

16/09/2001

Our battle together

THE United States should not act with imperial high-handedness in its crusade to end terrorism and to punish the states that sponsor terrorists. The battle against terrorism is not hers alone but the collective task of the international community.

As pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, terrorism is a crime that has to be dealt with by the whole world and resolved at its root. Its solution does not lie in demarcating the world into Islamic countries and non-Islamic countries or dividing it into friends and foes. Yes, there should be tough action to eliminate terrorism but this should not be mistaken as payback time - demanding nations to take sides, prove their loyalty and show absolute support for a course of action that is unilaterally American. History has proven that the politics of payback is a double-edged sword.

Violence begets violence and needless bloodshed, perpetuating rather than resolving the problem. Nor does it illuminate, heal or make redemptive struggle possible. Any retaliation based on the erroneous equation of terrorism with Islamic tenets and Islamic phraseology such as jihad is certainly counter-productive.

It would only bring about a surge of anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism to the political forefront; lay the groundwork for isolationism of the Islamic countries, at a time when engagement is extremely crucial to fight the menace of cross-border terrorism; entrench the perception that Muslims are a besieged lot and thus, fuel militant uprisings; and intensify xenophobia on both sides, the Islamic and non-Islamic countries.

As it is, the prevailing anti-Americanism in Russia has led to suggestions, particularly within the Council of Foreign and Defence Policy, that it abandons Nato and establishes an anti-American alliance of Russia, China and India or Pakistan - nuclear powers that could confront US-led Nato with the support of some countries such as Cuba or Iraq. As remote as it is, this possibility should not be discounted.

It is unfortunate that Tuesday's attacks has spawned anti-Muslim attacks in the US, Australia and United Kingdom. We believe this is a result of the Western liberal discourse that constructs the idea of a rabidly fundamental Islam - a tangible antagonist stand that allows the Westerners to subsequently assert their superior liberal qualities over the others. Despite the fact that the US, Australia and United Kingdom make allowances for multiculturalism, the stereotyping of Islam and Asian minorities persist. It shows that their multiculturalism is a hollow construct that divides rather than unites.

The Muslims in the US are Americans first and foremost; any other form of identity is irrelevant. It would be self-destructive for some people in these countries to turn the Muslims, their very own fellow-citizens, into hated examples of the terrorists' ideological brethren. By doing so, they will remain captive to a state of accusation and counter-accusation, of grievance and counter-grievance, of victims and victimisers.

These governments must take a hard line against the demagogues who spread prejudices and incite hate crimes. To be ambivalent is to grant these people a moral holiday, one in which their Muslim fellow-citizens will pay the price.

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