

Northern Book Launch of

HOW NOT TO GO TO WAR

Establishing Departments for Peace and Peace Centres Worldwide

By Vijay Mehta

Jointly organised by Peace Studies and International Development Department of the University of Bradford, The University of Bradford Peace Society and Uniting for Peace

Thursday 7th March 2019
18:30 – 20:30

The University of Bradford
Norcroft Lounge
Tumbling Hill Street
Bradford BD7 1DP

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Introduction

Good evening and welcome everyone to the book launch. I am pleased to see so many change makers acting for a better and more peaceful world. Thanks to Richard Outram, Sanna and Peace Studies and International Development Department and the University of Bradford Peace Society for hosting this event at a short notice. Let me also thank Fabian Hamilton MP's tireless work for raising the awareness for making the vision of Department for Peace a reality, so thank you very much.

I am going to speak about my new book, How Not To Go To War – Establishing Departments for Peace and Peace Centres Worldwide published in 2019 by New Internationalist.

War / Defence Departments are in almost all the countries of the world. War is institutionalised and is part of the fabric of the society. No wonder we are almost always on the war path. On the contrary, there are only five countries in the world with Departments / Ministries for Peace. UK under the Labour Government aspires to create a Department for Peace. If a major country like UK with 5th largest economy in the world is able to establish a Department for Peace, then it will create a precedent for many more countries to follow. Peace will be institutionalised and will be part of our everyday life, bringing governments, leaders and civil society – charities, companies and individuals – together to take concerted action for the benefit of all towards peace, reconciliation and solidarity among people and countries.

The book cuts the chase and recognise and highlights the lies and vested interests of elites, leaders, defence industry who are working for the few and not the many. The book's out of the box thinking points out ways things can be done differently to improve the lives of under privileged and marginalised people who are caught in a never ending spiral of hopelessness and destitution.

Everyone is debating Brexit and the £39 billion which is going from the UK to Europe annually. But the bigger drain on the UK economy is the £52 billion that the UK government spent in 2016 and every year after on its military machine to be present in ever further foreign lands. What has this achieved? And why is this not being discussed and highlighted? We have lost hundreds of our young soldiers' lives fighting in foreign wars, it has killed thousands of innocent people abroad and contrary to belief it makes us no safer and actually creates more enemies that prolong the cycle of war and war expenditure. The brutality of killings, suffering and its impact on social fabric and the economy of society is seldom discussed and highlighted in the mainstream media.

The book explores the psychological underpinnings of military expenditure and the public's acceptance of rampant militarism driven by propaganda and fear of terrorism, racial, ethnic and religious differences. Why do taxpayers consent to pay billions, if not trillions, of dollars to support military structures, even when their country faces no realistic threat of invasion and has not been attacked for centuries? Only by understanding this mind-set can we hope to change it, and obtain popular consent for deploying that wealth into more constructive directions. Psychological safety of the citizens is most important and key ingredients for wars to end and disarming of weapons to begin.

The state has a role to play in addressing the security fears of its citizens. The propaganda and threats of the war lobby which needs to be exposed include psychological drivers of war – aggression, greed, extremism, fear or threat which are instrumental in increased global military expenditure, a record level of \$1.739 trillion in 2018. It is scandalous that the permanent five members of the UN Security Council (USA, Russia, China, UK and France) are also the top five arms sellers.

Wars continue, with military interventions in blatant violation of national sovereignty, for economic and geopolitical ends. In addition, with the resurgence of nationalism, the emergence of terrorism, immigration, arms races, economic crises and corruption inherent in the neo-liberal system itself, we are on the verge of stumbling over the same rock again. The phantom of a new world war is shaking humanity, since it may be the last because the human species will no longer exist.

On the world stage and in the arena of international politics, Trump officially suspended the INF (Intermediate-Range Forces) treaty with Russia, the humanitarian crisis and tensions in Venezuela dramatically intensified, Brexit chaos and misery continues, and just a few days ago the conflict between India and Pakistan, the two nuclear powers, has begun to erupt once again. Reflecting on these events, which only happened in February 2019, have continuously destabilised peaceful relations between countries and citizens, is crucial.

History of Departments for Peace

I am going to speak on the history of Departments for Peace, an concept which is 150 years old. Two men, The African-American Benjamin Banneker and his white friend Dr. Benjamin Rush, a physician from Philadelphia, wrote an essay calling for an office for promoting and preserving perpetual peace in the United States. They argued when conflicts between nations happen, a Department for Peace would be charged with pre-empting these conflicts searching for peaceful resolutions to them. This would diffuse the crisis besetting the humanity before they exploded into violence.

After the 2nd World War, the campaign for a US Department for Peace intensified. Between 1955 and 1968, no fewer than 85 bills were introduced in Congress calling for the creation of a Peace Department. Unusually, there was little visible partisan divide; the bills drew support from Republicans and Democrats, unions and business owners and from across the religious spectrum. Indeed, more curious was the fact that the bills failed despite any clear and visible organised opposition to them. This has been attributed to apathy on the part of the electorate.

In October 2003, John McDonnell MP now the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced a 10 minute rule Bill in the UK Parliament for the establishment for Ministry for Peace with cross party support. The Bill was supported by Jeremy Corbyn, Alan Simpson and Alex Salmond among others. It was passed unopposed but fell for lack of parliamentary time. The Bill emphasised the need to create infrastructure for peace, based on peace building and conflict transformation efforts providing an alternative approach to security in Britain and around the world.

There are 5 countries who have established a Department for Peace.

Solomon Islands – 2002

Nepal – 2007

Costa Rica – 2009

South Sudan – 2011

Ethiopia – 2018

The countries who aspire to have Departments for Peace are UK, US, Canada, Italy and others.

Departments for Peace – A Great Institutional Invention

To counter the culture of militarism, we need to build trust finding common grounds to diffuse conflicts and build consensus politics. The book advocates that time has come to establish Departments for Peace. These promise to be among the great institutional inventions of the 21st century, bringing the prevention of violence and conflict to the centre of the policy agenda. It illustrates the broad but coherent set of responsibilities that would lie within a Department for Peace, and explains why other government ministries are inappropriate hosts for some of these. Such Departments of Peace must be distinct from foreign and development ministries, for instance, compromised as they are by espionage and export-promotion. It shows how peace can be institutionalized within the public sector.

Departments for Peace all over the world will work for the promotion of culture of peace and eventual abolition of war. A Minister for Peace will be a voice at the Cabinet table to speak up for non-violent conflict resolution and alternative to war. It will advise on policies which can be developed to reduce the potential of conflict. It

will provide and coordinate government resources to foster understanding in Britain and the world of how war can be avoided and peace achieved. It will shift the focus from war making to a culture of peace advancing practical techniques to avoid outbreaks of violence before they arise. Peace departments will also support and promote research into the causes and impacts of conflicts, monitoring potential areas of conflict and implement policies for conflict resolution.

Departments for Peace will include multilateral ways to resolve conflicts by seeking the common ground, to sit down with leaders and civil society to seek ways to resolve the great present and future problems facing humanity - water scarcity, climate change crisis, increased migration, escalating poverty, the threat of wars and weapons of mass destruction, ethnic and religious differences. These are some of the problems that urgently need to be dealt with.

By strengthening ties and fostering trust in this way, people will realise that weapons and armies are not necessary, that knowing each other and strengthening ties removes fears and mistrust, that the culture of other people are as valuable as their own, with the same thoughts, feelings and needs.

In 2018, the world spent an all-time high of \$1.739 trillion on military. That's equivalent to about a thousand dollars per family on the planet. Yet, all these weapons have not made the world less violent. In 2015, violence cost the global economy some \$14 trillion, a surge of 15 per cent from 2008. That number might seem high, until one considers the escalating inequality, famine, pollution, disease, collapse of public services, environmental damage and climate change that follows in the wake of war.

The book advocates for the establishment of Departments for Peace as an institution. Institutions endure. They can outlast the people that create them. The question asked by this book is, how can peace be institutionalised? It finds that the institutions of war need to be matched by institutions of peace. For every Department of Defence, there needs to be a Department for Peace that allocates public resources to forestall violence and militarism, by measures of pre-emptive conflict resolution rather than waiting for it to occur and then deploying violence against it. Such departments of peace will be distinct from foreign and development ministries, compromised as they are by espionage, export-promotion and militarization of aid.

Peace Centres – New Concept of Social Business Enterprises in the 21st Century

One of the roles of Departments for Peace will be to open Peace Centres in all major cities and towns. These Peace Centres will be training and education hubs for peace builders and leaders who will be working in communities for interfaith and multicultural activities. These centres will also work within the society for the

reduction of street violence, knife crime and murder. They will also address divisions in society in a more direct way by promoting a culture of peace in which conflicts can be resolved in a respectful way. Peace Centres will help create a vibrant local community, training in a non-violent way of life, through methods of reconciliation and conflict resolution, which will help in revitalising the society. By opening peace/social centres or franchises in each city, town and village, the peace movements can contain violence and foster a culture of non-violence.

Way Forward - Costa Rica and Ethiopia as an Example

Have you ever thought why Costa Rica, a Central American country with 40 million population, always tops the Happy Planet Index while ranking of United States is way down to 108. This data is gathered by New Economics of Foundation who publish a Happy Planet Index every year. It is because they have a focus on peace, equality and protecting the environment. Which create the best conditions for human happiness. It actively promotes peace through its Department for Peace.

Domestic and international peace has long been a priority in Costa Rica. In 1948, the country abolished its military allowing it to spend more on health and education. Its University of Peace, established in 1980, prepares future leaders in conflict resolution and peaceful alternatives to war. It also hosts workshops on corporate responsibility for international business executives.

In 2018, Ethiopia established a Ministry for Peace, where the new history of Africa is being written. Its Prime Minister and inspirational leader, Abiy Ahmed, is taking revolutionary steps and has created a Ministry for Peace, with a senior cabinet minister as its head. In another groundbreaking move, he has brokered peace on a 20 year old border conflict with Eritrea, which claimed more than 100,000 lives. Relations between the two countries, with flights and communications resumed, separated families reunited and embassies re-opened.

The book shows how the establishment of 'Departments for Peace' worldwide will result in the taxpayer saving trillions of US dollars, which governments can utilise in job creation, healthcare, education and peacebuilding. Only by institutionalising peace at many levels of society, can the peace movement become coherent and powerful enough to face-down the many commercial and official networks that have a vested interest in armed violence.

War is not inevitable and building peace is work in progress. With the publication of this book, myself and our organisation Uniting for Peace, have started a campaign to build support at the grassroots and governmental level for the establishment for Department for Peace in UK and other countries. It is a cross-party issue and we have to build support of all parties. I am going to York on 16th March 2019 to speak at a fringe meeting on my book, How Not To Go To War at the Lib Dem Spring Conference and later in June, I'm doing the same at the Green Party Conference in

Scarborough. There's a good chance of success if we can create the momentum towards it.

Let me finish my presentation with Costa Rica's Nobel Peace Prize Winning President, Oscar Arias Sanchez, he said and I quote, 'Peace is not a dream. It is an arduous task. We must start by finding peaceful solutions to everyday conflicts with the people around us. Peace does not begin with the other person; it begins with each and every one of us.'

Thanks for listening.

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Bio of the speaker:

Vijay Mehta is an author and peace activist. He is Chair of Uniting for Peace and founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity. His notable books include 'The Economics of Killing' (Pluto Press, 2012) and 'Peace Beyond Borders' (New Internationalist, 2016). His current book is 'How Not To Go To War' (New Internationalist, 2019)

The Sunday Times described him as a "longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment, who along with his daughter Renu Mehta has set a precedent for striving to change the world" (The Sunday Times, February 01, 2009).

In 2014, Vijay Mehta's bio "The Audacity of Dreams" appeared in the book form "Karma Kurry" published by Jaico Publishing House, India with a foreword to the book by Nelson Mandela.

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

"Vijay Mehta proposes that in countries and communities, in governments, private institutions and media, Peace Departments and Peace Centres be established to report on and promote peace."– Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate 1996 and Former President of Timor-Leste

Notes: excerpts have been taken from the books and articles below

1. Vijay Mehta, *The Economics of Killing*, Pluto Press, London 2012
2. Vijay Mehta, *Peace Beyond Border*, New Internationalists, London 2016
3. Vijay Mehta, *How Not To Go To War*, New Internationalists, London 2019
4. Paolo Gerbaudo, *Digital parties on the rise: a mass politics for the era of platforms*, Open Democracy, December 2018
5. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, Address on 10th December 70th Anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
6. Brian Cooper, *The Golden Principles of World Peace*, Edinburgh, November 2018
7. Luis Abad, *When Nations Work Together, Hope Prevails and Collective Solutions can be Found*, Peace Forum, Marking World War Centenary, Paris, November 2018
8. Tom Whipple, Demis Hassabi, Interview: The Brain's Behind Deep Mind on the Future of Artificial Intelligence, December 2018
9. Michael T Clare, *The Coming of Hyper War: Alexa, Launch Our Nukes!*, Tom Dispatch, December 2018
10. Zach Lampell and Lily Liu, *How Can AI Amplify Civic Freedom?*, International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), December 2018
11. John Scales Avery, *A World Federation*, Pressenza, December 2018
12. Ben Hoyle, *Alexa Says: Murder Your Foster Parents*, The Times, December 2018
13. Scilla Elworthy, *Business Plan for Peace: Building a World Without War*, Peace Direct, 2018
14. Ben Tarnoff, *Weaponised AI is coming. Are algorithmic forever wars our future?*, The Guardian, December 2018
15. Henry A Giroux, *Trump's Fascist Efforts to Demolish Democracy*, November 2018
16. Nick Mottern, *Alexa, Drop a Bomb*, Truthout, December 2018
17. Betty Reardon, *9 Gifts Peace Education Gives Year Round (and a note of thanks from Betty Reardon)!*, Global Campaign for Peace Education, December 2018
18. Edward Lucas, *"Brexit Preppers have the Wrong Priorities"*, January 2019
19. Paul Johnson, *"Acting in our own self interest will not make the world a better place"*, January 2019
20. Tom Watson, *"A nation to be proud of again – speech to the Fabian Society"*, January 2019
21. Youssef Mahmoud, *"What kind of leadership does sustaining peace require?"*, January 2019
22. Philip Aldrick, *"Rich get richer as the divide with the world's poor gets wider"*, January 2019
23. Bhikhu Parekh, *"Gandhi and Ahimsa (Non-Violence) as a Way of Life"*, The Gandhi Way, Spring 2019
24. Juan Gomez, *"Nationalism of multilateralism, War or Peace"*, Pressenza, February 2019