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## Losing the hearts and minds

EVERYONE'S worst fears about the US-led attack on Iraq are coming true as civilian casualties mount. Indeed, the killing of a vanload of women and children at an American checkpoint in Najaf on Tuesday has revived nightmares of Vietnam's My Lai when all the atrocities and viciousness of war caused soldiers to be so frightened they could no longer distinguish between innocent civilians and hostile forces. This is the stark certainty of war, to which much of the world is opposed.

No matter how loudly proponents for the attack say "it was not supposed to be like that," the reality should hit home by now - the invaders may win the war eventually but they may not win the peace. Already anger has been further fuelled among the Iraqis, putting paid to the high hopes of some people that they would hail the invading American and British soldiers as "liberators". And with the turn of events, we are not likely to see these soldiers feeding hungry people or giving medical attention to injured civilians because the vicious cycle of attack and retribution has started.

It was hatred of the unnecessary loss of civilian lives that propelled Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to speak up against the war in Iraq from the very beginning. Indeed Malaysia's opposition to the US-led campaign has been consistent, unequivocally stressing its stand against the unilateral attacks and not the United States or its people.

Malaysia, as pointed out many times by its leaders, always holds firm to the sanctity of the United Nations - including in matters pertaining to post-war Iraq, now already being discussed and debated. The role of the UN is being pushed hard by many countries.

This is all the more important as the US, already presumptuously predicting it will capture Iraq as a "war trophy", has made known its intention to determine the political and reconstruction processes.

This, in the first place, goes against the grain of its policy of launching the attack, which was only to "liberate" the Iraqis from decades of oppression under a tyrannical leader. Staying back to gobble up the spoils of war with scant regard for the UN will win the superpower more enemies than ever before.