

**SPEECH BY H.E. TUN DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD**  
**“EXPOSE WAR CRIMES: CRIMINALISE WAR” AT IMPERIAL COLLEGE,**  
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1. It is heartening to be asked to speak on criminalising war – a subject that needs to be taken up by all civilised people. How can we claim to be civilised when we condone and legalise mass killings of men, women and children, the old and the sick as a solution to conflicts between nations. We actually consider the most successful killers, the ones who do the most amount of damage as the winners and they are entitled to put the losers on trial and punish them, including murdering them. The judges in these courts are nationals of the winning side or countries. There can be no impartiality.
2. Yet at the same time we consider murder as a very serious crime which merit severe punishment. The more civilised countries claim to be so concerned about human life that they have abolished the death penalty, even for murderers.
3. But these same countries and these same people consider bombing innocent civilians, launching explosive missiles against them, machine-gunning and blowing them up with grenades as legitimate and morally right.
4. There is something wrong here. How can we object to the murder of an individual when we approve mass killings of innocent people. Yet that is what we do in war – we kill people, not always soldiers who may kill us but, now, more and more often, innocent civilians who can do us no harm.
5. War was in ancient times a necessary option in the settlement of conflicts between primitive people or uncivilised nations. But in those days the capacity to kill and to destroy was limited. The weapons used were incapable of mass destruction or mass killings. Soldiers had to handle the swords, bows and arrows, spears and daggers themselves. They had to face enemies who were similarly armed. If they fail to kill the enemy they would be killed themselves.
6. Wars were fought by soldiers on battle fields in those days. Of necessity the armies were small and the killings relatively limited. The defeat of one or the other of the armies would end the war. The losers would submit to the victors and the war would be over. The killings would also stop.
7. But over time the war-like nations developed more and more lethal weapons and the killings have become more massive. Now we are seeing weapons of mass destruction capable of killing hundreds of thousands, not on battlefields but just about anywhere. The whole country is made a battlefield, sparing neither towns nor countryside, neither soldiers nor civilians, the old, the sick and the disabled men, women and children. The killings and the devastation is total.

8. Such is the callousness of the human race that we see the killings and the wounds inflicted as just numbers, as casualties, and now as collaterals. The warriors gleefully notch their weapons to record the score of kills. It is as if these victims are not human. Yet the sufferings and the pain are very real to these people, to their families and friends.

9. These people may be killed by the wounds inflicted, or they may have their limbs and their heads torn off from their bodies while still alive. The sufferings may be over quickly but imagine having parts of your body torn off, your head pulled out from your neck.

10. For those who survive, the pain and the sufferings must be terrible. And in most cases no help would be forthcoming, no medical aid and, no hospitals to be taken to. They may lie there on the roads, or the fields or buried and crushed under fallen buildings, for hours with no hope for rescue. They may suffer horribly for hours until death relieves them.

11. We are not talking about one or two persons. With modern weapons, hundreds and thousands would experience this horror, the pain and death.

12. We would strive hard to raise money to treat one cancer patient for example. We are so human and humane. Yet we think nothing of killing healthy people by the tens of thousands.

13. We read about war, we even see pictures and TV coverage of war but we hardly ever get to see the real sufferings of the victims of war. We practically enjoy the TV coverage of war without thinking about the sufferings of fellow-humans just like us who had been wounded and killed in real life, not just on the cinema or TV screens.

14. We do not think of the smell of war, of the smell of rotting bodies, of gangrenous legs and arms, because our television cannot bring these odours to our comfortable sitting room. In fact the TV cameras avoid showing the horrors resulting from the war. They do not want to offend our sensitivities. Nor do they record and broadcast the screams of pain of the wounded and the dying.

15. We must all know that war is about pain and death and destruction. But after the civilised countries of the West developed standing armies to replace the irregular rabbles, the state and the leaders of these countries began to glorify war. They promoted the idea that war was noble and those who fought wars and die or were wounded were heroes and the icons of the people. They struck medals to decorate the killers they sent into battle.

16. Soldiers in the standing armies began to be fitted with smart uniforms embellished with stars and gold braids. They glorify the killers with statues and

monuments. And stories are told of their exploits i.e. of the murders they committed. Eternal flames burn over their graves.

17. In peace times they were made to parade in their smart uniforms, proudly showing off their skills at marching with precision like so many mechanical brainless robots. And indeed their brains had nothing in them other than thoughts of killing. The leaders are so proud and the girls are thrilled at the sight of these brainless killers.

18. They were continuously trained in killing people, not necessarily enemy soldiers. There were elite troops, equipped with the best weapons, and trained to kill in the most hideous way. They were taught how to creep up to an unsuspecting victim and slit his throat. There was no thought about the victim being as human as his attacker, most likely with wife and children, brothers and sisters. There was no thought that a moment ago he was alive and breathing, just like his attacker. He must be killed because he was the enemy.

19. These elite special forces troops invariably undergo a psychological change. They became killers, pitiless killers. They look forward to wars so they can put their killing skills into practise.

20. But for years there may be no war. They retire and try to take up civilian life. But they are trained murderers. The forces have released murderers in the midst of ordinary people.

21. They will find difficulty to adjust. Hardened and trained to look at killings as a vocation, they either become criminals, murderers or psychopaths.

22. Those soldiers who had to serve on the war front, fighting and killing and witnessing the horrors and becoming immune to the sufferings of others cannot but become psychopaths also. They would find difficulty to adjust to civilian life. They may become mentally deranged.

23. In today's war waged by the U.S. the soldiers may be exposed to radiation, if not from nuclear explosions, perhaps from handling shells etc coated with or made from depleted uranium. They will suffer from radiation sicknesses, from cancer.

24. The people who sent these young people to fight their wars will be safe. They will eat well, drink well and enjoy life's luxuries. It is the young who will suffer, who will pay the ultimate price.

25. The novelists, the television and film producers will concoct glorious stories of war and heroes. It does not matter if they are blatant lies. It is good for making money. The U.S. lost the war in Vietnam but on the cinema and TV screens Rambo would single-handedly defeat the whole Vietnamese army. And

the Americans and their allies just love it. They would feel so proud seeing the exploits of a fictitious Rambo on the screens.

26. And youngsters would be taken in with the pictorial glory depicted and would be persuaded to join the killers in the armed forces, to gloriously kill and wound the enemies.

27. The leaders of the countries with the finest team of killers equipped with the best arms would not hesitate to send their young people to their death based on fabricated lies. That was what happened in Iraq. But the people of these countries re-elected these liars so they may continue to send the cream of their young people to their death.

28. That is what war really is – not a glorious struggle for democracy and human rights, but merely to satisfy the crazy ambitions of lying leaders of the powerful countries. In the old days leaders and generals lead from the front. The cowardly leaders of today stay clear thousands of miles from the front, sipping wine and gorging themselves on the finest food.

29. Even as we talk here, wars are going on in several places initiated by the bullies of the world. People are being killed and maimed. We need to make quick progress with the criminalisation of war.

30. It will not be easy of course. William Wilberforce spent 20 long years to get the British Parliament to outlaw slave trading nearly 200 years ago. But slave trading is nothing compared to the killings and the breaches of basic human rights in modern war. This is not to say that slavery and slave trading are less heinous than war. But the struggle against war is far more serious because every day newer killing machines are being invented by the rich and powerful in order to kill more people. And the urge to try out these machines is very strong.

31. Actually, these new weapons are bankrupting the nations of the world. To recover the cost of research, development and production these advanced countries are selling their weapons to countries which can ill afford them.

32. As soon as the weapons are sold to the poor, newer weapons would be invented or the previous weapons would be modified and updated. Then the arms salesmen would come again. If a country refuses to buy, a neighbouring country would be persuaded to buy. Then the salesmen would return to the first country and broadly hint that if it does not buy then its forces would be inferior to its neighbours.

33. Even if the countries are not at war with each other, their military personnel would feel unhappy if they cannot have the new toys. And so money that the poor can ill-afford would flow to the rich countries. As the weapons are

upgraded and newer weapons invented the flow of money to the rich would become a deluge. The poor will get even poorer.

34. The worst part is that the poor countries will probably have no occasion to use the sophisticated weapons. Yet they have to be maintained at high cost while they give no returns at all to the poor nations.

35. The arms trade is destroying the economies of many poor countries. Yet the exporting countries are not benefiting either. They have to continue investing in research and development of newer and more efficient killing machines. The cost will mount and keep mounting as the new technologies and innovative designs require ever more sophistication and more expensive material. And if the powerful countries go to war, as America has done in Iraq, the cost to the country is mind-boggling. The cost of the war in Iraq for the U.S. is estimated by Joseph Stiglitz the Nobel Laureate to be more than US\$ 3 trillion dollars so far. It is going to go on gulping more and more money. Even the U.S. cannot afford to lose this amount of money, especially when victory has not and will not be achieved. Imagine what we can do for the poor and the sick of the world with just a fraction of the 3 trillion.

36. And the whole world is suffering also. Everyone has to spend more money on security, air travel is no longer safe, and lots of money have to be expended on checking the so-called Muslim terrorists. Far from war against Iraq resulting in the spread of democracy in the Middle East, it has brought about the spread of instability and insecurity to the whole world.

37. War is truly not an option in this modern world. The militarily powerful such as the US and European countries cannot win any war, their sophisticated and costly weapons notwithstanding. This is because the defeat of the enemy, no matter how weak, will not end in victory for the winner. The Governments may surrender and sign a peace treaty but the people will not. They will continue to fight with whatever means they have. Bitter over their countries' defeat and occupation they will not stop fighting.

38. Against these people all the modern weapons, the helicopter gunships, missiles, bombs, rockets, stealth aircrafts and jet fighters, special forces, tanks, warships are quite useless. Once in a while the nationalists might get lucky and destroy a multi-million dollar aircraft or tank.

39. In Vietnam the powerful U.S. military was soundly thrashed by pyjama-clad Viet peasants until the U.S. ran away helter-skelter. In Afghanistan the Taliban have successfully confined the NATO forces to certain towns only. In Baghdad the American and British forces have achieved none of their objectives. Killing Saddam has not resulted in ending the war. "Shock and Awe" have not overawed the Iraqis and forced them into submitting. nor do we find democracy spreading.

40. Surge and new forces have cost more money and more deaths of U.S. soldiers, more mental diseases among them with no sign of bringing the war to an end or making Iraq a successful democracy.

41. The rich countries may come up with all kinds of costly weapons capable of killing more people more efficiently but all these weapons will not win wars against people determined to fight and preserve their independence.

42. Perhaps the weapons, including nuclear weapons can be employed in a war among the militarily powerful. Perhaps they can be used by the U.S. and Britain against Russia and China. They may be able to pulverise these countries but these countries would also wreak havoc in the aggressor countries. In fact the whole world will be destroyed by war between the powerful nuclear powers.

43. The rich and militarily powerful countries should take note of this. All their money, weapons and tactical skills will avail them of nothing. In fact they will lose when fighting against countries weaker than them, and they will suffer death and destruction if they fight against countries which can match their military capability. In the end, they would still achieve nothing.

44. Let us take the history of the U.S., the militarily most powerful nation since the end of World War II. This powerful country lost the war against China and North Korea and had to settle for a treaty that left North Korea still intact.

45. In Vietnam the powerful U.S. military machine and highly skilled killers were defeated by a primitive army of pyjama clad soldiers and the U.S. had to make an inglorious retreat and evacuation of Vietnam.

46. In Somalia a ragtag army belonging to warlords killed and dragged U.S. soldiers along the street and forced a hasty retreat by some of the best soldiers in the U.S. Army.

47. The U.S. may claim victory in the Gulf War but it was far from final. A few years later starving Iraqis and depriving them of medicine, the U.S. launched its much Vaunted Shock and Awe. I need not relate where the U.S. is now.

48. In Afghanistan after spending billions the U.S. and its Nato allies have still not defeated the Taliban. U.S. and other troops are still being killed. Afghanistan may be in ruin but what has the U.S. to show for the man, money and weapons expended in that war?

49. The record of this most powerful nation in its wars against pygmies illustrates the fair of wars even by the militarily powerful to achieve any objective. The men, money and sophistication in weapons have all been a waste.

50. Maybe the nuclear powers should try a full scale nuclear war and conquer the world. But it would be a useless devastated world, devoid of anything valuable. And for the victors a truly pyrrhic victory.

51. Clearly war is no longer an option, not just because of the massive death and destruction that modern weaponry can inflict but also because the cost of war has gone up so much that even rich countries like the US can be bankrupted. As Joseph Stiglitz has computed the war in Iraq alone has so far cost the US\$ 3 trillion dollars. The US is bankrupt and this war will prevent the US from ever settling its debts. Of course it can just not pay. That is the prerogative of the strong. The belief that might is right still prevails.

52. But as I pointed out because of the virtual arms race caused by the high pressure sales tactics by arms salesmen, other countries have also become financially strapped. Indeed the whole world is now heading for financial disaster partly because of investing in ever more sophisticated and ever more costly arms. And for what? They are never going to win any war with these weapons.

53. The rise in oil prices are connected with war. And oil prices affect the prices of all goods. In other words, the increase in oil prices brings about inflation. The poor of this world will be the ones most affected. But the rich will suffer also. We are seeing this happening now.

54. The wars will clearly bankrupt the world. And yet the wars will solve none of the problems of humanity, none of the conflicts between nations. The cost in human lives and property is literally killing.

55. Looked at from any angle, war is a great waste of everything. So why are we still going to war? Why are we still killing people and destroying wealth when we are not getting anything from doing so?

56. We claim to be civilised. How civilised is a society where duels and killings are legally accepted as a way of settling quarrels. Would justice be served when the winner usually is the one skilled in killing? The end result must be a society of killers.

57. Yet war between nations is actually a duel on a grand scale. seventy million people were killed in the Second World War. Property that was worth trillions of dollars were destroyed. The Allies were proclaimed the winners. But what have the winners got to show for all these? Was justice served? Were the people killed brought back to life? Was the huge sums of money expended recovered? Was there any profit for anyone?

58. The answer to all these questions must be a resounding "No". No one gained anything from war. Everyone lost. And the cost in human suffering is immeasurable.

59. We cannot claim to be civilised when we kill and destroy in order to prove how right we are or how just and fair we are.

60. How long more are we going to do this? We are already capable of destroying the whole world. Must we wait until we do this before we stop, before we declare wars as illegal and the people who initiate wars as criminals? By that time you must agree it would be too late. War must be stopped now. War must be regarded as a crime. The people and especially their leaders who resort to war in order to settle disputes between them and others must be regarded as criminals, must be made to face charges in a court of law and be punished appropriately. Until then let us not claim that we are civilised.

61. I say criminalise war and punish the leaders and the people who resort to war in order to settle disputes with other countries.

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