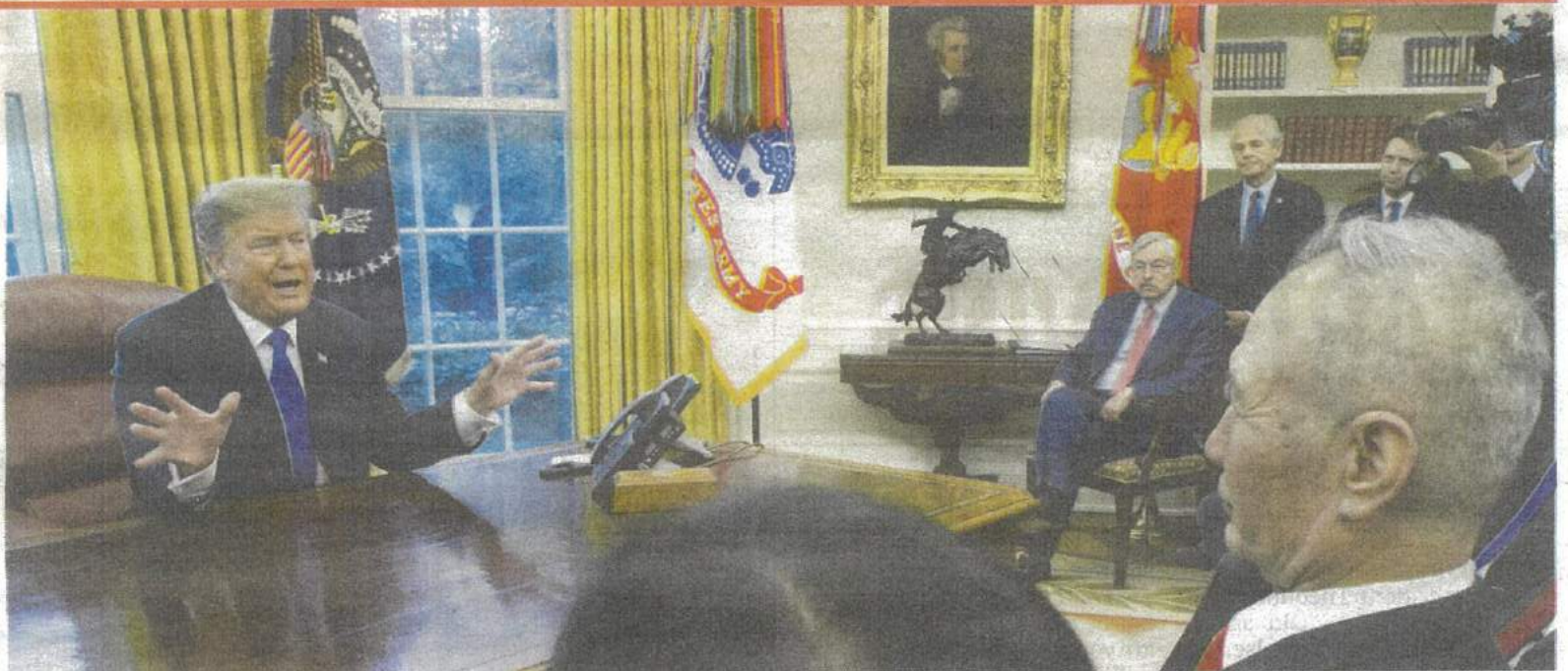




K.K. TAN



US President Donald Trump (left) during talks with China's Vice-Premier Liu He (right) at the White House in Washington, DC, in January to ease tensions emanating from the trade war between the US and China. EPA PIC

US-CHINA CONFLICT

SUSTAINING WORLD PEACE

The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never be forgotten if we are to avert the next world war

SEVENTY four years ago, on Aug 6, 1945, the world's first atomic bomb was dropped at Hiroshima killing 70,000 people. Another 70,000 died from radiation and the five-year death total exceeded 200,000 due to cancer and other effects.

Three days later on Aug 9, a second bomb was dropped at Nagasaki and killed another 80,000.

After the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945, United States scientists of the Manhattan Project successfully tested an atomic bomb in July.

There was a compelling urge to use it to end the war with Japan quickly and to demonstrate the US' military superiority. Until today, the US remains the only country in the world to have used nuclear weapons.

An "A-Bomb Dome" at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was designated in 1996 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

On the structure is written: "A stark and powerful symbol of the most destructive force ever created by humankind: it also expresses the hope for world peace and the ultimate elimination of

all nuclear weapons."

Then US President Barack Obama, who visited Hiroshima in May 2016, said: "A flash of light and a wall of fire destroyed a city and demonstrated that mankind possessed the means to destroy itself." And he called for a world without nuclear weapons.

Until today, there has been a big moral debate if the US government under President Harry Truman made the right decision to use the atomic bombs.

Those in favour said it helped to end the war quickly, and avoided a costly invasion of Japan and saved many lives (especially US soldiers who were fighting the kamikaze Japanese attacks) and prevented the involvement of the Soviet Union, which was keen to take part and would have gained influence as well over Japan after the surrender.

Those against the bombing believed that it was evil and morally wrong to use atomic weapons, and that so many innocent civilians were killed in such a horrific manner.

They also felt that a weapons demonstration in a non-inhabited but observable area would have been enough to compel Japan to surrender.

The two atomic bombs dropped were relatively small compared with today's nuclear weapons, in their capacity for mass killing. The nuclear arsenal by any of the superpowers is grossly an overkill and can destroy our planet many times over.

The horrors of what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never be forgotten. It is a lesson

for mankind to avert the next world war at any cost.

The biggest threat to world peace today seems to be a major confrontation between two nuclear-armed superpowers, the US and China.

The trade war between US and China was started by a bellicose US president to try to contain the rise of China and playing to the domestic gallery on the "America First" narrative in order to get re-elected in November 2020.

The US seems to be very concerned about its declining economic, financial and political influence vis-a-vis China. The ongoing trade war is just a start, with global ramifications.

China seems to be fighting back and sending the message that it will not allow the US to stop it from growing economically.

China has important strategic assets to rely on such as its strong financial position, large population and impressive technological advances.

The current developments in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the South China Sea can exacerbate the confrontation between these two superpowers.

The new US Defence Secretary, Mark Esper, has just announced that the US intends to quickly deploy missiles in Asia to counter the rise of China.

Many events related to the two superpowers can spiral into a military conflict such as accidental firing and conflict escalation, sabotage by rogue elements within the armed forces, hacking into a missile launch system by terrorists and severe loss of face (to

its people) if one side were to back down.

There are also other regional hotspots of conflict such as Kashmir, Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, North Korea, Yemen and Iran, which may well escalate into a global conflict with the involvement of one or more superpowers.

Another threat to peace is cultural extremism and terrorism. Not much has been done to educate people about its real causes and evils. Very little too has been done locally and globally to promote sustainable peace (based on justice).

Most people, including businesses everywhere, expect their respective governments to ensure peace, which is fine if it is within a country. But if there are cross border or regional or global conflicts, most people feel helpless and tend to live in denial.

As global citizens we must do something constructive to promote peace. We can start in a small and meaningful way locally and then build up into a national, regional and global movement for peace like during the Vietnam War.

All governments must ultimately listen to the voices of their peace-loving people.

The activities of every global citizen count in promoting sustainable peace.

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