

Are we doomed to a perpetual nuclear arms race?

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The world reached a grim milestone this month with the 80th anniversaries, on August 6 and 9, of the obliteration of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by U.S. nuclear weapons, thus ushering in the nuclear age. In [a recent article posted on the TomDispatch website](#), Eric Ross, organizer, educator, and PhD candidate in the history department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, raises some troubling questions: why was there so little dissent from the scientists at Los Alamos, and what does that mean for us today?

However, there was some dissent. In June 1945, a group of scientists at the University of Chicago's Metallurgical Laboratory, one of several teams working on various aspects of the bomb's development, spoke out. Led by physicist James Franck, they sent a [report to Secretary of War Henry Stimson](#) "warning of the profound political and ethical consequences of employing such a bomb without exhausting all other alternatives." By this time, it was clear that Germany, already defeated, had not developed a nuclear weapon. The prospect of a potential German atomic bomb had been the impetus for the Manhattan Project.

These scientists understood "that the atomic bomb wasn't just a more powerful weapon but a fundamental transformation in the nature of warfare, an instrument of annihilation." They recognized that the use of such a destructive weapon without sufficient military justification would undermine U.S. credibility in future arms control efforts. They also "observed that the development of the bomb under conditions of extreme wartime secrecy had created an abjectly anti-democratic situation, one in which the public was denied any opportunity to deliberate on such an irrevocable and consequential decision."

Nevertheless, Ross ends on an encouraging note: he says, "This history should also remind us that the development and use of nuclear weapons was not inevitable. There were those who spoke out and a different path might well have been possible. While we cannot know exactly how events would have unfolded had dissent been amplified rather than suppressed, we can raise our own voices now to demand a safer, saner future."