

Nuclear Weapons and Our Future
-The Ukraine Crisis Raises Questions."
By Kokoro Nishiyama

“Have you seen the news of Ukraine?”

A friend of mine from the same department knocked on my dormitory room shouting, "War has finally started," he cried with desperate face.

In February 2022, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, I was in California, U.S.A., for graduate school. My department was deeply involved in security issues, and many of the students in my department are usually aware of international issues. On the night of the day the Ukraine crisis was reported to have started, the crisis in Ukraine was the topic of conversation in the communal kitchen of the dormitory. The word "Ukraine" (“Ukuraina” in Japanese) could be heard everywhere. I learned then, to my embarrassment, that the word "Ukraine" is the English pronunciation of the Japanese word "Ukuraina".

Since then, the graduate school lecture schedule was changed and the Ukrainian crisis was dealt with more frequently. The days were filled with exchanges of opinions linking various academic fields, such as international law and media theory, to the war. Meanwhile, I realized that the people affected by this war are right next to us in our daily lives. A Russian student in the same department told us, "My bank account has been frozen and I cannot use my credit card." “I wonder when I will be able to go back to my home country again," "I am afraid of what people will think of me”, “I don't know what to do with my life," and he said, choking on the sofa in his dormitory every night.

At that time, I felt "war" as close to me as I had ever felt in my life.

I did not see the war with my own eyes and experienced the power of bombs. However, I did know that "war" does not end on the field of battle, and that even in places far from the battlefield, there are people who are affected and wounded by it. I saw firsthand that "war" does not end on the battlefield. A few months after the war started, the Ukraine crisis accelerated the depreciation of the yen, and my life in the U.S. began to suffer economic woes as well.

Three months after the Ukraine crisis, in one of my last graduate school lectures before the summer break, a professor asked the question, "Should nuclear weapons exist? " The class

was small, with six American students, one Russian student, and myself, a Japanese student, totaling eight students. All of us raised our hands in favor of "nuclear weapons should be eliminated." To be honest, I was surprised at this result. I had assumed that students who were born and educated in a nuclear-weapon state would think that nuclear weapons are necessary to protect the nation. However, they understood the two sides of the security benefits and risks of nuclear weapons and concluded "NO." Their answer was based on the reconfirmation about the risk of nuclear weapons possession because of the Ukrainian crisis. Some students answered "NO" to the question, considering the impact on international order by the use of nuclear weapons, which the Russians are planning to use, and the human suffering caused by the leakage of radioactive materials from nuclear reactors if nuclear power generation is attacked. One student said "NO" because of the real damage that nuclear weapons would cause. He was the one who asked me to teach him about nuclear issues that I had studied in Japan before, and as he was listening to a presentation on the Nagasaki atomic bombing. He was also the one who had knocked on my dormitory door on the day the Ukraine crisis began.

The Ukrainian crisis called to me, "War is no stranger to us. " I feel as if the crisis is asking us if nuclear weapons, which may be used as long as they exist, are really necessary. Some people believe that nuclear weapons have a certain deterrent effect on the nuclear weapon states and their allies, preventing the outbreak of World War III. As I continue my study of nuclear issues, I also feel that the complete abolition of nuclear weapons may be difficult to achieve.

But once again, let us ask ourselves only the pure question posed by the Ukraine crisis: What is our future? Do we need nuclear weapons in our future? Do we want to spend the rest of our lives with nuclear weapons?

My answer was already given when I visited Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum for the first time on a school excursion in the sixth grade of elementary school. Everything I saw at the museum was shocking. A blackened lunch box, a human bone stuck to a melted bottle, and an exhibit that reproduced the collapsed Urakami Tenshudo. I was speechless. I was even more astonished when I heard the explanation, "The initial target of the bombing was Kokura. Fukuoka." I felt ashamed that I had lived for 12 years without knowing about Nagasaki, not knowing that the bombing was scheduled to take place in Fukuoka, where I was born and grew up.

Until then, war had been a distant memory. I had always thought of the war as something I read about in Japanese textbooks, something completely separate from my own world and fictional. I had a sense that it was a world of fiction. However, when I visited the museum, I saw the war as real for the first time. In the second year of junior high school, I moved to Nagasaki, where I learned about the earnest wishes of A-bomb survivors who appealed for a "world without nuclear weapons, " and saw young students who raised their voices saying "No More Nagasaki. " Then, I felt as if war and nuclear weapons were "my business."

More than 12,000 of these weapons, which I think are now my business, with their astonishing destructive power, are still in existence. And our lives, which are built on this unstable nuclear foundation, are the reality of today.

"I want to change that reality and create a future in which humans do not coexist with the threat of nuclear weapons. " This is the answer I have come to. Even now, while studying in a place far away from the A-bombed city, I continue to make steps toward this dream. This aspiration is a dream that I will continue to carry forward. This aspiration began in a place of prayer and peace, where the reality of the atomic bombings has been passed down from generation to generation.

My "future," which began in Nagasaki, does not need nuclear weapons.