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It won't work

FOR Israel, the international "war on terror" led by its godfather, the United States, has replaced the logic of peace with the logic of violence. If America can bomb Afghanistan in pursuit of al-Qaeda, why can't the Jewish state bulldoze a few Palestinian villages and refugee camps, indeed bring the Palestinian Authority to heel, in pursuit of suicide bombers?

If George W. Bush can make a bad guy out of Saddam Hussein without having to prove the Iraqi president's links to terrorism, surely Ariel Sharon needs no justification but his own to boot out Yasser Arafat and render the Palestinian leader "irrelevant"?

America's complicity in granting Israel unlimited rein under the rubric of "self-defence" chimes perfectly with Sharon's hard-line Zionism. He is holding Palestinian statehood hostage to absolute Israeli security - in other words, indefinitely, at least until it can be conceded under Israel's own terms, including the non-partition of Jerusalem, the pushing of boundaries to cover illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and the expulsion of most of the Palestinian population to neighbouring countries in order to abrogate, once and for all, their right of return.

Sharon is trying to push forward some of those terms by forcing Arafat into exile and replacing him with a quisling Palestinian leadership. It won't work. If Arafat were to be martyred in the Israeli siege and demolition of his headquarters, as Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has warned after receiving a call for help from the Palestinian president, all hell would break loose in the Middle East.

There can be no resolution to the Mideast crisis until the issue of Palestinian statehood is uncoupled from that of Israeli security. Only a comprehensive peace plan can begin to erode the substantial grounds for terrorism on both sides of the divide.