

Asia should develop own security

Mahathir Mohamad, prime minister of Malaysia for 22 years until 2003, was interviewed by *The Yomiuri Shimbun* in Kuala Lumpur.

The Yomiuri Shimbun: What can we expect from Bush's second term in office? How will the world be affected by him during his second term?

Mahathir Mohamad: Well, it will be more of the kind of thing he did in the first term. That is to say, he will use as much force as possible.

Now if Iraq has an election and is able to set up a new government, and that government functions well, then Bush will say that his approach toward "regime change by using force" is the best approach. And therefore, he should also take action against other



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countries whose governments are not to his liking or approval. So we may see Bush trying to impose his will on Syria, Iran, Sudan and other Muslim countries and also some pressure on North Korea.

On the issue of North Korea, I think the presence of the United States is indispensable to the overall security of Asia, what do you think?

I don't think so. I don't think that you can solve this problem by applying pressure on North Korea. North Korea must be given a chance to integrate with the rest of the world. And the approach by South Korea for a peaceful relationship with North Korea is the correct approach. But if you apply pressure against North Korea, it is going to isolate itself even more. And it will try to defend itself by developing nuclear capabilities.

As for Japan's relations with the United States over North Korea, there are certain areas in which Japan should follow the United States. But on some matters, yes, Japan must have its own policy and should be in keeping with the policies of other countries in the region, like China, South Korea, and other countries. And if Japan simply follows the United States, then of course the conflict with North Korea is going to get worse.

What other roles can the United States fulfill in Asia? Especially on security issues.

I think the best thing is to allow the Asian countries to develop their own security capabilities. The United States thinks that by stationing their fleet here, it will serve to protect. But we don't regard China as our enemy, we don't regard North Korea as our enemy; we don't regard Japan as our enemy. So

this confrontational and aggressive type of a policy of the United States is not good for East Asia or Southeast Asia. The United States should allow these countries to solve their problems through diplomacy.

For example, the security of the Strait of Malacca is the responsibility of the littoral countries, like Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. So, they are already cooperating. We do not need the United States. Because if it comes in, it is going to stop ships, examine them and all those things. And that will have a very negative effect.

(However, for) this (tsunami) disaster, the United States should support all (the affected) countries (militarily). All other countries are supporting (relief efforts for the victims of the Dec. 26 earthquake and ensuing tsunami that struck countries along the Indian Ocean). And the United States is not the only country. In fact, Japan is also giving more money than the United States. So I think it is the United Nations, who should be put in charge, not the United States. I think (the U.N. could manage it efficiently), if we gave it the power and the backing. If people do not want to obey the United Nations, of course it would not be effective.

Since the end of the Cold War, regional groupings such as the European Union and Association of Southeast Asian Nations have emerged as influential organizations. On the contrary, the United States as a single country has become more and more influential in the world with regard to security issues. What are your views with regard to this?

Each country must be responsible for its own security. If want to cooperate, we can cooperate with the countries in the region, in the regional group by exchanging information for example. We can cooperate with the United States in a two-way manner. The United States must provide information and other countries can provide the United States with information also.

Can Asia's economy be self-reliant without the United States?

Economically, yes. It is getting more and more self-reliant. Initially the engine of growth was the United States. Most of the Asian countries sell to America. But business between the Asian countries is now growing, so it will not be dependent upon the United States for very long.

When you were prime minister of Malaysia, you strongly advocated the East Asian Economic Caucus and last year during the ASEAN summit, it was finally agreed upon by members of the ASEAN plus Three (Japan, China and South Korea) countries and it is slated to be held this year in Malaysia. What are your comments on this?

It is a bit late. Actually, this should have been done when it was first proposed about 13 years ago. But the United States had objected. It is quite happy to have the North America Free Trade Agreement, and to accept the European Union, but will not allow East Asian countries to cooperate. That is grossly unfair on the part of the United States.

Now, of course, the U.S. government has not obstructed the meeting of the ASEAN countries and the three Northeast Asian countries which are now practically the EAEC. It is too late and has taken a long time.

What do you think of the Islamic fundamentalism influence in Asia?

The Islamic fundamentals are all right. But there are people who do not teach the fundamental Islam, not basic Islam. They are teaching something that is deviating from the Islamic teachings in order to justify their political agenda. So that is not Islam.

The reason is that if you take from a Muslim country and give to another country, then of course the Muslim is going to fight, like anybody else. Supposing you take Okinawa from Japan, I think Japan will fight. It is political, it is territorial. The conflict between the so-called Muslims and the others is not about religion. There is nothing about religion. It is about taking a Muslim country and giving it to the Jews. That is the problem.

Can the Malaysian government lead the U.S. and other Islamic countries to a closer relationship?

Yes we can, I suppose. But the United States must be reasonable. It says "Muslim countries must be moderate." But the United States itself is not moderate. It is very extreme. It says it has the right to change the government of any country. Muslim countries have no right to change the government of the United States. It must be a two-way thing.

What are the roles Japan can fulfill in Asia?

Japan can help strengthen East Asia by looking after the interests of East Asia and not just playing the role of the frontline for U.S. policies. That will not make Japan very useful to East Asia. Japan must look at the interests of East Asia and not just the interests of the United States.

We Malaysians have always looked up to Japan because we think Japan is a very good model. But Japan is only a good model if Japan carries on with its own policy. But if Japan becomes merely a satellite of the United States, then of course, we might as well follow the United States and not follow Japan. We would like to continue to follow Japan because we think that the Japanese people have the capabilities. So we hope the Japanese people will return to their old way of being independent.

In certain things, of course, you can be with the Americans, but when America does something wrong, Japan must say, "It's wrong."