

“The Fragile Nature of Peace”

1st Asia Future Conference

Bangkok, Thailand, 8 March 2013

「平和はもろいものである」—平和は
祈りさえすれば到来するものではない。
それを実現するためには、国家や
国境を越えた、新しい「国益」が考え
られなければならない。

Yasushi Akashi

明石 康

Former Under-Secretary-General of
the United Nations



I am delighted to have this opportunity to talk about peace in connection with the situation in Asia today, at the 1st Asia Future Conference organized by the Atsumi International Foundation, in cooperation with Thammasat University and the University of Kitakyushu. I am particularly honoured to be at this conference, which is attended by a great variety of people who have come together by their common interest in Japan and their common concern for peace, prosperity and human well-being.

I would like to start with a discussion of what we mean by peace. Peace, of course, is a primary pre-occupation in today's world. Everybody aspires for peace, but what is it? We can define peace narrowly as the absence of war or organized violence. But I am not satisfied with such a narrow definition.

In fact, I remember distinctly what Mr. Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania after its independence and a man highly respected for his great integrity, told the UN General Assembly when he came to New York. Mr. Nyerere said he does not agree with the definition of peace offered by many people in the West, which was a rather static kind of peace. He told the audience that if such peace means acceptance of

unjust and unequal status for the people in Africa, many of who are deprived of the privileges enjoyed by Western countries and their people, he can not subscribe to such an unjust peace. In the opinion of President Nyerere, peace has to be a dynamic one, in which justice and humanity are part and parcel of real peace. He said that that is the only kind of peace the Africans can accept.

We are now in the 13th year of the 21st century. But you and I have a distinct memory of the 20th century, which was probably the most cruel and bloody century in world history. There were two world wars in that century. In the First World War, there were almost 10 million deaths and about 20 million wounded. The Second World War produced much larger casualties.

It has to be remembered here that it was civil wars within the countries more than wars between nations which produced the largest number of casualties. For example, between 1815 and 1914, the American Civil War produced the largest number of casualties, and between the two world wars, the largest number of casualties were incurred by the Spanish Civil war. And we have seen that in the 1990s and later, eth-

nic conflicts which were essentially internal, often spilled over to other countries and produced appalling number of casualties, exceeding five million people in the last ten-year period. Civilian casualties, particularly those of women and children, increased phenomenally in the 20th century. In comparison, most wars in the earlier centuries were wars engaged in by professional soldiers, with a smaller ratio of civilian casualties.

When the Cold War, with the United States and the Soviet Union as the two super-protagonists, ended around 1990, everyone in the world breathed a big sigh of relief. Many people dreamed of a new era of peace focused on the United Nations. I remember the special session of the UN Security Council held in January 1992, in which heads of states of the Council members unanimously pledged their adherence to peace focused on the United Nations. I was privileged to be appointed head of a major multi-dimensional UN peacekeeping force deployed in Cambodia, UNTAC, in 1992-1993, which after hard work and some good luck resulted in the birth of a democratic Cambodia with the United Nations as its midwife. It was heartening to see that all member states, including five permanent members and all Asian countries (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, China and Japan), unanimously supported the UN-organized free elections in Cambodia.

However, in the mid 1990s, the United Nations experienced some bitter setbacks and turbulence in countries like Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Inter-tribal conflict in Somalia was particularly violent. In Rwanda, almost 800,000 Tutsis were brutally killed by mostly Hutus. In the former Yugoslavia, ethnic and religious antagonism spread from one republic to another. We can say that the Yugoslav conflict continued to expand in part due to the lack of wisdom of European countries which were quick to recognize new governments in the former Yugoslavia one after another, even though such policy did not enjoy the unanimous blessing of the

ethnic communities involved, therefore producing disastrous consequences.

In August 2000, my colleague and respected friend Lakhdar Brahimi, who is today Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Syria, presented his report to the Security Council and the General Assembly, stating that there are places where UN peacekeepers should not be sent and there are tasks which should not be undertaken by peacekeepers in view of the inherent limitations of the United Nations. With his astute sense of realism, Mr. Brahimi added that, when peacekeepers are sent, there should not be undue constraints placed on the resources or the number of personnel to be sent. He called for more effective and multidimensional forces to be sent, with a clear-cut mandate, to resolve complex inter-ethnic conflicts.

In the former Yugoslavia, where I was sent to head the largest peacekeeping operation in UN history with 44,000 troops, I was hampered by the lack of cohesion among major member states, unlike the case of the Cambodian peacekeeping activity. One local faction had the support of the United States; another faction was backed by Russia; and the third had the sympathy of a major European country.

In hindsight, it was not at all clear as to which side was to blame for the outbreak of the Yugoslav conflict, which started in a small village called Boroboselo in the southern part of Croatia. There was apparently a small shooting incident between Bosnian Serb villagers and Croatian police. Each side drew a completely different picture of what happened and who shot first, and the conflict continued to escalate from village to village, city to city and republic to republic. Violence reproduced itself in a continuous circle of violence in which regular, irregular and criminal forces participated. It would seem that mutual fear and stereotyping of the enemy side were inflaming the violence. One after another, European countries followed Germany's lead in recognizing one side of the conflict, even though a group of eminent EU experts had recommended that governments refrain from premature recognition in

the absence of consensus among the ethnic groups concerned.

In the case of territorial disputes which are numerous in this part of the world, it is indispensable for us to avoid conflict escalation through accidents, misunderstandings or compulsion to “save face”. In order to prevent these unfortunate developments, it is highly recommended to construct an accepted framework for instantaneous consultation and communication in anticipation of unsuspected events. Such a mechanism is often a prerequisite for restoring military stability. I admit, however, that in the case of a premeditated conflict, meticulously and cold-bloodedly planned, like the Rwanda massacre of 1994, escalation of events are preordained.

Unfortunately, the media often fans “public opinion”. At times, the media even creates “public opinion”. In the 1930s, Japanese newspapers played a most unfortunate role in inflaming nationalistic emotions towards military confrontation with neighbouring countries. In the long run, building durable peace seems to depend on such structural factors as the overall absence of big economic gaps, degrees of social mobility, the absence of political persecution and the lack of deep psychological scars inherited from the past.

When a conflict occurs, the United Nations is often successful in arranging a cease-fire agreement between parties, but a cease-fire serves merely as a temporary device to stop bloodshed under a neutral supervision. It is far more difficult to construct a lasting peace, as we have seen in the Middle East, Kashmir, and Cyprus.

A cease-fire is often no more than a palliative behind which each party tries to build up arms and troops for the next show of force, as exemplified four years ago in Sri Lanka between the government and LTTE. It is always a major challenge to develop good relations particularly with neighbouring states, since proximity at times builds up contempt and mutual dislike. Yes, knowing one’s neighbours may well lead to friendship and trust. But it could also lead to hostility based on familiarity with the other

party’s shortcomings. Familiarity breeds contempt. In Asia today, we are faced with a tremendous diversity of nations, tribes and cultures. It is therefore wise and realistic that the ASEAN Charter has adopted a consensual approach based on patience and consultation.

Postwar Japan has adopted pacifism, internationalism and democracy as can be seen from the Preamble to its Constitution. It is no secret that such acceptance was partly due to pressure from the American Occupation authorities, but I strongly believe that it was largely a result of genuine sentiment for peace held by many postwar Japanese who revolted against militarism and aggressive wars. Chinese leaders like Prime Minister Wen Jiabao have recognized this fact and welcomed the Japanese conversion of heart in the postwar period.

Currently, however, there is an extensive domestic debate in Japan as to whether Article 9 of the Constitution is too idealistic, lacking in realism. I am of the opinion that the first paragraph of Article 9 is entirely acceptable, because the stated principle of non-use of force to resolve international disputes is simply an echo of a well-known principle found in the UN Charter itself.

But a serious problem exists with regard to the second paragraph of Article 9, which mentions that Japan will not possess land, sea or air forces and that the country renounces the right of belligerency. Moreover, to give up on the exercise of the inherent right of collective as well as individual self-defense in today’s turbulent world seems to me to be somewhat utopian and irresponsible. I venture to say that arguments in this matter in Japan are rather theological and more emotional than rational, since the right of self-defense, either individual or collective, is widely accepted as self-evident in contemporary international law. Instead of continuing hairsplitting arguments on this matter, it may be advisable to work out objective guidelines and criteria on the concept of self-defense in order to judge if assertions of self-defense may indeed be far-fetched or a spurious excuse with some

aggressive intention, as is often suspected.

Like other regions of the world, Asia is today in the process of redefining traditional notions of "national interest" based on national sovereignty. In our age of rapid and massive trans-national trade, commerce, the movement of money, commodities, people and information and the global surge in the exchange of art, music, entertainment and in science and technology, the Westphalian definition of "national interest" is clearly becoming obsolete. A new and broader definition of "national interest" must emerge, which takes into account the common interests of all nations in trade expansion, environmental issues, treatment of contagious diseases, control of international crime and disaster prevention, to name just a few. I profoundly regret the fact that many nation-states, including emerging countries, still seem to be unwilling to accept the full implications of a revised 21st century concept of "national interest". Reference in the Outcome Document, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005 to the notion of "Responsibility to Protect" people at large is a striking development of major significance, indicating an evolution in thinking is occurring, progressing towards a new concept of "modified sovereignty".

At any rate, peace in the world will not be brought about by merely praying for it. We have to work hard for real peace which is based on our dedicated effort in taking action. Beyond our patriotic, normal attachment to our nation-states, we must show a genuine concern for our collective, regional as well as international concerns. At the same time, we should be able to balance increased universal engagements with our strong cultural attachment to our national identity, which must be nurtured and respected.

In closing, I would like to stress the growing importance of "soft power" as against traditional "hard power". "Soft power", based on individual, cumulative and transnational exchange and cooperation, has become more accepted, and its sphere of influence is widening day by day. Instead of com-

petition in hardware, or in armies, battleships and armaments, which is essentially a zero-sum game, let us try to promote more cross-border cooperation and joint activities which are a "plus sum" game in our endeavour in art, music, culture, literature, sport, science and other areas of shared human activity.

In East Asia in particular, we have to be mindful of several cardinal principles. I name here only a few of them:

- (1) Greater respect for Chinese culture;
- (2) Conversely, China's self-restraint in Asia and the world as a re-emerging superpower;
- (3) Japan's sincere reflection on its past as a colonial empire;
- (4) A broad acceptance by countries of realistic "balance of power" with its own rules of the game, which must include the United States; and last but not least,
- (5) Neighbouring states of China should have self-confidence based on their own culture, history and competitive strength.

We need a careful balance between our global and regional commitment, on the one hand, and our national attachment, on the other. Let us strive to work and play together across national borders. We need to break down both the physical and the psychological barriers to true understanding which still separate us.

The world of tomorrow will be one with many different faces and cultures; our motto will be global unity with diversity, willing to work for peace and happiness together. Having said this, I hasten to add that we should not be under any false illusion about our ability to overcome numerous difficulties and obstacles quickly. We can move forward only step by step. Progress will be cumulative and dialectical, full of setbacks and detours. I know, however, we will eventually reach our goal. This conference is one such step towards our common goal.