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## Recognising the worth of nations

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AT a time in history when the unashamed use of force has characterised the expression of power, it may seem unrealistic to want to examine other attributes which compose power and influence, not all of which "soft" but not all as hard and final as the use of military might.

The use of force is intended to achieve and influence outcomes with the threat that its further use will be made if there were any subsequent challenges to those intended out-comes.

The Israeli approach to the use of force in its problems with the Palestinians is the best contemporary example of such expression of power, which has found its universal counterpart in the American approach since Sept 11, 2001.

This is not to say there was no use of force by the Americans before then, but that use was not expressed as the first mover act of choice, only the result of the failure of other methods of influence.

Even then, there always have been intense debates whether all those other methods had been exhausted before force was used, and if that use of force was ethically and legally correct.

Now, with the immediate, direct and unilateral use of force, its ethical and legal rectitude is constantly challenged, even as its intended outcomes remain elusive.

The first mover use of unilateral force has resulted in the loss of the moral high ground which, perhaps, the "realists" in the Bush administration are not too bothered about, but also in the frustration of intended outcomes - which should concern the Bush administration.

The loss of the moral high ground, however, is not something to be ridiculed, because it has the consequence of diminishing the worth of the American nation, the attributes of power and influence that have impelled other nations to American experience and achievement as, arguably, no other country has so impelled in the history of the world - from the values of liberty, freedom, opportunity to culture, even if flawed, to economic and technological achievement.

In the immediate term, much of the deep sympathy felt for the atrocity of Sept 11 has evaporated before the uninhibited use of American weapons of near mass destruction in Afghanistan, Iraq and goodness knows where else.

Even with such free use of over-whelming force, however, America's objectives and intended outcomes are stuck in a quagmire in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the fight against international terrorism.

All this shows the use of force alone in the expression of power, even by a country whose military capability exceeds that of the next eight countries combined, cannot achieve intended outcomes in the civilised community of nations and does, indeed, diminish the overall "power" of the perpetrator.

There is a revulsion against what the Americans are doing that exceeds the opposition to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s.

If the "realists" in the Bush administration think, having survived Vietnam, America can see through this round, they are sadly mistaken. America has antagonised the world's Muslims by the use of force against Islamic nations without addressing the causes of discontent and by identifying the conspirators and perpetrators of Sept 11 with Islam, thereby releasing also latent urges against Muslims.

If the "realists" think there is this "hate" against America and things American in any case, what they have done is to enlarge the constituency of this "hate" among Muslims and others, as a result of their chosen route to express power. America is diminished in the eyes of the world.

If the "realists" think all this does not matter as military might will prevail ultimately, they are wrong, because it will not, and has not. This is a different world from the 1960s and 70s.

There has been an information, communication and technological revolution which both disperses the appurtenances of power while also conspiring in its convergence outside the formal organisation of the sovereign State.

The organisation of terror is one expression of this transformation which challenges traditional arrangements of statehood and international relations.

It is a challenge the use of powerful American force alone cannot address.

It requires wise counsel in the councils of nations. It is an international problem, not just an American one, even if the Americans are the most aggrieved, and even if America must lead in the consultation process in the exercise of its power and influence as the leading nation of the world.

There will be a diminution of that position however if America continues to go-it-alone and to use force as first recourse.

It will lose influence, even with traditional allies, and will not be an example the world will choose to follow, both in matters of conduct and in the achievement of ends if those ends are so clearly seen to be ultimately put to destructive use. It is still not too late for America to pull the world together.

Malaysian Worth

AS we celebrate the 46th year of independence today, we might also want to reflect on our level of power and influence.

Of course in terms of scale, we are not anywhere near American attributes and achievement. But we have chalked up some useful values which might have some worth in the conduct of international relations.

We have had our problems - the communist insurrection, the May 1969 racial riots, economic crises - but we have surmounted them by fashioning long-term structural solutions and by not lashing out with impatience and in indignation.

We have not been perfect, there are many shortcomings to be addressed, but we are internationally recognised as a successful developing nation, a model of progress, tolerance and moderation.

That we are a Muslim country, at the same time multi-racial and multi-religious, makes us all the more unique in our achievement in the eyes of the world. As a result particularly of the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, we do have a power and influence in the affairs of the world.

We do have problems of course, not least the threat posed to our system by Pas which wants to take the country along an extremist route which would cancel our economic achievement and imperil our political survival.

We must and can handle this threat, but our cause is not helped if the Americans continue to do things which increase the appeal of extremist Muslims. Ironically, the way Pas assumes it is right to force through what it wants is similar to the American assumption in its use of force today.

Be that as it may, with Pas thankfully still at bay, many countries, especially Muslim ones, look to Malaysia as a kind of role model, and Malaysia can play a useful role in bridging the gulf between America and the Muslim world - if only America would not make it so difficult to

happen.

Malaysia will be chairing the OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference) summit in mid-October, after which the Apec summit will be held in Bangkok, which President Bush will attend. There should be intense diplomatic efforts to establish some kind of "contact" between Muslim countries and the US, to some extent to bridge the gap, by coming up with some sensible positions and statements at the OIC, in the expectation of a reasonable response and commitment when President Bush meets Dr Mahathir in Bangkok.

As always, these things have to be carefully choreographed before hand.

Malaysia has to play a pivotal role among the Muslim nations.

We have come far enough after 46 years of independence to establish a worth, a power and an influence, to be a force for good at this dark time in the history of the world.