

**Interview session between Agenda TV and Tun Dr. Mahathir
Mohamad on Nov 11, 2006 in Wellington, New Zealand**

AGENDA

Presented by Lisa Owen

LISA Earlier this week Saddam Hussein was sentenced to hang for his role in the torture and killing of hundreds and Shiites. George W Bush claims the verdict vindicates his decision to invade Iraq despite the fact that there is no end in sight for the war on terror. Dr Mahathir Mahamad, who once described Bush as the most hated President in history, was Prime Minister of Malaysia for over 20 years, during that time he promoted a model of moderate Islam with western economics, but that doesn't mean he agrees with the western approach to Islamic terrorism. I spoke with Dr Mahathir earlier this week and I began by asking him whether he thought putting Saddam Hussein to death was the right decision.

DR MAHATHIR MAHAMAD – Former Malaysian MP

Well I think that it was not a fair trial, a trial that is conducted by your enemy is not likely to be fair, and we set up a group to oversee the trial and we find that his lawyers were actually murdered and he was often sent out of the court. In any case the judge was presiding initially who appeared to be siding with him was removed and another judge almost a hanging judge was appointed and I felt that certainly he's going to be found guilty and sentenced to death. That doesn't reflect well on the system of justice that the US promotes.

LISA So what will that mean if he is put to death in this way, politically what could happen?

MAHATHIR His followers and they are quite substantial will continue to hate the west, the Americans in particular, and whenever they can I think will try to seek revenge.

LISA George Bush, he described this as a major achievement for Iraq's young democracy, so is he wrong then?

MAHATHIR I think George Bush has got a different view of things completely, when they failed he was telling everybody that he had won the war, you must remember that he went to Iraq to declare that they had defeated Saddam and they had achieved success but now the whole world says that he has done a very



bad job, now he's still saying the same that he has done a good job.

LISA If in your view full scale war in Iraq is not the way- what is the answer in Iraq?

MAHATHIR Now using force is not the right thing to promote democracy, you have to educate people and democracy's not the easiest system to work and I hate to compare it but if you compare the number of people killed by Saddam and number of people killed as a result of George Bush's invasion of Iraq I would say that Bush has done a worse job than Saddam. People are not yet capable of understanding – the ordinary people understanding democracy and if you want to have a democratic system people must understand the limitations of democracy and it should be implemented gradually.

LISA So if George Bush is responsible for the deaths of so many people does that make him a terrorist too?

MAHATHIR Well if you consider that a person who terrorises is a terrorist then the people of Iraq they are being terrorised by the prospect of being killed, being bombed, being rocketed, and to me anybody who terrorises is a terrorist.

LISA What is the best way for the west to counter Islamic militancy, what can the west do?

MAHATHIR The problem has always been because of the situation in Palestine, before there was no such conflicts in the Middle East as serious as you see now, but when they decided to take Palestinian land and declared the state of Israel and expel the Palestinians from that state then of course you will cause people to be very, very angry, frustrated and living as refugees is not helping them to feel comfortable with the ideas of the west, so they will continue to be against the west for as long as they cannot go back to their old country, they can have a say in the running of their own country.

LISA So are you saying that the destruction of the Palestinian state is at the root of all of these problems?

MAHATHIR Yes I think so, that was the initial cause of all the problems that you see in the Middle East today.

LISA To what extent do you think that the US's policy in say Iraq and Afghanistan have added to problems with terrorism?

MAHATHIR It has made matters worse, in fact we know that the whole world was against the invasion of Iraq but Bush and Blair decided that they should go ahead and disregard the opinions of the United Nations even, so this is the problem and basically it is due to what happened to the Palestinians.

LISA When this war started you said that it would expose the world to more acts of terrorism, so have you been proved right?

MAHATHIR Yes I think so, in fact before they invaded Iraq I wrote letters to Bush, Blair, Chirac and Schroeder saying that it will worsen the terrorist situation by invading Iraq and today we see something happening that is worse than what I expected so they are handling this problem in the wrong way they don't seem to understand. Bush certainly doesn't understand anything about other people.

LISA If we look a little bit closer to your home, Indonesia, is there a danger that we could see more attacks like the Bali bombings, could it happen again?

MAHATHIR Well there is that possibility, we cannot dismiss it but I think if we could resolve the Palestinian problem and show less antagonism towards Muslim on the part of countries like the US and Britain I think there would be less possibility of instances in Indonesia.

LISA Is the Palestinian problem going to be solved in your lifetime. You're in your 80s, is it going to be solved in your lifetime?

MAHATHIR Well I don't think it would be solved in my lifetime, I don't know how many more years I have but I think the first step should be taken now.



LISA What are those first steps?

MAHATHIR Just to recognise the fact that the root cause of the present problem in the Middle East is the creation of the state of Israel and Israel's subsequent occupation of the whole of Palestine, they have their settlements there, there'll be wars there and if the Palestinians kill one Israeli they are going to destroy one whole village.

LISA So what do you see as New Zealand's role in the region, New Zealand's role in preventing terrorism and terrorist attacks?

MAHATHIR To talk about the need to recognise the causes of this problem and to adopt a much more reasonable view of the situation rather than to be like some countries keep on blaming only the Muslims for their not being reasonable.

LISA Does New Zealand have a reasonable view on this in your opinion?

MAHATHIR Yes I think your view is quite different from that of Australia, before we used to identify New Zealand and Australia together as having the same viewpoint, but today New Zealand is far more concerned about peace and non proliferation of nuclear weapons and things like that.

LISA Looking at your own country, at Malaysia, the Bumiputra policies or affirmative action, why did you come up with these policies and do you think they achieved everything that you wanted to?

MAHATHIR When we became independent there was a great deal of disparity in terms of wealth and economic prosperity within the indigenous people and the Chinese in particular, and we feel that racial difference in itself is going to cause conflict, but when racial differences accentuate that by differences in economic status then the possibility of conflicts is much greater.

LISA So your policies did what?

MAHATHIR Well we tried to correct this imbalance and we have succeeded so much so that even during the financial crises Malaysia was stable, other countries affected by the financial crisis were less stable.

LISA So did you achieve everything you wanted to with those policies?

MAHATHIR Not quite, I think more needs to be done but certainly we have removed most of the extreme disparities within the different races.

LISA Thank you very much for you time this morning Doctor.

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