

A GLOBAL VISION Event

“THE RISE AND FALL OF CIVILISATION: PERSPECTIVES OF MORAL POLITICAL ECONOMY”

***“Disarm the Military Juggernaut to Tackle Financial,
Environmental and Development Crisis”***

Tuesday, 20th July 2010
6:00pm – 8:00pm

House of Lords Committee Room 2A
Westminster, London SW1A

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Other speakers include: Moeen Yaseen, Daud Pidcock, Muhammad Rafeeq,
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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Breaking the Silence on Twisted Military Logic and Continuation of Wars.
3. Disarming the World for Solving Financial, Environmental and Development Crisis.
4. Conclusion.

➤ INTRODUCTION

Thanks Moeen and Global Vision for inviting me to speak today on “The Rise and Fall of Civilisation”. Global Vision is an organisation which is doing a great job in highlighting the current financial meltdown and collapse of the financial markets and exploring moral, Islamic and other alternatives to set it right.

I am going to discuss underlying causes of financial crisis which I am also doing in the book to be published in 2011 on military spending and its relation to development and poverty reduction. In it, I am exploring how military spending, corporate deception and its profound effects on financial meltdown are interlinked.

As the global population sets to reach 9bn by 2050, the widening gap between the rich and poor is simply unsafe and unwise. There will be widespread pollution, natural disasters, and extinction of species, resource shortages leading to instability, civil wars, increasing terrorism, mass migration and pandemic diseases. Estimates of when the point of no return will be reached may be no more than a decade from now. Experts agree that these international issues are all inter connected and one of the foremost reasons for this dire situation is continual wars and increased military spending which is currently \$1.53 trillion.

➤ BREAKING THE SILENCE ON TWISTED MILITARY LOGIC AND CONTINUATION OF WARS

War is a major cause of poverty. World economy is tied up in military spending, arms trade and wars to the tune of trillions of dollars. Industrial countries are spending billions of dollars daily to advance their capacity to wage war, whilst hundreds of millions of people suffer in wretched destitution. The world’s wealth and resources are being misused and the economies of the world are collapsing under unserviceable debt.

Profit motive of corporations, lack of political will and apathy among many states are some of the causes of perpetual military spending which is continually increasing owing to wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and global war on terror. The 15 countries with the highest spending account for over 81% of the total. The USA’s military spending budget accounts for 41.5% of the world total.

In contrast, the entire budget of the United Nations amounts to approximately 1.8% of the world’s military expenditure. For \$5 billion, the lives of 6 million children under the age of 5 could be rescued each year. UNICEF’s annual budget is spent on military purposes every 15 hours.

In reality, the logic of military spending has been reversed. It is not that awesome weapons are required to counter awesome threats – threats are needed to justify high tech weapons. There is no terrifying Soviet, Muslim or Martian plan to conquer the West. There is despair and anger expressed using the poor person’s weapon of war – labelled “terrorism” by our own high tech terrorists – that would vanish, instantly, if Western elites stopped inventing motives and machines for attacking innocent people. But as the leftist British musician Billy Bragg once sang: “War, what is it good for? It’s good for business.” The inevitable victims are the helpless billions of world’s population trapped in extreme poverty.

➤ DISARMING THE WORLD FOR SOLVING FINANCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT CRISIS.

The present severe financial crisis is the right time for governments and parliaments to take legislative steps to adopt good policies of disarmament for development to overcome policies that endanger current and future generations. The additional benefit is, global security, a prerequisite for global development which has been elusive and hampered by the ever more dominant military industrial complex, which oversees corporate interests and financial elites prosper at the expense of almost everyone.

We need to expose drivers of military expenditure i.e. rogue traders, arms brokers, corporate and government lobbyists, military industrial complex (Pentagon, CIA, MI5 Defence Departments). We should also expose the double rhetoric of leaders and government officials and military generals who are talking of bringing peace in the world while preparing for war and creating artificial fear in countries for generating demand for military hardware.

We also need to expose unnecessary tax breaks and tax incentives to the oil and banking industry despite their record profits. These initiatives given to industries which are already thriving should be deployed for education, health care and social security. Let me quote the former French Prime Minister, Pierre Messmer: “There are military secrets that translate into budgetary silences. Nowhere will you find within the military budget the possibility of precisely calculating atomic weaponry. We did this on purpose.”

Niall Ferguson said at the Aspen Ideas Festival 2010, “American Empire can suddenly collapse quite quickly due to the countries rising debt which is going to go live soon. Other Empires such as the former Soviet Union and the Roman Empire – collapsed quite quickly and the tipping point is often when the cost of servicing an Empire’s debt is larger than the cost of its defense budget. That has not been the case I think at any point in U.S. history, it will be the case in the next five years.”

In our interconnected world a future built on global military expenditure, corporate greed and injustices which has the foundations of mass poverty in the midst of plenty is economically inefficient, politically unsustainable and morally indefensible. We have to expose the double whammy of continuation of war for destroying the infrastructure of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan and then reaping profits in reconstruction.

We also need to pinpoint scandal of international trade of giving aid in return of lucrative contracts or buying arms and military hardware. There are resource wars for plundering of oil and scarce resources like diamond and cobalt from poor countries. We also need to explore how wars are continued for the sake of artificial growth of economy and for the benefits of elites to the tune of trillions of dollars.

➤ CONCLUSION

We should promote the strategy of disarmament and demilitarisation which will free up the global resources to be directed at economic, political and cultural development thus enhancing human security. The need for disarmament for development, international peace and security has been recognised in the international legal framework. However, many states have been reluctant to acknowledge its implications, let alone act on it. What it requires is governments and parliamentarians to adopt policies and take legislative steps to give the message that war is not inevitable and the notion that security lies in having and using more weaponry is false. We can get free of this evil habit to realise the peace dividend. The international community should adopt innovative financing solutions for development. It should work on reducing conflicts, protecting human rights, promoting democracy and good governance as key ingredients to sustainable development.

Global Vision and the Wider Peace Movement should work to expose the hideous continually increasing military expenditure throughout the world. Just imagine billions of dollars saving what it can achieve – closing the gap between the rich and the poor, eliminating civil wars and ethnic conflicts, fixing the financial and environmental crisis.

What defines us is our humanity. Let no leader destroy the sacred gift of life on the planet. It is too precious. Let me finish with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. He said and I quote, “*A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programmes of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom*”.

Thank you for listening.

Notes

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

The role of global institutions in tackling poverty – Vijay Mehta. Magdalen College, Oxford, OX1 4AU.

A Tax on Financing – Bernard Kouchner (Paris conference on innovative financing – September 2009)

Millennium Development Goals: at a Glance – issued by UN Department of Public Information 2010.

Muhammad Yunus, Building Social Business, Public Affairs (2010)

SIPRI Yearbook 2009

Aspen Ideas Festival 2010 – Niall Ferguson

Foreign Affairs – May/June 2010

The full version of this speech can be downloaded from:

VM Centre for Peace
Action for UN Renewal

www.vmpeace.org
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Vijay Mehta is president of VM Centre for Peace www.vmpeace.org , Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity www.fortuneforum.org, Chair of Uniting for Peace (Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign). He is an

author and global activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment. Some of his notable books are The Fortune Forum Summit: For a Sustainable Future, Arms No More, and The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century.

He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum charity held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007. 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. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

Vijay Mehta 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

At present, Vijay Mehta is writing a book for Pluto Press to be published in 2011. The subject is "Military Expenditure and its Relation to Poverty Reduction"