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Thai academic wants Asean to speak out against US air strikes

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THE 10-member countries of Asean were urged by Thai academics to "speak out with one voice" against the aggressive military action by the United States and Britain on Afghanistan.

Spearheading the call is Chulalongkorn University political scientist Surat Horachaikul, who said Thailand should play a leading role in seeking a unified stand with Malaysia and the regional grouping to counter the unilateral attacks.

Speaking at a seminar entitled Impacts and Options for Thailand in the US War on Terrorism at the Thai Rak Thai Party headquarters in Bangkok last Thursday, Surat said Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had come down hard on the retaliatory action by US with Cambodia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand unequivocally backing the stance.

Major local dailies here reported him as saying that joint action by Asean was urgently needed since "the United Nations was under the thumb of the US".

"Asean must unite to keep the balance, otherwise it will be easy for the US to take UN resolutions for granted and attack any country US considers its enemy," Surat was quoted as saying.

He also questioned the Thai Government's move to "hastily ally itself with the US following the Sept 11 terrorists attacks without getting solid information about the terrorists who are its alleged masterminds".

"Having read news reports of the U-Tapao airbase being used by American bombers, I doubt if the Government is taking a neutral stand.

Addressing the same seminar, an expert on Muslim affairs at Chulalongkorn University, Arong Suthasart was also quoted as questioning the true intention of the US strikes on Afghanistan.

He said that the US had declared war on countries that sheltered terrorists, but it was unbelievable that there were no such persons in the US as well.