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Act justly

RIGHTLY so, the international community supports the call by the United States to eliminate terrorism. But it should not be seen as an unequivocal support for an unapologetic and implacable demonstration of American might and muscle to "bring our enemies to justice".

Malaysia and like-minded countries who support the US have reminded it that military action will not prevent further acts of terrorism. The US must be certain of the targets it intends to pursue and the judgment of Osama bin Laden's guilt or anyone else for that matter should be based on hard evidence rather than on circumstantial evidence. Most countries agree that any riposte to military attacks on their territories, be it the use of military base and airspace, must observe international law and exercise great care to avoid civilian casualties. But how does one ascertain that civilian population will not suffer?

The resolution passed by the Congress, authorising President George W. Bush to "use all necessary and appropriate force" against terrorism comes uncomfortably close to the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which President Lyndon B. Johnson cited as his basis for escalating the Vietnam War. We have seen how military action as a rule of engagement has allowed for America's blameless passage through the labyrinth of 20th Century atrocity. Will this call to war do the same?

True, Article 51 of the United Nations Charter authorises the use of force in self defence against armed attacks. But in international law, the use of force is authorised when its necessity is "instant, overwhelming and leaves no choice of means and no moment of deliberation and must be limited by that necessity and kept within it". Still, it is a legal doctrine frequently abused by no less than the US herself in pursuit of Wilsonian idealism; a stance that justifies military intervention and imperial repression in the discharge of its duty to cleanse the world of impurities.

Yes, some things need putrefaction. Terrorism is one of them for it is an act that perverts peace-teaching ideologies and religions, including Islam; distorts the cause of the oppressed; and assaults all of humanity. But as pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the use of arms alone will not resolve terrorism as long as the problems of the oppressed people in several parts of the world remain unresolved.

It is imperative that the international community devotes its attention to solving the problems that caused people to resort to acts of manic desperation, terrorism. It is timely to pursue the previously unheeded call by Egypt and Malaysia, both moderate Islamic countries, for a World Congress on Terrorism. Egypt has lost a president to terrorism and Malaysia is seeing the rise of Islamic militancy and extremism.

The past has witnessed the erosion of the US' moral authority as The Last, Best Hope of Mankind. This is the opportune moment for the US to reclaim its moral authority - by putting aside its thirst for bloody vengeance, and opening new avenues of sanity for the oppressed and desperate. But for that, the US and the global community must sit together and stop the injustices in the world. Surely, Bush does not want to be the post-Cold War Emperor Nero, standing on stacks of dead civilians in the name of bringing justice to America's enemies.

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