Proposal for the IF fund

Global Hiroshima:
The History, Politics, and Legacy of Nuclear Weapons

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This proposal is a request for partial support of an international conference in Summer 2017 in the city of Hiroshima, Japan, that we believe represents not only a furtherance of Princeton University’s goals in internationalizing the university but also lays the groundwork for a potentially transformative reinvigoration of discussion around one of the central global events of the twentieth century. Before describing the rationale around the second, we address the importance of the first.

“Global Hiroshima” builds on existing ventures in internationalizing undertaken by Princeton, and it offers the seeds for new approaches. We understand the project to be furthering the University’s internationalization goals on four levels: the University as a whole; the faculty; graduate students; and undergraduate education. First, the project grows directly out of Princeton’s pre-existing partnership with the University of Tokyo, not only raising the visibility of that relationship in Japan as a whole — by moving the site to Hiroshima and involving the Governor of that Prefecture — but also globally, as it can serve as a model for other such collaborative ventures both with current or future strategic partners. Further, the scholarly interrogation of the legacies of Hiroshima from interdisciplinary and global angles will serve as a very public affirmation of the mission and core ideals of Princeton University on an important stage in East Asia. At the level of the faculty, the very broad array of scholars participating in the project provides contacts not only for research, but for future international cooperative ventures with a number of individuals who represent institutions (such as the Centre for Policy Research in India and the Fundação Getulio Vargas in Brazil) that extend the faculty’s international contacts in productive ways. (Arrangements for the conference have already led to some discussions in these directions.) We also will bring two graduate students — one from Politics and one from History — both to help in taking notes for framing the ensuing volume, and so that the interdisciplinary and global perspective will continue on Princeton’s campus. And last, but far from least, we intend to use both the occasion of the workshop and the subsequent volume to reinvigorate teaching of nuclear history and politics on Princeton’s campus, especially among undergraduates who are becoming newly aware of the legacy of Hiroshima. We currently have a paucity of regularly-offered courses that directly engage undergraduates in these issues (on the order of five), and our goal is to both increase that number and the visibility of the questions and the approaches back on campus.

The intellectual and scholarly backdrop draws directly from this organizational imperative. Since 1945, when the United States Army Air Forces dropped two nuclear bombs on the cities of Hiroshima (6 August) and Nagasaki (9 August), thereby revealing to the world the feasibility of atomic weaponry and its tremendous destructive potential,
the fact of these weapons has been a constant preoccupation around the globe. Those two bombs, nicknamed the Little Boy and the Fat Man, were also the only two such weapons to be used in combat in the almost 75 years since the end of World War II, despite the slow but inexorable spread of the knowledge of how to produce such devices to an expanding circle of nations. This much is well known, and the implications of nuclear weapons have been a topic of much academic and public conversation in the years since. That conversation has been, however, rather asymmetric and partial, and we are proposing a way to repair the discussion so as to bring a new and more comprehensive engagement with the legacy of the destruction of Hiroshima.

There are two main deficiencies in the current state of research. There have been vigorous and illuminating discussions of the history and legacy of nuclear weapons in both the discipline of history and that of political science; what there has not been is a vital exchange of ideas between these two disciplines. Both fields are the poorer for the partiality of their engagement, and there are tools from political science (e.g., game theory, models of international relations) and findings from historical research that could illuminate the complementary field. The second deficiency is no less serious: exploration of nuclear history and politics has been confined within nation-state or at best regional contexts. Yet one of the obvious implications of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been that these weapons have posed and continue to pose challenges for the entire world. There was an opportunity at the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II in 1995 to have a deeper, more wide-ranging investigation of the legacies of Hiroshima, but that chance foundered in the wake of a domestic American political controversy concerning an exhibit of the Enola Gay, the B-29 that delivered the Little Boy, at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC.

The 75th anniversary, coming up in 2020, provides a renewed chance to reorient the discourse around the global history and political implications of nuclear weapons in an interdisciplinary and interregional framework. Both proposers have been working for several years in assembling a team of top-rank scholars from around the world, including extensive representation of Japanese political scientists and historians, to produce a landmark volume that would redeem the missed chances of 1995. To that end, we organized an international conference with 24 scholars at Princeton University in October 2015 for the 70th anniversary, to begin the discussion, and this proposal seeks support for the sequel, which will workshop developed research articles for the volume, about which we are already in conversation with Princeton University Press for publication. The success of the 2015 conference, funded under the auspices of the Princeton-Tokyo partnership and the Center for International Security Studies in Princeton, leads us to anticipate a truly significant breakthrough in global studies.

We have already begun planning for an international conference on 3-4 August 2017 in Hiroshima, Japan, which has been generously supported by the Governor of Hiroshima Prefecture. In recent years, the Governor of Hiroshima, Mr. Hidehiko Yuzaki, has hosted an annual “Hiroshima Round Table,” each August, bringing Japanese and international scholars and policy experts together to discuss nuclear arms control and disarmament. Professor Ikenberry has been a member of the advisory group that plans and participates
in these meetings. Governor Yuzaki’s vision is to make Hiroshima a site for research, education, and activism in this area. With this in mind, the Governor and the Round Table are a natural partner for our project, and the Prefecture government has kindly agreed to cover the hotel expenses of our project participants. Our meeting will be held immediately after the conclusion of the Hiroshima Round Table, creating opportunities for the Roundtable participants to listen in on and participate on our workshop discussions.