

Birkbeck Open Discussion Society

# Surviving the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Global Challenges, Threats and Prospects for Peace

Vijay Mehta – [vijay@vmpeace.org](mailto:vijay@vmpeace.org)

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## Venue

Room 101  
30 Russell Square, WC1B 5DP

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## 1. Introduction - Turmoil in the World Today

At a time of increasing tension over Ukraine, the Middle East, increase in extremism, fanaticism, continuing wars in Syria and Iraq, the world seems to be descending into a dangerous situation.

We are a good deal closer to new world disorder now than ever with the continuing bombing in Libya, the Sahel, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. The most serious is the fighting in Eastern Europe which if escalates can lead to a full scale war between Russia, Europe and US. We need to work to avoid a new era of superpower tension whose victims are innocent civilians caught up between US-Russia proxy war.

The US and West are creating Islamic wastelands which hardly can be a foundation for peace. The war profiteers make us believe war is the only option and the other is doing nothing. War does not bring stability. However, the reality is war leads to violence, militarism, a resurgence in global terrorism and a disregard to life we live on this earth.

Both sides in the conflict ISIS (Islamic State) and Western military intervention has resulted in barbaric killings. Can the western leaders really think they can tackle the militants by bombing fundamentalists? If you need to create a just and civilised world we must try to understand the root causes of conflict – talk with, listen and to empathise with the people in region and explore non-violent alternatives.

## 2. Military Aggression and its Consequences

This leads to what is undoubtedly one of the world's largest problems: the insatiable appetite of US military expansion, the militarisation of Europe with NATO leading towards a new cold war and military aggression. US Neocons in alliance with NATO backed by media reporting about the Ukraine conflict are constantly pushing for war with Russia. It is a disaster waiting to happen if tensions between Russia and the West are not resolved soon.

Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark had this to say about what is happening in the world today? 'The international community is not by chance, and what happened in Libya is not by chance, what is happening in Syria and Iran is not by chance.

Who is behind the acts of terrorism? What is behind the assassinations and murder of intellectuals and high-ranking officials in both countries? We are building up to what, exactly? And where is the truth in the international press?

The weapons circulating around the world have enriched American, French and German dealers. Arab countries have been destabilized for a century by a power struggle that is fuelled by the interests of the West. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr. "US is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world." In 2013 the military spending worldwide was \$1.75 trillion, which is 2.5% of global GDP and US alone spent \$700 billion which is the 40% of the world total.

The damage done by Military Industrial Complex (MIC) and its continued expansion is huge as I have examined in detail in my book 'The Economics of Killing' and it affects many areas some of which are below:

- a) Rise in militarism, conflicts
- b) Oppression of developing countries and forced transfer of resources

- c) Violence, terrorism and war on terror
- d) 2008 financial collapse and current economic crisis
- e) Marginalisation of UN and weakening of world institutions
- f) Negative effects on environment, global and human security including refugees, migrants etc. – 45 million refugees displaced by conflicts and wars
- g) Misuse of science:
  - i) Important for students misuse of science, technology research in universities for developing satanic weapons
  - ii) 17 top UK universities – including Imperial College London, Cambridge and Oxford were given £83 million for military research on 21<sup>st</sup> century high tech weapons
  - iii) AWE – Atomic Weapons Establishment one of the funders
- h) MIC giving powers to military alliance NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) to police the world and fight its wars

### 3. Solutions

Imbalance of power in the world today is the highest and our perception of each other (us and them) do not match up. At the same time we are more connected than ever economically and electronically on the World Wide Web

We need to ask relevant questions. As political and peace activists we have a bounden duty to pursue that tradition and protect our hard won political, economic, social and civil liberties. As Abraham Lincoln said “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today”

In my last book, *The Economics of Killing* I argued that war and continue war is not a solution to terrorism, jihadism, sectarianism, we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. We cannot bomb an ideology, or heal sectarian conflicts with the barrel of a gun. Invisible to the public, the bombing inevitably causes widespread suffering among innocent people, multiplying enemies and provoking further 'terrorism."

I have advocated a solution by campaigning and developing an effective strategy for nonviolent future by following 4d for World Peace campaign. The 4D's stand for Disarmament, Demilitarisation Development and Democracy and advocate for promoting soft power approach for the well being of humanity. It is a campaign for civil society groups to work not only to change government policies, but also economic incentives and cultural understandings to resolve all conflicts by dialogue and diplomacy for lasting peace. It works on the principle that what we have in common is more important than our differences.

For a start, stop expansion of NATO and take steps to wind down its military pact with the European Union. Disband its operation like the Warsaw Pact. Why in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century MIC is producing more guns, weapons and bullets which have made arms industry the biggest trade in the world. It can only result in more violence, wars and suffering.

The cold war paradigm of confrontation and militarisation should be abandoned for close cooperation between Europe and Russia, USA and the Middle East for seeking peaceful solutions.

We do not require a cold war thinking in Europe. We should continue to build structures through which we can cooperate and which reflect our relations of interconnectedness and interdependence. The vision of the founders of the European Union to link countries together

politically, economically and culturally, in order to lessen the likelihood of war among nations is one of the most worthy endeavours in the history of mankind. We should try utmost to keep it intact.

## 4. Prospects for peace

The UNESCO preamble is as relevant today as it was in 1945: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

We call ourselves civilised. But a true civilisation does not need to possess weapons and to train millions of men and women in armed forces and send them to war. To counteract the evil of warmongering we need a global movement for a positive change to show we can live with our fellow human beings in peace, by taking steps to build a peaceful and secure world based on non-militarist approaches. A radical rethinking of political forces is needed to initiate an act of reconciliation.

More constructive alternatives to military intervention include:

- Need of political will and more effective leadership, efforts at a global scale for a world without war
- Accelerating humanitarian assistance for displaced people
- Immediate halt to air strikes and stopping the flow of arms to the regions of conflict,
- Prioritising diplomatic intervention under United Nations auspices,
- Insisting on a renewed peace process for Syria, Iraq, Middle East and Ukraine that includes all parties
- Moving away from secrecy, war propaganda, and the outmoded macho approach so often manifested in the defence, foreign affairs and national security sectors
- Helping create peaceful and just societies – changing the mindset from culture of guns to culture of peace
- Changing the current political-economic system which is a form of plutocracy or elite rule to diverging form of democracy significantly influenced by the public will
- Stop the pursuit of profit without any ethical and moral compass

## 5. Civil Society Actions

We can make peaceful world by

- Opposing violence, wars, militarism
- Educate the public
- Holding meetings like today
- Be your own media
- Starting a 4d for World Peace Campaign
- Speaking the truth to power – Julian Assange, Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden
- 16 federal spy and intelligence agencies in USA including CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and NSA (National Security Agency) spent most of the \$52.6 billion on spying in 2013 with hardly any public accountability
- Change begins with one person
- Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King – were individuals who fought against their political system to achieve their moral objectives.
- Begin peace education when children enter school

- David Frost asked John Lennon in an interview, "When Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia, if people had said 'peace and love' to him, it wouldn't have done much good." Lennon said, "No, but what if they had been saying it to him from the moment he was born? That was wonderful." Gandhi also said that if we want peace in the world, we have to start with children.

The aim of a peace activist is to create and leave behind a legacy of a better world for future generations, a humane world where there is social equity and a nurturing environment for one and all.

## 6. Conclusion

Peace starts in recognising and valuing the inherent humanity in each of us as the Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously said 'My humanity is bound up with yours, for we can only be human together'. So, let us take the first step in recognising the world we live is interdependent and interlinked. We all have to work together to solve the intractable problems we face not by rivalries but through co-operation.

Things do change. Europeans have made Europe peaceful for the first time in history. Apartheid era is gone. There was cold war, but then the Soviet Union dissolved. Recently we had reunification of Germany. What we need today is urgent change by extraordinary change makers, courageous peace leaders who do not give up against all odds to inspire global movement for a just and peaceful world. Our greatest strength as individuals is citizen power. Individuals, organisations and countries - let us cooperate on a global scale to take bold but doable, practical steps to change things around and sow the seeds for a more peaceful and prosperous world. Then we will have as good a chance as any for surviving the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thanks for listening.

### Notes:

The following articles were consulted and excerpts has been taken from them

1. Mairead Maguire, The Disturbing Expansion of the Military-Industrial Complex, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2014
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3. Ramsey Clark, United Nations Turning into NATO Tool of Aggressions
4. Vijay Mehta, The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World, Pluto Press, London, 2012
5. Vijay Mehta, A new Momentum for Peace: No Syria Intervention – What Next?, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014
6. Noam Chomsky, US, The World's Leading Terrorist State, November 04, 2014
7. IPB Statement: There Is No Military Solution To Fundamentalism, Geneva, 16 October 2014
8. Pax Christi, 2014 Report on global financing on nuclear industry
9. Noam Chomsky, Can Civilisation Survive Capitalisation, New York Times News Syndicate 2013
10. Nita Bhalla, Spend Less on Arms, More on Schools, says Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, 21<sup>st</sup> Oct, 2014
11. Vijay Mehta, A Nonviolent Sustainable Future is Possible by Overcoming Violence, Wars, and Inequality, 8<sup>th</sup> ICPNA, India
12. War Impoverishes Us, World Beyond War

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Please watch 4D for World Peace film: "Change the World" –  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9GEK4FFrXk>

Bio – **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 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.

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. 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 appointed a fellow of the New Westminster College, Province of British Columbia, Canada in 2013.

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.theeconomicsofkilling.org](http://www.theeconomicsofkilling.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

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)

He is among the 98 Peace Philanthropists around the world.  
[http://peace.maripo.com/p\\_philanthropy\\_bios.htm](http://peace.maripo.com/p_philanthropy_bios.htm)