of treated water used to cool down the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor into the Pacific Ocean, marking the end of a long-drawn process of negotiation and persuasion, but also triggering a swift deterioration in Japan’s relations with China. The process commenced with the green light given by the International Atomic Energy Agency in July, following which the government decided to start the disposal by August. As

a part of its outreach efforts, it invited a panel of experts from South Korea to visit the plant and ascertain the veracity of Japan’s claims of having treated the wastewater to remove most of the radioactive components. As a result, the South Korean government officially [gave](#) its approval to the wastewater disposal plan, despite significant opposition from South Korean citizens. A significant share of Japanese citizens, especially fishermen in the Tohoku region, are also opposed to the release.

However, China remains resolute in its staunch opposition to the plan, and preemptively declared a ban on Japanese fisheries shipped to Hong Kong and Macao. Since the release, China’s opposition to Japan has been expressed both through official and unofficial channels, with Foreign Ministry spokespersons publicly criticizing Japan’s action at press conferences, and stoking protests and acts of vandalism against the Japanese embassy and Japanese schools in China. Tokyo has also [reported](#) over 6000 cases of prank calls being made from China to various municipalities around the country, where most callers have been recorded using abusive and pejorative words to address the person on the Japanese side. Tokyo has in turn escalated its rhetoric criticising Beijing’s actions, and has [hinted](#) that it is considering taking China to the World Trade Organisation for what it calls Beijing’s “politically-motivated” attacks on trade. Concerns over the life and safety of Japanese citizens and businesses in China are mounting, however, as September contains several significant dates commemorating Japanese acts of aggression during the Second World War.