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Obama in Hiroshima: A Case Study in Hypocrisy

By Eric Draitser

May 25, 2016

President Obama heads to Japan this week for an historic visit to Hiroshima, site of the world's first use of a nuclear weapon, and one of the United States' most enduring shameful acts. The corporate media has hailed the visit as an important step in strengthening bilateral relations between the US and Japan. Indeed, it certainly is that as the US seeks to reassert its hegemony in an Asia-Pacific region increasingly being seen as the sphere of influence of China.

However, Obama's arrival in Japan also highlights the deeply hypocritical and cynical attitudes of US policymakers, and President Obama himself, when it comes to the relevant issues. He is not expected to formally apologize for the needless slaughter of more than 200,000 Japanese citizens (mostly civilians), nor is he going to address the lingering policy-related effects of the war such as the highly unpopular US military occupation of Okinawa. In fact, it seems Obama is unlikely to touch on anything of substance. But there are indeed numerous subjects which merit close scrutiny.

First and foremost, one must consider the fact that for 70 years the United States has maintained a permanent military presence in Japan, one which is deeply reviled by the majority of the people of Japan, especially the citizens of Okinawa who regularly and continuously protest the US occupation. And while Obama and his counterpart, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, will discuss the continued friendship and partnership between the two countries, the reality is that it remains a master-client relationship. There will likely be much discussion of past, present, and future, without any admission of guilt either on the side of the US for its horrific war crimes nor

by Japan for its unrestrained aggression against China, Korea, and the rest of the Asia-Pacific. As Kurt Vonnegut would say, “So it goes.”

Interestingly, the question of nuclear weapons will likely also not be addressed in a substantive way. There may indeed be some discussion of the subject in general terms, but it will be veiled in the typically flowery, but utterly vacuous, Obama rhetoric. Given the opportunity, an intrepid reporter might venture to ask the President why, despite winning the Nobel Peace Prize “for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples [and] vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons,” he has presided over an administration that will spend more than \$1 trillion upgrading, modernizing, and expanding the US nuclear arsenal.

Perhaps even more uncomfortable might be a question about why the allegedly anti-nuclear president who waxed poetic about disarmament as a student at Columbia University has spent two terms in office providing tens of billions in aid to nuclear-armed Israel, raising the amount of US aid to Tel Aviv to historic levels. In 2014, the Obama administration also enthusiastically signed a new nuclear deal with the UK which, according to Obama himself, “intends to continue to maintain viable nuclear forces into the foreseeable future... [America needed to aid Britain] in maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent.” So much for disarmament.

And while Obama and his coterie of spin doctors shape his anti-nuclear legacy with talk of a nuclear deal with Iran – a country that has no nuclear weapons – the cynicism is impossible to ignore. Obama has in fact done everything to promote nuclear proliferation including the absolutely insane new US missile “defense” system in Eastern Europe which, almost by definition, forces Russia to upgrade and expand its own arsenal, including its nuclear stockpile (still the largest in the world) as a countermeasure.

And then there’s the irradiated elephant in the room: Fukushima. The ongoing cover-up of what’s really happening in Fukushima lurks in the background of all discussion about nuclear issues and Japan. No one should hold their breath for even a whisper about this still unfolding environmental catastrophe which the Japanese government has gone to great lengths to dump down the memory hole.

Rather than formally apologizing to the Japanese people for the grave crimes of the US Government, Obama will instead frame his position as “looking forward, not backward,” a hollow platitude that calls to mind the utterly reprehensible decision by Obama not to investigate or prosecute the Bush administration criminals involved in torture. Rather than a heartfelt expression of regret, Obama offers the Trans-Pacific Partnership and an escalation of tensions with China. Rather than working for peace as one might expect of a Nobel Peace Prize winner, Obama instead will continue to champion his “pivot to Asia” strategy which has yielded little in terms of progress but much in terms of US military presence.

President Obama’s visit to Japan, like his allegedly great successes in Iran and Cuba, will change nothing. Obama will say a few words, then leave Japan. He’ll soon leave office with a still more dangerous world than when he entered: more nukes, more wars, more destruction. And this from our Peace Prize President.