

Nuclear war: a brief overview, 1945-2025

A large portion of today's world population has spent their entire lives under the threat of nuclear war- or, rather, under the threat of nuclear annihilation.

80 years ago, on July 16, 1945, scientists working on the Manhattan Project at the behest of the U.S. government inaugurated the atomic age with the first detonation of a "plutonium implosion device" in the desert of New Mexico. It released 18.6 kilotons of power, instantly vaporized the 100-foot tower upon which it had been mounted, turned asphalt and sand in the surrounding area to green glass, and ignited an enormous blast that sent searing heat across the desert, knocking observers to the ground.

Less than a month later, on August 6th and August 9th, the United States used its new weapons to obliterate the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More than 300,000 people were killed, including those who died instantly and those who perished in the aftermath from radiation sickness, cancer, and other lingering effects of the explosions.

The use of these weapons on a civilian population was a crime against humanity. Horrified by what they learned about the outcome and rightfully fearful of the implications for the future of warfare, some government officials and many of the scientists who had worked to research and develop the weapons called for international control over this new technology, with its unprecedented capability to unleash widespread death and destruction. But the only government that then possessed the technology (ours)- to be joined soon thereafter by the Soviet Union- refused.

The world came to the brink of all-out nuclear war several times in the 20th century alone, most dramatically in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. With the fall of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991 and thus the end of the "Cold War," a seamless opportunity for nuclear abolition presented itself and was purposefully avoided.

Today, nine countries possess nuclear weapons, **with nearly 90% of them owned by the United States and Russia.** And now, with global violence and political instability escalating daily, both nations are investing billions

in enhancement, modernization and expansion of their arsenals, leading non-nuclear states to increasingly consider development of these weapons to be a requirement for their own survival.

Together, the United States, Russia, China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom **possess over 12,300 nuclear weapons**, most of which are exponentially more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Notes the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), "A single nuclear warhead could kill hundreds of thousands of people, with lasting and devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences. Detonating just 1 nuclear weapon alone over New York would cause an estimated 583,160 fatalities." (See https://www.icanw.org/nuclear_arsenals)

Yale Climate Connections reports that even a "limited" nuclear war "would be capable of causing a catastrophic global nuclear winter, and recent work predicts that over 2 billion people could be killed — with famines and diseases in the aftermath eventually killing hundreds of millions more." (<https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2025/05/nuclear-winter-from-a-pakistan-india-war-could-kill-2-billion/>)

The United States now has a president who, in addition to all his other abuses of power in his bid to authoritarian dictatorship, withdrew the United States from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Iran nuclear deal, recently supported Israel's attack on Iran, and announced on August 1st that he has "ordered two Nuclear Submarines to be positioned in the appropriate regions, just in case," after some bellicose remarks by the former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

This same president has the sole authority to launch a nuclear strike.

***Remember Hiroshima- August 6, 1945.
Remember Nagasaki- August 9, 1945.***

***Resist This Endless War, 2025.
Resist fascism (before it's too late.)***
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New Haven Sunday Vigil, August 3 and August 10, 2025