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War is not the answer

THE air strikes on Afghanistan will be indelibly etched in history as heralding a "sustained, comprehensive and relentless" campaign against terrorism in the eyes of the United States and its allies. It has also raised concerns, including possible reprisal attacks by terrorists and the fate of innocent civilians.

Yes, we understand the pain, anger and anguish in the wake of the Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington which claimed about 5,600 lives but do the means justify the end? Undoubtedly, the terrorists have been trying to create a pervasive sense of fear among the Americans, but an eye for an eye is not the answer.

The new war has pitted the world's strongest nation against one of the least developed. President George W. Bush has declared that the US will not waver from the "carefully targeted" strikes at the Taliban, its military installations and terrorist training camps. The Taliban regime remains defiant, saying it will defend itself "by every means".

In a country that has been ravaged by war and drought, the attack brings new sufferings to its 24 million people. An estimated 1.5 million have already fled their homes trying to cross into neighbouring countries. Humanitarian aid takes on a new urgency.

Bombs and missiles may cause destruction, but there is no guarantee the US-led forces will achieve their main objective of wiping out the terrorists or their networks in Afghanistan. This is made difficult by the mountainous terrain which may necessitate the deployment of ground forces in a long and protracted war.

In such a scenario, the US-led coalition may unravel as sympathy grows among the Arab states as well as Muslims in other parts of the world. It is imperative that the search for a diplomatic solution continues.

While Malaysia backs Washington's war on terrorism, it is against a war on Afghanistan. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says, the US action will not help eradicate terrorism as terrorism is not just concentrated in Afghanistan, but exists elsewhere in the world as well. Efforts must be made to find the reason why some people resort to violence in the first place.

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