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Sept 11 attacks
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Mahathir**

Mohamad

Below is an abstract of the speech given by former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the General Conference for the Support of Al-Quds in Kuala Lumpur.

We live in a world that is only partially civilised. I say this because we still believe that the way to solve conflicts between nations is to kill people in what is called war. The winner is the side which succeeds in killing the most number of people.

Yet we vehemently declare that killing people is murder, a terrible crime worthy of the most severe punishment. We are being openly hypocritical. Mass killing is glorious but killing one man is a heinous crime. There is something wrong with our thinking. While one can excuse those defending themselves, there can be no excuse for the aggressors who resort to killing.

But that is not all. We talk much of justice and the rule of law. We urge countries to uphold the rule of law. But the very people who talk most about the rule of law feel no embarrassment when they themselves blatantly disregard the very laws which they want others to respect and uphold.

The world of today is one hypocritical mess. Despite high-sounding sentiments and slogans, the killings are still going on and there is injustice everywhere. The rich and the powerful are still inventing, producing and equipping themselves with more and more weapons of mass destruction (WMD) even as they go to war to stop others from having the WMD.

I would not be wrong if I say that the mess we are in today have their origins in the western imperialism of the past.

During the heyday of colonialism they had no compunction about drawing borders which divided people, changing demography by moving large numbers of people to occupy other people's land, and when they had to give up their empires, time bombs were left everywhere - racial, religious, economic, financial and military time bombs. They then insisted on the new states practising democracy even though they themselves had imposed authoritarian rules when they were occupying their colonies.

One of the greatest injustices done was to take Palestinian land to give to the Jews to create the state of Israel. It was so easy to take what belongs to others in order to give to people who had been giving you problems in your own country. The Palestinians must be sacrificed to save the Europeans from the deprivations of the Jews.

The Jews had always been a problem in European countries. They had to be confined to ghettos and periodically massacred. But still they remained, they thrived and they held whole governments to ransom. Even after their massacre by the Nazis of Germany, they survived to continue to be a source of even greater problems for the world. The Holocaust failed as a final solution. Creating a state for them was thought to be a better solution. It

could be if some European territory had been allocated to make a permanent ghetto for the Jews.

But of course if this was done the affected European state would rise in arms and kill all the Jews the way they had been doing before. So the debate was about creating an Israeli state in Uganda, Africa, or somewhere in Latin America, or Palestine of course. It was so easy to decide on Palestine, a British-mandated territory. Restrictions on the disposal of mandated land could be ignored. This is nothing new – renegeing on solemnly given undertaking is endemic with Europeans.

The majority of the people in Palestine at that time were Arab Muslims. There were a few Arab Christians and Jews. But the world recognised Palestine as an Arab Palestinian state.

It may have been a part of Sham or Syria, an Arab territory in the Ottoman Empire. But the British and the French, disregarding the locals, decided to break Sham into several Arab states and Palestine was one of them. Disregarding totally the wishes of the people, Palestine was given to the British as mandated territory.

Maybe that is recent history. We should ignore it. We should think of the past. Historically it was occupied and ruled by the Jews off and on. But before the Jews, there were the Canaanites. The Jews seized Filistine from the Canaanites. So if we must recognise past owners, the Canaanites have more rights than the Jews.

The Canaanites have metamorphosed into Arabs and today's Palestinians, some of whom at least, must be the descendants of the Canaanites. Historically therefore the Palestinian Arabs have more right to Palestine than the Egyptian Jews who conquered it and ruled it sporadically.

We cannot therefore take only the ancient history of the place. It is far legitimate to accept what existed in Palestine before the arbitrary partitioning. We did this for all the colonies seeking independence. The British-mandated territory was an Arab Palestine, and was recognised as such. The British did not have a mandate on Israel or any Jewish land. Palestine was Arab at the relevant point in time.



There may have been reference to Israel in the Bible but even then it was not as a nation state but actually as a vague part of Canaan. To claim exclusive right to a land based on some reference to it in a holy book is to legitimise all historical claims which will result in massive changes of the land and boundaries in the world. There would be endless conflicts and wars as there is hardly any country which does not have a historical claim to some territory or other.

Even Malaysia has a lot of claims. Singapore was a part of Johor. But we realised the impracticality of claiming it.

Palestinians claim legitimate

But the Palestinians claim is legitimate. The land of Palestine was until only 60 years ago their land after its liberation from Ottoman Turkey. The mandate given to the British was to hold it until such time when it could be given back to the people there, the Palestinian Arab majority and the Jewish minority. There was no right accorded the British through the mandate to give it to anyone else and certainly not to the Jews to create a homeland for them. The British have committed a grave injustice when they reneged on their undertaking.

Looking at Palestinian history and origins from any angle, there is nothing to warrant the disposal of the mandated territory of Palestine in any other way than by giving it back to the people living there. The Palestinian Arabs were not all Muslims but certainly the vast majority of them were. There were a few Arab Christians and a few Jews. They too would be the citizens and would retain their right to whatever they held in Palestine.

Perhaps the Palestinian Arabs should be regarded just as Arabs, the people of the land of all the Arabs. But Arabs have divided their lands into nation states and each one of them have their own nationality. Obviously the Arab states do not regard Palestinian Arabs as their citizens. Palestinian Arabs are the citizens of Palestine. Palestine is therefore the land of the Palestinian Arabs.

The seizure of Palestinian land in order to create the state of Israel was unprecedented and was accompanied by the killings and expulsion of the Palestinian Arabs from their land and their country. This was done in full view of the whole world. Certainly the British were totally aware of the inhuman treatment of the people they were mandated to administer and look after.

Though the British were totally culpable, they raised not a finger to protect the Palestinian Arabs. And yet they had clearly stated in various documents that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine". Expelled from their own country, the Arab Palestinians lost all their land and properties and for the last 60 years and more they have been living under intolerable conditions as refugees in other countries.

Is it wrong for them to want back their country? Is it wrong for them to seek every means to return to their own country? Isn't it natural for them to feel this way about their own country?

They have no means to fight back and wrest their land from the invaders and occupiers. They had called on the Arab League to help them fight a conventional war to regain their heritage. But their brother countries were no match against the might, not just of Israel, but of the most powerful countries in the world – the United States, Britain and France.

The unequal fight has gone on for six decades now. The Palestinians have lost more land in the process. They have not been allowed to even call what remains under their control as the state of Palestine, not allowed by Israel and apparently endorsed by the Western powers. They are now just the Palestinian Authority.

Jewish settlements are built on their land and high walls separate Arab families from each other. They may not even use roads built on their land. Humiliation after humiliation are heaped upon them. Their Gaza land was invaded by the Israelis. More than a thousand of them have been killed – many more wounded. After the ceasefire, the bombings and

rocketing are still going on.

But if their enemies hope to crush their spirits they are mistaken. The Palestinians have not broken down. Their spirit is stronger than ever. They will continue to fight for their rights and justice even if it takes a century or even more.

The world may wish to ignore the war and wish that it would go away. But it is not going to go away. Instead it has given birth to what the West choose to call terrorism.

We can condemn these acts but when people are driven into a corner they cannot be too particular about how they fight back. Bereft of the sophisticated weapons possessed by their attackers, they have to make do with the primitive weapons that they can devise.

Telling them that such acts as suicide bombings are immoral and that their victims are little children will not stop them. After all, when the bombs and rockets of the Israelis hit them, no amount of scientific precision will stop the Palestinian children, the old and the sick, the non-combatants from being maimed and killed.

The Palestinians are terrified by these attacks. To them the terror they feel is real. And therefore their attackers are to them terrorists. State terrorism is no less terrifying than those by irregulars.

In Gaza the indiscriminate bombings, rocketing and bulldozing of homes while the occupants were still in them obviously terrify the people. The terrifying attacks against civilians must be considered acts of terror as well.

Is there much difference between non-combatants being killed by suicide bombers than those being killed by bombs dropped from above, by rockets fired from distant and invisible sites or by armoured bulldozers destroying homes and killing the people in them?

Uncertain whether Muslim terrorists involved

In September 2001, the World Trade Centre was attacked allegedly by terrorists. I am not sure now that Muslim terrorists carried out these attacks. There are strong evidences that the attacks were staged. If they can make Avatar, they can make anything. Killing innocent people to provide an excuse for war is not new to the US.



But whether real or staged, the 9/11 attacks have served the United States and Western countries well. They have the excuse to mount attacks on the Muslim world. Apart from the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the world's Muslims, all 1.6 billion of them, have been essentially declared to be terrorists who must be subjected to all kinds of indignities to prove that they are.

Today the world is made to feel insecure. Everyone must fight the war against terror. Billions of dollars are being spent to counter terrorism. Air travel in particular has been greatly affected with governments and airlines losing billions of dollars from the decline in air travel.

Just when the counter-terrorist measures seem to be working, a new incident has shown that security of air travel

has not been achieved.

New measures, which add greatly to the cost and the inconvenience to airlines and air travelers have been introduced. But there could still be a chink in the armour. The desperate "terrorist" may find yet another way to outsmart the security measures.

Scan their shoes, confiscate bottles of cosmetics, search their underpants, scan their bodies, do whatever but when people feel death is better than living under oppression, living without freedom and honour, the threat of the attacks will always be there.

The war against terror which the Western powers profess they are fighting cannot be won by the sophisticated and costly weapons that are pouring out of the western industrial plants. The war against terror essentially is a guerilla war. The battlefield is the whole world.

Guerilla wars cannot be won by armies, navies and air forces equipped with the most sophisticated destructive weapons. The world has not realised this yet. The guerillas always win in the end. That is what we have seen in Vietnam, in the numerous wars of independence of the colonies. That is what we are seeing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Governments may surrender but guerillas will fight on.

Guerilla wars can only be won by winning the hearts and minds of the people. The present worldwide guerilla war has a definite cause. It is primarily to regain the land the Palestinians had lost. It is the injustice perpetrated on the Palestinian people. It is the misery of the people of Palestine who have been forced to live in primitive camps for the past six decades. It is the denial of their right of return to reclaim their lands in occupied Palestine.

Until the creation of the state of Israel on Palestinian land, the world was secure for people to go about their business, to travel and to enjoy life. Now the security is gone. For the people who are responsible for the creation of the state of Israel, for the people who sustains it with their moral, financial and military support, there can be no security. The danger of being attacked or killed anywhere in the world will always be there.

If they choose to make every Muslim a terror suspect, they will have to accept that they have 1.6 billion enemies lurking in every corner of the world.

But if they choose to eliminate the primary cause of the present violence and indiscriminate killings, then there is a good chance that the world will become secure again, that they can go anywhere in the world without fear of being blown up, kidnaped or simply being shot.

The world need to take cognisance of the root cause, that is the fate of the Palestinians. The world must be concerned about their sufferings. The world must remedy these ailments.

Some might think this would be giving in to blackmail. Well, conventional war, attacking a country is also blackmail. Give in or be killed and destroyed. Give in or the mailed fist would keep on hammering you. That is blackmail too. And you will pay the price for ignoring it.

The Jews have always found refuge in other lands. It is true that in Europe they had often been persecuted, confined to ghettos and even massacred. But whenever they were persecuted in Europe they had always found safe havens in Muslim countries. There they have lived, practicing their own religion and prospering from their financial and business skills.

But when they acquired a country for themselves they reject non-Jew immigrants. Worse

still, they would not allow the people whose country, land and properties they had seized to even return to their homes. That these people are the same people who had given them refuge from persecution in the past seems to mean nothing to them.

In seizing the land of the Palestinian to create a homeland for the Jews, the West has launched the longest and the biggest guerilla war of liberation. The West has made a grievous mistake by doing this. It is continuing to perpetuate the mistake by supporting a state that is leery of international practices and laws.

If we are going to see an end to the guerilla war, the West must acknowledge their mistakes and at the very least help implement the right of return of the Palestinian Arabs to their homeland. They are not asking for much. All they are asking for is stability and justice and the rights of Al-Quds and Palestine.

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