

JAPAN

Hiroshima sends a clear message to Washington

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

THE anniversary of the first ever-atomic bombing of a crowded city has turned into a yearly ritual to remind the world of the grave consequences of uncontrolled arms race that might put our own existence at stake. Ever since the August 1945 atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima followed by a similar one in Nagasaki three days later, peace activists in Japan and all over the world are relentlessly trying to carry the message of importance of a world free of such deadly weapons. And this yearly observance had all along provided them with a platform where from they were able to convey the message of peace addressed to the world community. But as in every other political maneuverings, this yearly ritual too was tainted due to a sharp division between the supporters and opponents of rival camps throughout the Cold War period. As a result, despite all good intentions and sincerity of the organizers and supporters, much of the messages of the observance failed to carry the necessary weight to convince people of the world of the importance of such initiatives.

The end of the Cold War in early 1990s has freed the atomic bomb observances of Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the burden of superpower rivalry. The situation initially seemed to be a perfect one for the proponents of peace to popularize the idea of atomic and nuclear free world. But the emergence of a mighty single superpower with the intention of running the global political show according to its own desire had soon derailed the whole initiative, and for sometime in the recent past the voices of Hiroshima and Nagasaki seemed to be the reflection of a timid voice coming from a forgotten corner of the world. But the situation has once again turned favorable for peace activists around the world after what has happened in the United States on September 11 last year, and also due to the fanning of war propaganda by the US administration against an enemy fictitiously invisible but termed as devastatingly destructive. Since the new enemy of the new mighty single superpower is mostly invisible in form, the nature of fight against that enemy without a face is also gradually turning nasty where there are already a number of most unlikely victims. And among them stand the city of Hiroshima too.

For more than fifty years the term 'Ground Zero' has widely been used to indicate the epicenter of the explosion of atomic bomb over Hiroshima in 1945 that has so far claimed 226,870 lives. Since it was the American bombing that created such havoc, the term 'Ground Zero' for fifty years was an irritated reminder of brutality for the Americans, which the US conservatives were always willing to forget and discard. The controversy surrounding the atomic bomb exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute back in 1995 was centered around the part of the display that was supposed to illustrate the destruction at Ground Zero with life-size pictures of Japanese dead and wounded, personal narratives of those who survived, and a variety of artifacts, including a watch with its hand frozen on the moment when the bomb exploded over Hiroshima. A group of American conservatives and war veterans were particularly



offended by the organizers' decision to emphasize the destruction at Ground Zero, which they proudly proclaimed as being a heroic act of US military personnel involved in the war against Japan. By stressing the death and destruction at Ground Zero, the exhibit, according to them, would make Japanese look like victims.

The eventual fate of the exhibition is now a well-known fact. But it had no doubt once again brought forward the irritating factor related to the term 'Ground Zero'. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that the US policymakers as well as the media didn't waste time at all to get hold of the possession of the term with first opportunity after the September 11 incident and converted it into something very much of their own that would also be useful in the process of fanning patriotism of marshal nature in times of need. The 'Ground Zero' of Hiroshima thus has been tactfully hijacked to commemorate three hundred plus victims of the World Trade Center. This reality is probably a painful reminder that the world's only superpower is willing to dictate its own terms not only in world politics alone, but also in the shaping of history as well. The Hiroshima anniversary this year, as a result, came as an opportunity to highlight those disturbing trends in international diplomacy and also to remind people of the importance of a world free of deadly nuclear

weapons that now have the potentiality of destroying our mother earth many times over.

A special ceremony was held at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima last Tuesday to commemorate the 57th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb over the city. More than 45 thousand people including Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and other leading political figures of Japan attended the ceremony. Participants offered a silent prayer for the victims at 8:15 a.m. the exact time of the bombing. The prime minister and the mayor of Hiroshima also addressed the ceremony.

Although the prime minister in his address expressed firm determination of his government to take the lead in international community for the abolition of nuclear weapons, he tactfully avoided mentioning any concrete measures towards that goal. Neither he pointed out the increasing militarist trend, particularly of the world's sole superpower, which is threatening the outbreak of hostility with the potentiality of inflicting massive destruction. But the mayor of Hiroshima compensated for much of what the prime minister tacitly avoided.

Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba read out a peace declaration in which he appealed to the United States and the world to end a chain of retaliation and instead to seek reconciliation. The mayor made it clear that the people of Hiroshima, first ever victims of atomic bombing in the world, do not have any intention at all to blame a particular country or nation for what happened in the past, but for the sake of the future of mankind they would like to urge the United States to stop the process of massively arming itself.

Mayor Akiba also noted that the danger of nuclear war has become more threatening ever since the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States and called on every nation to work for the prevention of any such possibility.

The message of peace and the denunciation of US nuclear policy were in fact main issues in a number of other events related to the observance of atomic bombing anniversary as well. A number of participants at a symposium on Hiroshima's role in promoting peace held in the city during the weekend expressed the opinion that to prevent or contain possible conflicts in the future, it is necessary to view past battles from a broader perspective. The Japan Congress against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs held an international conference last Friday in Yokohama where peace activists denounced US nuclear policy following the September 11 terrorist attack. They termed US administration's nuclear policy as "impractical and unrealistic."

Taking into consideration the recent trends in world politics, it is most likely that such calls from Hiroshima would hardly make any impact on those who are increasingly discarding the concept of multilateral cooperation and justice in favor of unilateral action in solving issues considered vital for the whole mankind. But even so, the moral voice of Hiroshima at least comes as a reminder that decency always finds its ground, even in times when darkness seem to be looming all around.

AFGHANISTAN

Bad roads are sign of donors' unmet promises

SUSAN B. GLASSER, The Washington Post

FOR MONTHS, the Asian Development Bank had promised that it would take on one of the biggest headaches in postwar Afghanistan: the cratered, agonizingly slow highway connecting Kabul with Kandahar. The project to rehabilitate the major artery between the country's two largest cities was estimated to cost \$150 million, the largest single investment in Afghanistan's infrastructure since the collapse of Taliban rule last November.

Instead, the deal fell apart. In meetings last month, the bank demanded that the Afghan government accept loans to finance the project. Frustrated with international donors that have promised to help rebuild the country, only to impose conditions the fledgling government cannot meet, the Afghans said no.

"They're pulling out," said a top aide to President Hamid Karzai. "Their excuse is that we won't accept loans, but in reality it is too big a project for them."

The Kabul-Kandahar project is not the only road work stalled by the combination of balky donors, the slow pace of bureaucracy and the daunting logistics of accomplishing anything in a barely functioning country. In fact, not a single major road project has been started since the fall of the Taliban.

At a time when Karzai begins nearly every speech with a plea for money to rebuild Afghanistan's roads, when there are armies of unemployed men clamoring for just such work and when international donors are pledging billions of dollars in assistance, the absence of road improvements reflects a broader problem: Even the most basic of Afghanistan's many needs remain unaddressed.

Seemingly everywhere in Kabul these days, there are bustling UN offices and international aid groups flush with funds giving the impression that the rebuilding has begun. But Afghan officials say those appearances are deceiving. Although various nations pledged \$4.5 billion in aid over five years at a January conference in Tokyo, most of that money has not been received. The funds that have arrived have gone largely for such short-term humanitarian programs as assisting refugees and feeding drought-stricken villages.

The country's roads and bridges, rendered all but impassable during two decades of war and neglect, sit untouched and are likely to remain that way for months, if not years.

"Not this year," said one Western diplomat, shaking his head as he considered the stretch of road his government had pledged to help fix, but may never get to.

"We are not in a position to start any project soon," said Salim Qayum, who runs the Asian Development Bank's program here.

He called the collapse of the Kabul-Kandahar highway deal a "misunderstanding." No one questions the urgent need to rehabilitate Afghanistan's roads. The smooth, paved highways built in the 1960s were once the pride of this landlocked country, linking Kabul with such far-off provincial capitals as Herat and Kandahar and speeding commerce with neighboring Iran and Pakistan.

Today, traffic creeps along those highways, which are now littered with bomb craters and potholes bigger than many cars. According to statistics cited in Washington, only 3,200 kilometers (2,000 miles) of road are paved in all of Afghanistan, and only 20 percent of that is in good shape.

"It took two hours to reach Jalalabad in 1973. It takes eight hours now," said Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani, a World Bank veteran who has taken the lead in demanding cash from reluctant international donors. He added, "We have been slowed down; the whole world is speeding up."

A recent trip by road from Kabul to Herat took 24 hours; it used to take 13 hours. On the way from Kabul to the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, nearly every bridge is washed out or destroyed.

For Karzai, such destruction serves as a visual reminder of how fragmented Afghanistan remains. Physically and politically divided into city-states, the country cannot reunite, he tells audiences, until there are highways to bring it back together.

"Highways are very important for us politically," said an aide to Karzai. "They interconnect the whole country. Even more importantly, they integrate us into the region and the world. No matter who Karzai is talking to, roads are always a major priority."

At the same time, Karzai's inability to make progress on his priority has become another symbol of the president's impotence. After months

of promises by the Western leaders who support Karzai, the Afghan president has made increasingly pointed demands in recent weeks. "Six months, more or less, have gone by when we didn't accomplish much," said the Karzai adviser. "Now, we have to deliver." The U.S. aid program is an example of what Karzai is up against. American officials say they have already spent their first \$280 million in Afghan assistance on a program that included no major roads component. A new bill pledging an additional \$1 billion-plus is making its way through Congress, but it, too, includes no significant funding for roads.

That could change, according to a senior foreign diplomat in Afghanistan. He said that the U.S. package would be adjusted to reflect Karzai's pleas for road construction. "We want to add it to the mix," he said.

In the meantime, the U.S. assistance program has concentrated on large donations to such UN operations as the World Food Program, combined with smaller-scale work being done by civil affairs teams of the U.S. military.

In the western city of Herat, work has begun on one project to improve road access to the nearby Iranian border at Islam Qala. But that project is being funded by the Iranian government. A U.S. Special Forces team based in the city said it did not have the mandate to do such work. Overall, the U.S. military gave its humanitarian team in Herat \$700,000 to spend; half of it went to a project for desilting a canal. "We spent all our money," one Special Forces soldier said, but none was spent on roads. The European Union says it plans to commit between \$60 million and \$80 million to overhauling the Kabul-Jalalabad road, a rutted track over which hundreds of thousands of refugees have returned this year from Paki-

stan. But no one yet knows who will do the work or when it will begin.

Several European countries have talked about adopting the Kabul-Jalalabad project and backed away. "Which is it now?" asked one international engineer working in Kabul. "I can't keep track."

Several Afghan officials said the delays have been predictable. "People have unrealistic expectations," said Vice President Hedayat Amin-Arsala, who served as finance minister during the first half of the year.

"They think if people promise something, the funds will flow right away," he said. "Of course that's not possible." Arsala said that at the World Bank, where he used to work, it could take two years to get a project going, no matter how worthy. "The problem is that ordinary Afghans do not understand this process," he said. Qayum attributed the failure of the Asian Development Bank's road project to unrealistic expectations. "The commitment made by the world in Tokyo is misunderstood by Afghans," he said.

"They think that people will come here with sacks full of dollars." Qayum acknowledged that the bank had made "a commitment to take the Kabul-Kandahar road," but said the project fundered last month over the terms of financing. He said the bank has \$200 million available this year to spend on projects in Afghanistan. Of that, \$150 million was to have been in loans for the road project and \$50 million in grants from the Japanese government, and the \$50 million in grants cannot be spent outright on the Kabul-Kandahar project, he said, because the terms of the Japanese gift stipulate that it can be used only to improve secondary roads, not major highways.

ASIAN SECURITY

China seizes the moment

ALAN BOYD

COLIN POWELL always appeared a reluctant convert to Washington's escalating war on terrorism, and is now acutely aware that he is not the only one harboring serious reservations.

The US secretary of state began his second Asian tour with a guarded endorsement of the George W Bush administration's self-appointed mission to drive out Iraqi President Saddam Hussein after a moderately successful campaign in Afghanistan.

He ended it with a ringing condemnation from his Chinese counterpart Tang Jiaxuan that just may have left a bigger impression on regional leaders, at least in the Muslim world.

With impeccable timing, Tang released a position paper that turned the full glare of security discussions at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Brunei on President Bush's increasingly unilateral vision of world order. Calling for Asian countries to establish their own formula for resolving global issues, the paper reflected unease in developing Asia over the secondary role being accorded the United Nations.

"The new security concept is, in essence, to rise above one-sided security and seek common security

through mutually beneficial cooperation," stated the document.

Setting aside Beijing's own threats to take unilateral action to recover renegade Taiwan, multilateralism has been the cornerstone of Chinese security interests since a landmark policy shakeup in 1996. There is little in the latest statement that could be viewed as a departure from this dogmatic stance, which reflects Chinese fears of being left out of a post-Cold War framework of "global unipolar" influence by the United States.

Based on what are termed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the Chinese policy extols precepts that might almost have come from the ASEAN book of dispute resolution: mutual trust, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states and social equality.

And the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) evidently is listening. Predominantly Muslim Indonesia reportedly told Powell that it wants a regional consensus on the next phase of action against terrorism before the US acts. Malaysia concurs, as does Brunei, the current ASEAN chairman.

Even in the more pro-US states such as Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, there is dissatisfaction with the unambiguous - some might say simplistic - rationale

expounded by Bush for attacking rogue states such as Iraq, which is an important trade partner of ASEAN.

Enter Beijing, in the unlikely role of a diplomatic power broker.

"China maintains that a universally accepted new security model should be set up to replace the Cold War mentality and bloc politics," the state-controlled People's Daily commented after the paper's release.

The implication is that Beijing wants to restore the declining status of the UN Security Council, where it can still exercise a veto over "the Cold War mentality and hegemony" of the Pentagon.

To isolate the US, China is forging regional blocs that can out-muscle Washington in the global talks arena and build its own credentials as an emerging superpower. Most important of these is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, set up several years ago with Russia and four central Asian states to promote security dialogue. It has already paid enormous dividends for China, both at the diplomatic and military levels. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov was among the first to back Tang's call in Brunei for a multilateral formula on terrorism, though US officials contend that he was more interested in canvassing

support for an offensive against Chechen rebels.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is due to initial a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation during an official visit to China this year that will likely focus on a joint bid peace in the Korean peninsula. Paralleling separate efforts by Powell to revive the stalled dialogue between North and South, the initiative is so far limited to low-level discussions but will nonetheless appeal to regional states that would like Asia to take more control of its own destiny.

While it does not yet constitute a formal security alliance, the Sino-Russian pact is undoubtedly leaving an imprint on US policy in Asia, especially with respect to the volatile Taiwan Strait.

When Russia announced plans last month to sell China another 40 top-line Su-30 fighter planes, Washington immediately hinted that it would upgrade Taiwan's air-defense missile systems. The same thing happened when China acquired 30 Su-30s three years ago, giving credence to charges by some Asian countries that the two biggest global arms suppliers are fueling tensions.

China wants to forge a better security rapport with East Asia, possibly by building up ARF's role in conflict resolution - the much-coveted multilateral solution. But it is not likely to have an easy ride. For one thing, the ASEAN states are no more comfortable with the notion of extended Chinese influence than with an excessive US military presence in their region. For another, they don't want ARF's noble objective as a forum for diffusing tensions to be overshadowed by the more globalized struggle for ascendancy between Washington and Beijing.

ASEAN would prefer that the two circling economic dynamos share responsibility for keeping the peace in Asia, starting with a cooperative

effort against the terrorism scourge. However, this is unlikely to happen until China's strategic intentions within the region become a little clearer, as the US defensive stance is clearly based on a potential Chinese threat.

It is not the limited Chinese long-range missile capability that worries Washington, but its targeting, which has radically changed since Beijing began to improve its relations with Moscow. Once aimed predominantly at the far-flung Soviet nuclear sites, China's 20-30 aging Dong Feng 5/5A intercontinental ballistic missiles and a larger stock of intermediate DF-21/21As are now thought to be targeted at US cities.

While they do not affect the balance of power within the region, the missiles are an obstacle to the security dialogue, despite overwhelming evidence that China's military capability is defensive in outlook.

Yet there is a basis for optimism that the relationship with the US could improve, even with the undercurrent of tensions over Taiwan and Chinese reservations over the terrorism response. Security analysts are putting their faith in the ongoing transformation of China itself from an agrarian economy to an emerging industrial state, with a corresponding decline in the military apparatus.

Washington should be in a position to influence this transition, but instead pursues policies on China that are uncoordinated and lacking a consensus position, according to Washington's influential US-China Review Commission. In its annual report to the US Congress last month, the commission warned that "serious differences in perceptions" between each country had created a climate for possible misunderstandings.

Courtesy: Asia Times Online