

Commentary

Dancing with a Rogue Empire

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July 4 marks the independence day of what has become today the modern American Empire. July 4 also used to be our own independence day because while it was granted to us by our colonizer right after the Second World War, it became an outright farce as new economic, political and military agreements were imposed on us. These were the quid pro quo for the passage of reconstruction assistance by the U.S. Congress that our leaders had to beg for to rebuild Manila's infrastructure, the second most devastated city in the world, next only to Warsaw in Poland.

But our July 4th "independence day" became too embarrassing, so we turned July 4 into "Philippine-American Friendship Day." Ironically, then Philippine president Diosdado Macapagal who made this change of date of Philippine Independence from July 4 to June 12 would not go beyond date change in asserting the country's national sovereignty. Nor did he have the political will to stand up to U.S. designs. The "Filipino First" economic policies of the previous Garcia administration were dismantled by Macapagal, giving in to the wishes of the American Chamber of Commerce and the International Monetary Fund. It was then that the Philippines entered the era where its economic and fiscal policies were designed by the IMF and the World Bank, institutions under the thumb of the United States.

Today, we have joined the global "war on terror," led by what a former official of the U.S. State Department, William Blum, called "The Rogue State". The Philippines has become an accomplice thru the Balikatan military exercises which trains U.S. interventionist forces for missions around the globe.

More than half a million American troops are posted outside U.S. territory (of which 137,000 are in Iraq) in at least 740 overseas military bases and facilities, mostly in Europe and Asia, to guard U.S. corporate, vital resource and strategic interests. In fact, its armed legions have divided the world into "U.S. unified commands" like the Pacific Command, European Command, Central Command, Southern Command, Northern Command, even the U.S. Air Forces' Space Command, etc.. On the other hand, it rules and dominates the high seas with gunboat diplomacy maintained by its naval carrier fleets and so-called "expeditionary forces." It has used its lead in high-tech warfare and panoply of advanced strike, surveillance and communications systems worldwide to bomb just about any target it wishes to destroy on our planet with impunity. And in the past five years, in contravention of the U.N. Security Council, it has invaded and occupied two sovereign states which were recognized by the United Nations.

It controls and dictates the direction and policies of the three largest global corporations today: the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. The largest private global corporations are U.S. transnational corporations, but even the largest strategic oil and vital resource corporations, are U.S. corporations. Now an empire, and a far cry from its founding fathers' libertarian aspirations, the United States, though having less than 20 percent of the world's population, consumes more than 60 percent of the globe's natural and food resources.

A recent book, *Empire and the Bomb* (2007) by Dr. Joseph Gerson, an American scholar of East

Asian affairs, states that the U.S. rogue empire engaged in more than 150 military interventions from 1899 to 2000, in complete disregard of the sovereignty of small states. It is the only country that actually exploded nuclear weapons against the people of a non-nuclear state. According to Gerson, the United States has threatened the use of nuclear weapons to preserve its global empire on more than 20 occasions against other countries especially during the Cold War — against Russia, China, Vietnam, Korea and the Middle East. Today, it continues to follow its doctrine of “full spectrum dominance” by threatening to use and to detonate nuclear weapons against smaller countries.

But it is not just guilty of double standards when it comes to the matter of nuclear weapons; it also does so when it comes to human rights and democracy. The Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo prisons --- or even those long-ago atrocities committed against a distant people, the Filipinos, during the “pacification” war in the early 1900s, all speak of how the United States truly regards human rights.

That is why it cannot claim to have a high moral ground when it raises concerns against nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Iran, while ignoring the nuclear arsenals of its allies, Israel and Pakistan. It also keeps mum on its own continued development of mini-nukes, uranium-depleted ordnances, strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, and other kinds of weapons of mass destruction like chemical and biological weapons that it continues to develop and refine.

The Bush administration’s foreign policies have, in fact, only increased the enemies of the U.S. worldwide, such as those among families left behind by those who were obliterated by American bombs in Afghanistan and Iraq. Six years after 9/11, the U.S. —the rogue empire — has neither diminished the threat to its homeland nor to its interests; it has become the No. 1 recruiter of its most feared “terrorist” enemies.

Our friendship today with the American people should start by strengthening our solidarity with those among them who oppose the continued military occupation of Iraq and the global military interventions of the Bush administration. Thousands of promising young Americans just out of their teens, especially from minority families —Blacks, Hispanic, Asian including Filipino-Americans — who have joined the U.S. armed forces either for employment or for the much-coveted U.S. citizenship are being used today as cannon fodder in a useless, senseless war in Iraq. Many young Americans have been sacrificed by Bush to die for the expansion and reaping of superprofits by U.S. oil companies which have shamelessly grabbed Iraq’s oil-rich lands.

Recently, the American people have expressed their anti-war sentiment by voting for Democrats in both chambers of the U.S. Congress. We should support those Americans who oppose war and intervention in other sovereign countries. They are our allies as we are theirs in the struggle for peace. The American people are learning that they must act quickly, they must speak out now, before it is too late, as more Iraqis and Americans continue to die for the corporate greed of U.S. oil companies.

A few years ago, a Filipino war veteran who survived Bataan and the Death March and who now lives in San Diego wrote me a lengthy letter saying I was an “ingrate” (walang utang na loob) for opposing U.S. policies in the Philippines and in other countries. He said that “we should support Americans for having liberated us Filipinos from the Japanese in World War II, and we should be grateful for this.” I wrote back to our kababayan in the United States, clarifying two points with him.

First, I said, when Filipinos strongly articulate pro-Filipino and pro-sovereignty positions on issues such as the Subic rape case where the victim was a Filipina, they do not seek to disrupt or sever our ties with the United States. On the contrary, what we seek is the improvement, expansion and deepening of those ties, which have been weakened, smeared and strained in the past and even in

the present by unequal, one-sided relations. Because after all, when we talk about true “friendship”, a relationship between two entities, we assume that there is mutuality and respect of the other . When one treats the other as a doormat, you cannot expect such a relationship to flourish or develop.

Second, that those who are strongly against U.S. interventions are not anti-American, but are in fact, pro-American people. The policies and activities of the US government in many Third World countries are not necessarily supported by the American people, let alone known by the latter because these are hidden under the cloak of secret operations by the CIA. There is also opposition because of the serious budgetary deficits caused by over-spending on its defense and military expenditures, eating away a big portion of the US budget that should have gone to health, education, welfare and school-feeding programs, and other basic social services for the American people.

If we succeed in preventing and stopping U.S. wars and other forms of U.S. military interventions overseas like the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, we would in fact be giving the American people a big favor. In that case, more money can be rechanneled to where it should be spent, namely, for their social and welfare services . This is where the deeper and more substantial interests of the Filipino and American peoples can actually converge.

P.S.

* This article appears in the July 4, 2007 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer. It was based on the author’s speech at Dela Salle University-Taft, Yuchengco Hall on June 30, 2007. Roland Simbulan is Full Professor at the University of the Philippines. An author of several books on Philippine-American relations, he is also a former Faculty Regent and Vice Chancellor for Planning and Development.