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Anti-war, not anti-US

THE American ambassador to Malaysia has assured that US-Malaysia ties will remain intact despite the country's opposition to the US-led war on Iraq. Marie T. Huhtala also expressed the hope that Malaysia will continue to stay "friendly" with the US and to be "mindful of the very important interests" that the two countries share.

While Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been a high-profile critic of the American invasion of Iraq, Malaysia is not, and has never been, anti-American. Malaysia opposed Saddam Hussein when he invaded Iraq in 1990 in clear breach of international law and supported the coalition organised by the US under the auspices of the United Nations. After the Sept 11 attacks, Malaysia has been, and still is, on the frontline of the global war on terrorism.

The American ambassador has asked the world to "give the US the benefit of the doubt". However, the Bush strategy of pursuing American foreign policy defiantly alone if need be, does not inspire confidence in what it believes. Its unilateral instincts in a range of multilateral issues ranging from the Kyoto Protocol to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to the International Criminal Court make it difficult for the world to give the US the benefit of the doubt. This will be made even more difficult if the US goes on with its campaign to transform the Middle East and topple other tyrants with weapons of mass destruction. The onus is on a belligerent America to demonstrate that it is indeed "a force for world peace". Among other things, the US will have to show a sceptical world that the post-war reconstruction of Iraq will be accompanied by the vigorous pursuit of a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Malaysia remains committed to becoming "friends and partners" not only with the US but with the rest of the world, partly because the world has become too intertwined, and partly because democracy means dialogue. The dialogue between Malaysia and the US must not be broken off, and both countries will need to continue to speak to and hear each other.