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From Hiroshima to Fukushima: Japan Set to Declare Wide Area Uninhabitable Due to Radiation　ヒロシマからフクシマ--日本政府、放射線による居住不可能の広域設定発表へ

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By Greg Mitchell

The worst nuclear disaster to strike Japan since a single bomb fell over Nagasaki in 1945 occurred in the spring of 2011 at the Fukushima nuclear power plant following the epic tsunami. On August 22, *The New York Times* reports (in submerged fashion, headlining Gaddafi's imminent fall in Libya) the disturbing news that a wide area around the Fukushima plant "could soon be declared uninhabitable, perhaps for decades, after a government survey found radioactive contamination that far exceeded safe levels."

According to The *Times,* "The formal announcement, expected from the government in coming days, would be the first official recognition that the March accident could force the long-term depopulation of communities near the plant, an eventuality that scientists and some officials have been warning about for months." Just two weeks ago, it was reported that radiation readings at the site had reached their highest points to date.

As Winifred Bird and Elizabeth Grossman report, moreover, radiation risks have been compounded by severe chemical contamination throughout the Fukushima area and its peripheries as a result of earthquake tsunami destruction of petro-and agrochemical plants, iron foundries, steel works, automotive, electronics, plastics and pharmaceutical plants among others. Toxic Watch Network posted a map of 130 such facilities throughout the Northeast Region (http://japanfocus.org/-Winifred-Bird/3588).

Above all, the wide release of radiation, and fear of same, has forced the Japanese and others all over the world to reflect on what happened to the country in 1945, and the continuing (but usually submerged) threat of nuclear weapons and energy today.

In its main story marking the sixty-sixth anniversary of the atomic bombings, the *New York Times* highlighted the new activism of survivors of the bombing (the hibakusha): campaigning against nuclear power, which has provided most of their country's energy needs. No one in the world can better relate to the fears of a wide populace terrified that they (and perhaps the unborn) may be tainted forever by exposure to radiation.

As Kodama Tatsuhiko, head of the Tokyo University Radioisotope Center has pointed out, the Japanese government has both concealed and distorted the true dimensions of radioactivity released following the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power reactors. Kodama observes that, "according to what we know so far, when we compare the amount of radiation that remained after the a-bomb and that of radiation from the nuclear plant, that of the former goes down to one-thousandth after one year whereas radioactive contaminants of the latter are reduced to only one-tenth." (http://japanfocus.org/-Kodama-Tatsuhiko/3587) Zeroing in on the critical dangers to pregnant women and infants, he shows the extremely high risk of cancer in areas of radiation concentration in the form of Iodine and Cesium isotopes. Above all, Kodama shows that, given the vagaries of wind, rain, and terrain, the danger zone is by no means limited to the proposed evacuation zone.

My colleague Robert Jay Lifton in an op-ed for the *New York Times* titled "From Hiroshima to Fukushima," pointedly asked "how it is possible that Japan, after its experience with the atomic bombings, could allow itself to draw so heavily on the same nuclear technology for the manufacture of about a third of its energy." His answer was that there was " . . . a pattern of denial, cover-up and cozy bureaucratic collusion between industry and government, the last especially notorious in Japan but by no means limited to that country." [Yuki Tanaka explains why, before 3.11, with very few exceptions, there was little Hibakusha resistance to nuke power.]

The *Mainichi Shimbun* sought out Taniguchi Sumiteru, now 82, and currently director of the Nagasaki A-Bomb Survivors Council, for comment. It noted that while he normally talks quietly and haltingly, "when the conversation turns to the ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant it is as if the floodgates open, and his tone suddenly turns harsh." Taniguchi said: "Nuclear power and mankind cannot coexist. We survivors of the atomic bomb have said this all along. And yet, the use of nuclear power was camouflaged as 'peaceful' and continued to progress. You never know when there's going to be a natural disaster. You can never say that there will never be a nuclear accident."

As it happens, I have interviewed Taniguchi three times, in the United States and in Japan. He is perhaps the iconic symbol of the *hibakusha* today, thanks to footage of him taken after the bombing, showing him, months after the attack, still on a floor, spread-eagled, his entire back an open wound, flaming red. It was part of footage shot by a US film crew, and suppressed for decades, as I probe in my new book *Atomic Cover-Up.* (You can see some of the Taniguchi footage here.)

In April, 2011, five survivors' organizations including Taniguchi's Nagasaki group submitted a statement to the Japanese government declaring the collapse of the "safety myth" around nuclear power and demanding a change in the government's energy policy to prevent creating any more hibakusha. And Hidankyo, the

nationwide organization of hibakusha, where Taniguchi still serves on the board, “has sent a statement to the government,” *Mainichi Shimbun* reported, “demanding that it distribute health record booklets—similar to the ones that are distributed to atomic bomb victims and can be used as proof of radiation exposure—to nuclear power plant workers and residents living close to them, and also provide periodic health examinations to those populations.”

Taniguchi pointed out that numerous A-bomb survivors over the decades had sought help from the government after falling ill or suffering cancer and other diseases, allegedly from radiation exposure, but had been “abandoned.” The *Mainichi* article closed with this question: Will the people who are suffering from invisible dangers in Fukushima be subjected to the same treatment?

Of course, the Fukushima disaster forced me to relive my own experiences in visiting the atomic cities, and research into the significance of their bombing and the American “cover-up” since. I was hardly alone. Writing in a *New York Times* op-ed after Fukushima, Nassrine Azimi, a senior adviser at a United Nations Institute, observed: “When it comes to nuclear issues—from atomic weapons to nuclear power—no two nations could be more irredeemably intertwined. After the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, despite dissenting voices of some of its own citizens, America drew mostly wrong conclusions as it plunged into nuclear expansion.” She cited the book Lifton and I wrote several years ago, *Hiroshima in America*, for its painstaking account of “the relentless public relations campaign—unleashed by the Truman administration almost within hours of the Hiroshima bombing—that led to the Faustian bargain that blinded the Americans (and later the Japanese) to the insidious, long-term damage of radiation. Prominent journalists and media outlets of the time embraced, with enthusiasm, the ‘Dawn of the Atomic Age’ and America fell, in the authors’ words, into the ‘nuclear entrapment’ that is with us to this day.”

The 3.11 earthquake tsunami and nuclear meltdown have opened the way for hibakusha and the Japanese people to revisit the decision to predicate their energy future on nuclear power. While it would be premature to judge the outcome, critics of the exorbitant human, natural and financial costs of nuclear power in earthquake prone Japan, have begun to make their voices heard. Official recognition of the contamination of Fukushima will strengthen their convictions.

This is a slightly revised and expanded version of an article by Greg Mitchell at The Nation, August 22, 2011. Greg Mitchell’s new book is “Atomic Cover-Up: Two U.S. Soldiers, Hiroshima & Nagasaki, and The Greatest Movie Never Made.” Email: epic1934@aol.com.

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