

SPEECH

**WORLD CONFERENCE ON MUTAHHARI'S
THOUGHT IN TEHRAN**

Iran

May 1979

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I deem it an honour and a privilege to participate in this historic conference on Ayatollah Mutahhari's Thoughts, on the occasion of the Anniversary of his shahadat in May 1 979.

Iran's Islamic Revolution represents one of the greatest achievements of Muslim Ummah in the 20TH Century. This revolution does not represent merely political change in one country; it represents a high-water mark in the glorious movement of global Islamic Resurgence. That is why it is being treated as a key-target by all the forces, within and without, opposed to Islam and Islamic Revival. Permit me to state that February 1979 Revolution in Iran was not merely a negative uprising against a despotic monarchic-regime; it represented a challenge to the dominant secular-liberal civilisational paradigm of the West, which had also encompassed the Muslim World. As such this ideological upsurge of the Islamic Ummah had strong intellectual, moral and civilisational dimensions along with the political aspect of regime-change, from secular to Islamic. It is this ideological and civilizational significance which makes the Islamic Revolution of Iran unique and also a pace-setter and a source of inspiration for the rest of the Muslim Ummah in general and particularly for all those who are engaged in similar efforts to promote Islamic Resurgence and as such enable the Islamic Ummah to play its rightful role on the global scene. While we should always critically examine our own performance, focusing on both achievements and failures, we must realize that the struggle we are engaged in has a long way to go. This struggle is also multidimensional with global reach.

While Imam Ayatollah Roohullah Khomeini was the leader and chief architect of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, he was assisted in that unique struggle by a legion of Ulama, scholars, intellectuals, statesmen, and political activists. In this glorious firmament Ayatollah Murtaza Al-Mutahhari occupies a very unique place of pride. His contribution in the making of the contemporary Islamic Iran is significant in view of the input he made in the intellectual field by reconstruction of Islamic Thought, bringing into sharp focus Islam's relevance to our own times. Al-Mutahhari was not an arm-chair scholar. He was also active in the Islamic Revivalist Movement in Iran, from the Fidayyan struggle, through 1963 uprising in Qum, to the 1978-79 culmination of this struggle in the form of February' 79 revolution and his subsequent shahadah in May' 79. He remained active on both fronts: intellectual and grass root political mobilization. When the Islamic Revolution of Iran was in its most critical phase of actualization Ayatollah Mutahhari was amongst those who were identified by Imam Khomenei as his representatives in Tehran. The tribute that Imam Khomenei paid to him on his shahadat reflects his contribution to the revolution, as well as the appreciation of his efforts from the chief architect of the revolution, Imam Khomeini said:

Let the evil-wishers know that with the departure of Mutahhari, his Islamic personality, his philosophy and learning, have not left us. Assassinations cannot

destroy the Islamic personality of the great men of Islam. ...Islam grows through sacrifice and the martyrdom of its cherished ones. From the time of its revelation down to the present, Islam has always been accompanied by martyrdom and heroism.

There is no doubt that Ayatollah Mutahhari was one of those luminaries who are rightly credited to be "the intellectual infrastructure of the Islamic Republic", as put by Ayatollah Khamanai.

Ayatollah Motahhari tried to revive the intellectual tradition established by the great Muslim Thinker and Philosopher, Mullah Saddra Mutahari represented a blend of three traditions within Iran, the spiritual world of Mashhad, the theological and legal tradition of Qum, and the intellectual, and liberal dialectic of Tehran. His earlier education in Mashhad exposed him to the spiritual life of that center of learning. His studies and discourses at Qum enabled him to have a deeper understanding of the theology and legal thought and tradition of Qum. Finally his role as a Professor of Theology at the University of Tehran for 22 years gave him direct access to the intellectual environment of Tehran. All this enabled him to play a critical role in giving direction to the religious discourse in Tehran. He had studied Western thought and philosophy with critical insights. That is why one finds in his works a depth, originality and a freshness that represents a happy mixture of traditional and the modern.

As an intellectual and a philosopher he has covered his writings and discourses almost all areas contemporary Muslim Thought philosophy, law, politics, sociology, history and literature. His most creative and enlightening contribution is his work on the Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism (Usul-i-Falsafa va Ravish-i-Ri'alism). His other works on Adl-i-Ilahi, (Divine justice) Ashna'i ba' Ulum-i-Islami (An Introduction to Islamic Sciences) Maqaddama bar Jahanbini-i-Islami. (A Preface to the World-view of Islam), Nizam-l-Huquq-i-Zan dar Islam (The Rights of woman in Islam), Masal'a-i-Hijab (The Question of Veil) and others¹ have played a very important role in presenting Islamic thought in the context of contemporary philosophic and scientific debates on the one hand, and the problems of Muslim society in the contemporary world on the other. One may have reservations about any of his specific interpretations here or a formulation there, but it deserves to be acknowledged that on the whole his imprint on the Muslim intellectual landscape in Iran in particular and all over the world in general has been distinct, in fact a pace-setter.

Coming to the general theme of the Conference that is "Religion, Freedom of Thinking and Revival of Religious Thought I would like to make a few submissions about the main challenge that Islam and the Muslim Ummah face in the post 9/11 global situation. The leaders of the West, USA, in particular, -

1. For an exhaustive bibliography of Mutahari's writings see; "Fihrist-i-Asar-i-Ustad-i-Shahid Murtaza Mutahhari," in, "Yadnama-yi-Ustad-i-Shahid Murtaza Mutahhari edited by Abd al-Karim Surush, Tehran, 1981, pp 435-552

-have been trying, ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, to project Islam and the contemporary movements of Islamic Resurgence as major threats to the Western civilization and Western powers. There is, however, an explosion of anti-Islamic hyperbole after 9/11.

Intellectuals, religious scholars, political strategists and spokesmen of the powerful US lobby known as "neo- cons" have launched a systematic campaign to malign Islam, project Muslims struggling for their rights as "terrorists" and call upon the political leadership of USA and Europe to use force to contain, control and manipulate the Muslim World to achieve the political, economic and civilisational objective of the West. By and large this is becoming the declared agenda of the present US leadership and its allies. Of course all the people in Europe and America are not necessarily a party to it; even among the intellectuals and political leaders quite a few are critical of this one-sided crusade. Yet the dominant groups are creating a scenario of global tension, rift and insecurity in the name of an undefined "war against terrorism". That is why it is important to realize that the present US leadership has unfortunately taken upon itself what cannot but be described as the new Crusades a multidimensional offensive that is intellectual, economic, political and even militaristic. Whether we like it or not and whether we want it or not, the US led West is virtually at war with the Muslim World.

Prof. Samuel Huntington of Harvard University has summed this up very bluntly in his much-discussed book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. He says:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic Fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people is convinced of the superiority of their culture and is obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the US Department of Defence. It is the West, a different civilization whose people is convinced of the universality of their culture and believes that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West².

This is the line that intellectuals like Prof. Huntington and policy makers like Condoleezza Rice, Donald Ramsfeld, Wolfowitz, Daniel Pearle and a host of others are pursuing openly, even brazen-facedly. Some are blunt, others more discrete and deceptive, yet the real agenda is no longer concealed. The Muslim World must realize the real nature of the challenge that besets them and should develop effective strategies to face it in a manner that is in keeping with its faith, independence, dignity and ideological identity. But our response must also be realistic, cognizant of ground realities, and not a product of emotional rhetoric. Both dimensions, i.e. idealism and realism, are equally important.

2. *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, by Samuel Hungtington, 1996, pp-217- 218

We cannot sacrifice one for the other. Loss of ideology and identity would mean that we demean ourselves and would ultimately lose our freedom and come under some form of foreign domination. If we react emotionally and without preparation we would simply walk, to our peril, into the trap made by our adversaries. Bravery does not mean premature confrontation. It is only through self-confidence, clarity of vision of our objectives and priorities, proper preparation, prudent resistance, active dialogue and strengthening of countervailing forces that this multi-dimensional challenge can be met successfully.

Three points are very clear on which we should focus our thought and policy. First, the central issue is civilisational. There are two major paradigms, which are competing and would influence the course of events in the future. One is the secular-liberal paradigm of the West, which tries to build the entire fabric of society in total disregard of the Divine Revelation and universal moral values presented by all the Prophets of Allah (swt). This is the so called rational, materialistic, allegedly liberal but in fact hedonic and hegemonistic model of a world order.

The other is the Islamic paradigm based on Tawheed, commitment to Divine Revelation; and the vision of a New Social Order based on Justice. It represents a blend of the moral and material approaches. The role-models for this movement are God's Prophets, articulated in its final and complete expression in the life-example of Prophet Muhammad (saw). This vision of the world order is spiritual as much as it is oriented to the freedom and welfare of mankind. The ultimate worldly objective is establishment of justice and benevolence (Adl wa Ehsan) for all human beings and a global order that is pluralistic, admitting of diversity as authentic and natural in all major fields; religion, culture, civilization, social systems and economic ideologies. Naturally this spells out a cultural and political landscape congenial to healthy competition between ideas, values and alternatives. This is possible only if the global system ensures peace and rule of law and create an environment which is free from intimidation, oppression, totalitarian despotisms and foul play of the dictum of 'might is right'. The real competition is in the realm of values and visions of man and society. The Muslim Ummah has to face this global challenge by commitment to its own faith and values and by hard work to re-establish the intellectual and political superiority of Islam and its civilization.

In the final analysis it is the power of ideas, values and principles, of truth and reality that is destined to prevail. Whatever be the odds, truth is to be the ultimate victor.

Allah's promise is very clear

وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

“And you shall succeed, if you are true believers”. (*Ale-Imran 3:139*)

And history bears witness that

وَجَعَلَ كَلِمَةَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا السُّفْلَىٰ وَكَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

“And He humbled the word of the unbelievers, and Allah's word is inherently upper most and supreme. Allah is All-Wise, All-Powerful”. **(At-Taubah 9:40)**

Time is on our side provided we are prepared to do our duty as beckoned by our faith, culture and destiny.

The second point relates to political and economic dimensions of the current global situation. Islam was a world power for over a thousand years. During the last two hundred years we have gradually lost the ground and the Western countries have emerged as dominating powers of our time. In the century five European nations called the shots. The century has seen the gradual demise of these major European powers, i.e. Spain, Portugal, Italy, France and finally Great Britain. It also witnessed the emergence of Russia and America as two Super Powers. But by the close of the century Russia also disintegrated as a super power and now it is America alone that constitutes the Sole Super Power. This Super Power is now behaving as a menace and as such constitutes the greatest threat to humanity. Naturally Islam and Muslim Ummah are its major targets.

During the last half of the century, the Muslim countries have also attained political independence and some economic leverage. Yet there is gross asymmetry of power between the West and the Islamic world in almost all fields, military strength, political power, economic development, cultural reach and also in the fields of science, technology, education, media and communications. It is this disparity in power, which has emboldened America and its allies to invade, control and manipulate other nations and people. Invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the US support to Israeli aggression in Palestine are only the latest examples of this outrageous behavior. The only way to face this is to prepare ourselves through hard work, prudent use of our resources, good governance, unity and self-reliance to attain that degree of deterrence and balance of power which would enable us to defend our frontiers and our values and civilizations. That alone would enable us to face this situation successfully. There is no short cut and there is no valor in courting confrontation without preparation. The Quran makes it very clear that the, correct strategy for the Muslims is to prepare themselves to meet all challenges from a position of moral, spiritual, material and military strength. Allah lays down these guidelines for the Ummah to follow:-

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَابِ الْحَيْلِ تُرِيدُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَآخَرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

“Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war-mounts you are able to muster, so that you might deter thereby the enemies of God, who are your enemies as well, and others besides those whom you may be unaware, (but) of whom Cod is

aware; and whatever you may expend in God's cause shall be repaid to you in full, and you shall not be wronged.”
(Al-Anfal 8:60)

The Qur'anic guidance is very clear. We have to prepare ourselves and acquire required strength and power, which alone would ensure justice for all in the world. It is our weakness that has always emboldened the adversaries to aggression, persecution and consequent suffering of the Ummah.

The third dimension relates to Huntington's blunt statement that the West wants to extend its values on others through force. This is the crux of the matter. The West's approach is out and out imperialistic and hegemonistic. It is not prepared to accept plurality of civilizations or world views, as also diversity of economic and social systems as desirable and authentic. The fact however that is this diversity alone is the path to peace and co-existence. It would be a blessing for the mankind.

The real threat today comes from the West's superiority complex and its claim that it has the right to impose its values on others by use of force. That defines the real issue before mankind. The real threat comes from this arrogance, this ambition to use naked power to extend its own values and culture over the rest of the world. This is in total negation of the fundamental principles of liberty and equality of human beings. This is a threat to whatever systems of global security were developed during the last two centuries culminating in the UN charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This approach is an affront to the laws of nature and history.

Allah (swt) has given freedom to all human beings and has also been Kind and gracious enough to extend the range of human liberty to the extent that the humans may deny Him and challenge even His guidance! No one has a right to impose one's ideas and beliefs on others by force. The Quran makes it very clear that:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

“There is no compulsion in religion. The right way now stands clearly distinguished from the wrong.”
(Al- Baqarah 2:256)

Similarly, Islam has established the dignity of all human beings, believers or non-believers.

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْوَجْدِ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا

تَفْضِيلًا ﴿١٧٠﴾

“And indeed, we have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and seas and provided them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured them far above most of our creation.”
(Al-Asra/Bani Israel 17:70)

Our assignment is not to impose our views on others force, but to share with them through dialogue discourse. Our interest is to ensure that there should not be any impediments to free exchange of ideas. There cannot be any justification for imposing one's views by use of force or manipulation. Similarly occupation of other people's countries or lands or control over their resources is not acceptable in any just world order. In fact this lies at the root of rivalries, tensions and conflicts that are threatening peace and security in the world.

Islam stands for freedom, dignity and justice for all. It is important that we live up to this principle and should project these dimensions of Islam before the world. The final decision in respect of human beings would be in the *Akhirah* and not in this world. This world is the arena of choice and opportunity. The success of all humans lies in choosing the path of truth and justice by volition and not submitting to any particular set of values under compulsion, coercion or oppression. Islam spells out the vision of a pluralistic world in which all have the right to live in peace and compete with each other in search of better life and higher good in society. Islamic faith gives rise to a society where on the one hand those who believe in Allah and His Prophets are enabled to live in loyalty to their faith, values, culture and tradition and on the other are open enough to enter into dialogue with all and sundry in search of truth. The ultimate objective is to engage in an effort to make human life permeated with the values of justice and fair play for all, including respect for their right to dissent and disagreement. That creates a framework for diversity and opens up opportunities for dialogue and discourse. In such a society and state if those who believe in certain ideals, values and principles and share the vision of a social system, are in majority they have the right to shape their individual and collective life in accordance with their value system But it also gives to those who subscribe to a different value system, an opportunity to live in accordance with their own values, within a matrix of mutually recognized rules of behaviour, a public law, and the principle of respect for each other. This pluralistic model is relevant, not only in lands where Muslims are in a majority but equally so, where Muslims are in minority.

Muslim communities are eager to live even in non-Muslim majority countries in accordance with their own values along with respecting the laws and traditions of the societies in which they live. This is the vision of multicultural and multi-religious co-existence in societies all over the world.

Let me conclude by submitting that the three challenges I have identified and the manner in which the Muslims should respond to them is broadly in keeping with the thoughts Al Mutahhari Shahid had developed in his own philosophical and innovative way. We can meet these challenges by rising above our petty positions and interests and by holding the rope of Allah fast. Muslim Ummah can attain unity only on the basis of faith, and by establishing Islam in the individual and collective life of the Muslim communities. We must commit ourselves to live a life of loyalty to Allah and His Prophet (PBUH), loyalty to the Islamic values and principles, and adhere to the path of consultation and tolerance for resolving differences within the framework given by Islam.

This demands that we give priority to setting our house in order and also set better example before the world which, despite scientific, technological and economic achievements, is faced with moral crisis, spiritual void and politico-economic injustices. The world is searching for a new civilizational paradigm which ensures spiritual contentment, moral excellence, material well-being and peace and justice in all aspects of human life and society.

That is the challenge that besets humanity and that provides the Muslims with an opportunity to respond to it with integrity, creativity and goodwill.

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ قُوَّةِ الْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ قُوَّةِ جَادِلِهِمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ^ط

Call (all mankind) unto your Sustainers path with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the most, kindly manner.

(Al-Nahal, 16:125)

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