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US-Trigger (commentary)  
UNITED STATES A TRIGGER-HAPPY NATION

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- President Bill Clinton's decision to cancel his trip to Malaysia because of the standoff with Iraq once again shows the United States' tendency to be a trigger-happy nation.

By choosing to stay at home perhaps to decide which targets U.S. missiles should shoot in Iraq, instead of meeting over a dozen leaders now here for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, suggestions that the U.S. is a trigger-happy nation may not after all be far-fetched.

Just look at what Clinton's missiles recently did in poor Sudan. In retaliation to the bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the U.S. fired missiles at a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan, killing several factory workers.

Now if the factory had really been manufacturing chemical substances as the Americans alleged, then surely the Sudanese government would not have slotted the factory as one of the places to be visited by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his trip to the African nation in May.

But due to a problem he was then having with his foot, Dr Mahathir had to cancel the factory visit at the eleventh hour.

It is perhaps something in the American psyche to be trigger-happy. For one, the American society is a gun-owning one with perhaps the most liberal gun-ownership rules.

Cities like Washington and New York, for instance, have one of the highest crime rates and gun-killings in the world.

Questions have been raised in many forums as to whether free-wheeling gun-ownership under the American system is so sacrosanct that any suggestions to ban the use of hand guns by citizens would always be shot down.

And questions have also been asked if gun-ownership by citizens is part and parcel of human rights as the American see it.

The U.S. spends billions to run its prisons -- perhaps the most sophisticated in the world -- and perhaps more than the gross national product (GNP) of many developing countries.

Studies have shown that most deaths in crimes in the U.S. were due to the use of guns and trigger-happy criminals were the cause of untold trauma by tens of thousands of families who have lost their loved ones.

Over the past few years, there has been a spate of massacres at some remote elementary schools in the U.S., again by trigger-happy kids.

Still, until today any suggestions at outlawing the use of hand-guns by ordinary citizens in the U.S. would never see the light of day.

In the case of the Iraq standoff, neither President Clinton, nor the ostensibly wise men and women of the U.S. Congress or Senate, as well at the United Nations Security Council had ever seemed to ask why, after more than seven years, weapons inspectors from the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) had not completed its inspections of the so-called weapons of mass destruction Iraq is believed to possess.

For years before Iraq first pulled the plug a year ago against UNSCOM, these inspectors were virtually free to roam the country. Did they find any?

Surely, if there were any weapons of mass destruction (as the Americans describe them), they would have stumbled on something in more than seven years since UNSCOM was set up by the UN Security Council in April 1991.

And surely the Security Council could not have expected Iraq to agree to the inspectors doing their work for as long as they want to.

If anything, the whole affair lends credibility to criticisms that either the inspectors led by Richard Butler are grossly inefficient or that the U.N. Security Council is playing to the U.S. gallery.

There is merit to Iraq's fears that the American members of UNSCOM could be telling their country on the locations of targets for the planned U.S. missile attacks.

Prime Minister Dr Mahathir raised the same point yesterday. He asked: "Why not let others do the inspections. When you insist on having people who are biased even before they reach Iraq, the report is not going to be accurate".

Consider for a moment Iraq's arguments. It has got every right to protect its own sovereignty which for over seven years has been torn apart by the UNSCOM presence.

The question that needs to be asked is that why no deadline has ever been fixed for UNSCOM to complete its task?

Iraq, particularly its President, Saddam Hussein, of course is largely to blame for the crisis and the seige the country and its people are now in.

Granted that it was Saddam's adventurism to attack and later invade neighbouring Kuwait in 1990 that was the root cause of all the sufferings the Iraqi people have to endure for the past eight years.

But certainly, too, the international community must see to it that there ought to be a cut-off point to the punishments that Iraq -- once a showpiece of the Middle East -- and its people are subjected to.

The Security Council should demonstrate its own clout by coming down hard on the U.S. for trying to act unilaterally against another country. It should outlaw any such attempts without any hesitation.

If the U.N. could not be expected to do this, then the effectiveness of the U.N. itself should be called into serious question.

A country like the U.S. which prides itself in being the grand champion of human rights, but at the same time shows no remorse with killing innocent lives in a vital pharmaceutical factory in one of the world's poorest nations, should not be allowed to take the law into its own hands.

And the world perhaps would be little safer place to live in if the U.S. stops being trigger-happy.

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