

9/11 and Angelo de la Cruz

Two years after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, there was a general agreement that there was a need for people to move on but many questions remain unanswered. There were two prominent views which emerged with regard to the reason for the attack and what strategy to use to prevent such a tragedy from ever occurring again. One view pointed to al-Qaeda under the direction of Osama bin Laden as the perpetrators. The reason was blamed on Islamic fundamentalism and particularly a hatred for America as the epitome of the decadent vices of the western world. The other view, however, expressed that the US and the western world in general were also much to blame for the fall of the Twin Tower; because such an action was considered as a retaliation against their political and economic policies which have continued to undermine the less privileged countries and the less privileged in their respective societies. The former view, however, seemed to have prevailed as seen in the popular public opinion support for the US attack on Afghanistan to weed out the Taliban regime and in the process to capture bin Laden.

A major problem, however, emerged when the Bush administration stretched the “war on terror” all the way to Iraq. Insisting that Saddam Hussein had close ties with bin Laden and was hiding weapons of mass destruction, it campaigned to oust the government of Saddam Hussein, something which Bush Sr. failed to do in the Gulf War of 1991. This time, however, the international community did not bite. Heated debates ensued at the UN Security Council led by France, Germany, China and Russia against the threat of US invasion of Iraq until there

was proof that there were indeed weapons of mass destruction. Despite the absence of UN approval, the US invaded and overthrew Saddam. More than a year after the invasion, weapons of mass destruction are still to be found and the US is slowly losing its control of Iraq.

THE LOCAL IS GLOBAL

Foreign policy concerns are, more often than not, tied to domestic concerns, particularly, economic issues which can determine the fate of leaders. The US “war on terror” which led to the invasion of Iraq was something of prominent concern among Filipinos as there are over a million Filipinos in the Middle East. Thus, when the Philippine government chose to go along with the “coalition of the willing,” this was opposed by the Filipino public particularly those concerned with the plight of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). For the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, however, the more important concern was the millions of US dollars the country would get in being part of the coalition.

The justification, however, changed with the capture of Angelo de la Cruz, an OFW working as a truck driver in Iraq. The Iraqi captors of de la Cruz threatened to behead him in a matter of days if the Philippine government would not pull out its troops in Iraq. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo succumbed to their demands not because she questioned the rationale of her government’s participation in the “coalition of the willing” but because of self-preservation. Coming from a hotly contested May 2004 presidential election, where her leading opponent has not yet conceded, she could not afford the possible domestic destabilization that she feared would ensue if de la Cruz was beheaded. Such an action by the Philippine government was heavily criticized not only by the US government but also by other allies in the “coalition of the willing” led by the Australian Prime Minister John Howard. Whether such an episode has strengthened the Philippine state in terms of its domestic and international capacities remains to be seen. As noted by Herman Kraft in his article, the destabilizing effect of terrorism is mainly due to the inability of the Philippine state to harness economic and political resources that could meet the needs of the Filipino people.

THE STATE AS THE MAJOR DETERMINANT

This brings us to the question of whether 9/11 has indeed strengthened or weakened the state. In his article, Felipe Canlas III argues that 9/11 strengthened rather than weakened states around the world. He debunks the argument that 9/11 has brought about a *revolutionary* change in the international order. For him, the change has been *evolutionary* whereby emphasis continues to be on the Westphalian model of state sovereignty.

PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR DIPLOMATIC OVER MILITARY MEANS

If states are indeed to define their policies, there is a prevailing option for diplomatic over military means in countering the “war on terror” in the Asian region. As pointed out by Renato Cruz de Castro in his article, although initially East Asian states, with particular focus on the Southeast Asian countries and China, reacted positively to closer cooperative security with Washington, the new US national security strategy in September 2002 has created problems for its allies in East Asia. De Castro argues that the US’ campaign against terror, because it relies on military means, does not address the conditions that bring about the sources of destabilization in the region.

The US military approach to resolving its problems with North Korea also did not sit well with South Korea and China as noted by Gavan McCormack’s article on the Korean crisis. Together with their Southeast Asian neighbors, McCormack notes that China and South Korea are interested in bringing about greater cooperation among each other in the region as opposed to the more divisive military approach of the US in confronting the tension in the region. Liselotte Odgaard’s article also highlights this issue as she argues that the use of diplomacy is the preferred instrument of engagement by China, South Korea and Japan over the United States disposition towards the use of force.

HOW POWERFUL IS THE US?

A question which arises from all these is the strength of the US in pushing for its militarist agenda. Samir Amin, in his article, recognizes the continued superiority of the United States in all areas—economic, political and cultural—which gives it a decisive advantage over Japan and the European Union allowing it to enjoy military superiority as well as control global natural resources. Thus, to create an “alternative

global system favourable to social and international justice,” Amin argues that one has to defeat “the US ruling class project.”

Walden Bello, however, is more optimistic. He argues in his article that US hegemony is on the decline, beset by previous problems such as the adverse effects of the Asian financial crisis and the challenges to the US agenda in the WTO. Such a situation Bello points out allows for the reordering of political space given the impetus of “anti-hegemonic” challenges to the US.

This “World After 9/11” *Kasarinlan* issue, therefore, hopes to highlight the various dimensions of the debates which have arisen since September 2001. These are debates which have raised old and new issues with a common concern on how to make the world a better place for all. ❀