

Obama in Hiroshima

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Taking a side trip from a G7 summit meeting in Tokyo that was dominated by US war preparations against China, Barack Obama played the advocate of world brotherhood and international morality at Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Friday.

Overshadowing the visit was a muted public debate over whether, as the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima, Obama should offer an apology for what was unquestionably one of history's greatest war crimes. America's Nobel Prize-winning president and his aides made it abundantly clear from the moment that the trip was first proposed that he would do no such thing.

It is not as if US officials have never acknowledged the criminal character of this closing act of the Second World War, the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of civilians, most of them women and children, in the back-to-back atom bomb attacks against Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As the historical record makes abundantly clear, these acts of mass murder were not, as the American public was incessantly told, designed to bring a speedy end to the war and "save lives." Rather, they were carried out with the aim of intimidating the Soviet Union and preparing for a potential Third World War.

Dwight Eisenhower, the former World War II commander and president, acknowledged to *Newsweek* magazine in 1963, less than three years after leaving office, "...the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing."

Admiral William Leahy, who was chief of staff to Harry Truman, the US president who ordered the bombings, wrote in his memoir: "It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional

weapons... My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children."

Obama could make no such candid admission. Instead, he engaged in flowery rhetoric about Hiroshima being a place where "death fell from the sky and the world was changed." Fell from where? Changed by whom? Questions best left unasked. In a misanthropic address, he stressed that such barbarous acts are really only the product of human nature. "Artifacts tell us that violent conflict appeared with the very first man," he said.

The Second World War itself, he added, "grew out of the same base instinct for domination or conquest that had caused conflicts among the simplest tribes."

The answer to this "base instinct"? According to Obama, "We must reimagine our connection to one another as members of one human race."

This deliberate obfuscation, grotesque hypocrisy and potted history of humanity on Obama's part were not a matter merely of political expediency and cowardice.

If the US president is less capable of speaking one hard word of truth about Hiroshima and Nagasaki than top officials who were directly involved in the war that produced these atrocities 71 years ago, it is because he is engaged in preparing even worse horrors still to come.

Why should anyone have expected Obama to apologize for Hiroshima? If he was interested in contrition, he would have done better to start with the seven countries—Syria, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia—where US interventions and proxy wars continue to claim civilian lives nearly eight years after the candidate of "hope" and "change" was swept into office on a wave of popular anti-war sentiment. During that time, his

administration is unquestionably responsible for more civilian deaths than those inflicted by the twin atomic bomb blasts of 1945.

The most shamelessly hypocritical section of Obama's speech at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial was his posturing as a champion of nuclear disarmament. "Among those nations like my own that hold nuclear stockpiles, we must have the courage to escape the logic of fear, and pursue a world without them," he declared, quickly adding, "We may not realize this goal in my lifetime."

Given a continuation of the policies pursued by his administration, at least the second part of this statement is indisputable. As for the first, it stands as one of Obama's more nauseating exercises in his signature blend of moral invocation and bold-faced lying in the service of US imperialism.

As a newly declassified report issued by the Pentagon reveals, the Obama administration has done less to reduce Washington's nuclear stockpile than any other post-Cold War US president, including both George H.W. and George W. Bush.

Aside from the absolute number of warheads, his administration has embarked on the most ambitious nuclear arms buildup in modern history. It has begun a \$1 trillion modernization of US imperialism's nuclear arsenal that is projected to unfold over the next 30 years. So much for the "courage to escape the logic of fear." Spending on nuclear weapons is set to double under this plan, even as the government continuously proclaims that there is no money to confront the scourges of unemployment, poverty and misery that afflict ever-growing layers of American working people.

New nuclear-armed submarines and bombers as well as ICBMs and cruise missiles are what the Obama White House is in reality pursuing, along with newer, faster and more usable weapons that make the transition from a conventional to nuclear war not only easier but, indeed, inevitable.

The nuclear buildup is being prosecuted in the context of an ever-growing escalation of US military provocations on the borders of the world's other two largest nuclear powers, with US troops and antimissile systems being deployed on Russia's western flank and the US Navy conducting continuous "freedom of navigation" operations in territorial waters claimed by

China.

The world is today closer to a nuclear war than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. This insane preparation for mass slaughter is the result not, as Obama would have it, of the inherent violence of man, but of the insoluble crisis of the world capitalist system and, in the first instance, the drive by the United States to utilize military means to offset its relative economic decline and maintain its position as a global hegemonic power.

Preventing imperialism from plunging humanity as a whole into the horrors experienced at Hiroshima is the task of the international working class mobilized in a mass movement against war and its source, the capitalist system.



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