

In the Footsteps of Yamaguchi Senji: Achieving a Nuclear Free World

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Friends, the writer Jules Romain taught that the spirits of those who have died are present when we remember them. Although he is no longer with us, those of us who were privileged to know, were inspired by and learned from Yamaguchi Senji carry something of him within us. With Watanabe Chieko, he was among the most courageous, visionary and forceful Hibakusha. He was a national and international treasure who transformed his excruciating physical and emotional pain into one of the most powerful forces to free the world from the threat of nuclear annihilation. We have Yamaguchi-sensei, other courageous Hibakusha and Japanese activists to thank for much of the inspiration that in March brought representatives of 127 governments together in Oslo to confront – again – the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons. Yamaguchi-sensei and other Hibakusha played the central role of placing the possibility of a nuclear free world on the world’s agenda. I want to dedicate my talk today to his memory.

Before summarizing current U.S. nuclear war policies and suggesting elements of an action plan as we approach the 2015 NPT Review, I want to say a few words about the profound political crises in my country, especially the “deep state.” Edward Snowden’s revelations confirmed our suspicions about NSA tracking of all internet, telephone and U.S. postal communications. He illuminated the existence and use of totalitarian technologies, a system legitimated – if that is the word – by a “still secret...body of law” that, as the New York Times editorialized “is a perversion of the American justice system.”¹ President Obama may not be reading your or my e-mail today, but that could change with the next

president. We do know that our government has been secretly listening to conversations in the European Union's Mission as its diplomats prepared for Free Trade negotiations, and we have to wonder if the same is true as Japan, Vietnam and other nations engage in the TPP negotiations. How serious is this? Former President Jimmy Carter recently charged that "America does not at the moment have a functioning democracy." ⁱⁱ

At home, our police forces are increasingly militarized, including the use of drones for surveillance purposes. As those of us living in Watertown, Massachusetts experienced in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing, police forces now rely on military hand me downs, from helicopters with thermal imaging to armored vehicles with massive fire power. And, as we learned following the unexplained FBI killing of Ibragim Todashev in the course of the investigation about the Boston Marathon bombing, over the past decade 150 people have been killed by the FBI. In each case, the only formal investigation was conducted secretly by the FBI, and no fault was found in any of these killings.

We also have a new National Security Advisor and U.N. Ambassador, Susan Rice, and Samantha Power respectively. These women were the driving force behind the ill-conceived U.S. military intervention in Libya that left the country in a shambles and reinforced Jihadist militias across much of North Africa. And, as we can read, Rice's fingerprints could be found on last month's Egyptian military coup ⁱⁱⁱ. Senior officials who believe that democracy can be delivered with drones, bombs, bullets, and coups remain in Washington's political saddle.

Finally, our Supreme Court is doing its best to turn the clock back to the 1950s, as it covertly reopens the way to the racial apartheid that we thought we had overcome with our

second and nonviolent revolution, the mid-20th century's Civil Rights movement. By eliminating the key element of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the Court has made it possible for states to change their election procedures in ways that will again disenfranchise the poor and people of color. The goal is to reinforce the power, privilege and influence of white and usually militarist conservatives.

Here in Japan, the Abe Administration is hardly better. Seen from afar, the greatest concern is its campaign to eliminate or radically revise the interpretation of Article 9 and to restore the Emperor as Japan's sovereign. Much of the world is mystified by Abe's refusal to acknowledge Japan's wartime aggression or the existence of a territorial dispute with China that should be addressed diplomatically. Abe's commitment to revise the 2010 military guidelines to permit the development of pre-emptive strike capabilities^{iv}, his stated willingness to go to war with China for the Senkaku Islands and his bond to Yasakuni Shrine reinforce hardliners in China and have led Seoul to put still more distance between itself and Tokyo.

Meanwhile, in Fukushima, deadly radiation flows into ground and sea water. Prime Minister Abe has purged nuclear critics and is pressing the resumption of nuclear power generation in plants located on earthquake faults.^v How many Japanese lives is he willing to sacrifice for TEPCO and other energy corporations?

And in Okinawa, which Sadako Sasaki's brother recently remarked suffers the "same sorrows" as Hiroshima, Governor Ota tells us, with the Abe Administration's insistence on building an environmentally disastrous new U.S. mega-base at Henoko, it is no wonder that we now hear calls for Okinawan independence.^{vi}

THE U.S. STILL PREPARING FOR NUCLEAR WAR

As you know, President Obama used his recent speech in Berlin to outline his nuclear arms control – not abolition - goals. In his speech and related documents, he did nothing to advance nuclear disarmament. His words were a retreat from the inspiring 2009 oratory in Prague, where he committed the U.S. to work for a nuclear weapons-free world. Tellingly, Japan's Foreign Minister commended the Berlin speech for its reaffirmation of Washington's nuclear umbrella.^{vii}

While acknowledging the truism that "so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not safe," Obama reiterated that as long as nuclear weapons exist, the U.S. will remain the world's dominant nuclear power. The core element of his speech, which has been broadcast uncritically by the media, was the offer to build on the New START Treaty by negotiating limited strategic and tactical nuclear weapons reductions with Russia.

There was less to Obama's speech than met the eye. It was a rehash of long-standing policies and is best understood as a public relations gambit and soft power diplomacy. Senior Russian officials have been telling us for months that they will only participate in multilateral nuclear weapons negotiations, the very forums that the Obama Administration has refused to join. This past year, with *Israel*, Washington sabotaged the convening of the Middle East WMD Free Zone conference mandated by the 2010 NPT Review Conference, and it boycotted the Oslo conference on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons and the U.N.'s Open Ended Working Group.

Cynically, President Obama failed to address the reality that, resulting from the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders, as well as U.S. conventional, high-tech and space

superiority, Moscow relies increasingly on its nuclear arsenal and is no hurry to negotiate nuclear weapons reductions.

It is possible that President Obama wants to reduce the central role of US nuclear weapons in U.S. military policies, but actions speak louder than words. In the fifth year of his presidency, preparations and threats to initiate nuclear war play critical roles in enforcing the U.S. Empire. How else can we understand that despite Obama's rhetoric, the Pentagon still maintains a first-strike nuclear war-fighting doctrine or that B-2 and B-52 bombers conducted simulated nuclear attacks against North Korea this past March? In much the same way that many U.S. leaders believe that their preparations for and threats to initiate nuclear war on more than thirty occasions during international crises and wars reinforced U.S. global power and influence, Air Force figures boast that the recent simulated attacks "eas[ed] tensions with North Korea".^{viii} Similarly, the "all options on the table" threat against Iran still stands, and the Pentagon's Defense Science Board has recommended "the United States must be prepared to threaten the use of nuclear weapons to deter cyberattacks."^{ix}

The Obama Administration has also made a "U-turn" that "flies directly in the face of the pledges Obama made in 2010...not [to] deploy new (nuclear) weapons." Washington is spending roughly \$200 billion to "modernize" its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems, beginning with \$11 billion being spent to upgrade B61 bombs.^x As the *New York Times* wrote in an editorial titled "A Modest Nuclear Agenda", after president's the Berlin speech, "America's nuclear arsenal costs the country \$31 billion a year and will cost billions more if modernization proceeds."^{xi} This doesn't count the \$1.5 trillion to be spent to build and operate the nuclear capable F-35 which will be targeted against China and North Korea here

in East Asia. This comes at the same time that, across the United States, urban schools are being shuttered, hospitals closed, access to subsidized housing lost, essential social services slashed, and critically needed infrastructure repairs postponed.

The revitalization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal also comes at the same time that Air Force units responsible for launching nuclear armed missiles are suffering “loss of discipline” and are taking actions in “intentional violation of nuclear safety rules.”^{xii}

President Obama’s words in Berlin about the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) were no less disturbing. “Building support for” is not the same as submitting the treaty to the Senate for ratification. Ratification of the CTBT is widely recognized as a critical step in stemming nuclear weapons proliferation and for progress toward the complete elimination of these omnicidal weapons.

The same applies to the president’s so-called Nuclear Security conferences, which are ostensibly designed to limit nuclear weapons proliferation. As Joseph Rotblat, the Nobel Peace Laureate and the only senior scientist who quit the Manhattan Project, taught, unless meaningful progress is made to completely eliminate all nuclear weapons, their proliferation is inevitable. Why? Because no nation will long tolerate what it experiences as an unequal (and unjust) imbalance of terror.

We are like birds balancing on all-too-fragile nuclear wires. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the continuing Japanese-Chinese confrontation over disputed ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands or conflict between India and Pakistan could escalate into nuclear wars that end life on earth as we know it.

Toward an Action Plan for 2015:

To fulfill the promise of Prague there are a host of actions that President Obama should be initiating. In Berlin he should have announced a commitment to rejoin multilateral disarmament diplomacy and to begin “good faith” negotiations to finally implement the NPT’s Article VI obligation to eliminate the world’s nuclear arsenals.

He should be unilaterally withdrawing tactical nuclear weapons from Western Europe. Still better, he could avoid the delays inherent to negotiating with Moscow by announcing major unilateral reductions of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. This would build international pressure on the other P-5 powers to follow suit and would further revitalize multinational disarmament processes. On a hopeful note, even as he defended Obama’s nuclear policies, Barry Blechman of the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board, made just this recommendation for unilateral reductions in the *Washington Post*.^{xiii}

As the petition campaign launched by AFSC, Peace Action and our partner organizations urges, President Obama should end Washington’s boycott of multilateral nuclear disarmament forums and commit to participate in September’s U.N. High-Level Meeting. He should respond to our call to convene the postponed Middle East WMD Free Zone conference, a profound commitment of the 2010 NPT Review’s Final Declaration. And, having said in Prague that “as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act,” the president should participate in the Mexico City follow-on conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war. There he could use the occasion to help U.S. people to understand the “humanitarian consequences” and crimes of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombings, the deadly

sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of atomic veterans and downwinders and the cataclysmic dangers of nuclear winter. Were he serious about creating a nuclear weapons free world, President Obama could dare Senate Republicans to stand in the way of nuclear nonproliferation by sending the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to the Senate for ratification.

But, as Fredrick Douglas, the anti-slavery abolitionist, taught more than a century ago: power concedes nothing without a struggle. Liberation from nuclear bondage will not rain down from the heavens. Just as Japanese civil society's actions have defended Article 9 and kept all but two nuclear power plants closed since 3-11, it is when the people lead that our so-called leaders will follow.

Our struggle, our action plan, must be both simple and complex, reflecting our nations' political and cultural differences and the importance of pursuing an outside/inside strategy. We need to intensify our challenging and joyful work of building pressure from the outside and below: collecting petition signatures on street corners, from family and colleagues and for some of us on the Web, organizing demonstrations, writing letters to the editor, and making creative connections with campaigns for social and economic justice. As Maekawa Tiro and other young activists know, we need to be persistent and make imaginative use of social media. And there are the forums, conferences and lectures to be organized.

Even as it feels like a step backward for those of us who have long been in this struggle, we need to honor what we are being told by diplomats committed to abolition: if we are to build the international force needed to move governments, we have to once again teach the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

In the U.S. our work plan includes pressing our petition campaign which calls for the Obama Administration to rejoin multilateral efforts to achieve nuclear weapons abolition, to convene the Middle East WMD-Free Zone conference, and to prioritize meeting human needs over weapons of mass destruction. Our campaigning includes mobilizing pressure on Congress to cut funding for nuclear weapons modernization, integrating calls to cut spending for nuclear war into our campaigns to “Move the Money” from the Pentagon to maintaining essential social welfare programs, creating jobs and building a 21st century infrastructure. In Massachusetts, our Budget for All referendum calling to preserve essential social services and to cut military spending won in each of the 91 towns and cities on which it appeared on the ballot and was supported by the state’s voters by a 3:1 margin. It means Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations, making the call for nuclear disarmament by the U.S. Conference of Mayors more widely known, and exploring campaigns for divestment from corporations involved in manufacturing nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. Together, these campaigns can revitalize and broaden our movement’s base as we prepare for the 2015 NPT Review.

And here at the World Conference we have the opportunity to think together about how best to address frustrations by some in our movements about the obstacles we face within the NPT process. These challenges include how to address the NPT’s role in legitimating nuclear power while keeping our focus on nuclear weapons abolition, how to overcome the P-5’s obstinance, and how best to build together as we coordinate our efforts.

While pressing from the outside, we need to continue engaging, learning from and working with those within state systems who share our abolitionist commitments. As Ban Ki-Moon, U.N. High Commissioners for Disarmament Sergio Duarte and now Angela Kane, and

the other senior diplomats here repeatedly tell us, our efforts can and must be mutually reinforcing. This is how in the U.N. General Assembly, 175 nations came to vote for the Non-Aligned Movement's resolution calling for timelines to be set to negotiate a "legally-binding framework" to eliminate the world's nuclear arsenals. And it is how 135 nations came to support Malaysia's call for nuclear weapons abolition negotiations to begin without delay.

Diplomats need us, and we can't achieve abolition without them.

And, for all of us, activists and diplomats alike, a prerequisite for our action plans is to open ourselves to the pain, courage and steadfastness of Hibakusha, and to make them our own.

Inspired by the Hibakusha's tenacity, at the center of our action plan must be doing all we can to build the popular forces that can impact the 2015 NPT Review. Preserving our democratic rights and Article 9, helping U.S. and Japanese people acknowledge and face an acknowledge the ugly parts of our history and political cultures, finding ways to create common security alternatives with China and preventing wars here in Northeast Asia are all critical elements in our struggle to create a nuclear free world.

Together, we must prevail. No more Hiroshimas. No More Nagasakis. No more Hibakusha. No more war!

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