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Uncle Sam's plans for the world

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The Malaysian Chapter

MALAYSIA is another US friend that seems to have fallen foul of Washington because of its opposition to the invasion of Iraq. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is certainly not the flavour of the month in Washington.

The Americans, however, must understand we are not anti-American, never have been, but we have the sovereign right to hold to certain principles and to express them to protect the interests of small countries such as ourselves.

It depends, the Americans say, on how we express our views, and on whether or not we act on them. Well, there is no doubt they are getting at Dr Mahathir here, as if he is not speaking for Malaysians and the Malaysian Government. He is, and in his own style, just as President Bush speaks differently from Colin Powell. The policy is the same.

On whether or not we act on what we believe, I don't think, as a small country, we can do much, except perhaps assemble likeminded countries so as to increase the hopedfor influence on American thinking.

At the end of the day, the US is all-powerful and can choose to ignore what it wants. So there is no big deal about Malaysia being able to do anything against the US, except rave and rant, as the Americans see it.

Malaysia always wants to have good relations with the US. Indeed, the substantial relationship is significant, not just in terms of trade and investment, but also in terms of education and culture, as well as, AND THIS IS IMPORTANT, real co-operation against international terrorism.

We are not a country which says one thing and does another. When we say we are against international terrorism, we act on it. But we have a different view on how best to comprehensively defeat it. And we do not believe in enlarging the fight to pursue strategic interests.

If the Americans continue to pursue this enlargement in an unconscionable manner, it would strain relations, however fundamentally good and substantial they are. To push out at the boundaries, to talk about American bases in Asia as if every country has to willynilly accept them is not good form in a world of sovereign States. Or have the Americans forgotten that?

Of course, in the final analysis, we are more dependent on the Americans than they are on us, if at all. We do want good relations with the US - a long way out, but up to a point.