President Biden: De-Escalate in Ukraine, Do Not Risk Nuclear War!

By Gerry Condon

“Should the First Casualty of War be Truth?”

This simple yet profound statement is attributed to many, including Hiram Johnson in a speech in the U.S. Senate in 1918, during the “war to end all wars.” Hiram Johnson was a progressive Republican who had been elected to the Senate from California that very year. He remained in the Senate until he died of old age on August 6, 1945, the day the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on the civilian population of Hiroshima, Japan.

The Baltimore Sun quoted Senator Johnson more fully in 1929, during a Senate debate on an international agreement called the “General Treaty for the Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy” (also known as the Kellogg-Briand Treaty):

“The first casualty when war comes is truth, and when ever there is a war, and whenever an individual nation seeks to coerce by force of arms another, it always acts and always insists that it acts under self-defense.”

As the war rages in Ukraine in 2022, actual combat is eclipsed by well-practiced information warfare. It was not surprising when the White House and State Department began shouting that the Russians were about to launch a “false flag” event to justify their pending invasion of Ukraine. After all, isn’t that the way it is always done? Isn’t that the way the United States did it with the Tonkin Gulf Incident in Vietnam, babies being thrown out of incubators in Kuwait, and Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. Of course, the United States has a bigger challenge claiming self-defense as it invades smaller, weaker countries halfway around the globe.

No-Fly Zones Mean War!

Veterans Warn Against “No-Fly Zone” In Ukraine

Veterans of several U.S. wars are urging President Biden to hold fast against growing political pressure to implement a “no-fly zone.”

“A no-fly zone is an area established by a military power over which opposing aircraft are not permitted. No-fly zones are enforced by military interception of aircraft and missiles using deadly force, and sometimes include preemptive strikes to prevent potential violations. In other words, a country that declares a no-fly zone must then be ready to enforce the protected space, putting the United States in direct military conflict with Russia, escalating war between two nuclear powers.

No-fly zones have only been utilized three times in history—in parts of Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War, in Bosnia in 1992, and in Libya in 2011. Those crises were situations in which the United States and NATO used their superior air power to stymie the air defenses of the countries they were attacking.

The United States and NATO have so far resisted imposing a no-fly zone in Ukraine out of concerns that it would draw them into an armed showdown with Russia, and possibly even a nuclear war. A no-fly zone would almost certainly result in U.S. and allied aircraft directly engaging Russian aircraft—something NATO leaders strenuously tried to avoid during all four decades of the Cold War.

“For several years during the 1990s, my job at the Pentagon was to help enforce the Southern NEZ over Iraq. I was part of the Battle Damage Assessment Cell,” said Robert Prokop of Veterans For Peace. “A no-fly zone is an act of war—nothing less. It is lethal ordnance falling, not just on equipment, but on human beings. We all need to be crystal clear about this with elected officials and the general public.”

“A no-fly zone would mean direct combat between the U.S. and Russia, leading to a wider European war involving countries with nuclear power,” said Garrett Reppenhagen, Iraq War veteran, and executive director of Veterans For Peace. “We need de-escalation and diplomacy to bring this terrible war to an end as soon as possible.”

Veterans For Peace continues to urge President Biden and congressional leaders to not implement a no-fly zone and to use every available diplomatic resource to push for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal and to apply pressure on other nations to do the same.

It is not alarmist to say this is the greatest imminent threat of nuclear war since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.
Our Deeply Subconscious Magical Thinking

Last month our park system in Toledo sponsored a lecture by a renowned ornithologist, describing the international attention our part of the Lake Erie shoreline attracts during spring bird migration. He explained that large birds like ducks and eagles travel typically by day, navigating by land features, whereas songbirds and warblers fly at night and navigate off the stars. Some birds, weighing barely an ounce, fly 450 miles a day for a week straight, sometimes over long stretches of open water, just to get back home to their natural breeding grounds. He described how the shapes of certain land masses, like in the Middle East, can channel large numbers of birds into narrow corridors.

Editorial

From the audience, one woman asked, “For birds that fly during the day and navigate by what they see on land, will the ones flying over Ukraine be able to make it?” Instantly, everyone’s attention and emotions riveted on what had dominated the 24-hour news cycle for weeks – the war in Ukraine.

One needn’t be even an armchair psychologist to reckon how deeply into the national subconscious two weeks of constant war news had permeated for someone listening to a lecture on bird migration, in Toledo, Ohio, to ask a question like that.

Since our speaker had also mentioned bird migration in the Middle East, I wondered if anyone in the audience had considered the plight of migrating birds or people there, one of the most heavily bombed regions on Earth?

Returning home I was glad to see these words from Jeff Cohen, founder of the media watch group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), from online comments and a Free Speech TV interview. In a nation that prides itself on freedom of speech, his statements are not only rare but unfortunately in the current atmosphere, downright courageous.

“I’m happy to see that the U.S. media is covering the violation of international law committed by the Russians. I’m happy to see its empathetic coverage of all these civilians that are being terrorized because of missiles hitting them. That’s a great thing because in modern warfare civilians are the main victims. That’s what journalism should do. But when the U.S. was the culprit killing all these civilians, you just couldn’t get it covered.

“When I hear about the pregnant women giving birth in shelters in terror (in Ukraine), do you think during the weeks and months of Shock and Awe – one of the most violent bombing campaigns in global history that the U.S. committed in Iraq – do you think that magically, women in Iraq quit giving birth? There’s this magical thinking when the U.S. is dropping the bombs.”

It’s not surprising most people here didn’t think of the death and destruction endured by civilians when U.S. bombs fell on Iraq. Why would they when, as many of us recall, U.S. network reporters waxed nearly orgasmic describing the “beauty” of the Shock and Awe images, or the excitement they felt witnessing a cruise missile launched from a Navy warship, or hearing America’s most popular network anchor, Dan Rather, refer to George W. Bush as “my commander-in-chief”?

And in case heartfelt reportorial jingoism doesn’t generate sufficient subconscious magical thinking, network executives step in to assure it, as related in a FAIR article describing top CNN officials telling reporters how to spin stories to downplay civilian casualties caused by U.S. bombing in Afghanistan.

Wars, all wars, cause tremendous suffering to all life, but only an incalculably small number of Americans have seen

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Love Among the Chaos

By Tarak Kauff

With all modern wars, it is the innocent noncombatants who suffer the most. As I review reports from Ukraine I read of those who are most innocent, the children and the animals, and I want to cry. There is no excuse, no rationale for killing innocents. Whom to blame? Maybe all the participants—governments of Ukraine, Russia and the U.S. and NATO. None of these actors is without guilt. A case can be made as to who is most responsible but I’m not going there; you can read the arguments for that elsewhere.

I want talk about what seems to be of little concern—the non-human animals who have no responsibility or blame for this madness, but who suffer in every way and die just as we do. Animals don’t make war, humans do. Animals give us unconditional love, devotion, and loyalty, and give the veteran a reason to live.

Amid all the suffering of Ukrainian civilians, soldiers and the young Russian soldiers, who probably would rather not be fighting their ethnic cousins, there are still stories of love, courage and beauty. A Ukrainian soldier taking the time to bandage the head of a wounded dog; soldiers on both sides adopting, caring for, and feeding abandoned dogs and cats; and then there’s the family of Alisa, walking the last 10 miles to the Polish border with their 12-year-old female German shepherd, who kept falling down, but they would not leave her, this essential part of their family. The husband carried their dog to the border.

Alisa tells part of her story, “We left Kyiv in a small Peugeot 307 car. There were nine of us, me, my mum, my sister, our two husbands, four children and two

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De-Escalate

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in a time of war, would it not? We don’t want to justify Russian aggression. We don’t even want to hear their side of the story. A simplistic, one-sided narrative tells us that Vladimir Putin—who is both evil and mad—has initiated a war in order to rebuild the former Russian empire. Who knows where he might stop? There is absolutely no evidence to support this implausible narrative. But the truth be damned. This is war.

A “No-Fly Zone” Means

World War III

President Biden is demonstrating at least a bit of prudence. The President must make life-and-death decisions that are somewhat based in reality. He is resisting the growing calls for a No Fly Zone in Ukraine. He and the generals at the Pentagon know what that means. Even the usually pugnacious Senator Marco Rubio stated “it means World War III.” Yet pressure is growing for a No Fly Zone—maybe a “limited” one—as both Republican and Democratic leaders take their turn on top of the war wagon.

Joe Biden and the United States have a nuclear war, a serious concern for all modern presidents. Vladimir Putin is brandishing his large nuclear arsenal as a disincentive for direct U.S./NATO engagement in the Ukraine war. The United States canceled a planned ICBM test launch from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California to its usual target in the much-bombed Marshall Islands. Apparently, the United States did not want to risk spoiling Putin, about whose mental state many people are speculating. Could it be that Putin is employing Richard Nixon’s famous “madman theory,” keeping his enemies at bay with unpredictability?

Of course, Russia has its own propaganda apparatus, but we will not be much exposed to it here in the United States. Russia Today (RT) has been removed from most cable TV services as well as from YouTube. Well actually, almost everything Russian is currently being canceled, in a furious frenzy of Russia-hatting that has been central to U.S. culture ever since World War II. The Russians are never given credit for their outsized role in defeating the Nazis, nor sympathy for the 27 million lives lost in that war.

The United States Routinely

Violates the U.N. Charter—and

Now Russia Has Done So

The Russian invasion is a violation of the U.N. Charter, but hardly unprecedented. International law in no way restrained U.S. war-making in Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Grenada, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia or Yemen. Russia’s invasion was not in self-defense—except in a preemptive sense—they were not under immediate military attack.

Some say that the ongoing Ukrai- nian war against two breakaway Russia-aligned provinces in eastern Ukraine provided Just Cause for Russia’s invasion. Fourteen thousand people have died in the violence there since 2014, when a U.S.-backed coup overthrew a Russia-friendly president and replaced him with someone handpicked by the United States. An annoying factoid that.

Another annoying factoid is the well-documented role of Nazi militias in the 2014 coup and in the current government and military.

The Information War Presents the

Peace Movement With a Dilemma

The nonstop barrage of information, misinformation, disinformation and rallying around the flag has presented the peace movement with a dilemma. How do peace-loving people rightly condemn the Russian invasion—the destruction of cities, the killing of hundreds of civilians, the displacement of millions? How do we express our outrage and our strong disapproval of this aggression and violence without appearing to join in the war fervor that is sweeping the United States?

Conversely, how do we explain the role of the United States and NATO in creating this crisis without appearing to justify this horrible violence? How do we demand that President Biden stop pouring fuel on the fire by sending more weapons into Ukraine? How do we tell people that sanctions are not an alternative to war, but rather an escalation of war?

Escalation is the very last thing we want. The Ukraine war presents the entire world with an existential threat. It is not alarmist to say this is the greatest imminent threat of nuclear war since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The one where the United States was reacting to Russian nuclear missiles being positioned in Cuba, way too close for comfort. Does that ring a bell?

The Danger of Nuclear War Should Focus Our Attention

The very real danger of nuclear war should focus all our attention. With both U.S. and Russian nukes on “hair-trigger alert,” what could go wrong? And then there are the 15 or so nuclear power plants in Ukraine, several of them reportedly compromised by the war. Is that a real threat or is it war propaganda? Perhaps both. It is in everybody’s interest to end this very dangerous war as soon as possible.

Joe Biden is not new to this conflict. Biden and—famously—his son Hunter, have been involved in the Ukraine mess at least since the 2014 coup, after which a Ukrainian oil company paid Hunter Biden $50,000 a month to sit on its Board. No conflict of interest there, all the Democrats insisted. Even without family enrichment, Joe Biden has long been dedicated to the Cold War project of putting the Soviet Union—and now Russia—in its place, which is no place, and with no respect. The United States leads NATO—the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe 2014 coup and in the current government and military. is always a U.S. general. President Biden probably could have headed off the Russian invasion by simply saying publicly that Ukraine would not become a member of NATO. But he refused to do that. He called Putin’s bluff, and Putin showed him it was no bluff.

President Biden Must Act Now to De-

Escale This Dangerous War

Whatever disagreements there are about how the Ukraine war came about, reasonable people should be able to agree on this: This war is very aggressive. It threatens to become a wider war in Eu-

rop.e. It could even lead to a civilization-ending nuclear war. It therefore must be brought to an end as soon as possible.

President Biden is in a position to make a bold diplomatic move that could bring this war to a screeching halt. Instead of pouring in weapons and piling on sanc-
tions, we should call on President Biden to begin good faith negotiations with all concerned parties, respecting each of their security concerns.

Once the world has—hopefully—pulled back from the brink, we should begin a serious international discussion about how to abolish nuclear weapons and war once and for all. How will we avoid getting into the same kind of war with China over Taiwan? How can the United States adjust to a multi-polar world where it is no longer The Sheriff?

Verdict: The United States is offering its own Nuclear Posture Review, with sections on Russia and Europe and all the nuclear powers. It makes well-researched recommendations, such as implementing No First Use policies and taking nuclear missiles off “hair-trigger alert.” It calls on the United States to rejoin the ABM and INF treaties, and to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It calls on the U.S. to initiate negotiations “to reduce and eventually eliminate all nuclear weapons,” as the five permanent U.N. Security Council members—the original nuclear powers—agreed when they signed the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. If the United States and other nuclear powers had kept their promise to eliminate nuclear weapons, we would probably not be at war today in Ukraine, or worrying about Armageddon.

Gerry Condon is the former president of Veterans For Peace and a co-author of the Veterans For Peace Nuclear Posture Review.

Special Issue on the War in Ukraine—Summer 2022

peaceandplanetnews.org
The Greatest Evil is War
Russia was baited into war but that does not absolve its criminal act of aggression.

By Chris Hedges

Preemptive war, whether in Iraq or Ukraine, is a war crime. It does not matter if the war is launched on the basis of lies and fabrications, as was the case in Iraq, or because of the breaking of a series of agreements with Russia, including the promise by Washington not to extend NATO beyond the borders of a unified Germany, not to deploy thousands of NATO troops in Eastern Europe, not to meddle in the internal affairs of nations on the Russia’s border and the refusal to implement the Minsk II peace agreement. The invasion of Ukraine would, I expect, never have happened if these promises had been kept. Russia has every right to feel threatened, betrayed, and angry. But to understand is not to condone. The invasion of Ukraine, under post-Nuremberg laws, is a criminal war of aggression.

I know the instrument of war. War is not politics by other means. It is demonic. I spent two decades as a war correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans, where I covered the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. I carry within me the ghosts of dozens of those swallowed up in the violence, including my close friend, Reuters correspondent Kurt Schork, who was killed in an ambush in Sierra Leone with another friend, Miguel Gil Moreno.

I know the chaos and disorientation of war, the constant uncertainty and confusion. In a firefight you are only aware of what is happening a few feet around you. You desperately, and not always successfully, struggle to figure out where the firing is coming from in the hopes you can avoid being hit.

I have felt the helplessness and the paralyzing fear, which, years later, descend on me like a freight train in the middle of the night, leaving me wrapped in coils of terror, my heart racing, my body dripping with sweat.


I was beaten by Iraqi and Saudi secret police. I was taken prisoner by the Contras in Nicaragua, who radioed back to their base in Honduras to see if they should kill me, and again in Basra after the first Gulf War in Iraq, never knowing if I would be executed, under constant guard and often without food, drinking out of mud puddles.

The primary lesson in war is that we as distinct individuals do not matter. We become numbers. Fodder. Objects. Life, once precious and sacred, becomes meaningless, sacrificed to the insatiable appetite of Mars. No one in wartime is exempt.

“We were expendable,” Eugene Sledge wrote of his experiences as a Marine in the Pacific in World War II. “It was diffi-
cult to accept. We come from a nation and a culture that values life and the individual.

To find oneself in a situation where your life seems of little value is the ultimate in loneliness. It is a humbling experience.” The landscape of war is hallucinogenic. It defies comprehension. You have no concept of time in a firefight. A few minutes. A few hours. War, in an instant, obliterates homes and communities, all that was once familiar, and leaves behind smoldering ruins and a trauma that you carry for the rest of your life. You cannot comprehend what you see. I have tasted enough of war, enough of my own fear, my body turned to jelly, to know that war is allways evil, the purest expression of death, dressed up in patriotic cant about liberty and democracy and sold to the naive as a ticket to glory, honor, and courage. It is a toxic and seductive elixir. Those who survive, as Kurt Vonnegut wrote, struggle afterwards to reinvent themselves and their universe which, on some level, will never make sense again.

War destroys all systems that sustain and nurture life—familial, economic, cultural, political, environmental, and social. Once war begins, no one, even those nominally in charge of waging war, can guess what will happen, how the war will develop, how it can drive armies and nations towards suicidal folly. There are no good wars. None. This includes World War II, which has been sanitized and mythologized to mendaciously celebrate American heroism, purity, and goodness. If truth is the first casualty in war, ambiguity is the second. The bellicose rhetoric embraced and amplified by the American press, demonizing Vladimir Putin and elevating the Ukrainians to the status of demigods, demanding more robust military intervention along with the crippling sanctions meant to bring down Vladimir Putin’s government, is infantile and dangerous. The Russian media narrative is as simplistic as it is toxic.

There were no discussions about pacifism in the barracks in Sarajevo when we were being hit with hundreds or Serbian shells a day and under constant sniper fire. It made sense to defend the city. It made sense to kill or be killed. The Bosnian-Serb soldiers in the Drina Valley, Vukovar, Srebrenica had amply demonstrated their capacity for murderous rampages, including the gunning down of hundreds of soldiers and civilians and the wholesale rape of women and girls. But this did not save any of the defenders in Sarajevo from the poison of violence, the soul-destroying force that is war. I knew a Bosnian soldier who heard a sound behind a door while patrolling on the outskirts of Sarajevo. He fired a burst from his AK-47 through the door. A delay of a few seconds in combat can mean death. When he opened the door, he found the bloody remains of a 12-year-old girl. His daughter was 12. He never recovered.

Only the autocrats and politicians who continued on page 14…

Kharkiv, Ukraine

Special Issue on the War in Ukraine—Summer 2022
The Dangerous Idea of a Well-Behaved War
By Antonio De Lauri

The war in Ukraine resuscitated a certain dangerous fascination for war. Notions such as patriotism, democratic values, “the right side of history,” or a new fight for freedom are mobilized as imperatives for everyone to take a side in this war. It is not surprising then that a considerable number of so-called foreign fighters are willing to go to Ukraine to join one side or the other.

I met a few of them recently at the Poland-Ukraine border, where I was conducting interviews with a Norwegian film crew of soldiers and foreign fighters who were either entering or exiting the war zone.

Some of them actually never got to fight or be “recruited” as they lack military experience or proper motivation. It’s a mixed group of people, some of whom have spent years in the military, while others only did the required military service. Some have family at home waiting for them; others, no home to go back to. Some have strong ideological motivations; others are just willing to shoot at something or someone. There is also a big group of former soldiers who transitioned toward humanitarian work.

As we were looking for borderers to get into Ukraine, a former U.S. soldier told me: “The reason why many retired or former soldiers moved to humanitarian work might easily be the need for excitement.” Once you leave the military, the closest activity that can take you to the “fun zone,” as another one said, referring to the war zone in Ukraine, is humanitarian work—or, in fact, a series of other professions, depending on proximity of war, including contractors and criminal activities.

“We are adrenaline junkies,” the former U.S. soldier said, although he now only wants to help civilians, something he sees as “a part of my process of healing.” What many of the foreign fighters have in common is the need to find a purpose in life. But what does this say of our societies if, to search for a meaningful life, thousands are willing to go to war?

Propaganda
There is dominant propaganda that seems to suggest war can be conducted according to a set of acceptable, standardized, and abstract rules. It puts forth an idea of a well-behaved war where only military targets are destroyed, force is not used in excess, and right and wrong are clearly defined. This rhetoric is used by governments and mass media propaganda (with the military industry playing with a human skull in Afghanistan: an exception. German soldiers in Abu Ghraib: an exception. U.S. soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners tortured by British troops: an exception.

I and many young men like me of draft age were faced with a draft at a time that the United States was ramping up a war against Vietnam and forces in that country that were fighting for its liberation from a century or more of colonial and imperial subjugation and for unification after the United States had blocked a unification election fearing it would result in a victory by national hero and Communist Party leader Ho Chi Minh.

I didn’t want to support the U.S. war, or any war. My options were leaving for Canada, as some of my classmates did, hiding out and dodging the draft and the FBI, which others did, or resisting the draft and refusing to be inducted, which would likely mean federal prison, as others did. I knew I would not participate in the war in Indochina in any capacity, even doing “alternative service.” With a low draft lottery number (81) assuring I would get a call to the army, I chose resistance.

But I didn’t pass judgement on what choices other young men might have taken. Everyone who took steps to avoid being made part of the U.S. war machine was doing the right thing in my view.

Now in Ukraine men of all ages between 18 and 60 are required to take up arms and defend their country from a Russian invasion. Some may say that it is a struggle for the independence of Ukraine, but the issues are more complex than that. Ukraine has not been innocent in the conflict with its larger neighbor. Consider, for example, the laws passed since the 2014 U.S.-backed Maidan coup that overthrew Ukraine’s elected government and presidedly as many as 15,000 to date. I also heartily support those courageous protesters, tens of thousands of them, who are protesting Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, some of whom are facing stiff prison terms for their actions.

As well, regardless of the causes of this current war in Ukraine, many people simply do not believe war is the answer. As one young draft dodger who fled Kiev and slipped out of war-torn Ukraine making his way to the UK told The New York Times, “Violence is not my weapon.” He reports getting death threats from people in Ukraine.

It was, actually, a bit like that in the United States back in the late ’60s and early ’70s. Being even suspected of being or looking like the popular image of a “draft resister” could lead to one’s being called a traitor, being beaten up, or having one’s hair or beard cut off. I remember getting a few death threats back in those days for articles I wrote against the draft and against the U.S. war on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Defending Ukraine’s Draft Dodgers
How can we call Ukraine a part of the ‘free world’?
By Dave Lindorff

Back in 2015, when I was driving from Kuopio Finland up to the country’s far north to write an article about global warming and how it was affecting the Sami indigenous people of Lappland, I found myself offering rides to a number of Ukrainian young people, mostly male, or males accompanied by girlfriends, who were fleeing the civil war in their country, which saw Ukrainian forces, including the fascist Azov Battalion, shelling and shooting at ethnic Russians in the two breakaway oblasts [districts] of Donetsk and Lugansk.

These young people of draft age all told me they were fleeing their country to avoid being drafted to fight in a war against their countrymen in eastern Ukraine, a majority Russian region of Ukraine. “I have nothing against those people in Donbas,” one young man told me, “and I don’t want to be forced to kill them and get killed myself.”

They had all gone to Finland because of short-term agricultural work visas available to people willing to pick blueberries, which cover the forest floor above the Arctic Circle at that time of summer.

I appreciated their dilemma. Back in the spring of 1967, I and many young men like me of draft age were faced with a draft at a time that the United States was ramping up a war against Vietnam and forces in that country that were fighting for its liberation from a century or more of colonial and imperial subjugation and for unification after the United States had blocked a unification election fearing it would result in a victory by national hero and Communist Party leader Ho Chi Minh.

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So I want to say clearly that I heartily support those men of draft age in Ukraine who refuse to support the war by picking up one of the guns being handed out by the Ukraine government, and who flee the country to escape being made to fight something they don’t believe in—re-
Starving a People, Committing a Genocide: Biden’s Sanctions on Afghanistan

By Eve Ottenberg

When the United States stole $7 billion from Afghanistan on Feb. 11, that was no mere crime of robbery. It was a war crime and a crime against humanity that condemns possibly millions of Afghans to starvation. In short, prelude to genocide; no special plenaries about this excuse for this outright theft of Afghan funds, namely compensating the 9/11 victims. The Afghan government didn’t kill their loved ones, indeed back in 2001 the Taliban offered to turn the al Qaeda culprits over to Washington. The United States refused the offer and invaded instead.

Biden’s shocking action makes all Americans complicit in sickening atrocities. According to UNICEF, “More than 23 million Afghans face acute hunger, including 9 million who are nearly famished.” By the middle of this year, 97% of Afghans will be in poverty, the United Nations estimates. To say that people who steal half of their $7 billion is an understatement. To say those who steal half of it from them are thieves is not only. Since the last plenary tens of thousands of wheat due to the Ukraine war. This rise is the rest of the world sure does. Just look at the front page of China’s Global Times back on Feb. 23. It featured Afghanistan’s Washington-imposed agony, with a petition demanding the U.S. return money to Afghans. And that’s not the only international headline to point out Washington’s cruelty.

It was a war crime and a crime against humanity so unimportant. Is it the color of their skin, is it that they’re not white? They’re not European? That their problems comes from a妍tut like us? Or the occasional unexpected investigative report or in the margins of independent media. One exception was a March 5 article in The Guardian by Selay Ghaffar. “Across [Afghanistan], five million children are on the brink of famine. Many young people are in despair; suicide is on the rise,” Ghaffar writes, and then lamented the wonder of wheat due to the Ukraine war. This rise in cost means more people will starve. Part of the reason is that during the 20-year U.S. occupation, the country was “made into a graveyard,” depending on flows of humanitarian aid. Biden “has refused responsibility for America’s intervention in our country.”

The lesson of the U.S. defeat in Afghanistan and the promptly ensuing sanctions is dammed if you do and dammed if you don’t. Any country Washington attacks has a Solomon’s choice: surrender or fight and win and then face Washington’s global financial fury and the mass destruction it engenders. That’s how the empire works. It’s the sorest loser on the globe. Defeated, it exacts an excruciating revenge. If the geniuses in Washington think they can win the propaganda war on Afghanistan, they better think again. Too many people will die to be conceded. Many lamented Americans who consider their country blameless may not know about the Washington-inflicted mass death, but the rest of the world sure does.

magical thinking can be set aside. Like in this case, when Pope Francis dropped what has to be the exact opposite of a bombshell, by denying 1600 years of Roman Catholic tradition with just four words, “Wars are always unjust,” he told Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in a video conference on March 16. Mark that date because the “just war theory” has sent millions to slaughter – every one of whom had God on their side – since St. Augustine proposed it. One can easily say it is the very cornerstone of magical thinking.

Francis sealed his historic statement with this universally- resonant reason even the spin masters at CNN and the temporary resident of the White House can’t deny, “because it is the people of God who pay.”

—Mike Ferner

Mike Ferner was a hospital corpsman during the Vietnam War and has travelled to Iraq and Afghanistan. He is a senior editor of Peace & Planet News and a past president and executive director of Veterans For Peace.
Will Humans Be the Next ‘Freedom Fries’?

By Ray McGovern

U.S. pundits and strategic experts seem blissfully unaware of how close we all are to being fried in a nuclear strike by Russia. (Fair Labeling: if you are simply looking for yet another reason to demonize Putin, rather than to understand where he is coming from, save time and read no further.)

Here’s the thing: The Russians have good reason to be on hair-trigger alert. Their early-warning radar system is so inadequate that there are accidents (including those involving innocent rocket launches) under which Russian President Putin would have only a few minutes—if that—to decide whether or not to launch nuclear missiles to destroy the rest of the world—on the suspicion that Russia was under attack.

“If that”? Yes, launch-to-target time is now so short that it is altogether likely that the authority to launch nuclear weapons is now vested in subordinate commanders “in the field,” so to speak. Readers of Daniel Ellsberg’s Doomsday Machine are aware of how the United States actually weaponized the days of the first Cold War, I. e., was shocked to learn that. Worse: today the subordinate commanders might be noncommissioned officers.

Russia, of course, is not about to admit that its early-warning system is far inferior to the U.S.’s worldwide, satellite-based capability. But such is the case. The implications could not be more serious.

This came to mind today as former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said the Kremlin would never allow the destruction of Russia. He warned, however, that if Washington did achieve what he described as its destructive aims, the world could face a dystopian crisis that would end in a “big nuclear explosion.”

President Putin addressed this issue four years ago, shortly after unveiling Russia’s new nuclear arsenal, including hypersonic missiles and other highly advanced weapon systems. Commenting on nuclear war, Putin told an interviewer: “Certainly, it would be a global disaster for humanity; a disaster for the entire world.” He added that “as a citizen of Russia and the head of the Russian state I must ask myself: Why would we want a world without Russia?”

Use Them or Lose Them

Putin went on to say that, despite the disastrous consequences, Russia would be forced to defend itself using all available means, if its very existence were put at stake.

“A decision on the use of nuclear weapons may only be taken if our ballistic missile attack warning system not only detects a launch, but also predicts that the warheads would hit Russian territory. This is called a retaliation strike.

That’s the rub. Some radar “detects” and “predicts,” and we’re all toast—or freedom fries. While Russia now has

in its operation inventory sophisticated weaponry that can defeat any traditional Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) defense, it lags the United States in the capability for early warning.

Think about it. Which should you fear more: getting fried on purpose, or getting fried by mistake? Macabre. Are not these choices incredibly stupid for rational human beings? If forced to choose, though, I think I’d rather not get more getting fried by “Oops, pardon our mistake.” Please read what follows and ask yourself whether an immediate ceasefire is needed in Ukraine, or whether those who want to risk war with Russia should be given their head.

Russia: Limited Early-Warning Coverage

The U.S.’s satellite “global situational awareness” alert system enables it to detect immediately the launch and location of a ballistic missile anywhere on the planet, including the sea. Russia lacks that worldwide capability. If this technical shortcoming is not taken into account (and there are signs that the Pentagon is paying it no heed), we could all suddenly be very dead—or “mostly dead” (to quote Billy Christel in The Princess Bride). Ted Postol spelled this out in some detail at a Conference for the Republic virtual salon on March 17.

Postol, a retired MIT professor of physics and senior Pentagon adviser, provided a brief case study, which I summarize below:

On Jan. 25, 1995, Russian generals were focused on a rocket that was launched from Norway and detected by their automatic-alarm radar. Could this be the opening volley of a large-scale nuclear attack including sea-launched ballistic missiles? Given Russia’s inability to detect missile launches from submarines at sea, those generals could not rule out the possibility that Russia was already under attack by nuclear-armed Trident submarines. A saving grace in 1995 was that those same generals had reliable intelligence that U.S. ICBMs were not about to attack. At least equally important, in 1995 relations between Russia and the United States were on a relatively even keel. Now? Not so much.

Postol added the following to indicate Russia’s redoubled concern over its early warning deficiency: the United States has now increased the overall killing power of U.S. ballistic missile forces by a factor of between two or three. This is exactly the kind of capability that a nuclear-armed state would build if it wanted to have the capacity to fight and “win” a nuclear war by a disarming first-strike.

The rocket from Norway? Scientists launched it to study the Northern Lights, but apparently no one had thought to tell the Russians.

Aside from asking the Norwegians to forewarn the Russians next time, what else can be done? Washington can stop making relations still more tense over Ukraine. The Pentagon may boast about its formidable offensive strategic capabilities, but it has no way to protect us from a Russian nuclear attack. And if a false alert occurs in 1995, this time sans the “saving grace” of a decent bilateral relationship with Russia, we could all end up as human fries. It should give us all pause to consider that the people of our own country are the most likely to end up as human fries.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. His 27-year career as a CIA analyst includes serving as chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch and preparer/brief of the President’s Daily Brief. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Love Among the Chaos

… continued from page 2

big dogs, including an elderly German shepherd. It was impossible to move inside the car. We drove for 16 hours to a village about 140 kilometers from Kyiv. After the village, they came to a point where cars were backed up and no one was moving, so they decided to walk the remaining 10 miles. Alysa continued, “We decided to leave the village later in the morning because it was dangerous, even there. Near the border with Poland there were a lot of cars and we couldn’t stay in the car for the next three—or five—days, so we decided to walk the last 17 kilometers to the border. We left at 4 am—it was minus seven degrees. It was a hard trip around mountains and rivers. My kids were crying because of the cold. I wanted to cry too but I couldn’t give up. It was my idea to go to the border.”

Here’s the part that gives me hope. “My dog is 12 and a half and she struggled to walk and fell down every kilometre or so and couldn’t stand up again. I stopped cars and asked for help but everyone refused; they advised us to leave the dogs. But our dogs are part of our family. My dog has experienced all the happy and sad moments with us. Mum’s dog is all she has left of her former life. So my husband, at times, carried our dog on his shoulders.”

Tarak Kauff is the editor-in-chief of Peace and Planet News. He was a paratrooper in the U.S. Army from 1959 to 1961 and is a lifetime member and former board member of Veterans for Peace. He is a longtime activist for peace, justice, and the environment.

Top: Soldier sheltering cat; bottom: Alisa’s family and dog huddle together on the floor after arriving in Poland from Ukraine. Photograph: Alisa/Guardian Community
Urging Regime Change in Russia, Biden Exposes U.S. Aims in Ukraine

By Aaron Maté

President Biden’s declaration that Putin “cannot remain in power” was not an error, but a clear expression of entrenched U.S. policy: using Ukraine for a proxy war against Russia.

When Donald Trump took office weeks later, Washington neoconservatives capitalised on Russian propaganda to support a pro-war “year of offense” effort. Henry “Sleepy” Henry Paulson, then Treasury Secretary, coupled with his own incentive to disperse the financial allegations that he was beholden to the Kremlin, soon duped Trump to reverse the Obama policy and appoint a hawkish team under John Bolton. What sealed the same position: “If you’re playing on the military terrain in Ukraine, you’re playing Russia’s strength, because Russia is right next door.”

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No amount of spin can obscure the obvious. Just like when he blurted out the truth that the United States and the United Kingdom backed the 2014 Maidan coup against former Ukrainian President Yanukovych, Biden’s declaration that Putin “cannot remain in power” has forced the Biden administration to make clear that its goal of destabilization and regime change in Moscow far surpasses any Ukrainian lives lost as a result.

By choosing to invade Ukraine rather than exhaust all diplomatic options to resolve its grievances over the Donbas war and NATO expansion, Russia is legally and morally responsible for the carnage that it has caused.

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By Caitlin Johnstone

Everyone’s antiwar until the war propaganda starts. Nobody thinks of themselves as a warmonger, but then the spin machine gets going and before you know it, they’re spouting the slogans they’ve been programmed to spout and waving the flags they’ve been programmed to wave and consenting to whatever the imperial war machine wants in that moment.

Virtually everyone will tell you they love peace and hate war when asked; war in that moment. The spin machine gets going and before you know it, they’re programm to wave and consenting to the propaganda they’ve been programmed to spout- the spin machine gets going and before you know it, they’re programm to wave and consenting to the propaganda they’ve been programmed to spout-

The propaganda is the single most overlooked and under-appreciated aspect of our society. It has far more influence over how the public thinks, acts, and votes than any of our official mechanisms for influencing of one percent of the total propaganda that Westerners consume. Almost all of it comes from Western sources.

All the mainstream alarm ringing about Russian propaganda gives the impression that it comprises close to 100 percent of the total propaganda that Westerners consume, when in reality it’s a tiny fraction of one percent of the total propaganda that Westerners consume. Almost all of it comes from Western sources.

Propaganda is the single most overlooked and under-appreciated aspect of our society. It has far more influence over how the public thinks, acts, and votes than any of our official mechanisms for continued on page 12 …
Some Hard Thoughts About Postwar Ukraine

By Graham E. Fuller

The war in Ukraine has dragged on long enough now to reveal certain clear trajectories. First, two fundamental realities:

1) Putin is to be condemned for launching this war—as is virtually any leader who launches any war. Putin can be termed a war criminal—in good company with George W. Bush, who has killed vastly greater numbers than Putin.

2) Secondary condemnation belongs to the United States (NATO) in deliberately and risk of broad starvation.

There are already deep cracks in the European façade of so-called “NATO unity.” Western Europe will increasingly rue the day that it blindly followed the American Pied Piper to war against Russia. Indeed, this is not a Ukrainian-Russian war but an American-Russian war fought by proxy to the last Ukrainian. Contrary to optimistic declarations, NATO may in fact ultimately emerge weakened. Western Europeans will think long and hard about the wisdom and deep costs of provoking deeper long-term confrontations with Russia or other “competitors” of the United States.

Europe will sooner or later return to the purchase of inexpensive Russian energy. Russia lies on the doorstep and a natural economic relationship with Russia will possess overwhelming logic in the end.

Europe already perceives the United States as a declining power with an eratic and hypocritical foreign policy “vision” premised upon the desperate need to preserve “American leadership” in the world. America’s willingness to go to war to this end is increasingly dangerous to others.

Washington has also made it clear that the Belt and Road runs right through Russia. It is impossible for Europe to close its doors to Russia while maintaining access to this Eurasian megaproject. Thus a Europe that perceives the United States already in decline has a little incentive to join the bandwagon against China. The end of the Ukraine war will bring serious reconsideration in Europe about the benefits of propping up Washington’s desperate bid to maintain its global hegemony.

Europe will undergo increasing identity crisis in determining its future global role. Western Europeans will tire of subservience to the 75-year U.S. domination of European foreign policy. Right now NATO is European foreign policy and Europe remains inexplicably timid in assert any independent voice. How long will that prevail?

We now see how massive U.S. sanctions against Russia, including confiscation of Russian funds in Western banks, is causing most of the world to reconsider the wisdom of banking entirely on the U.S. dollar into the future. Diversification of international economic instruments is already in the cards and will only act to weaken Washington’s once dominant economic position and its unilateral weaponization of the dollar.

One of the most disturbing features of this U.S.-Russian struggle in Ukraine has been the utter corruption of independent media. Indeed Washington has won the information and propaganda war hands down, orchestrating all Western media to sing from the same hymnbook in characterizing the Ukraine war. The West has never before witnessed such a blanket imposition by one country’s ideologically driven geopolitical perspective at home. Nor, of course, is the Russian press to be trusted either. In the midst of a virulent anti-Russian propaganda barrage the likes of which I have never seen during my Cold Warrior days, serious analysts must dig deep these days to gain some objective understanding of what is actually taking place in Ukraine.

Would that this American media dominance that denies nearly all alternative voices were merely a blip occasioned by Ukraine events. But European elites are...
Michael Brenner: 
American Dissent on Ukraine Is Dying in Darkness

When it came to the Ukraine conflict, Professor Michael J. Brenner did what he’s done his whole life: question American foreign policy. This time the backlash was vitriolic.

Below are excerpts from a provocative conversation between Robert Scheer and Professor Brenner. Hear the full discussion at scheerpost.com, as they continue to dissent, despite living in an America that is increasingly hostile to any opinion that strays from the official line.

Robert Scheer: Corporate media’s “cartoonish” depiction of Russian President Vladimir Putin is not only misleading, but dangerous, given the nuclear brinkmanship that has ensued. The irony is that we’re back in the worst moments of the Cold War, but then at least we were willing to negotiate with people who were ideological enemies. Nixon had his kitchen debate with Khurshchev, and we had arms control with the old Soviet Union. Nixon went to China and negotiated with Mao Zedong. There was no illusion that these were wonderful people, but they were people you had to do business with. Suddenly Putin is now Hitler and you can’t talk.

Michael Brenner: We have to look in the mirror at the source of our disquiet, it’s within us; it’s not out there, and it is leading to gross distortions of the way in which we see and interpret the world. And of course, continuing along this course can only have one endpoint, and that’s disaster of some sort or other.

From day one, we’ve had faith that we were born in a condition of original virtue, with some kind of providential mission to lead the world to a better, more enlightened condition, that we were therefore the singular exceptional nation. That justifies the United States as the judge of what government is legitimate and what isn’t; which self-defined national interests other governments can accept, and which we won’t accept.

Of course, this is absurd in its hubris. It also defies logic. We don’t exercise restraint based on ideological humility, nor on realism grounds. And that’s why I say we’re living in a world of fantasy—a fantasy which clearly serves some vital psychological needs of the country and especially of its political elites. Because they are the people who are supposed to have taken on the custodial responsibility for the welfare of the country and its people, and that requires maintaining a certain perspective and distance on who the thesis of the one that is caricatured and almost universally accepted, not only in the Biden administration, but in the foreign policy community and in general.

From 1964 to 1969 Robert Scheer was Vietnam correspondent and editor of Ramparts magazine. From 1976 to 1993 he was national correspondent for the L.A. Times and in 1993 became a contributing editor and nationally syndicated columnist until 2005. He is now based at the San Francisco Chronicle. Author of eight books, he was a fellow at the Center for Chinese Studies at UC-Berkeley and was a fellow in arms control at Stanford.

Michael J. Brenner is professor emeritus of International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh and a fellow of the Center for Transatlantic Relations at SAIS/Johns Hopkins, as well as former director of the International Relations and Global Studies Program at the University of Texas. He worked at the Foreign Service Institute and the U.S. Department of Defense and Westinghouse, and has written several books on U.S. foreign policy.

We have to look in the mirror at the source of our disquiet, it’s within us; and it is leading to gross distortions of the way in which we see and interpret the world.

Being Antiwar

… continued from page 10 doing so, yet it’s barely discussed, it isn’t taught in schools, and even the best political ideologies barely touch on it relative to their other areas of focus. All the fretting about Russian propaganda from Establishment narrative managers comes so close to giving away their secret that they know it’s possible to manipulate the way the public thinks, acts and votes using media. They just don’t admit that they’re the ones who are doing this.

It’s actually the weirdest thing in the world that there’s something that has been directly affecting our minds our entire lives, and which directly affects the way our entire society is organized, but we don’t talk about it constantly. It should be at the front and center of our attention. Suddenly Putin is now Hitler and you can’t talk.

It’s important to research and learn new things about the world, but what’s equally important and which doesn’t get emphasized nearly enough is the practice of examining the beliefs you already hold about your society, your government, your nation, and your world. Inquiring as to whether they’re really true, and who might benefit from your belief in them.

Don’t make the error of assuming you’ll be aware and informed enough to spot all the lies right away. You’re dealing with the single most advanced and powerful propaganda machine that has ever existed, and you’ve been marinating in its effects your entire life. It takes some time.

Even the most aware among us were indoctrinated into the mainstream worldview to some extent earlier in life, and to this day most of the information they get about the world has some of its roots and branches in parts of the propaganda matrix.

It takes work to see things clearly enough to form a really truth-based worldview. But unless you do this it’s impossible to be truly antiwar, because you can’t skillfully oppose something you don’t understand. To fight the imperial war machine is to fight the imperial propaganda machine.

This article is from CaitlinJohnstone.com and re-published with permission. Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Her work is entirely reader-supported, so if you enjoyed this piece please consider sharing it around, liking her on Facebook, following her antics on Twitter, checking out her podcast on either Youtube, soundcloud, Apple podcasts or Spotify, following her on Steemit, throwing some money into her tip jar on Patreon or PayPal, purchasing some of her sweet merchandise, buying her books Notes From the Edge of the Narrative Matrix, Rogue Nation: Psychonautical Adventures With Caitlin Johnstone, and Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Peppers.
So This Is What It Looks Like When the Corporate Media Opposes a War

Major American media outlets oppose military aggression ... unless the United States is doing it.

By Jeff Cohen

Having worked inside mainstream U.S. media during the beginning of the “War on Terror” and run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, I find the differences in today’s war coverage dizzying.

Al Jazeera, or CNN International, are more frequent and lingering. The near-blackout on coverage of the civilian toll continued for decades. In April of last year, NBC anchor Lester Holt did a summing-up report on Afghanistan as “America’s longest war” by offering one and only one casualty figure: “23,000 American deaths.” There was no mention of the more than 70,000 Afghan civilian deaths since 2001, and no mention of a U.N. study that found in the first half of 2019, due mostly to aerial bombing, the United States and its allies killed more civilians than the Taliban and its allies.

As the war on terror expanded to other countries, U.S. mainstream media remained largely uninterested in civilian victims of U.S. warfare and drone strikes. The mainstream media has correctly, repeatedly, and rationalizing the killing and maiming of Afghans as missiles strike nearby.

Unfortunately, there was virtually no focus on civilian death and agony when it was the U.S. military launching the invasions. After the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 on false pretenses—made possible by U.S. mainstream media complicity that I witnessed firsthand—civilian deaths in Iraq were largely ignored and undercounted through the years.

Shortly after the United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, leaked directives from CNN’s management to its correspondents and anchors showed that the network was intent on playing down and rationalizing the killing and maiming of Afghan civilians by the U.S. military. One memo instructed CNN anchors that if they ever referenced Afghan civilian victims, they needed to quickly announce to their audience: “These U.S. military actions are in response to a terrorist attack that killed close to 5,000 innocent people in the U.S.” Such language was mandatory, said the memo: “Even though it may start sounding rote, it is important that we make this point each time.”

A few weeks after 9/11, what CNN viewer had forgotten it?

Noting the cursory U.S. television coverage of Afghan civilian casualties, a New York Times reporter wrote: “In the United States, television images of Afghan bombng victims are fleeting, cushioned between anchors or American officials explaining that such sights are only one side of the story. In the rest of the world, however, images of wounded Afghan children curled in hospital beds or women rocking in despair over a baby’s corpse, beamed via satellite by the Qatar-based network, roboticized the story. In the rest of the world, how ever, images of wounded Afghan children curled in hospital beds or women rocking in despair over a baby’s corpse, beamed via satellite by the Qatar-based network, roboticized the story.

As a lifelong opponent of imperialism, I’m also indignant that a powerful country like Russia is using force to try to impose its will and its own chosen leadership on the Ukrainian people.

But I’ve never heard O’Donnell or anyone at MSNBC denounce U.S. imperialism. Indeed, the existence of something called “U.S. imperialism” is so adamantly denied by mainstream U.S. media that the phrase doesn’t appear in print without scare quotes.

This stubborn unwillingness to recognize U.S. imperialism persists despite the fact that no country (including Russia) has come close to ours in the last 70 years in imposing its will in changing the leadership of foreign governments—often from good to bad (for example, Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954; Congo in 1960; Chile, in 1973; Honduras in 2009). Not to mention other U.S.-led regime changes (for example, Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011).

This denial persists despite the fact that our country maintains more than 750 military bases in nearly 80 foreign countries (Russia has about 20 foreign bases in a half-dozen countries); that our military budget dwarfs that of every other country (more than 12 times larger than Russia’s); that the United States provides nearly $30 billion per year in arms, including weapons sales and military training to 40 of the 50 most oppressive, anti-democratic governments on earth.

Speaking of U.S. imperialism, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been all over the news in recent days commenting on Ukraine and accurately denouncing Putin as anti-democratic. But her commentary reeks of hypocrisy on many grounds; one is her key role, largely ignored by mainstream U.S. media, in enabling the violent military coup regime that replaced elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

So as we rally to support Ukrainian civilians against great-power aggression, I’m also indignant that a powerful country like Russia is using force to try to impose its will and its own chosen leadership on the Ukrainian people.

But I’ve never heard O’Donnell or anyone at MSNBC denounce U.S. imperialism. Indeed, the existence of something called “U.S. imperialism” is so adamantly denied by mainstream U.S. media that the phrase doesn’t appear in print without scare quotes.

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So as we rally to support Ukrainian civilians against great-power aggres-
Pulling the trigger. This is a crime. Their political sense. This does not, however, establish a NATO missile base 100 miles understood by all of us reporting in Eastern our heads—by expanding NATO was unprovocation of Russia—whose nuclear ar conflict, one that now flirts with the nu accounts swell. They will cash in on this merchants of death are Satanic. The more the root of the conflict with Moscow. The demand. It is the root of the two-decade-operates outside the laws of supply and get for 2022. The Biden administration work for a return to diplomacy and san- and deny that of the other. Therefore, the violence produced by war is not mere em- itial fact, but also a form of social com- It follows that war cannot be simply de- from war. The expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe has earned Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Analytic Services, Huntington Ingalls, Humana, BAE Systems, and L3Harris billions in profits. The stoking of conflict in Ukraine will earn them billions more.

The European Union has allocated hundreds of millions of euros to purchase weapons for Ukraine. Germany will almost triple its own defense budget for 2022. The Biden administration has asked Congress to provide $6.4 billion in funding to assist Ukraine, supplementing the $650 million in military aid to Ukraine over the past year. [Since this writing, Biden has asked for an additional $33 billion.] The permanent war economy operates outside the laws of supply and demand. It is the root of the two-decade-long quagmire in the Middle East. It is the root of the conflict with Moscow. The merchants of death are Satanic. The more corpses they produce, the more their bank accounts swell. They will cash in on this conflict, one that now flirts with the nuclear holocaust that would terminate life on earth as we know it.

The dangerous and sadly predictable provocation of Russia—whose nuclear arsenal places the sword of Damocles above our heads—by expanding NATO was understood by all of us reporting in Eastern Europe in 1989 during the revolutions and the break-up of the Soviet Union.

This provocation, which includes establishing a NATO missile base 100 miles from Russia’s border, was foolish and highly irresponsible. It never made geopolitical sense. This does not, however, excuse the invasion of Ukraine. Yes, the Russians were baited. But they reacted by pulling the trigger. This is a crime. Their winning American journalist, Presbyterian minister, author, and television host. His books include War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, a finalist for the Na- tional Book Critics Circle Award for Non- fiction; Empire of Illusion: The End of Lit- eracy and the Triumph of Spectacle; Death of the Liberal Class; Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt, written with cartoonist Joe Sacco, which was a New York Times best- seller; Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt; and his most recent, America: The Farewell Tour. He writes a regular original column for ScheerPost.

The body of a Russian soldier is coated in snow next to a destroyed Russian military multiple rocket launcher vehicle on the outskirts of Kharkiv, Feb. 25. Photo: AP/Vadim Ghirda.

A British official likewise told Fergu- son that the prevailing “No. 1 option” is for “the conflict to be extended and thereby bleed Putin.”

“This war will not end easily or rapid- idly,” Jake Sullivan declared shortly be- fore Biden left for Europe last week. “[Biden’s trip] will send a powerful mes- sage that we are prepared and committed to this historic mission.”

The Biden administration has given every indication that it wants the proxy war in Ukraine to last a long while. The White House, The New York Times re- ports, “seeks to help Ukraine lock Russia in a quagmire without inviting a broader war that they could professionally never win, “primarily by deploying the CIA to “en- sure that crates of weapons are delivered into the hands of vetted Ukrainian military units.” These weapons shipments, the Wall Street Journal reports, are “one of the larg- est and fastest arms transfers in history.”

By choosing to invade Ukraine rather than choosing to work for a return to diplomacy and san- ity, a moratorium on arms shipments to Ukraine and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the country. Let us hope for an end to war before we stumble into a nuclear holocaust that devours us all.

Originally published at ScheerPost. Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer-prize

Greatest Evil

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dream of empire and global hegemony, of the godlike power that comes with wield- ing armies, warplanes, and fleets, along with the merchants of death, whose busi- ness floods countries with weapons, profit

Regime Change

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“was Kyiv’s opposition to negotiating with the pro-Russian separatists.” And even as “the talks continue to stall and the threat of war grows more present,” the Post added, “it’s unclear how much pressure the United States is placing on Ukraine to reach a compromise with Russia.”

In a recent interview, Zelensky made it clear that the only U.S. pressure he received was to sabotage diplomacy. Speaking to CNN, Zelensky effectively admit- ted that Russia’s core demand to avoid war in Ukraine rests on Ukrainian renunci- ation of membership and commit to neutrality—was used to bait Russia instead.

“I requested them [NATO] personally to say directly that we are going to ac- cept you into NATO in a year or two or five, just say it directly and clearly, or just say no. They never said the right thing. There was very clear, you’re not going to be a NATO member, but publicly, the doors will remain open.”

By insisting that “the doors will remain open” to a NATO pledge that they had no intention of fulfilling, the United States and its NATO allies knowingly crossed a Russian red line that could trigger a full-scale war with Ukraine renunciation of membership and neutrality.

The fact that Zelensky was willing to entertain this charade—and only casually acknowledge it weeks after it helped spark a catastrophic invasion of his country—raises questions about the heroic image that the U.S. media and political establish- ment have cultivated for him.

“The End of the Putin Regime”

With Zelensky admitting that NATO membership for Ukraine was the bait, Biden and other top officials continue to make clear that regime change in Mos- cow is the goal.

“The only end game now,” a senior ad- ministration official reportedly told a pri- vate event earlier this month, according to Niall Ferguson in Bloomberg. “Is the end of Putin regime. Until then, all the time Putin stays, [Russia] will be a pariah state that will never be welcomed back into the community of nations.”

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A Clean War?

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All exceptions? No. This is exactly what war is. Governments make big ef- forts to explain that these kinds of epi- sodes don’t belong in war. They even pre- tend to be surprised when civilians are killed, even though systematically target- ing civilians is one of the defining charac- teristics of war; for example, over 387,000 ci- vilians were killed in the U.S. post-9/11 wars alone, with more likely to die from those wars’ reverberating impacts.

The idea of a clean and efficient war is a lie. War is a chaotic universe of military strategies intertwined with inhumanity, violations, uncertainty, doubts, and de- ceit. In all combat zones emotions such as fear, shame, joy, excitement, surprise, anger, cruelty, and compassion co-exist.

We also know that whatever the real reasons for war, identifying the enemy is a crucial element of every call for con- flict. In order to be able to kill—system- atically—it is not enough to make fighters disregard the enemy, to despise him or her; it is also necessary to make them see in the foe an obstacle to a better future.

For this reason, war consistently re- quires the establishment of an enemy identity from the status of an individual to a member of a defined, and hated en- emy group.

If the only objective of war is the mere physical elimination of the enemy, then how do we explain why the torture and de- struction of bodies both dead and alive is practiced with such ferocity on so many battlefields? Although in abstract terms such violence appears unimaginable, it be- comes possible to visualize when the mur- dered or tortured are aligned with dehu- manizing representations portraying them as usurpers, cowards, fibby paltry, unfaith- ful, vile, disobedient—representations that travel fast in mainstream and social media. War violence is a dramatic attempt to transform, redefine, and establish social and moral boundaries; to afirm one’s own existence and deny that of the other. Therefore, the violence produced by war is not mere em- pirical fact, but also a form of social com- munication. It follows that war cannot be simply de-
Transcending the Certainties of War

By Robert Koehler

Peace, in the deepest sense—in the midst of war—requires a clarity and courage well beyond the boundaries of linear understanding. The warning lights flash. World War III has entered the red zone. Can we turn to cone and refuse to see . . . an enemy? This is the deep, haunting need that is now required, as we clutch tomorrow, hold it tight, vow to protect it with our lives. But it’s far too easy, instead, to surrender to a certainty that the other guy—Russia, with the smirking face of Vladimir Putin—is 100% wrong, acting solely out of greed and delusional grandeur, which is something we never considered and have never done. And it goes without saying we are blameless in all this. 

On with the show!

“Twenty-four-hour cable news coverage of the ugly war in Ukraine is keeping Americans hyped up and dumbed down,” writes Gerry Condon of Veterans For Peace. “The very real horror of war is on the screen for all to see. The bombed-out buildings, the mounting civilian casualties and the frightened refugees speak their own truth.”

None of this horror should be minimized, bandaged over, for the sake of “peace,” as cynics assume. But, as Condon notes, “we rarely see the victims, the grieving families and the terrified refugees when the invader is the U.S. The ‘shock and awe’ U.S. terror bombing campaign on Baghdad was described by one network TV anchor as a ‘beautiful thing to see.’” We also fail to notice three decades of Western minimization of Russian concerns—of Russian existence.

“The decision to spurn the possibility of peaceful coexistence with Russia at the end of the Cold War is one of the most egregious crimes of the late 20th century,” writes Chris Hedges. Instead, he notes, we spiraled into “a furious frenzy of the Russia-hating that has been central to U.S. policy since World War II.”

This is not about blame, but it is about accountability—in all directions. Peace! It’s an ongoing, collective process, a crucial force needed especially in the midst of conflict. It’s about bridging gaps, listening to everyone, creating the future. A conflict isn’t simply “solved,” but it becomes very dangerous indeed to the future of democracy as the authoritarian rulers of the East,” he said. “What’s needed in this moment, of course, is a negotiated ceasefire, a Russian pullout. To that end, here’s part of the text of a letter CODEPINK has written to President Biden and Congress, one you can sign onto at the Code Pink website if you wish.

“There is no military solution to the conflict over Ukraine, a country caught in the crossfire between the U.S. and Russia, the world’s two most heavily armed nuclear nations. While the U.S. and the world are rightfully denouncing Putin’s invasion of a sovereign country, the shelling of civilians, the destruction of homes and hospitals, and threats of nuclear attacks, the major role the U.S. has played in exacerbating the conflict that led up to Russia’s invasion must also be acknowledged and addressed. By breaking promises not to expand NATO into Eastern Europe, by placing offensive missiles in Romania and Poland that could reach Russia in minutes, by arming Ukrainian forces, by continuing to ‘modernize’ the U.S. nuclear arsenal and by withdrawing from key non-proliferation treaties, the U.S. has played in exacerbating the conflict that led up to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. We know that Russia must withdraw its troops and commit to respecting the sovereignty of Ukraine, but the United States must be ready to make compromises and support negotiations between Ukraine and Russia . . . ”

The letter concludes with a list of commitments the U.S. needs to take to help negotiate a ceasefire here. Here’s what I would add, in solidarity with Yuri Shevchuk: Sign—and honor—the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons! It’s time to step into the future, fellow residents of Planet Earth. Nuclear weapons are not a “de-terrent.” They’re either an accident waiting to happen or a geo-psychopath’s last result. And the time to tuck them into history and move toward real peace is N-O-W. We can turn the invasion into the spark for global salvation.

Noting that the European Union is considering opening its doors to Ukraine, Shevchuk expressed joy at the possibility of such a uniting, but added that a “consolidation of the West should not be a consolidation against a so-called enemy, against the East. East and West should find the peaceful reconciliation and should pursue global governance, unity of all people in the world without armies and borders.”

Robert Koehler (koehlercw@gmail.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Chicago award-winning journalist and editor. He is the author of Courage Grows Strong at the Wound.

Postwar Ukraine

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Perhaps slowly coming to the realization that they have been stumped into this position of total “unanimity”; cracks are already beginning to appear in the façade of “EU and NATO unity.” But the more dangerous implication is that as we head into future global crises, a genuine independent press is largely disappearing, falling into the hands of corporate-dominated media close to policy circles, and now bolstered by electronic social media, all manipulating the narrative to its own ends. As we move into a predictably greater and more dangerous crises of instability through global warming, refugee flows, natural disasters, and likely new pandemics, rigorous investigation and corporate domination of the Western media becomes very dangerous indeed to the future of democracy. We no longer hear alternative voices on Ukraine today.

Finally, Russia’s geopolitical character has very likely now decisively tilted towards Eurasia. Russians have sought for centuries to be accepted within Europe but have been consistently held at arm’s length. The West will not discuss a new strategic and security architecture. Ukraine has simply intensified this trend. Russian elites now no longer possess an alternative to accepting that its economic future lies in the Pacific where Vladivostok lies only one or two hours away by air from the vast economies of Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. China and Russia have now been decisively pushed ever more closely together specifically out of common concern to block unfettered U.S. freedom of unilateral military and economic intervention around the world. That the United States can split U.S.-induced Russian and Chinese cooperation is a fantasy. Russia has scientific brilliance, abundant energy, rich rare minerals and metals, while the vostok lies only one or two hours away by air from the rest of the world—Latin America, the Middle East and Africa—find few national interests in this fundamentally U.S. war against Russia.

Graham E. Fuller is a former vice chair of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA with responsibility for global intelligence estimates.
Russia’s War Is Inexcusable—but the U.S. Is Not a Credible Force for Peace

Russia bears responsibility for this ghastly tragedy, but decades of U.S. policy helped make it possible

By Norman Solomon

While the world desperately needs adherence to a single standard of nonaggression and human rights, some convoluted rationales are always available in a quest to justify the unjustifiable. Ideologies get more twisted than pretzels when some people can’t resist the temptation to choose up sides between rival forces of terrible violence.

In the United States, with elected officials and mass media intensely condemning Russia’s killing spree, the hypocrisy can stick in the craw of people who remain mindful that the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions started massive protracted carnage. But U.S. hypocrisy in no way excuses the murderous rampage of Russia’s war on Ukraine.

At the same time, hopping on a bandwagon of the U.S. government as a force for peace is a fantasy journey. The United States is now in its 21st year of crossing borders with missiles and bombers—as well as boots on the ground—in the name of the “war on terror,” and its military spending is more than 10 times higher than Russia’s. It’s important to shed light on the U.S. government’s broken promises that NATO would not expand “one inch eastward” after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Expanding NATO to Russia’s border was a methodical betrayal of prospects for peaceful cooperation in Europe. What’s more, NATO became a far-flung apparatus for waging war, from Yugoslavia in 1999 to Afghanistan a few years later to Libya in 2011.

The grim history of NATO since the disappearance of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact military alliance more than 30 years ago is a saga of slick leaders in business suits bent on facilitating vast quantities of arms sales—not only to longtime NATO members but also to countries in Eastern Europe that recently gained membership. The U.S. mass media makes a careful collective detour around mentioning, much less illuminating, how NATO’s dedication to avid militarism keeps fattening the profit margins of weapons dealers. By the time this decade began, the combined annual military spending of NATO countries had hit $1 trillion, about 20 times Russia’s.

After Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, denunciations of the attack came from one U.S. antiwar group after another after another, which had long opposed NATO’s expansion and war activities. Veterans For Peace issued a cogent statement condemning the invasion while saying that “as veterans we know increased violence only fuels extremism.” The organization said that “the only sane course of action now is a commitment to genuine diplomacy with serious negotiations—without which, conflict could easily spiral out of control to the point of further pushing the world toward nuclear war.”

We should be clear and unequivocal that Russia’s war in Ukraine is an ongoing, massive, inexcusable crime against humanity for which the Russian government is solely responsible. But we should be under no illusions about the U.S. role in normalizing large-scale invasions while flouting international security. And the geopolitical approach of the U.S. government in Europe has been a precursor to conflict and foreseeable calamities.

The Decade the Rainforest Died*

By Teresa Mei Chuc

The dear did not stop running
leopards climbed into trees
that could not hide them
the douc langur and the white cheeked gibbon
cursed at the metal gods we flew
raining on them as they burned from napalm
elephants choked on the smoke of gunpowder and poison
their steps a strange rhythm

as they tried to fly
the thunder of bombs echoed the steps of elephants
tigers exploded as they stepped onto landmines
in a forest covered with leaves
dead from Agent Orange, fallen trees and decomposing bodies of animals and people
the earthworms were washed away
in monsoons with soil that could no longer grab onto roots
the Javan rhinoceros and the wild water buffalos that were still alive wandered aimlessly
weary with M16s and AK-47s, we marched quietly and steadily not knowing why we were killing each other

*For ten years, the U.S. Air Force flew nearly 20,000 herbicide spray missions in order to destroy the forest cover as well as agriculture lands in key areas of southern Vietnam.