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Propounding an alternative model

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"MUSLIMS are at their weakest point in recent history", Datuk Dr Munir Majid noted in *The Big Picture* (New Sunday Times, Nov 10), and suggested the way forward was through strong leaders such as Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Johan Jaafar, in the same issue, argues that liberal (and moderate) Muslim majorities may be the greatest enemy of positive global Islamic influence today because of their relative silence. He calls upon Muslim leaders and governments to define the real terrorists in their own countries before all are pasted with this generalised label. I would say this is the time for proactive advocacy.

Munir's thesis accepts today's geopolitical status quo as much as Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* does, but the former explains the reasons from an "insider's empathetic point of view".

This view of the real plight of Muslims in the world today is valid, but who is listening or who really will listen after 9/11 and, now, the Bali bombings? If we accept the premise of the power paradigm and want to play the power game, we must fight fire with fire, not merely try to douse it with tears of emotion!

That seems to be why the Prime Minister is reported to have said, "Muslims must rise up and use whatever means of influence they have, even if it is oil as a weapon."

He is not advocating war or terrorism but really accepting the premise that in the "real global politik" of today, only power expressed in such ways - although often in unjust and unacceptable ways - still rules and dictates what is conceived, perceived and accepted as right. In such a paradigm, might is right.

Johan pleads for the alternative way. If the majority of Muslims are moderate and can be somewhat "liberal" in democratic terms, "their voice can and must be heard".

Munir does not advocate using power as a means to be heard, but rather using the democratic liberal means of advocacy; first in their own Muslim nations, and then the global arena. He warns the moderate Muslim majority of the dangers of silence in a world increasingly being mobilised against "Islamic terrorism".

Malaysia is a model of moderate, liberal Islam. The Malaysian model of Growth with Equity (GEM) can become a case study in "peaceful achievements in a predominantly Muslim but multiracial and multi-religious country", as Munir argues.

Terror begets more terror, and Dr Mahathir has argued that this war cannot be fought just with guns. The US and its allies do not yet believe him, as few did when he "argued against the IMF's penicillin solution". Time will prove him right again, though.

In the meantime, state terrorism still rules, although with the unanimous "acquiescence" of the United Nations Security Council.

I argued elsewhere that the only valid compromise in the Security Council was through a negative block vote by all 10 non-veto members, and that too only when they were satisfied with all conditions set upon Iraq, Israel and the Palestinian State.

Although the UN has now voted in favour of the Iraq resolution, one can still hope all 15 Security Council members have the courage to "enforce" all resolutions, whether they deal with Iraq or Israel or the Palestinian

state, for a just model of UN governance without selective preferences. Otherwise, it may be that the kangaroo court of justice will again prevail in the name of a global "peace" force, as has happened many times before.

The next question is, how can Malaysia propound an alternative model or a way forward which does not subscribe to the power paradigm?

The New Testament scriptures argue that "power is made perfect in weakness". And few would argue that Mother Teresa did not exemplify such "positive soft power" through her ministry in Calcutta. This power to do good may be what all theological empowerment is about.

The power and authority of the state, as exercised in the mandatory death sentence for drug traffickers or for illegal possession of guns in Malaysia can be viewed as being propagated for "the destruction of evil intentions in society". The possession of drugs or guns without "declared legal intent" is defined as "evil" in Malaysian law.

Before 9/11, the liberal democrats often argued for the absolute rights of the individual and often viewed legislation such as mandatory death sentences as undemocratic.

Today, after 9/11, as Munir argued, even 15-year-olds are "imprisoned without trial" in the so-called greatest democracy in the world. Absolute rights of the democratic liberal kind, even in the US, are now subject to the constraints of "homeland security".

The American Government today accepts that national interest can be defined in "political-cultural" terms, even transcending liberal political definitions. One can argue that the American "homeland security laws" are their version of our Internal Security Act. Whither, then, all the institutions of Western absolute liberalism (like Amnesty International, etc) when the US Government now violates their own traditional perspectives?

The peaceful way forward in the world can be aptly captured by Dr Mahathir's prosper-thy-neighbour philosophy. Malaysia's growth with equity model is fundamentally premised on this love-thy-neighbour way.

Therefore, whether Malay or Indian or Chinese or Kadazan or Kelabit, poverty has been and continues to be an enemy of the state in Malaysia. Absolute poverty is now almost nil but relative poverty is still a serious enemy especially in urban areas and squatter colonies.

The Government of Malaysia's proactive development agenda argues that it is not sufficient for "any system" to only be concerned for themselves. We must also take care of the less fortunate in our communities. We do not beggar-thy-neighbour but really should seek to prosper them.

If the UN adopts this philosophy of development in the Millennium Development agenda to eradicate absolute poverty in the world, can we believe that the need for "terrorism" will be reduced? Actually, in Malaysia we have been successful - with a similar development agenda - in our own war against militant communism between 1948-1960.

That anti-terrorist war was strategically planned and executed brilliantly by two of our ablest leaders - the late Tun Sir Gerald Templer and the late Tun Abdul Razak; and the founding fathers of the Royal Military College. They led the military war against terrorism and the war for rural economic development, respectively.

So, when Dr Mahathir tells an increasingly deaf world that the war on terror cannot be fought with guns alone, it is not an empty statement. It is founded on our experience with development and built upon the GEM that Malaysia has pursued since 1948.

Now, in the ninth Five-Year Plan period, we can still continue to grow with (relative) equity and multicultural political stability. Hopefully, as we move towards 2020, we will weather many other storms as well.

Maybe by then the world will notice our peaceful model and think it

worth emulating.