

**SPEECH BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
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“Reinventing the Future”

When we propose to Reinvent the Future, the assumption must be that we already know what the future would be like without our intervention and probably not liking it much, we propose to shape the future according to our wishes. It is perhaps a little bit presumptions on our part both to presume we know what the future would be like and then to reshape it before it even happens.

But we are not really too presumptions because we are today much more knowledgeable than our ancestors. We have recorded the past better, we have experienced and analyzed the present and we can to a certain extent predict if not the distant future, but at least the near future.

Being essentially a politician I will try to illustrate what I mean in the political sense. Today we are convinced that the best system for any country is democracy. We are prepared to massacre people, and destroy their countries in order to promote democracy. We believe that democratic countries will not fight each other. And therefore there would be peace in this world if all the countries have become democratic. We are of course seeing the promotion of democracy going on before our very eyes and we presume we know everything the democratic future would be like.

But think again about the systems and the ideologies of the past. There was the system of absolute monarch which our ancestors thought was the natural system, the God-given system even, that certain individuals were somehow qualified to rule and their rule should not be disputed, that these individuals would protect society from the anarchy that human society seems prone to descent into. The ancients used to worship these monarchs and to submit completely to them.

But despite this deification the monarchs abuses of power were so bad that the system had to be discarded. They oppressed the people and caused more misery than the benefit of stability and security which they brought. Still the system was considered the only state system blessed by God that when a tyrant of a monarch was deposed, he would be replaced with another monarch.

But eventually it was realised that absolute power for an individual will eventually be abused. Power should not be absolute and should not reside in one person only. Thus the idea of Republicanism, a return by definition to people's power, the power of the public, came to be accepted to replace absolute monarchy.

But the French Revolution proved that republicans could be as tyrannical as the monarchs. For a time the French Republic reverted to a monarchical system. Still the idea of the people ruling themselves was attractive and considered to be so good that it must be tried again. And so republicanism was reinvented and modified to give us the ideologies of socialism and communism. By making the people more equal it was thought that there would be no tyranny and a Heaven on Earth would be created.

But as we all know these ideologies did not deliver either. Socialism killed the initiatives which helped to enrich societies, while the Heaven on Earth promised by Communism turned out to be hell for the very people who were expected to benefit from it. Workers rule became rule by a select group of the privileged who never be hesitated to tyrannise to stay in power.

Then we have to go back almost to square one – to capitalisms and the free market, to being ruled by powerful elites in the pay of the rich. But we are seeing today how unbridled capitalism has brought about misery and death to millions of people even when coupled with democracy. The military / industrial complex built by capitalists thrives on war, in fact, prosper on war. And they will ensure that democratic tyrants rule the country so as to give them the maximum wealth.

Things as you can see, have a way of taking unexpected courses and turns. The ideals of people governing themselves have been hijacked so that a select few, in the name of the people, would abuse the power of the people for their selfish ends. And these people set up dynasties which are no different from the hereditary kings of the past.

Obviously in politics human society had tried to reinvent the future. But each time the expectations did not turn out the way they should. But that is politics. Let us take technology. We had always wanted to see around corners and to see further than the eyes could see. Seeing our reflections on smooth surfaces we invented the mirror and eventually the telescope. But today we have real time television and even 3D telephones. We can now see around many corners and even as far as the moon and the stars. And we can hear sounds from thousands of miles away in addition.

Seeing the progressions of technology we can to a little extent visualize the future technologies. But if we want the future to be as we would like to have it then we really must not just look at possible uses, but also at the consequences brought about by future technologies.

For example we now have cellular phones, and we know its capabilities. We could have predicted these capabilities from the trend and the logic of its development. But the variety of its applications that we see now was not thought of before the availability of the technology.

Thus the development of S.M.S. came after the technology was available. Then came the programmes such as the Malaysian Idol and Academy Fantasia, “invented” because the cellular phones and SMS made them possible. We did not know the effects of these on human society, yet they impact strongly on our future.

The televisions were followed by the tape and other recorders. The DVD now brings the cinema into our homes. These are all good inventions. But they all had their down-sides – so that today TV programmes all promote sex and violence and the tapes and DVD weighed in with pornography, which are the direct and indirect causes of new and increased crimes within society.

Had we been able to influence the future we may not stop the development of new technology but we may want to avoid the evil that the technology brought into our future. But in our joy at getting these technologies we did not pause to think of the bad consequences. Yet, simply because we can now talk and see each other over thousands of miles, is our present i.e. the future of the past, any better. Would we have invented a future without these bad side-effects?

The militarists could only think of the contribution of new technologies to the efficiency of their killing machines and the criminals the ways to use technological advances to commit more crime on bigger scales. Why has technology failed to create a better life? It is because we really never think of the social consequences. And yet in the end it is a better quality of life that we desire. If every time a new technology is invented or developed we pause to think of the evil consequences to our society and we develop ways to prevent them from happening, then we can truly enjoy the good life that should result from technological advances. Surely if we care to reinvent the future we would not want to have the evil that the future would bring with our reinvention.

But can we do this. We can if we promote a better civilization, a civilisation that is focused on the quality of life rather than the just advancements in technology and greater wealth. Our future would be better if we develop and promote better sets of values for the human society and aim for a more human civilization.

Today we tend to give in to the pressures created by technology. We used to ban pornography for example. Pornographic literature and picture are illegal. But because we believe and uphold freedom, the Internet may not be censored. Anyone can now access filthy magazines and moving pictures through the Internet. Our children minds are polluted and they become obsessed with sexual gratification at whatever cost. We read daily of little girls being raped and then murdered.

Take freedom for example. Religion restricts freedom. The followers of the religion are restricted in order to create a better society. Thou shalt not kill. But we give the excuse that we are killing in order to promote good values.

Once we are prepared to ignore the injunction of religion against killing, we fill justified in developing more and better weapons. We have now reached the ultimate. We have invented the doomsday weapon and the shadow of this weapon threatens us all the time. Is this the future that we want to invent?

We now live in a world of fear – fear of wars and killings. The cost of living becomes grossly inflated because we have to spend a big chunk of the national budget to secure our safety. We have the means to fly but we fear being blown up by someone with a bomb. And we have to submit to checks and inspections, to even having our penknife being take away from us because this great invention that enable hundreds to fly at jet speed to anywhere in the world is vulnerable to a little bomb made for a few cents. The pleasure that we should enjoy through flying has now been converted into fear of untimely deaths. We are terrified we may be blown out of the sky.

Now we have to spend more money not just to check baggage and passengers but also to install anti-missile equipments on commercial aircrafts. And the contest will go on. Almost as soon as a protection system is invented and installed, those who are bent on destroying the aircraft will invent newer ways of blowing up the aircraft. More money would be needed and less people would be able to enjoy life that they are entitled to because of the new technology.

It is the same with all the other inventions intended to make life more enjoyable for the maximum number of people. The reason is because the invention and development of new social and legal systems do not go hand in hand with the ingenuity in the inventing of new technologies. As a result new technologies fail to bring about a better quality of life.

This is what has happen and will probably happen to a more serious degree in the future. Not only are our values, which shape our civilization not keeping up wit the technologies but they are actually regressing. Good values of the past have actually been discarded to be replaced by bad values. And as they regress; the quality of our life regresses also.

If we propose to reinvent our future we must ask ourselves whether we merely want more conveniences which our technology can provide us or we want to have along with the technologies and conveniences a better quality of life as well. We need to ask ourselves what would constitute a better quality of life. Certainly we would need peace and security. Can these be ensured by providing ourselves with more powerful weapons, by the ability to kill more people?

I am not so sure. The people in the most powerful nations in the world obviously live in fear now. They may have the money and the means to go anywhere in the world, to see beautiful sights, but their Governments tell them it is not wise to

travel to this or that place. What is the good of having money, of luxurious jet aircrafts if you cannot use them?

The powerful countries may defeat their enemies and the enemy Government may surrender and sign a peace treaty. But the people may conduct a guerrilla war in the country and elsewhere. The victors gain nothing, only continuous fear of attacks by the defeated people. They may not be safe even in their own countries. They invent devices to alert them to attacks. But than they would be living in a state of tension.

Powerful, Yes. But safe, No. And it cannot be the quality of life that anyone wants. Both victors and vanquished would never experience the good quality of life that is expected in a civilized world in the 21st Century. If we are to have a good quality of life than the idea of war as an option in the solution of conflicts between countries should be discarded. Perhaps a revival of the true religion may do this. Or perhaps a new philosophy needs to be spread world wide wherein one of the teachings would be the rejection of war, the massive killing of people. Everyone should be taught this religion or philosophy, beginning with infants and throughout life.

Eventually leaders of nations coming from these children brought up to reject war will not want to resort to war. Perhaps all candidates for elections to lead Governments should be required to take an oath publicly to reject war if they wish to get the support of the people, if they wish to get elected. Domestically the quality of life that everyone should enjoy must be one as free of violence and crimes as possible. One should be able to walk about or travel throughout the country without fearing assault and robbery. Ones home should be safe.

For this to happen the people again must imbibe good values which they believe in and they practice. They should learn from the time the are small the essence of these values. They should get a good understanding of what is good and what is bad, what they should accept and practice, what they should reject and show their abhorrence. School should teach the good culture and good value system as an important part of their course.

The Government should keep out evil, violence and sex in the TV and other forms of entertainment. People should go back to wearing what may be called decent and proper dresses which cover the essentials. It is not a Puritanical society that should be advocated, but a decent society where there is respect for the institutions of marriage and family and for parents and older people.

People must be taught to rein in their base feelings, to be disciplined to exercise their freedoms without encroaching on the freedoms of others, and of the community.

For the religious, the good teachings of the true religion unadulterated by the interpretations of the self-serving must be revived. Certainly there is a need for this among Muslims, for in the 1400 years of the existence of Islam the teachings have been interpreted by so many learned scholars that the Muslims are confused and given to fighting and killing each other.

Perhaps this is not what you would expect when you ask me to talk on Reinventing the Future. If you care to read magazines, you will find descriptions of new inventions and how they are going to make life easier for you. We are already being told about robots which will replace our servants and perhaps the workers as well.

There would be other miraculous inventions including in the field of agriculture, biology and medicine. We are all going to live longer healthier lives. But these magazines also tell of how robots will be built to fight human enemies and kill them efficiently and in great numbers. Guns, aircrafts, tanks, ships – all will be operated by robots. There will be no compassion on the part of the people programming the robots and operating them as they will not see (except in their tiny video screen) the people their robots will kill. Already bomber pilots feel nothing about pressing buttons to release the bombs, nuclear or otherwise on unprotected men, women and children. Now the robot-masters will have even less compunction about destroying whole cities, countries and people. They don't have to worry about being injured or killed themselves.

I am all for advances in science and the technologies and the inventions which will follow. But if we must reinvent the future, the most important thing is to ensure that scientists are responsible and accountable and before they spring their inventions on human society, there would be a careful study of the effects.

The future we wish to reinvent is not just one with all kinds of gadgets and weapons but a future that guarantees a good quality of life as well. If they can bring only destruction like the nuclear bombs do, kill the invention immediately.