

# MIDDLE EAST IS PEACE POSSIBLE

## Date & Time

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## Venue

House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

## Facing The Truth

# What will it Take to Achieve Peace in Middle East

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## **Introduction**

As we discussing the Middle East issue today the Israeli government announced couple of days ago that it will counter Palestinian attempts if it applied for enhanced status at UN. The Israeli Government also said that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas be replaced as he is an obstacle to peace. The government have further threatened that they are considering measures including freezing the transfer to the Palestinian government of tax revenues collected on their behalf by Tel Aviv. It is a dangerous sign as direct peace talks are on hold for 2 years.

I am trying to explore whether is peace possible in Middle East? The answer is it is possible if we get all parties to the dispute including Israelis, Palestinians, Hamas and Hezbollah to get involved in earnest and hammer out a mutually consensus agreement. Two-thirds of Israelis and Palestinians say they support the peace process, and solid majorities favour nonviolence over military solutions for security, self-determination and prosperity. To see how it can be done one has to look at other conflicts which have been resolved successfully and are in place like the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland.

What I am going to do in my talk is to explore the obstacles to Israeli-Palestine conflict, examine the successful peace process called Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland and see how we can apply the lessons learnt to the Israeli- Palestine Conflict.

## **The Obstacles to Peace**

- Palestinians dealing with a rightwing Israeli government who are not willing to adopt moderate policies.
- Disillusionment of citizens and youth who have lost all hope for peace and are angry, violent and resentful.
- No strong condemnation or effort by International community to take action to put an end to the crimes committed by occupation.
- The efforts of successive US governments in resolving the conflict ,but are hindered by not being an honest and impartial broker although they have the leverage to solve it .
- Both parties sticking to their position of a one state, two state solution confusing and delaying the issue instead of solving it.
- No consideration of Palestinians political rights or justice by the Israelis and their constant daily struggle for survival.

As the violence from the both sides Israel and Palestine continue, it is important to find solutions which are agreeable to all sides in the dispute for a peaceful future.

I had the good fortune of addressing Truth & Reconciliation Commission in Belfast in 2009 and met hunger strikers and prisoners who had suffered during the violence and the riots but now are committed to keeping peace in Northern Ireland. It was a greater learning experience.

So can we apply lessons and solutions from Northern Ireland for the Middle East Peace Process.

## **The Good Friday Agreement and Northern Ireland Peace Process**

The conflict in Northern Ireland began in its modern form with the 1921 division of Ireland. Since 1969 3,200 people died as a result of political violence in Northern Ireland. It has reflected a struggle between different national, cultural and religious identities.

In the course of the 1970s and 1980s many attempts were made to arrive at some sort of compromise to end the violence which had begun to escalate with the growth of the civil rights movement in 1968/69. Eventually the talks and negotiations between SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party) leader John Hume and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams began to intensify in the early to mid-1990s. With the active involvement of the British governments led by John Major and Tony Blair and the Irish governments led by Albert Reynolds, John Bruton and Bertie Ahern as well as through active engagement by the American Clinton administration specially of peace envoy George Mitchell and not least under the impression of renewed IRA violence a compromise solution was finally reached: the Good Friday Agreement of 10 April 1998.

The Good Friday Agreement, or Belfast Agreement, called for devolved government and thus for the transfer of power from London to Belfast. It also established a Northern Irish Assembly and Executive (the provincial government) in which unionists and nationalists share power. In addition a North-South Ministerial Council and a British-Irish Council was set up. Not least, the Good Friday Agreement also contained provisions on decommissioning, policing, human rights, and prisoners. The Agreement recognizes that a change in the status of Northern Ireland can only come about with the consent of the majority of the Northern Irish people.

Still, on the whole, the Northern Irish peace process appears to be working. The relatively well-functioning cooperation of a power-sharing government made up of unionists and nationalists was a surprise to many. This cooperation culminated when Ian Paisley, the first minister and notorious unionist firebrand, and his deputy Martin McGuinness, a former IRA commander, developed very close and friendly relations.

Since 1998 Northern Ireland has developed into a very different place; a place where increasingly democratic politics and the strictly enforced observation of human rights and individual liberties rather than the gun and the threat and the use of violence determine the political process. Northern Ireland also has become a much more pleasant place to live, and not just because of its fabulous countryside.

A number of the major reasons for the successful transformation of the 'Troubles' into a relatively well functioning Northern Irish peace process are listed below. Some of these points may serve as a model for other global peace processes. However, it must be recognized that many of the reasons listed below arose from the complexities of the local Northern Irish situation and cannot easily be transplanted to other countries and continents.

## **The Alternatives for a Long Term Peaceful Future for Middle East**

Among some of the main factors that have made a distinct contribution to the Northern Irish peace process and can be followed by Israeli, Palestinians are below:

- By the mid 1990s, an increasing exhaustion and tiredness with the conflict in Northern Ireland and its violence could be noticed and felt by citizens. The Palestine and Israeli conflict is now going on for over 60 years and all parties are longing for peace and it is a good starting point.
- The rising economic prosperity in both parts of Ireland throughout the 1990s until the recent global economic and financial crisis played an important part. So, what we need today is a international funding which can lead to mutual prosperity for a peaceful solution.
- There were strong local leaders such as John Hume, Gerry Adams and also Unionist leader David Trimble, who enjoyed the authority and respect of their followers and thus had the ability to embark upon serious negotiations. Similarly, we need a strong support of international community and leaders to see the peace process through.
- There was a growing realization that the Irish civil war could not be won by either side to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The UK government recognized that it was unlikely that Britain would lose the civil war in Northern Ireland but it was equally improbable that the UK would be able to gain a decisive victory in what had effectively become a guerrilla war. Same can be said about Israel Palestine conflict, both have to live together and share scarce resource of oil, water and food.
- Lastly, all the governments, institutions and experts involved made a much greater effort than hitherto to actually understand the conflict and genuinely address the fears and vulnerabilities – perceived and very real ones – of both nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland. Thus, much better and more thoughtful conflict management techniques were employed. The same can be said of the Middle East conflict to realise peace all neighbouring countries in the area should take part in earnest negotiations to resolve the issue.

Talking to terrorists and learning from the Northern Ireland Peace Process is now held up as a beacon for conflict resolution around the world. The 'lessons of Ulster' have been applied by prime ministers, presidents, diplomats and intelligence agencies to numerous areas of violent conflict, including Spain, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Afghanistan and Iraq.

On the basis of the British experience in Northern Ireland, it is now widely agreed that talking to terrorists is a pre-requisite for peace, and that governments should avoid rigid pre-conditions in their attempts to bring extremists into the political process. The British Foreign Office has revived contacts with Hezbollah and many suggest that it is now time to 'engage' with Hamas.

Making Peace in Northern Ireland suggest that what really matters is not the act of talking to terrorists itself, but a range of other variables including the role of state actors, intelligence agencies, hard power and the wider democratic process. These lessons can also be applied to Middle East Peace Process.

Too many of the players in any dispute are locked into extreme, unjust and unsustainable positions for too long – fed up by continuing violence. The extremists in any conflict need to be marginalised and identified and the mainstream needs to move forward with conviction to solve in seeking sensible solutions

## **Conclusion**

Despite the long history of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, there are many people working on peaceful solutions that respect the rights of peoples on both sides.

Following the example of the integration of European Union, in March 2007, Japan proposed a plan for peace in Middle East based on common economic development and effort, rather than on continuous wrangling over land. Both sides stated their support. This became the Peace Valley plan, a joint effort of the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments to promote economic cooperation, and new business initiatives which can help both sides work together, and create a better diplomatic atmosphere and better economic conditions. These kind of plans need to be put in practice now.

The majority of both peoples say they prefer nonviolent methods to militaristic or violent ones for achieving self-determination and security.

Palestinians and Israelis want peace and share a strong appreciation for the value of achieving it for security and prosperity. Therefore, we all need to continue to find ways to advance the peace process through the "nonviolent forms of resistance and negotiation" that both sides support.

The civil society and the youth need to stand up and claim peace, which is the birth right of all citizens of Israel and Palestine. Then, peace will be a reality.

Thanks for listening.

The following publications/websites were consulted and excerpts have been taken from them during the writing of this article:

1. Vijay Mehta – **The Economics of Killing: How The West Fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World**, Pluto Press 2012, London, UK [[www.theeconomicsofkillling.org](http://www.theeconomicsofkillling.org)]
2. Vijay Mehta, **Peacemaking in Britain and Ireland**, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Britain and Ireland, 2009, Belfast, UK
3. Paul Piller, **Don't Neglect an Israeli–Palestinian Peace**

**Vijay Mehta** is a renowned author, international speaker and global activist for peace, development and human rights. He is the chair of Uniting for Peace ([www.unitingforpeace.org](http://www.unitingforpeace.org)) and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity ([www.fortuneforum.org](http://www.fortuneforum.org)).

Working since 1979, Uniting for Peace is a non–profit organisation devoted to creating and promoting a global culture of peace, nonviolence and poverty reduction. The flagship campaign of Uniting for Peace is called 4D for World Peace. It is campaign to create global frameworks for taking actions on interconnecting global issues of disarming and demilitarising the world and the savings thus achieved to be deployed for development and democracy.

Fortune Forum was founded by his daughter Renu Mehta. Fortune Forum held summits (2005 and 2006) where Former US President Clinton, Former US Vice President Al Gore and Actor Michael Douglas were keynote speakers. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage.

Vijay Mehta's books include **The Economics of Killing** (2012), **The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future** (2006), **Arms No More** (2005) and **The United Nations and its Future in the 21st Century** (2005).

He has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajjak–24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet.

In 2012, Vijay Mehta has been selected for the Global Indian Karmaveer (Action hero) Puraskaar (Award) by iCONGO as a noble–laureate 2012–2013. It is an award for outstanding luminaries working for peace and social justice.

Vijay Mehta's new book **“The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels Wars and Poverty in the Developing World”** is published by Pluto Press (UK) / Palgrave Macmillan (USA) / Amazon (Worldwide). For reviews and endorsements of the book, please visit: [www.theeconomicsofkillling.org](http://www.theeconomicsofkillling.org)

“Vijay... a long standing activist for peace, development, human rights and environment”  
**The Sunday Times Magazine, London** 1st February, 2009

“Vijay Mehta lends intellectual credibility to the project and wrote ‘The Fortune Forum Code for a Sustainable Future’, a sort of manifesto that will underpin the group's future activities.”  
**The Independent, London** 26 September 2006