

THE MEANING OF PEACE IN ASIA

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As we mark the 40th year of the end of World War II, we must seriously inquire into the substance of peace which has reigned in Asia throughout the post-war period. Peace in Asia, like elsewhere in the Third World, has always been regarded as the superpowers' burden. It is a self-imposed responsibility that defines the essence of their being in the world. From their point of view, it is they alone who have the right to determine the requisites of global security. Accordingly, all other nations must align their respective national visions to the larger perspective that is supposed to inform the superpower's behavior.

It is on the basis of this perception that Americans scold Filipinos who have the "arrogance" to say that we do not need the protection of the American bases because we do not believe that we are facing any threat of foreign invasion. This, we are firmly told, is a myopic view of the requirements of global security.

In response to this North American assertion of *Pax Americana* we put forward the concept of non-alignment. It is our way of saying we have had enough of the type of peace that the big nations have unilaterally imposed on the rest of the world. Non-alignment, in short, is an attempt to establish an *autonomous* peace.

Peace Based on Terror

For we have seen what peace is like as the superpowers produce it. It is a peace perched precariously on the balance of terror. A peace secured by perpetual enmity and mutual suspiciousness. A peace that is fuelled by the non-stop production of nuclear weapons, and by periodic exhibitions of calculated recklessness and superpower *machismo*. A peace made possible by the permanent denial of the sovereignty of other nations.

Within our small nations in Asia, this hegemonic peace has meant not only allowing these self-appointed guardians of world security full access into our territories, but also taking positions on regional matters and questions in a manner totally subordinate to the global security interests of the superpowers. This is one of the main reasons why it has not been possible for the Southeast Asian governments to approach the Indochina question as a purely regional concern.

Peace Based on Violence

Because peace has been appropriated by the superpowers as their functional preserve, therefore, by implication, warlikeness, aggressiveness, and conflict — in short, the dangers to peace — are to be seen as principally attributable to the

folly of smaller nations. Thus, when trouble breaks out within our national boundaries or between our nations, the culpability is seen as lying exclusively at our door. Religion, nationalism, ethnicity — how many times have social scientists referred to these factors as the crucial determinants of conflict and war? But how often is reference made to the fact that these small nations that are at war with each other — or these sub-national communities locked in deadly combat — have been generously armed and properly psyched for war by the "guardians" of world peace themselves?

When we look for the anti-thesis of peace in the world, we look for war, conflict and struggles. Yet, we see that peace itself can be a violent and conflictful state of affairs. In our part of Asia, the peace secured under the aegis of dependent developmental dictatorships is among the most violent arrangements one can find in the world. This is the peace of the impoverished, the exploited, the marginalized, the silenced and the oppressed. This is the peace that is maintained primarily on behalf of the international division of labor, the transnational corporations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The Challenge to an Imposed Peace

Today, this imposed peace, this authoritarian peace — together with the pattern of dependent, unequal and superficial development which it promotes — is under siege in many parts of the world. The struggle to breach this type of peace is proceeding with great difficulty partly because of the premium that people place on peace — on any kind of peace, in fact. This attitude can be so overpowering that at times people may even be willing to forego a chance to establish a more lasting, just and participative peace if at some points in the struggle there is a danger that the mass movements may no longer be controlled, held back, or dissuaded from resorting to methods other than the non-violent means of protest.

The political and economic crisis that Filipinos are living through at the moment has brought untold hardships and dislocation to many people, especially those in the lower classes. The human suffering and deprivation that it has produced are all the more traumatic because the larger population has not been adequately prepared for it, both economically and psychologically. The mass agitation it brings with it, if not effectively translated into organized and sustained protest led by genuine people's organizations, can only become the occasion for the further restriction of fundamental freedoms and a further militarization of society.

But the situation is not entirely depressing. The crisis in the Philippines has become an opportunity for seriously

exploring other models of development, especially those anchored on the value of self-reliance. Above all, the crisis has become an opportunity for launching a large-scale, peaceful, but militant popular movement for the termination of dictatorial rule, and perhaps — beyond just the simple return of constitutional freedoms — the forging of a new political culture based on popular democracy.

The Search for Peace: The Philippine Case

The regime we confront is a typical one in the Third World. It was launched as an initiative to suppress the “lawlessness” both of a depraved oligarchy and of the “communist insurgency”. From the beginning, it projected itself as situated between those who had no ideals and those who had only ideals. It was to be a revolution from the center — responding to the rebellion of the poor from below.

As it effectively concealed its own politically reactionary standpoint, so also it successfully cultivated the sense that with it lay our economic salvation. We know better now, of course. We have seen how deficit spending and interminable borrowing, rather than solid economic development, kept us going for the last 11 years.

Yet, the general impression that has been promoted outside of the Philippines, of course, is that Filipinos are facing a crisis that is unique to them, given the circumstances.

The view promoted by Filipino and foreign businessmen, and picked up by the foreign media, is that the basic cause of the crisis in the Philippines is the erosion of credibility which is supposed to have engendered a crisis of confidence among domestic and foreign businessmen. Three factors are commonly cited as the most important in explaining the present crisis: (1) the widely-rumored failing health of Marcos and the vagueness of the succession process; (2) the Aquino assassination and very strong indications of government or military involvement in the incident; and (3) large-scale corruption in government, especially as epitomized by the so-called crony capitalists.

There is no doubt that all of these factors somehow contributed to the worsening of the current crisis. But to ascribe to them, as many do, a determining role in trying to account for the present Philippine situation, is to believe — just like many businessmen — that there is nothing essentially wrong with the manner in which economies like that of the Philippines have become incorporated and maintained in the world economy as satellites, or that there is nothing basically wrong with a developmental dictator, so long as the dictator is not corrupt and does not abuse his power. Such a view is dangerous, for it would place us on the side of those who would blindly defend any kind of peace and any kind of stability and normalcy.

All the developmental dictatorships in the region now find themselves in varying degrees of crisis. They are, in a manner of speaking, powder-kegs of varying volatility. Yet, in the rest of the region, the dependent authoritarian regimes continue to pulsate with life — totally unmindful or pretending to be unmindful of the structurally-generated problems that are upon all of them, whether they see them as problems or not. These are the problems of dependence, of their economies being too closely intertwined with the fate of the global economy, of the declining value of their exports, of transnational consumerist penetration through programmed liberaliza-

tion of existing import restrictions and of growing and persistent balance of payments deficits which could only be financed from borrowings. In short, they are all vulnerable. What keeps them from going down the way the Philippine economy under Marcos is now going down is precisely the illusion of growth fostered by deficit spending and excessive borrowing. The crisis in the Philippines began to be felt as really serious only *after* our creditor banks started to hastily pull out of the country. They did so as early as June and July 1983 when everybody thought Marcos was dying. Their withdrawal became complete after the Aquino assassination.

Ironically, many Filipino businessmen to this day still insist that the basic contours of the Philippine economy remain sound. From their point of view, there is nothing wrong with the roles we have accepted in the world economic order, i.e., as suppliers of traditional raw materials (timber, metallic minerals, copra, raw sugar), or of semi-processed or sub-contracted goods (garments, integrated circuits), or of manpower (construction workers in Saudi Arabia, domestics in Hong Kong, etc.). The truth is that many of those who have now joined the anti-Marcos movement benefitted from the satellization of the Philippine economy. Their main criticism of the regime is *corruption* and *credibility*. They want a change in personnel, not of the system. This is also a view being promoted by North America, if only because this is one way of concealing its own immense responsibility for the crisis.

The Mode of Struggle Towards an Autonomous Peace

The crisis has opened up wonderful opportunities for challenging the system, but we are alert to the painful fact that we do not foresee any resolution in the *short-term* that would represent an accommodation to the demands of the present democratic movement.

In the short-term, there is no way the present government can avoid having to borrow and thus fall under IMF control. In the long-term, the goal of popular democracy must rest on the presence of an informed and organized people, especially at the mass level. This cannot be accomplished overnight. Initiatives towards this are also being effectively intercepted by electoral politics.

In the long-term, the economy must grow, become less dependent, distribute economic gains equitably, and become more self-propelling.

What we also know is that Marcos himself is not our most important problem. At the structural level, the problem is the unjust world economy and its appointed guardians. At the individual level, our problem is how to combat the old political culture of subservience and feudal patronage that disables our people and replace this with popular politics and intervention from below. This is the new politics that is taking shape within the womb of the Philippine crisis. Whether such efforts are quixotic and are proven to be ineffectual in the end may not be so important as the gains in political education and organization that are being made in the process. Even as we try to survive the crisis, we are thus also making full use of it to advance authentic national freedom, popular democracy and autonomous peace.

The crisis we face has become an opportunity for doing many things. But it is only an opportunity. There is nothing inevitable about the way it is going to be resolved.