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A new dictator emerges

CERTAINLY, the US is not alone on this planet in wanting to destroy terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. But in the case of Iran, the US plays solitaire. Not out of pressure but by its own choice. Washington, especially the Congress, ought to ask itself why others are staying out of this one. Why did Paris allow its energy company, Total, to commit US\$2 billion (US\$1 = RM3.36) to help develop Iran's oil industry? Why did Moscow allow its company Gazprom to be in the same venture? France is, after all, a close ally of the US, at least by virtue of their relationship as members of the powerful Group of Seven and as veto-wielding high priests of the United Nations Security Council. Russia is also a member of the Security Council and, since the end of the Cold War, has become quite dependent on the Americans. Why would they want to incur the great wrath of the White House?

The answer to these questions is quite simple, really. The US, for all its experience in democracy, failed to realise that unilateral actions could only go so far. From the French and the Russian perspectives, and probably the perspective of the rest of the world, an American law is an American law, not an international or a global law. Iran may be pictured as the "bad guy" in American propoganda, in the made-in-Hollywood movies, or in the best-selling spy novels by American authors. American politics is not international politics, and American bias is still very much an American thing. Iran is a country that needs to feed its people, provide them with roofs over their heads, and jobs to make a living. Terrorism is not the exclusive occupation of Iranians, there is terrorism on American streets, European clubs, or Asian villages. The same goes with the US policy on Cuba, the only communist regime in the western hemisphere.

Economic or trade sanctions could serve a positive purpose but if it is to be imposed by the international community on one country, then some form of consensus or general agreement must be reached before sanctions can be applied. In the case of apartheid South Africa, the sanctions which were imposed on the country were almost on a global scale. It was clear that South Africa then was discriminating against the indigenous people, and the regime was arresting and killing leaders of groups fighting for freedom from apartheid. Even then, if the US had imposed sanctions against apartheid South Africa unilaterally, there was bound to be some countries that would not go along. In the case of the Kuwaiti invasion by Iraq, if the UN Security Council had not obtained a consensus on the Desert Storm mission to free Kuwait from invading Iraq, half the world may have condemned the Allies and come out in support of Saddam Hussain.

It is a simple matter of courtesy and showing respect for the laws of other countries. Devising the d'Amato law on Iran and passing it in the US Congress and then expecting the world to adhere to the sanctions without bothering to get feedbacks from them has added a putrid smell of arrogance to the whole US approach. Similarly, the insistence by some industrialised countries that Asean bars Myanmar from becoming its member, by virtue that the Myanmar junta was stifling the freedom of association of pre-democratic groups and was violating the rights of the Myanmar people. And the blind refusal by some powers to act against Serbia or arm the Bosnians when the former Yugoslavia was submerged in a sea of blood from the Serbs' brutal ethnic-cleansing campaign.

Malaysia, of course, has made it known quite some time ago about what it

officially thinks about the US unilaterally making rules and setting standards for the rest of the world. In fact, while in Cuba last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government was willing to face the consequences and risks involved in forging closer links with Fidel Castro's nation. Petronas' involvement with Total and Gazprom in the Iranian deal may also jeopardise the national oil corporation's position. But American laws are not about to govern Malaysians' lives or stop Malaysians from putting their money where they think there could be a win-win situation. If the US decides to isolate Iran, then it should go about punishing American companies that defy that law, not companies from other countries whose governments do not even support the US sanctions.

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