

Businesses should prioritise peace

ON Feb 9, 2017 at the Writers Guild Awards in Beverly Hills, California, highly acclaimed Hollywood producer, director and screenwriter Oliver Stone (*pix*) gave a moving acceptance speech for the Laurel Award for Screenwriting, about the costs of wars caused by the US. Here are the key parts of it:

"... in the 13 wars we've started over the last 30 years and the US\$14 (RM77) trillion we have spent and the hundreds of thousands of lives that have perished from this Earth, remember that it wasn't one leader but a system, both Republican and Democrat. Call it what you will ... It's a system that has been perpetuated under the guise that these are just wars justifiable in the name of our flag that flies so proudly over our lives.

"Our country has become more prosperous for many but in the name of that wealth, we cannot justify our system as a centre for the world's values. But we continue to create such wars and chaos in the world ... We know we've intervened in more than 100 countries with invasions, regime change, economic chaos. Or hired war, soft power. Whatever you want to call it. It's war of some kind. In the end, it's become a system leading to the death of this planet and the extinction of us all."

Oliver Stone should know and can speak about the horrors of wars. From February 1967 to April 1968, he served in a US infantry division in the Vietnam War and was wounded twice in action. He subsequently graduated with a Fine Arts degree in film in 1971 from New York University.

Our small planet in modern history has witnessed two world wars, numerous regional wars and some near misses (such as

Beyond the Wall.
A new mindset

BY K.K. TAN

the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis), which could have ended humanity.

Even common sense and the concept of mutually assured destruction among the superpowers may not assure us

about the possibility of "accidentally firing", actions by rogue soldiers or missile systems being hacked by extremists to launch a nuclear missile strike.

Or perhaps a mad man like Kim Jong-un launching a nuclear missile on South Korea or Japan or even further, to deliberately provoke the US to retaliate, which may trigger a regional conflict that may then escalate into a global war.

The current surge in violence in the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli strife, with Israel trying to unilaterally expand its control over the holy site in Jerusalem's Old City, where all three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) lay claims to parts of it, is a worrying sign and tension is spreading to the entire region.

I have written many articles in this column on the evils of wars and that there are no real winners, and often the victims are civilians and ordinary people who played no part in the conflicts. In my recent piece entitled "Superpowers gear up for World War III" I wrote about the new Cold War between Nato led by the US against Russia and its allies in Eastern Europe.

I gave as an example, about the Suwalki Gap (remember the name), a vulnerable 60-mile stretch of territory and a critical rail line separating Poland (member of Nato) from Lithuania (also a member of Nato) and linking Russian Kaliningrad with its ally Belarus. A global analyst David Andelman, editor-emeritus of *World Policy Journal*,

believes that World War III could start in this tense region as the Russian rail passes through Nato's territories on both sides.

World War III may have already started in certain, sensitive regions of the world and many people are simply unaware of the danger ahead.

For those who say that wars fought far away have no impact on us only need to be reminded of the shooting down of our own MH17 on July 17, 2014 as a result of the Ukraine War.

Regardless of who did it, and of course the culprits must somehow be punished, the fact remains that our own civilian aircraft was a casualty of war fought far away from home.

In today's globalised world, it would be stupid and dishonest for anyone to say that a war fought far away from our home would not affect us. It may even escalate into a global war and consume our country like the rest of Asean.

In our Asian region, there are two serious sources of conflict; one on the disputed territories in the South China Sea and the other is on the growth of militant Muslim extremism in parts of Asean such as southern Philippines. Our own Sabah (at Lahad Datu) was invaded in 2013 by armed elements claiming to represent the "Sultanate of Sulu". The likes of IS are also gaining a foothold in Malaysia and the region in a coordinated effort, after their recent defeats and losses in Iraq and Syria.

It is important to understand that normal businessmen have the most to lose in a war as the main business beneficiaries are arms manufacturers and traders. Of course, the smugglers too, taking advantage of the chaos in enforcement.

Promoting peace should be accorded the highest priority or even be seen as the

highest level of charity for business. In times of war the other normal charities, no matter how noble or well-intended, could be meaningless.

It is therefore strange that while most businesses around the world are prepared to support or engage in corporate social responsibility activities, such as on environment, community welfare and education (which are praiseworthy anyway), they tend to take a hands-off approach to promoting or preserving peace, citing it as "political" and "it is the government's responsibility". The exceptions to the rule are the media and some film makers and peace social enterprises.

Promoting peace does not have to be partisan or political, often peace seekers would have to promote constructive dialogues and diplomacy between warring parties rather than taking sides.

Sure, in general around the world, it is the government's responsibility to preserve and promote peace but certain politicians are also the biggest culprits in causing wars.

So, it would be foolish for business people to rely solely on their respective governments and politicians and take a complacent attitude.

It is high time that businesses take a more proactive engagement in promoting peace by being more involved in educational and awareness projects that highlight the current threats to peace and the evils of wars.

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