

Who's Afraid of Hiroshima? Obama's Nuclear Hypocrisy

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When the Nobel Prize committee announced their choice for this year's Peace Prize winner[1], they stressed that a key factor in awarding Obama the prize had been the commitment to a nuclear-free world he had outlined in speeches such as the one he delivered in Prague earlier this year.[2] "The committee has attached special importance to Obama's vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons" said the committee chairman when announcing that Obama had won the prize.

Assuming that the committee truly believed that the Obama presidency would signal a meaningful change in American nuclear policy, they did not have long to wait for a clear refutation of that thesis. Having learned in advance that Obama would be visiting Japan ahead of last week's APEC summit in Singapore, the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki extended formal invitations for Obama to visit their cities.[3] Had he done so, he would have become the first U.S. president to visit the cities since they were the victims of the world's first nuclear attacks. However, Obama turned down the requests, citing scheduling concerns and offering vague promises to visit the cities sometime in the future.[4]

While such a move may come as a surprise to the Nobel committee, it is decidedly less shocking to those who have been studying American nuclear policy for decades. One such man is Motofumi Asai, the President of the Hiroshima Peace Institute, who noted in a recent interview with The Corbett Report that, while surprised that Obama says he intends to visit Hiroshima one day, "anyhow, it is clearly not now." [5]

"In a very long historical term, his speech in Prague in April may be remembered as a departure from the nuclear century to the non-nuclear century" Asai said about the nuclear rhetoric that won Obama the Peace Prize. But, he added, "I am rather sober about the prospects of a change of U.S. nuclear policy."

Observers of the Obama administration's actions on the nuclear front would indeed have good reason to be 'sober' about the prospects of Obama living up to his nuclear disarmament rhetoric. As The Washington Times reported last month, the Obama administration has reaffirmed an unspoken decades-old U.S. policy to officially ignore Israel's nuclear stockpile.[6] This support ensures that Israel does not have to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which would require them to relinquish their hundreds of nuclear bombs. As The Washington Times report makes explicit, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu accidentally revealed in a television interview that Obama's rhetoric about a nuclear-free world is not meant to apply to America or its allies:

"It was utterly clear from the context of the speech that he was speaking about North Korea

and Iran,” the Israeli leader said. “But I want to remind you that in my first meeting with President Obama in Washington I received from him, and I asked to receive from him, an itemized list of the strategic understandings that have existed for many years between Israel and the United States on that issue. It was not for naught that I requested, and it was not for naught that I received [that document].”

The report exposing Obama’s nuclear hypocrisy was printed just one week before he received the Nobel Prize for his valiant efforts to bring about a “nuclear-free world”. Even Obama’s most logical political allies have questioned the sincerity of his “commitment” to the abolition of nuclear weapons. As Joseph Gerson wrote on CommonDreams.org earlier this year:

“...there appears to be less to Obama’s ‘perhaps not in my lifetime’ commitment to nuclear weapons abolition than the adoring press has let on. It is no accident that in his message to the NPT Preparatory Conference earlier this month that he made no reference to abolition. Similarly, the subject did not arise when President Obama and former Secretary of State George Shultz spoke with the press following their meeting at the White House.”[7]

Now Obama’s most fervent supporters are noting that his actual actions on nuclear disarmament so far have amounted to a series of token gestures[8] and empty platitudes.[9] Even basic steps like affirming a no-first strike nuclear policy have not been forthcoming. Obama’s nuclear promise, it seems, can be added to the bonfire of dashed hopes along with his broken promise to end warrantless wiretapping[10], his broken promises to close Guantanamo[11] and end secret detentions[12], his broken promise to not use signing statements[13], his broken promise to allow voters time to read legislation before it gets signed[14], and his broken promise not to appoint lobbyists to his administration.[15]

Sadly, this is not the first time the Nobel committee has erred so badly in its judgement of a world leader promising nuclear eradication. In 1974, Japan’s Prime Minister Eisaku Sato won the prize for his formulation of the so-called Three Non-nuclear Principles that every Japanese government has paid lip service to since they were first adopted by the Diet in 1971: that Japan will neither develop nor possess nuclear weapons, nor allow them in their territory.[16] It has since come to light that Sato himself broke the third principle when he negotiated secret agreements with the Nixon administration that allowed the U.S. to bring nuclear weapons into Japanese territory.[17]

Now, with President Obama’s nuclear abolition rhetoric turning out to be more hot air, it seems the Nobel Peace Prize committee once again has egg on its face. Unless of course it is the intention of the committee not to reward Obama for his non-nuclear words, but to shame his administration into living up to its lofty language. As I argue in the latest episode of The Corbett Report podcast, Peace Prizes for Warmongers, perhaps the Nobel committee is in fact using their prize as a tool for offering an ultimatum to the Obama administration: Follow through on your promises or be exposed as a fraud for all the world to see.[18] If this is indeed the case, The Corbett Report is only too happy to contribute to the attempt to shame Obama’s White House into peace and disarmament. The fact that this “man of peace” is in fact every bit the warmonger his presidential predecessor was presents perhaps the largest chink in his fast-disintegrating corporate media-supplied “president of the world” armour. Those who are truly interested in bringing about a nuclear-free world can start simply enough by condemning Obama for his failure to visit Hiroshima.

- [1] http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/announcement.html
- [2] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu_n_183219.html
- [3] http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2009/10/28/hiroshima_nagasaki_request_visit_from_obama/
- [4] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/12/AR2009111210925.html?referrer=digg>
- [5] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3QGZEc4Wfk>
- [6] <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/oct/02/president-obama-has-reaffirmed-a-4-decade-old-secr/>
- [7] <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/05/21-1>
- [8] <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/a-bombed-cities-okinawa-disappointed-by-hatoyama-obama-talks>
- [9] <http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20091113p2a00m0na001000c.html>
- [10] <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2009/04/obama-doj-worse-than-bush>
- [11] <http://www.antiwar.com/engelhardt/?articleid=14355>
- [12] <http://www.andyworthington.co.uk/2009/09/14/obama-brings-guantanamo-and-rendition-to-bagram/>
- [13] http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/09/us/politics/09signing.html?_r=1
- [14] <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/promise/234/allow-five-days-of-public-comment-before-signing-b/>
- [15] <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/promise/240/tougher-rules-against-revolving-door-for-lobbyists/>
- [16] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Non-Nuclear_Principles
- [17] <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb291/index.htm>
- [18] http://www.corbettreport.com/mp3/episode108_peace_prizes_for_warmongers.mp3

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