

# All Party Parliamentary Group on Third World Solidarity

“To promote and support human rights, peace and Justice through dialogue and debate”

## UPDATE ON IRAQ CRISIS IN IRAQ, ONLY NON-MILITARY SOLUTIONS CAN END THE CONFLICT

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## Introduction

Good evening and thanks to Mushtaq Lasharie and All Party Parliamentary Group on Third World Solidarity for inviting me to share a platform on "Update on Iraq." UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on his recent visit to Iraq highlighted the humanitarian crisis and said, "Some 10 million Iraqis require humanitarian aid while conflict has displaced more than three million citizens within the country." He also said these challenges can only be resolved by tackling the root causes of conflict and by ensuring justice and equality for all and also by shoring up Iraq's economy.

Wars in the Middle East and North Africa and its offshoot global terrorism are a serious threat facing the world today. The US-led occupation pulverised Iraq as a society and killed a million of its people. It is obscene to now suggest that the US will fight terrorism and protect the Iraqi people, when the rise of terrorism was the direct result of the US-led invasion of the country. The US foreign policy is based on imperialism and war mongering turning countries into compliant states and destroy the ones who do not tow the line. Obvious examples being Syria, Iraq and Libya.

Last week on a visit to US, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg was repeatedly asked by CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer to explain the reasons why NATO is not getting involved in fighting jihadists in Iraq as they previously did in Afghanistan to fight against Taliban. Obviously, US has no intention of ending the conflict in Iraq, on the contrary it is sending more troops and weapons. US is following Jo Biden, the Vice President's plan to divide Iraq into three territories: Sunni, Shia and Kurds with a weak government at the centre in Baghdad. This is the sad reality which can also be said as the Update on Iraq.

The West had repeated its mistakes in Libya, Iraq and 'most blatantly' Afghanistan – arming terrorist groups with Western weapons – with the result that seven hundred UK citizens had gone to fight for ISIS. Stopping the arms race to Iraq and Syria is essential for peace and nothing should detract the international community to find solutions for peace.

The militarisation of world politics the likes of which has no parallel since 1945, of which the war in Iraq and Syria are only two expressions. The main line of development in the Middle East and internationally is towards a conflict between the US, Russia and China.

This resurgence of militarism and war is creating chaos and turmoil and it seems it will carry on for a while till alternative solutions are enacted for a peaceful world. It inevitably will need political leadership and programme necessary to achieve the end result.

Military solutions to solve the crisis pursued for the last 13 years in Iraq have not produced any results. I will, in my talk, explore that there are more effective non-military solutions which we need to put in place to stop violence and bloodshed and open a path to restore stability, foster political reconciliation and address outflow of refugees.

## **ISIS and Al-Qaeda are made stronger out of Iraq quagmire**

So what are the root causes of the Iraq conflict, how ISIS came about and its consequences?

The birth of ISIS/Al-Qaeda and other terrorists groups came into being because of:

- Vacuum created by withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. Instead US planted militias in Iraq like SAS who were caught red handed while making bombs.
- Massive aid (\$3 billion in two years) given by Saudi Arabia and Qatar to former army officers of Saddam Hussein. These officers ruled Iraq for 35 years and were ready for action to follow Saudi and Qatari military agenda.
- Support of Muslim brotherhood
- Supporting of Kurdistan forces led by Nechirvan Barzani (Nechirvan)
- A compliant media with depictions of hate, violence and terror creating fear.

As a direct result of this, ISIS, Al Qaeda came into being and have become strong and global terrorism has become rampant. Baroness Eliza Manningham-Buller, former Director General of MI5, while giving evidence go the Chilcot enquiry had this to say on Iraq:

“The sensible thing for the US to do after 9/11 was to make peace with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, a secular Arab state opposed to al-Qaeda and with Iran, a Shia state opposed to al-Qaeda, and do what was necessary to force Saudi Arabia and its Gulf state allies to cease providing inspiration and financing to al-Qaeda.

“But, instead, Iran was included in the “axis of evil” and shunned and Iraq was invaded and occupied, falsely justified in part on the grounds that Saddam Hussein had a hand in 9/11. In the process, Iraq was transformed from an al-Qaeda-free zone into an area where al-Qaeda flourished, so much so that the President<sup>1</sup> later described it as “the main battleground in the war against terror”. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has continued to inspire and finance al-Qaeda and its offshoots – and continued to be the US’s best friend in the middle east, apart from Israel.”

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<sup>1</sup> President George W. Bush II

This disastrous policy, which has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, was compounded in the following decade by the overthrow of another secular Arab regime in Libya in 2011, followed by a 4-year long attempt to overthrow another in Syria. Three secular Arab states that were potential allies against al-Qaeda have been destroyed or badly damaged by the US and its allies, enthusiastically supported by Britain, and as a result the al-Qaeda offshoot, ISIS, has established a “caliphate” in parts of Iraq and Syria and has associated organisations in many parts of the Muslim world, from Nigeria to Libya to Yemen and Afghanistan

## **Non-military solutions to Iraq crisis**

First and foremost we need to challenge the repetitive falsehoods generated by those in power to justify armed conflicts. The starting point is to realise that extremism cannot be bombed out of existence. ISIS, one must note, was bombed into existence.

Defeating ISIS and the other terrorist groups is vital, but it is also important that we oppose US intervention, which is making matters worse and is designed to bolster US presence and use Iraqi Kurdistan as a base of operations and aggression against the Iraqi and Iranian people.

The recent carnage in Brussels underscores the horrific consequences of ISIS (also known as Daesh) spreading around the globe. Such attacks will likely continue so long as ISIS flourishes in its territorial bases of Iraq and particularly Syria. To stop ISIS's machinery of global terror a diplomatic approach, rather than bombing raids, must take centre stage.

Shifting from an almost exclusive focus on militarism to inclusive diplomatic and non-military solutions holds the best hope for peeling off ISIS's layers of recruits, weapons and financial support.

Eventually, one of the only ways to end the wars in Iraq and Syria is through diplomatic settlements, and the power of ISIS will diminish in the region. The question is: How many men, women and children will be killed before those settlements are reached, and what resources will remain for the Middle East to build a new future?

I suggest below some of the steps we as an international community should take to diminish the role of ISIS and start a peace process.

### **1. Stop the Bombs: US Military Force Is a Force Multiplier for ISIS**

According to the Pentagon's own estimates, more than 10,000 airstrikes, over 28,000 bombs, \$8.8 billion in US taxpayer dollars and some 4,000 US military advisers and ground forces later, ISIS has the same manpower it did when the US launched its war against ISIS.

With the Pentagon also estimating that US forces have killed some 20,000 ISIS fighters, these numbers tell a larger story. Killing people -- ISIS fighters and especially civilians -- in the quest to destroy ISIS assists the group in recruiting additional fighters.

## 2. Stop the Slippery Slope for More Ground Troops

The New York Times reported last December that ISIS political leaders and strategists have been plotting how to drag the United States deeper into war, since US military escalations swell the organization's ranks of volunteer fighters and unify extremists to the ISIS cause.

## 3. To peel off ISIS's layers of support, we need to stop feeding into its recruitment bonanza.

Middle East analyst Tamara Cofman Wittes notes, "the war against ISIS is the slipperiest slope of them all." She writes, "In under two years, the US administration has moved from airstrikes, to 475 military advisers in Iraq, to over 4,000 troops on the ground including US special-operations forces in both Iraq and Syria."

To peel off ISIS's layers of support, we need to stop feeding into its recruitment bonanza: We must halt our slippery slide toward an even more massive US ground invasion and permanent presence in Iraq and potentially even Syria.

## 4. Support Iraq and Syria Diplomacy

Diplomacy to end the Iraq conflict and Syrian civil war has far more momentum now than it has had in five years of war. During the first week of the cessation of hostilities that began on February 27, 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the overall casualty count decreased by an astounding 90 percent.

The cessation of hostilities did not cover areas controlled by ISIS and al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate, al-Nusra Front. However, de-escalating the violence in areas outside ISIS and al-Nusra control may be the most important step to weakening ISIS control where it does exist. If some measure of calm and stability can return to the majority of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, al-Nusra and other extremist groups will have far more difficulty obtaining recruits.

When there is international political will, there is an international political way. Like the agreement to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons, the success of the cessation of hostilities was made possible by US cooperation with Russia and Iran.

#### 5. Peel Off ISIS's Political Support: Iraqi Political Reconciliation

With the United States' triumphant claims about "success" in seizing Ramadi from ISIS (despite nearly demolishing the city in the process), the downward spiral of Iraq is increasingly out of the spotlight. But US officials are increasingly recognizing what human rights groups have documented for years: that Iraq's security forces have become yet another network of sectarian militia in the violence ravaging Iraq. Various sectarian militias included as state forces by the Iraqi government may have even committed war crimes.

Systemic disenfranchisement of Sunni-majority areas has been a major factor in the rise of ISIS in Iraq. Yet rather than take action to reverse that trend through political reconciliation, the fight against ISIS is causing it to increase.

After the Iraqi government expelled large numbers of Sunni forces from the security forces in late 2015, one anonymous US official noted that "this isn't rocket science," warning that "we literally went through the same problem with the same people 10 years ago."

It's time to hold Iraq accountable, and, at a minimum, condition further military aid to the Iraqi government on its progress in advancing political reconciliation efforts that address the grievances of marginalized Iraqis, especially those in Sunni-majority areas.

#### 6. Peel Off ISIS's Weapons: Stop Sending Arms in ISIS's General Direction

Amnesty International reported in 2015 that the bulk of ISIS weaponry is from the US-allied Iraqi government. When Iraqi forces flee from the advance of ISIS fighters, they often abandon weaponry that in turn increases ISIS's firepower. The United States must rein in its flood of weapons to Iraq and Syria in order to prevent more weapons from ending up in the hands of ISIS and other extremist groups.

Amnesty makes detailed recommendations to implement far stricter controls on the transfer, storage and use of arms to avoid further weapons proliferation, and ISIS's ability to loot these weapons for its use. Ultimately, the United States must show leadership in moving toward a regional arms embargo, ending arms to all parties in the violence in Iraq and Syria. Steps taken to reduce rather than escalate arms can lay the groundwork for international pressure to persuade Moscow and Tehran to limit and ultimately end arms to the Assad regime.

## 7. Peeling Off Poverty Can Peel Off Extremism

We must "go after the root causes that lead people to join these groups (ISIS and Al-Qaeda)," including "lack of opportunity for jobs." But the fact of the matter is that indeed, for many of its recruits, ISIS is seen as a jobs program in many areas under ISIS influence.

Obviously, addressing poverty doesn't address the whole of the ISIS problem and won't stop all ISIS recruiting, as we are fighting an ideology. However, poverty brings in many layers of recruits in countries like Iraq and Syria with millions of people living in abject poverty. Severe inequality leads to desperation, violence and wars.

## 8. A Marshall Plan for Development of Iraq

What we need is a Marshall Plan for the Middle East, a massive investment in economic and development efforts to help the region rebuild itself from the ground up, as was done for post-World War II Europe. As a country that has been responsible for so much killing and destruction in the region, the United States has a moral responsibility to the world to lead this effort. A Marshall Plan will not only counter ISIS, but will also help lay the groundwork for a more stable Middle East -- and a more stable world.

## **Conclusion**

History shows us, not least in the years of the 'war on terror', that when the US and its allies intervene in other people's countries, it is invariably catastrophic. Understanding the war mongering and imperialistic intentions that lay behind the talk of "humanitarian assistance" is essential if we are not to be duped again -- even after the disasters of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya -- into thinking that this time intervention is benign and well intended.

Speaking on the 5<sup>th</sup> March at a conference on the Middle East, I warned against partition of Syria, Iraq and Libya as a recipe for continuing Middle East wars. Oil power rivalries are a neglected factor in current conflicts. The international community had failed to tackle ongoing obstacles to Middle East peace, which resulted in the loss of hope by the region's youth, and attracted extremism.

Yet European Union policies and structures achieving 'positive peace' in Europe for seventy years, successfully followed by the African Union, could serve as a model for peace-building in Middle East. Bodies like Organisation of Islamic Co-operation

[OIC] and Gulf Co-operation Council [GCC], could help build an 'Arab Peace', but such requires deeper unity of Arab nations, and involvement of Israel and Iran. All-party peace talks [including ISIS and al-Nusra Front], building mutual trust, disarmament measures and equitable sharing of scarce resources such as water, are essentials for a lasting Middle East peace. Europe could best contribute by decisively rejecting its culture of militarism, by dismantling weapons, ending militarism, war and implementing international law.

To bring peace in the MENA region, firstly, 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.

Secondly, US needs to abolish its foreign policy of imperialism and war mongering, as once it revolted and abolished slavery and colonialism – evil scourges of humanity.

In conclusion, let us make a firm resolve from today's conference to end violence, wars and militarism. 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 two sayings. One by Gandhi, "Terrorism and deception are weapons not of the strong but of the weak." And the other one is 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:

1. Mehta, Vijay, Peace in the Middle East: A Dream or Reality, London 5 March, 2016
2. Gould, Kate, Treat ISIS like an Artichoke: A Non-Military Route to the Heart of the Crisis, Truthout, 30 March, 2016
3. Ki-moon, Ban, Iraq Leaders Urged to Work Towards Inclusive Peace, March 2016
4. Morrison, David, Al Qaeda, ISIS, and the wider fallout for Iraq invasion, 28 October 2015, Open Democracy
5. Rottgen, Norbert, To Unify Europe, Face the Mideast as One, The Opinion Pages, The New York Times 31 March 2016
6. Macintyre, Ben, To Catch the Devil, you must Recruit his Disciples, The Times, 1 April, 2016
7. Marsden, Chris, The Class Issues in the Brexit referendum, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016
8. Galtung, Johan, Realpolitik vs Realistic Politics, TMS, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016

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](http://www.unitingforpeace.org)) and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity ([www.fortuneforum.org](http://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](http://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).

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](http://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 Mehta’s 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.theeconomicsofkilling.org](http://www.theeconomicsofkilling.org) and was read and commented by figures such as Tony Benn, Mairead Maguire, Alice Walker and Deepak Chopra.

Vijay Mehta’s new book “Exporting Europe’s Peace” to be published next year makes the case for EU and its preservation of peace in Europe making the war on the continent unthinkable.

“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](http://peace.maripo.com/p_peacemakers.htm)

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[http://peace.maripo.com/p\\_philanthropy\\_bios.htm](http://peace.maripo.com/p_philanthropy_bios.htm)