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August 9, 1945: Why Nagasaki?

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62 years ago, on 9 August 1945, some minutes before 11 p.m. local time, four young US airmen decided to drop an atom bomb through the clouds onto the Japanese city of Nagasaki, a bomb that in a few seconds caused tens of thousands of deaths, and many more subsequently. Nagasaki was not their main target and ought not to have been bombed by radar targeting, according to the orders they had been given. Being without radio contact, dependent on themselves, they took this decision in order to lighten their B29 bomber by the weight of the bomb - over 4 tonnes - because they were short of fuel on account of damage and weather problems, and so as to get back to the nearest US base. This series of imponderable details sealed the tragic fate of the inhabitants of Nagasaki.

For shortening the war against Japan, the bombing of Nagasaki was pointless, even more so than the bombing of Hiroshima three days earlier. The US government knew with certainty, through messages from the Japanese government that it had intercepted and decrypted, that since 13 July 1945 an exhausted Japan had been wanting to surrender - on only two conditions, which were subsequently granted: an honourable surrender, with the emperor remaining in place.

Today 27,000 nuclear weapons, on average ten times more powerful than those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are threatening with a similar fate most of the world's great cities and particularly those of the northern hemisphere. It is urgent that the governments of states possessing nuclear arms, including France, should meet and decide a timeline for eliminating their nuclear arsenals, in accordance with the undertaking they made under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. To organise the total abolition of all nuclear weapons is the only means - a means recognised as such by the UN and all sensible leaders - to stop their proliferation and their real use, sooner or later, on new target cities.

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