

Of sovereignty and destiny

IN a grim reminder of how United States military hawks can be linked to both Democrat and Republican parties, President Clinton's Defence Secretary William Perry two days ago asked President Bush to bomb North Korea.

Perry had long advocated the policy of "preventive defence," which includes shooting down enemy missiles over third or fourth countries before they reach US territory. So what if allies or anyone else happened to be underneath or somewhere downwind during that nuclear exchange?

It was this kind of sadly ironic and self-contradictory logic that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad alluded to in his remarks during the Perdana Global Peace Forum in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday.

As forum chairman, he observed that the US attack on Iraq was based on Washington wanting to give democracy to a country whether the people wanted it or not. so that it could "kill you to set you free." The ends were made to justify the means, which tragically is the identifying mark of a terrorist.

A panel speaker, former UN Assistant Secretary-General Dennis Halliday, said there was state terrorism as sponsored by a government, and then there was conventional (private group or individual) terrorism as a reaction to that.

Then to keep such obscene absurdities as an illegal war safely in place from London to Canberra, Eisenhower's concept of the fear-some military-industrial complex had now become the military-industrial-media complex. Some news reports of atrocities could air in Britain or Australia but not the US, but people would still not move against the profanities.



Behind the Headlines

By BUNN NACARA

Dr Helen Caldicott, founder-president of the Nuclear Policy Research Institute, said she had written about the frightening destructiveness of US military power on the Iraqi people for the *New York Times*, but was told they could not print it. Perhaps pressing for democracy in other countries is more acceptable.

As a physician specialising in paediatric care, she was particularly concerned about the use of radioactive depleted uranium in US bombs, making Iraqi mothers give birth to children without eyes or brains and various other congenital abnormalities. A nuclear war without nuclear explosions is already in full swing in Iraq.

Another former UN Assistant Secretary-General, Hans von Sponeck, was swept away by the "incredible double standards" he found around the world today: the US expecting everyone to condemn Iran for a nuclear weapons programme it did not have, while US research continued on a new generation of nuclear weapons.

When asked about the prospect of change at the UN, he said no meaningful reform was likely. The necessary form of regime change at the UN would involve empowering not individual countries, but regional groups like the EU and Asean.

Prof Michel Chossudovsky of the University of Ottawa found the world already on a slippery slope when Washington placed nuclear



Dr Caldicott: Concerned about the use of radioactive depleted uranium in US bombs which lead to deformities in the newborn.

material in "conventional" weapons. The Cold War's separation between nuclear and conventional arsenals, under different military commands, is now over with a single command handling them.

US nuclear weapons currently described as "harmless to civilians" reminded him of how Hiroshima's first nuclear device was billed as "a humanitarian nuclear bomb."

Meanwhile, Israel has taken delivery of massive "bunker buster" bombs from its US suppliers to add to its hundreds of nuclear warheads, while no Muslim country is allowed to have anything like them.

Prof Francis Boyle of the University of Illinois said his Palestinian friends had told him that the Malaysian government was on the verge of establishing diplomatic ties with

Israel, and pleaded that it should not happen.

The current US military manoeuvre in the Gulf, with three carrier battle groups massing intimidatingly against Iran, was now step three in the Pentagon plan. After attacking Afghanistan and Iraq, it is the turn of Iran, with Syria and Lebanon likely to be next.

Boyle noted that New Zealand had declined giving hospitality to US warships on the way to the Gulf, but Malaysia had endorsed their passage. What difference would Malaysia's position make in the global scheme of things?

Since Malaysia is concurrently chairman of Asean, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Conference, for the country to be seen as supporting US moves against Iran would be extremely valuable to US strategists. Regardless of the local interpretation or spin given, the global image is key.

The Kuala Lumpur Initiative to Criminalise War launched by the forum is a humanitarian declaration opposing conflict without fear or favour. But despite its laudable objectives, it is still less likely to receive worldwide publicity than a government's position on a superpower's actions.

Members of the Malaysian public who took part in the forum wanted to know how the admirable aims of the declaration can be realised. The answer inevitably lies in how they, their society and their government act to make it happen.

The alternative of not making it happen seems too depressing to contemplate. Can Malaysia, the region or anywhere else afford that outcome?

If so, then it would be yet another case of First World ideas, Third World inaction. The results would be clear enough for all to see, regardless of anyone's interpretation or spin.