

Every generation inherits not only the achievements of those before it but also their unfinished dangers. Among these, none weigh more heavily on the moral conscience of humanity than the development and unrelenting pursuit of advanced nuclear weapons. Their creation carries consequences that transcend time and choice. Nearly eight decades after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the survivors' legacy and the destruction they witnessed continue to challenge the very foundations of intergenerational justice. Holding on to nuclear stockpiles exposes future generations to risks they did not consent to and cannot easily escape. Consequently, the moral question at the heart of this dilemma is: What kind of world do we intend to leave behind – one sustained by deterrence and fear, or one guided by cooperation and restraint?

This question becomes even more urgent as we enter what scholars (e.g. Andrew Futter, Ludovica Castelli, Admiral Pierre Vandier, and Lawrence Freedman) refer to as the 'Third Nuclear Age'. While the First Nuclear Age (≈1945–1991) was defined by the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the Second Nuclear Age (≈1991–2020s) by the start of nuclear dynamics in a multipolar and regionalised system, the Third Nuclear Age is defined by an ever more complex, competitive, and multipolar international security environment, marked by the rapid advancement of both nuclear and conventional technologies and the erosion of traditional arms control agreements. The implications of these transformations are evident in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. During the war, an unprecedented level of nuclear signalling and shifts in Moscow's nuclear rhetoric have reinstated deterrence as a central instrument of statecraft. NATO's provision of conventional weapons to Ukraine and North Korea's strategic interventions in this war amplified the stakes of escalation across the broader strategic landscape.

Beyond this war in Europe, China's expanding nuclear arsenal, North Korea's ongoing provocations, Iran's contested nuclear ambitions, and the India-Pakistan nuclear stand-off have created new deterrence dynamics across multiple regions. But deterrence is not a safe state of affairs. The risk of miscalculation is higher than ever, making unintended escalation spirals and accidents an immediate concern. A particularly vivid indicator of this renewed tension is President Donald Trump's October 2025 instructions to the U.S. Department of War to resume testing of nuclear weapons on an "equal basis" with Russia and China. U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright clarified one day later that the planned tests would not involve nuclear explosions but rather "system tests" or "non-critical explosions" of nuclear-weapon subsystems. Nonetheless, President Vladimir Putin called for an "appropriate and proportionate response," and instructed his ministries to submit proposals for a possible "commencement to prepare nuclear weapon testing." This episode not only exemplifies the potential erosion of the nuclear test ban norm but also represents an example of an action-reaction cycle.

As the 'Third Nuclear Age' is even more dangerous than its two predecessors, urgent moral questions arise. Can it be justified for nine leaders of nuclear-armed states to make choices that place future generations at risk, only to assert strategic advantages and,

in the case of non-democracies, their political survival? The question is not only whether these leaders will show the same level of restraint as previous leaders of nuclear-armed states, but also whether nine people can generally be as calculable as two people were, in the 'First Nuclear Age'.

Addressing this dilemma requires more than strategy alone – it demands dialogue, transparency and cooperative approaches that place shared responsibility and humanity's long-term survival above unilateral gains. Practical steps towards achieving this vision include renewing and expanding arms control agreements, establishing credible no-first-use and no-threat-commitments, strengthening communication channels among nuclear-armed states, and subjecting nuclear doctrines to rigorous scrutiny. Beyond strategic considerations, societal engagement is also a key, as illustrated by the humanitarian initiative that led to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Education and public discourse can cultivate a moral awareness of the long-term consequences of nuclear decision-making.

This issue examines two forms of societal engagement through distinct yet related lenses. The first article by Franco Escobar examines the role of education in shaping youth attitudes toward nuclear weapons. Drawing on twenty-four interviews with young Japanese anti-nuclear activists, Escobar examines why these young people joined antinuclear movements. Many of the interviewees argue that while Japan's peace education sustains unique levels of youth engagement with atomic bomb materials and historical events, it is perceived as insufficient to motivate political action or participation in movements. This underscores the challenge of translating knowledge and moral awareness into concrete actions. The second article by Susi Snyder shifts the focus to the institutional level, investigating the role of the corporate sector in the production and maintenance of nuclear arsenals, with a particular emphasis on how these companies secure political influence through lobbying and financial support of think tanks. Snyder concludes that the undue influence of corporations in the nuclear weapons debate provides a regular incentive for the continued existence of nuclear weapons and hinders disarmament efforts.

The issue concludes with two book reviews that engage with these broader questions of moral and strategic responsibility in the nuclear realm. Firstly, Jason Adolph reviews the anthology *Non-Nuclear Peace: Beyond the Nuclear Ban Treaty* (2020), edited by Tom Sauer, Jorg Kustermans and Barbara Segraert, which engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue about imagining a world free from nuclear weapons – the measures taken and the institutions created to achieve it. Turning to a different perspective, Ayesha Zafar reviews the monograph *Deterrence in the Third Nuclear Age* (2025) by Admiral Pierre Vandier, who contends that nuclear deterrence must evolve to remain credible in the 'Third Nuclear Age'. Together, these reviews underscore the persistent tension between the pursuit of disarmament and the maintenance of credible deterrence, which continues to shape contemporary nuclear debates.

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