

The World of the Twenty-First Century Takes Shape

By Wakamatsu Kenji

The 1990s saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War. Since then we have been living in what has been termed the "post-Cold War era." Democracy and free market economics, centered on the superpower United States, have spread around the world. The innovations in telecommunications technologies have spread American-style values through corporate management and even through our social systems. This so-called globalization has been cited as a feature of this era. And yet we cannot overlook the widening gap between rich and poor among countries and regions.

The suicide attacks carried out by Islamic extremists against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11 were a tragedy that shocked the world. They not only killed thousands of innocent and peaceful citizens, they also significantly damaged the world's economic nerve center and U.S. prestige. The attacks were an event that changed the world. Since then, citizens have been further rattled by the appearance of bioterrorism in the United States in the form of anthrax.

We are now fighting against global terrorism. The United States has keenly lobbied other countries for their understanding and support in this struggle. It has lobbied not only its NATO and Japanese allies, but also other countries in the vicinity of Afghanistan, including its neighbor Pakistan, the Arab countries, Russia, China, India and Iran. Washington expects that the United States and Japan will play a role in fostering a new post-Taliban regime and in rebuilding Afghanistan. Afghanistan is strategically placed between the Indian Ocean and resource-rich Central Asia. In the 19th century, it was the scene of rivalry between Russia and Britain. Millions of Afghans fled into neighboring countries as a result of the 1979 Soviet invasion and the ongoing civil war.

The U.S.-led air strikes have triggered another exodus of refugees. Moreover, bombing errors have killed or injured ordinary citizens, which have fuelled criticism of the United States amongst the people in Muslim countries.

The Arab-centered Muslim countries are angry at America's firm support for Israel. If the current Afghan "war" becomes a drawn-out affair, we shall have to make more efforts at fostering peace in the Middle East, as well as improving ties between India and Pakistan, which are at loggerheads over Kashmir. It will be all the more necessary to foster stability in these regions. The United States may have to change its usual course of action to eliminate terrorism. In any case, it is negotiating with other countries for their cooperation, which should help establish an international framework for a new order in the 21st century.

Meanwhile, Japan is providing logistic support in the current struggle. It has sent a number of escort vessels to the Indian Ocean to help supply U.S. forces. Although Japan is still under the constitutional restriction banning it from the use of force, it has signalled a greater willingness to play an international role in response to the changing international situation. Japan is trying to provide economic aid, as well as local NGO-based humanitarian assistance. It also wishes to hold an international conference in Tokyo to discuss the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Ridding our societies of terrorism will require the western world and the Islamic world to exorcise their suspicions of each other. Japan could contribute to the birth of new international ideals in the world of the 21st century by fostering dialogue between civilizations.

However, the terrorist attacks have had their biggest impact on the world economy. Spending is down in Japan and it will be increasingly difficult to break out of recession now

that the hoped for recovery in the United States is fading into the distance. Amid the growing calls for effective measures to stimulate the economy, there is the question of whether Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro can implement his painful structural reforms. Japan's economy and society are at a major turning point. We appear to have entered a crucial new year.

COMING UP

The next issue of *JTI* will examine Japan's economic reconstruction in 10 years time, taking the impact of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the global economy into consideration. In our "PIONEERS" series of articles, we will introduce Shibusawa Eiichi, a well-known industrialist who contributed to the modernization of Japan during the Meiji period.

TO READERS

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