MIDDLE EAST CONFLICTS
Impact on Europe and Prospects for Peace

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Peace in the Middle East: Only Non Military Solutions Can End the Conflict

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Introduction

Thanks to Gian, Warwick UNA and its members who worked tirelessly to keep hope alive in the time of despair. Your efforts and activities are a testament that progress is achievable. The current situation in Syria with 350,000 soldiers, 20,000 tanks, 250,000 warplanes, and involvement of many states in the conflict including US, UK, France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran threatens a all out global war. According to the European Union-mandated study, 51 companies from 20 countries including Turkey, Brazil, and the United States produced, sold or received the more than 700 components used by Islamic State to build improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The other fallout of the conflict could be division and partition of Syria, Libya and Iraq into many states/countries, consequences of which will be rivalry, further violence and wars. We are already witnessing a grave result of the conflict which is the link of Western intervention and rise of terrorism which is often denied. Islamic State and other groups have grown dramatically in Syria, Iran and Afghanistan lately. However, on a positive side, there is ceasefire and start of Syria peace talk in Geneva, although Islamic State and Al-Qaeda linked Al-Nusra Front are not part of the truce.

The trouble in Syria started when Bashar Assad refused to allow Qatar's proposal to construct a $10 billion, 1,500km pipeline through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey in year 2000.

Assad further enraged the Gulf's Sunni monarchs by endorsing a Russian approved "Islamic pipeline" running from Iran's side of the gas field through Syria and to the ports of Lebanon. The Islamic pipeline would make Shia Iran instead of Sunni Qatar, the principal supplier to the European energy market and dramatically increase Tehran's influence in the Mid-East and the world. Israel also was understandably determined to derail the Islamic pipeline which would enrich Iran and Syria and presumably strengthen their proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Just after that, CIA, NATO and all the US proxies started a war against Assad regime and funded ISIS and other terrorists organisations with the intention of dismantling Assad regime.

The Arab world is going through a very difficult time and torn by conflicts raging in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen. Daily killings, violence, suffering and deterioration and uncertainty are turning these countries into virtual failed states. Fighting in Syria is continuing and has entered fifth year with over 200,000 lives lost and millions of refugees fleeing to border countries of Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and also to Europe creating a huge migrant and refugee crisis. Iraq is in the grip of the brutal invasion by ISIS. Egypt has reversed to a de facto military rule turning into an authoritarian dictatorship.

The Shia-Sunni conflict between Iran and Arab states, the involvement of USA, UK, France and Russia in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other states, and the rise of radical Islamist Jihadism, have made the whole region a volatile background for proxy wars and melting pot for extremism and the rise of ISIS, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. These conflicts in Middle East and North Africa have a grave impact not only for the MENA region, but beyond for Europe as well.

The Obstacles to Peace in Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

I am outlining seven obstacles to peace in the Middle East:

1. In Syria, confrontation between US and Russia and their proxies are destroying the region. US and its allies wants to topple Assad regime and Russia wants him to stay. Civilians are the unfortunate victims of the continuing violence, bloodshed and sufferings

2. In the Israel/Palestine conflict, Palestinians are dealing with a rightwing Israeli government who are not willing to adopt moderate policies. Even worse Israeli's are building new settlements.

3. Disillusionment and despair of leaders, citizens and youth who have lost all hope for peace and are angry, violent and resentful. For example, there has been no election in Palestine since 20014 as they have lost hope.

4. No strong condemnation of interventions and wars in MENA region by International community including no serious attempts to peace-building.

5. The efforts of successive US governments in resolving the conflict, but are hindered by not being an honest and impartial broker. US is funding Israel and other proxies with the latest high-tech weaponry to the tune of $3 billion to $5 billion a year as Dr. Martin Luther King said "The US government is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world"

6. Ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Pakistan are a grave threat to peace in the region and the only beneficiary of continued war in the region are the oil suppliers, arms dealers, war profiteers, corporations, and elites.

7. The shadowy role of intelligence agencies is one of the root causes of creating conflicts where none existed. It has provided false evidence to justify new wars like the war in Iraq in 2003 started on the false pretext of existence of weapons of mass destruction.

Impact on Europe

The consequences of NATO/US policies of invasion and occupation of Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen, to name but a few are dire. A real question now to be asked by Europeans is: Do you want to continue being part of the perpetual wars of USA and its most belligerent states of U.K. Israel, etc.? and the militarisation and nuclearisation of Europe to continue. It has far reaching consequences as a result in terrorism, racism, resurgent nationalism, migration and refugee crisis.

All across the European Union, austerity cuts, imposed by many EU governments, are driving people into poverty. In spite of this lack of jobs and increase in poverty for many families, Political Leaders insist on Government policies, supporting foreign wars instead of human security of EU citizens, health care, education, environment, etc., The British Government has implemented austerity cuts which have devastated social services and many poor families and it is currently promising the renewal of the UK nuclear trident missile (the control of these nuclear weapons, although on European soil, are in the control of the USA Government) at a cost and maintenance of £100 billion of the tax payers money. This is all done in the face of millions of

citizens protesting against the possession of nuclear weapons and calling for a nuclear weapons free Britain and World.

Building Peace in MENA based on European Model

At present, the peace initiatives, like the Arab Peace initiatives and the French proposals both are dead in the water. And there is not even an Arab Summit, in Morocco schedule for April 2016 which now has been cancelled. I still believe that the Arab Peace Initiative is a valid basis for future negotiations and its two state solution should be revitalised.

I am going to explore how European Union has successfully kept Europe peaceful for the last 70 years, longest in the history of Europe. I am going to examine how institutions and infrastructures based on the European Union, can be applied in the MENA region.

Historically, Europe has been the planet's most violent continent: Today, this truth is almost forgotten, a testament to the remarkable change in Europe's internal relations after 1945. Until that point, war was a perpetual fact of European life. What changed?

Put simply, European countries systematically cancelled their own motives for war. I would like to dispense with alternative explanations for peace, such as culture change, the threat of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) or the security "guarantee" provided by the United States and NATO. Instead, it was Europe's institutional alignment and economic integration in European Coal and Steel Community, than European Economic Community and finally European Union. In my forthcoming book, "Peace Beyond Borders" I have identified 10 institutional peace promoting mechanisms that dispelled the mutual belligerence in Europe, creating permanent peace.

The 10 Peace Factors have been the pacifying framework that has been proven to work in the European Union. Of the 30 most peaceful countries in the world in 2015, 20 were in Europe[1]. The 10 factors that brought internal peace to Europe must be applied to other continents. These are: Enshrined Democracy and Shared Values; Economic Truce; Open Borders and Human Ties; Soft Power and Common Purpose; Permanent Discussion, Dialogue and

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[1] Global Peace Index 2015

Diplomacy; Financial Incentives and Support; Veto and Consensus Building; Resistance to External Interference; Rules, Rights and Multiculturalism; Mutual Trust and Peaceful Coexistence. These are the factors that bind nations together in a way that preserves goodwill.

A successful example is the African Union (based on the European Union) which should be praised for its role in discouraging military coups. In the 1980s and 1990s, military coups were commonplace in Africa. Today, they're relatively rare. The African Union deserves credit for this success in spreading democratic norms. Sixteen years ago, the 54-member bloc wisely adopted a policy that punishes governments that came to power through military coups. For instance, in September, when an army general tried to take power in Burkina Faso, the African Union called for the suspension of all economic, political, and military cooperation with the country, and asked the West African Economic and Monetary Union to deny the coup leaders access to Burkina Faso's financial reserves. The pressure worked. Burkina Faso returned to civilian rule. The general was charged with high treason.

These 10 factors prevented inter-state conflict during the latter half of the 20th Century by defusing specific flashpoints in Western Europe. These included the territorial dispute between Spain and the UK over Gibraltar; the dispute between the UK and Ireland over the six counties of Ulster; and secessionist movements in Spain, Belgium and in Scotland.

The framework that delivered these 10 mechanisms is today the European Union. The EU grew out of smaller and less ambitious regional bodies such as the European Coal and Steel Community and then the European Economic Community. The 10 principles for peaceful co-existence swiftly accreted around these structures. They provided a template for other continents to follow.

The success of the European Union has been in establishing a 'positive peace'. This kind of peace is established when different nations, groups of people or organisations become so vested in the interests of one another, and dependent on mutual cooperation, that the prospect of conflict becomes remote to the point of impossibility. In a remarkably short length of time – Europe has peace and cooperation where before there was conflict and

cynicism. It is also worth emphasising that Britain has played a key role in all of it.

Europe is peaceful and we need to remember how novel that is, why it is an achievement and, most importantly, what led to it being so normal that we don't even question it any more. Namely, the structures, organisations and processes of the European Union and Britain's role in all of those.

Better Together

There are organisations in the Arab World, like Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which is the second largest inter-governmental organisation after United Nations. The Organisation is the collective voice of the Muslim world and ensuring to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world. Another one is Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) an alliance of 6 Gulf countries. The purpose of the GCC is to achieve unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities, which are rooted in Islamic beliefs. They are both capable of taking the idea of Arab Peace forward by following European Union's practical role in securing peace.

However, countries in the Arab world can only succeed if they unite together determined to build peace in the region, for this they have to bring Israel and Iran in their fold. The most important part of this unity is to stop violence and resistance to external interference by the West and outside powers which influence enmity and wars. Ultimately, it will be the vision of the leaders in the Arab World which will bring peace, by building respect for each other and sorting out their differences by tolerance, dialogue and diplomacy.

To stop bloodshed in the region, the following steps should be taken as a matter of urgency.

     a) First of all, there should be immediate cease fire to end violence as all parties need to renounce continuous violence and infighting.
     b) Start negotiations with all parties in conflict including your sworn enemies (ISIS and Al-Nusra front) in a trusted manner for sensible solutions.

c) Agreement for equitable sharing of scarce resources – oil, water food, land etc. across the MENA region

d) Strong Leaders and communities to develop trust, close and friendly relations without excluding any group. The need for integrated education for children to learn together for peaceful coexistence.

e) Genuine efforts at decommissioning of weapons and prisoner release as a starting point for peace

f) Setting up an Arab Peace Council to settle differences instead of resolving them on the battlefield

g) Need for backing of international community for the recent Syria peace talks in Geneva including funding based on common economic development of the region.

h) No rigid preconditions for achieving the objectives of political peace process.

These are some of the solutions and lessons which are not utopian, and can be applied here as gradually over time as they were applied by European Union which is working successfully. One must remember that European Union started as European Coal and Steel Community with a few members (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) but now European Union has 28 members. Similarly, the Arab World has to make a start and govern themselves, self governance by Arab nations without outside interference.

Stop the Culture of Militarism

I believe Europe (and indeed the world) must now ask the hard questions and make hard, brave and courageous choices: 'Do we continue down the road of re-arming Europe and the World, and building a culture of militarism and war, creating enemy images and demonizing other countries and their leaders, implementing 'regime change' through bogus 'right to protect' military intervention, or do we choose to start disarming our conscience, hearts and minds, dismantling our weapons, ending militarism and war and implementing International law?'

Europe and the World needs a New Vision of Unity and Demilitarization of Regions, with power devolved to communities where people feel

empowered and true democracy can be established. A demilitarized world is something we can all work together to build. It is not an impossible dream, but begins with each one of us, choosing to live lives of nonkilling and nonviolence and building friendships between peoples and regions in order to co-operate as the human family on the problems we all need to deal with such as environment, poverty, etc., we can move away from nationalism and war, towards Regional solutions built on demilitarized societies of peaceful co-existence – we can and we must learn to live together in all our diversity, as Europe has done after the 2nd World War.

For too long, scramble for resources like oil, water, food etc. and greed driven agenda has been allowed to go on causing violence, death and destabilising millions from homes, throughout the greater Middle East. The cost of violence according to the Global Peace Index 2013, $9.8 trillion, 11% of the global GDP or $1,350 per person to put it into perspective.

There is a desperate need to change global spending priorities. The global community spends more than 1.7 trillion USD per year on security, 130 billion USD on global development, less than 10 USD billion on UN Peacekeeping Operations and less than 4 billion on peace building and conflict resolution activities. Until this mismatch of funding is changed, building sustainable peace will remain difficult.

US should dismantle its military bases in the Middle East as military force has failed as a strategy for making it safer and defeating terrorists organisation. Instead of investing in military bases, US should increase its diplomatic political and humanitarian efforts to reduce conflicts across the region.

Conclusion

Robert Fisk recently wrote in The Independent that there must be a plan made for "Life after ISIS" in the Middle East. He gave an example that in the 2nd world war, Allied leaders planned for the post war world – a United Nations – years before the conflict ended. We must do the same for the Middle East. I agree and recommend that European Union model should be adopted to stop the conflicts in the MENA region. It has to be on the basis that all – Jews, Muslims, Christians and all other minorities can live together and have peaceful coexistence.

To achieve peace, we need to take bold measures. One of them should be to include ISIS and al-Nusra front to negotiate in the peace talks, which are hosted by International Syria Support Group (ISSG) which includes the Arab League, the European Union, United Nations and 17 countries including US and Russia. The Northern Ireland Peace Process was successful because all parties to the conflict entered into peace negotiations with IRA. That was the beginning of achieving peace in Northern Ireland. So we will have to do the same to bring peace in the MENA region.

It is a good time to talk peace with ISIS and other factions as consistent bombing and blockade by US, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran have put a strain on ISIS and other factions. It seems that the days of the Caliphate are nearly coming to an end and warring parties will be willing to have dialogue and resolve the situation in a peaceful manner.

The West needs to be a better friend to the Middle East than it has been until now. It needs to recognise that regional unity in the MENA region is no more "extreme" an aspiration than it is in Europe and that suppressing the desire for unity is likely to reduce stability rather than supporting it.

People of different faith and communities in various parts of the world have lived together for centuries. For example, in my home country of India, we live peacefully with 180 million Muslims, third biggest Muslim population in the world.

So, it begs the question – is peace, security and stability possible in Middle East? The answer is, it is possible if we get all parties to the dispute including Israelis, Palestinians, Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS and their proxies (US, EU, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries) to get involved in earnest and hammer out a mutually consensus agreement. If an important lesson we can learn from recent invasion of Iraq by ISIS, it is that violent sectarian politics do not work. Instead what will work is equal power sharing structure between Shias, Sunnis and Kurds, to stop forces of tribalism, nationalism and scourge of war.

To bring peace in the MENA region, all the regional powers in the area should join together for dialogue and diplomacy to end war. They should follow

policies of reason and sanity as once were adopted by visionary leaders of Europe after the 2nd World War, thus giving the continent of Europe seventy years of peace, biggest ever period in its history.

I hope the current Syria ceasefire lasts which is shaky and the peace talk in Geneva result in the end of Syria war otherwise, there is a danger that Syria, Libya and Iraq will be divided and partitioned into many states with dire consequences of further violence, bloodbath and suffering.

In conclusion, let us make a firm resolve from today's conference to end violence, wars and militarism. We need to stop letting politicians and corporations treat militarism violence and death as business opportunities. The reality is pound for pounds, how many job military creates, education creates three times more. Until politics become about people instead of profits, we will remain crushed in the death grip of the war machine. Let us work towards lasting peace in the Middle East and North Africa. Let us make peace, security and prosperity a reality.

Let me finish with an African proverb "When We Eat From A Common Dish, We Have No Enemies"

Thanks for listening.

The following articles were consulted and some excerpts have been taken as part of writing this lecture.

Notes:

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7. Cockburn, Partrick, End Times for the Caliphate?, ICH, 26 February, 2016
8. Galtung, Johan, Editorial, Transcend Media Service, 1 February 2016
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10. Kennedy, Robert Jr, Syria: Another Pipeline War, Ecowatch, 25 February 2016
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Bio − **Vijay Mehta** is a distinguished author and leading peace activist and a champion for Development and Human Rights. He is the chair of Uniting for Peace (www.unitingforpeace.org) and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity (www.fortuneforum.org). He is a Director of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)

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 a 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. In 2016, Uniting for Peace have initiated a new campaign "Europe for Peace – Count Me In" (www.europeforpeace.org.uk) – It is an educational campaign aims to contribute positively to the upcoming UK referendum on EU's membership highlighting the EU's peace endeavours.

The charity Fortune Forum whose founder is Renu Mehta, daughter of Vijay Mehta, 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).

Vijay Mehta's new book **Peace Beyond Borders: How the EU brought peace to Europe and how exporting it would end conflicts around the world** will be published in June 2016 in print and ebook by New Internationalist. The book contributes positively to the upcoming UK referendum on EU membership by highlighting the EU's peace endeavours, with a foreword written by Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate and former president of Timor-Leste.

In 2014, Vijay Mehta's bio, "The Audacity of Dreams" appeared in the book Karma Kurry, published by Jaico Publishing House (India). It included 25 other inspiring change-makers' biographies. Nelson Mandela who wrote the foreword to the book, had this to say, "Ordinary people do extra ordinary things. These stories have that power to inspire people to rise and act, to make a difference." To read Vijay Mehta's full bio, please follow this link: http://goo.gl/JcUGwr

He has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-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.

Vijay Mehta is the recipient of the Global Indian Karmaveer (Action hero) Puraskaar (Award) by iCONGO (International Confederation of NGO's). He is now a noble-laureate 2012 – 2013 of the iCONGO team of advisors and mentors (www.icongo.in). It is an award for outstanding luminaries working for peace and social justice. He has been awarded as Global Peace Ambassador by Global Diversity Peace Centre London in 2015

"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

"Thank you for all you do Vijay - both the Organisation and yourself are inspiration and give us all hope that both yourself and Uniting for Peace can bring a world without war. Indeed it is possible, even in our own time."
Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate (1976)

Vijay Mehta is among the 1,300 Notable Peacemakers Throughout History
http://peace.maripo.com/p_peacemakers.htm

He is among the 98 Peace Philanthropists around the world.
http://peace.maripo.com/p_philanthropy_bios.htm