

Halting the Race to Oblivion

*An address given by Joseph Gainza, Field Director
of the American Friends Service Committee / Vermont
at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Burlington on Sunday, 7/30/06*

One week from today it will be 61 years since Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets, flew his B-29 over Hiroshima, let loose "little boy" and devastated the city. Little boy, an 11 kiloton bomb with a uranium core, dropped from the Enola Gay which Tibbets had named after his mother, killed over 200,000 Japanese, Koreans, and American prisoners of war. Also killed were Manchurian and Filipino slave laborers, and prisoners of war from Australia, Holland and Britain.

Dr. Shuntaro Hida, three miles from the epicenter of the explosion described his experience:

"A...tremendous flash struck my face and a penetrating light entered my eyes. All of a sudden my face and arms were engulfed in an intense heat...Within an instant I was crawling on mats which lay on the floor and tried to flee outside...

My whole heart trembled at what I saw. There was a great fire ring floating over the city. Within a moment, a massive deep white cloud grew out of the center of the ring. It grew quickly upward...At the same time I could see a long black cloud as it spread over the entire width of the city. It spread along the side of the hill in our direction and began to surge over the Ohta Valley toward Hesaka village, enveloping in its path all the woods, groves, rice fields, farms and houses. What I saw was the beginning of an enormous storm created by the blast as it

gathered up the mud and sand of the city and rolled it into a huge wave...

Dr. Shuntaro Hida is a Hibakusha, a witness/survivor of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He and others have dedicated their lives to working for the abolition of nuclear weapons so that no other human beings have to experience the living hell of a nuclear bomb dropped on their city.

The premise on which I base my address to you is:

The U.S. bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki for political and strategic, not military reasons; that the U.S. maintains to this day its nuclear stockpile for similar reasons and therefore the effort to eliminate these weapons and halt the race to oblivion must include addressing the underlying power structure and geopolitical strategies of the U.S. A further premise is that as the initiator of the nuclear age and militarily, economically and politically the most powerful nation on earth the U.S. bears the major responsibility for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. I also think, as do the major religious denominations, that the question of nuclear weapons is ultimately a moral one.

Announcing to the world that the first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, and describing the city of 350,000 as a "military base," President Harry Truman said: "We wished, in this first attack, to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians." The bombings, the world was told, were justifiable punishment for Japanese aggression and saved a million U.S. casualties. This is how most Americans still justify the horrors visited on Japan, a nation by then prostrate and trying to surrender with dignity.

But history has shown the rationale for destroying Hiroshima and Nagasaki is similar to the rationale the U.S. gave for invading Iraq three and a half years ago: fabrications to hide the real motives.

TWO QUOTES WILL ILLUSTRATE THIS:

“...I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to [Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson] my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives.”

**Dwight D. Eisenhower,
General, United States Army**

“Careful scholarly treatment of the records and manuscripts opened over the past few years has greatly enhanced our understanding of why the Truman administration used atomic weapons against Japan. Experts continue to disagree on some issues, but critical questions have been answered. The consensus among scholars is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan and to end the war within a relatively short time. It is clear that alternatives to the bomb existed and that Truman and his advisers knew it.”

**J. Samuel Walker,
chief historian of the
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory**

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The Bush II Administration has not only continued the policy of using nuclear weapons to dominate other nations, both allies and adversaries, but has pushed back the painfully won steps for controlling and decreasing the possibility of using nuclear weapons.

In its first year in office, the Bush Administration conducted a congressionally-mandated review of U.S. nuclear weapons policy. The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) was submitted to Congress in a classified version in December 2001 and is intended to provide guidance for U.S. nuclear strategy, doctrine, force structure and infrastructure for the next 5-10 years. According to the NPR, nuclear weapons will continue to “play a critical role in the defense capabilities of the United States, its allies and friends.” Additionally the NPR promotes a more “flexible” role for nuclear weapons; no longer are they solely to be used to deter a nuclear war, but also to deal with multiple contingencies and new threats.

This expansion of possible uses of nuclear weapons will require the US to modify existing weapons or develop new ones. And that is just what the Bush Administration is pushing to do. The Administration has repeatedly asked Congress for money to begin the development of a Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, sometimes referred to as “bunker busters” because they are designed to burrow into the ground to destroy underground military facilities. If developed and deployed they will have the destructive power of 70 Hiroshima bombs.

Additionally, at the request of the Bush Administration, Congress in 2003 repealed the statutory ban on research to develop “mini nukes” which would presumably be more “usable” as the explosive power is less than one third that of “little boy.”

Professor Satoru Konishi was 16 when “little boy” blew apart his classroom. The day after the blast, on August 7, he went with friends into Hiroshima which he describes as having “totally disappeared.” He relates this terrifying moment: “All of a sudden I heard a voice saying ‘give me water!’ I looked and saw it. It was a face like a lump of tofu, so white, swollen and soft with its eyes nose and mouth getting out of shape. It looked totally different from a human face. I cannot remember what I did and saw after that. One thing is sure, that I went away without giving him some water.” Konishi-san to this day is still haunted by the memory of “that face like to fu.”

More scenes like this are likely if present US nuclear and war fighting policies remain in effect. For example: the National Security Strategy of the United States which was promulgated by the Bush Administration in Sept. 2002 and updated in 2006 states it is US military policy to attack nations it deems a potential threat to national security, a direct violation of the UN Charter and other pillars of international law. Iraq was the first demonstration of this policy.

A classified version of National Security Directive 17, signed by President Bush in September, 2002 reportedly authorized “preemptive” strikes with nuclear weapons on sites believed to store or manufacture chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. The Bush Administration continues the longstanding US practice of refusing to refrain from striking first with nuclear weapons and has abandoned the stipulation against using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.

It is important to emphasize that all these policy changes and plans to develop new “usable” nuclear weapons violate the Nuclear Non-

Proliferation Treaty which the US and over 150 other nations have signed and which has been in effect since 1971. The treaty has two main parts; the first part obligates the non-nuclear states to refrain from developing nuclear weapons. In exchange they are to receive assistance in developing nuclear power for peaceful purposes such as generating electricity. The second part, found in Article VI of the treaty, obligates the nuclear weapon states to work for the elimination of their nuclear stockpiles; the vision of the NPT is a world without nuclear weapons. This part of the treaty Mr. Bush and every president before him has ignored. As he demonizes Iran for possibly violating the NPT and North Korea for withdrawing from the treaty, Mr. Bush continues the US violation of Article VI.

I feel it necessary to point out that both Iran and North Korea, who are included in Mr. Bush's "axis of evil" along with Iraq, have good historical reasons for wanting to defend themselves from another "preemptive" strike by the US. In the words of retired Marine Corps General Joseph Hoar, who commanded the U.S. Central Command from 1991 to 1994: "We put three countries on notice – Iraq, Iran and North Korea- and we attacked one of them preemptively...now we find that was a put-up job. Meanwhile North Korea and Iran have chosen different routes than what we wanted them to take."

Time does not allow a full recitation of US actions which have put much of the world on notice that having nuclear weapons is the best defense from US preemptive strikes. I only want to mention that the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, chaired by Hans Blix, former chief Iraq weapons inspector, has issued their report "Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms." The commission, whose members include former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry, rejects

the hypocritical view that nuclear weapons in the hands of some pose no threat, while in other hands they place the world in mortal jeopardy. The commission holds the U.S. largely responsible for the current nuclear crisis, in which threats of further proliferation to additional countries and possible terrorist acquisition are inextricably linked to threats from existing nuclear arsenals. The commission's June report says that "Explanations by the nuclear haves that the weapons are indispensable to defend their sovereignty are not the best way to convince other sovereign states to renounce the option."

So what can we do? The Friends Committee on National Legislation suggests these, what I call first steps. We citizens of this endangered democracy must call on our national government to:

- Formally reaffirm commitment to nuclear disarmament. 1996 World Court Decision

We must demand the U.S.

- Renounce the first use of nuclear weapons.
- Take nuclear weapons off hair trigger alert status. It is mind boggling that 16 years after the end of the Cold War, the US and Russia still have their nuclear weapons ready for launch within minutes.
- Retire all tactical nuclear weapons
- Abandon programs to build new nuclear weapons.
- Continue the testing moratorium and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty – which Clinton signed and Bush unsigned
- Abandon missile shield programs – which are essentially offensive weapons systems under the guise of defense.
- Increase support – both financial and political for cooperative threat reduction programs.
- Support use of bilateral diplomacy when appropriate.

- Strongly support – both politically and financially – the global nonproliferation regime
- Abandon the policy of preventive war.
- Negotiate and enact a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty – which would lesson the possibility of nuclear material getting into the hands of terrorist organizations.
- Strengthen the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions – which the Bush Administration has weakened.
- Support use of preventive diplomacy.
- Address roots of insecurity and instability.

I would add: abandon the lust for domination and World Empire, and strengthen the community of nations as the means for attaining our common security.

In the brief time available I have tried to lay out the crisis facing us, giving a too brief historical background and listing some technical things we could do to halt the race to oblivion. But as I said at the beginning, this question of nuclear weapons is ultimately a moral one. We need good information to make appropriate moral choices to be sure, but we, as moral agents must finally act from a foundation other than facts. I believe we must act from our love, our love for life, our love for the human drama and the particular people who inhabit it, our love for this glorious earth. We must act with the recognition that our quest for truth has a divine origin which unites all life in a sacred community. We must act from our profound sense that we live in, and are collaborators in a mystery beyond imagining and that the cold calculations of mega death are intrinsically evil as they cut us off from our sisters and brothers. Faithful to our love we can stop the race to oblivion; we can transform ourselves and this historical moment. I

conclude with the words of Choi Il Chul a Korean hibakusha who was 12 years old and 1.3 miles from the epicenter when “little boy” hit Hiroshima “I would like to wish you good health and success in your work and to pray for the abolition of nuclear weapons and world peace. Thank you very much.”