

U.S., Japanese leaders visit Hiroshima as Russia nuclear tensions rise

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FULL TEXT

HIROSHIMA, Japan —As Russia threatens the possibility of a "nuclear dystopia," Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel paid tribute Saturday to victims of the atomic bombing here and warned of the human devastation caused by nuclear weapons.

In a somber moment in the rain, the men each laid a wreath at the Hiroshima victims memorial. They visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, near ground zero, and its exhibitions documenting the human toll of the atomic bombing. In 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, vaporizing the cities and instantaneously killing tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, in each.

Emanuel and Kishida's visit was personal and symbolic, particularly in the face of rising regional tensions over nuclear threats from Russia and North Korea.

Emanuel was chief of staff to President Barack Obama, who in 2016 became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Hiroshima. Before his visit to the memorial, he met with bombing survivor Shigeaki Mori, who shared an emotional moment with Obama during the visit. Emanuel, who arrived in Japan in January, said that it was important to him to visit Hiroshima early in his tenure and that he also plans to visit Nagasaki.

Kishida, then foreign minister and an elected representative from the city, was instrumental in arranging the 2016 visit. Obama had folded and donated to the museum two origami paper cranes, which symbolize peace, and Emanuel and Kishida took a moment to visit the display together.

Saturday was the Hiroshima native's first trip back to his hometown since his campaign last autumn to become the country's prime minister, and he renewed his call for a world free of nuclear weapons.

The crisis in Ukraine "reminds us of the rocky path toward a world without nuclear weapons," Kishida said. "As the only country that has suffered nuclear attacks in war, we renew our strong resolve that a calamity of nuclear weapons must never happen again."

An estimated 140,000 people died during the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, and its aftermath. Three days later, the United States dropped a second bomb, on Nagasaki, killing a total of 80,000. A week later, Japan's emperor announced his nation's surrender.

Referring to the decades-long U.S.-Japanese postwar alliance, Emanuel said, "The alliance and the friendship between the people of the United States and the people of Japan reveal what possibilities exist when two people hear each other, listen and then decide to work together."

"This unlawful war unfolds daily with increasingly unlawful actions," Emanuel said. "Nowhere are our shared commitments for peace more paramount than here in Hiroshima, where we are reminded of the horrors of war."

On Saturday, Kishida had just returned from the meeting of the Group of Seven in Brussels to discuss the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Kishida rebuked Russia's nuclear saber-rattling. He said he hoped to send a message to the world through his trip with Emanuel that Japan and the United States will work together toward a world without nuclear weapons.

"There is a real concern that Russia could use nuclear weapons," Kishida said. "The use of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, is never acceptable."

The trip had been weeks in the making and was rescheduled because of the Russian invasion. On Saturday, the trip to

Hiroshima appeared even more timely, coming on the heels of North Korea's test of its most powerful missile to date, a vehicle designed to carry multiple nuclear warheads that can reach any part of the continental United States. The missile's landing spot in the waters between Japan and the Korean Peninsula was the closest yet to Japan. In recent weeks, Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised fears that he could resort to chemical or even nuclear weapons, especially in the face of Ukrainian resistance and increasing financial sanctions. Russia has already taken over the site of the closed Chernobyl nuclear power plant and launched attacks in the area of a functioning nuclear plant.

Since the invasion, Tokyo has taken an assertive stance toward Moscow, ramping up sanctions on Russia alongside the G-7 countries and pledging at least \$100 million in emergency humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Japan also has taken the unusual steps of accepting Ukrainian refugees and of shipping helmets and other nonlethal military gear to Ukraine.

DETAILS

Subject:	Nuclear weapons; Museums; Prime ministers; Nuclear power plants
Location:	North Korea; Russia; United States--US; Ukraine; Japan
Publication title:	The Washington Post (Online); Washington, D.C.
Publication year:	2022
Publication date:	Mar 26, 2022
Section:	World
Publisher:	WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post
Place of publication:	Washington, D.C.
Country of publication:	United States, Washington, D.C.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	26419599
Source type:	Blog, Podcast, or Website
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2643315828
Document URL:	http://ezproxy.nypl.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/u-s-japanese-leaders-visit-hiroshima-as-russia/docview/2643315828/se-2?accountid=147304
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Last updated: 2022-03-27

Database: Global Newsstream Collection
