

# Ukraine: Stop the Carnage, Build the Peace!

## Extent of Russian invasion of Ukraine March 2, 2022



Source: BBC/ISW

**Report on a series of public online  
conversations held in March 2022**



This page intentionally blank

# **Ukraine: Stop the Carnage, Build the Peace!**

**Report on a series of public online conversations  
held by Just World Educational in March 2022**

The conversations were hosted by **Helena Cobban** and **Richard Falk**. The guests in the various sessions were:

|                             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>David Barash</b>         | <b>Cynthia Lazaroff</b>      |
| <b>Medea Benjamin</b>       | <b>Anatol Lieven</b>         |
| <b>Phyllis Bennis</b>       | <b>Ray McGovern</b>          |
| <b>Marjorie Cohn</b>        | <b>Vijay Prashad</b>         |
| <b>Bill Fletcher, Jr.</b>   | <b>Indi Samarajiva</b>       |
| <b>Chas W. Freeman, Jr.</b> | <b>Marcus Stanley</b>        |
| <b>Lyle Goldstein</b>       | <b>Erik Sperling</b>         |
| <b>Mary Kaldor</b>          | <b>Katrina vanden Heuvel</b> |
| <b>Radha Kumar</b>          |                              |



Washington, DC

# Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Introduction and policy recommendations</b>  | p.3 |
| 1: Talking military realities and global implications with Lyle Goldstein and Vijay Prashad (March 2)   | 5   |
| 2: Exploring the urgency of peace and the duality of the world order, with Katrina vanden Heuvel and Chas Freeman (March 7)                   | 8   |
| 3: Medea Benjamin and Marjorie Cohn discuss the impact of the crisis on the peace movement, the role of NATO, and international law (March 9) | 11  |
| 4: The impact of the crisis on U.S. domestic politics, with Bill Fletcher, Jr., Erik Sperling, and Marcus Stanley (March 14)                  | 14  |
| 5: India's Radha Kumar and Britain's Mary Kaldor discuss war goals, diplomacy, and war-crimes prosecutions (March 16)                         | 17  |
| 6: Probing Russian decisionmaking and options with Anatol Lieven and Ray McGovern (March 21)  | 20  |
| 7: Exploring global impacts, and priorities for anti-war activism in the 'West', with Phyllis Bennis and Indi Samarajiva (March 23)           | 24  |
| 8: Nuclear risks and realities of the Ukraine crisis, with David Barash and Cynthia Lazaroff (March 28)                                       | 27  |
| <b>Participant bios</b>   | 31  |

*This report is published under a Creative Commons License by the Just World Educational Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization directed from Washington DC. Learn more about our activities and how to support our work at our website, [www.justworldeducational.org](http://www.justworldeducational.org). We are very grateful for the contributions made to this project by our Project Manager, Amelle Zeroug.*



# Ukraine: Stop the Carnage, Build the Peace!

## Introduction and Policy Recommendations

In March 2022, Just World Educational held a series of eight webinars on the international crisis sparked by Russia's February invasion of Ukraine. The sessions were co-hosted by JWE President Helena Cobban and Board Member Richard Falk; in each one, they conducted a broad public conversation on issues raised by the crisis with two—or in one case, three—superbly well-qualified and thoughtful guests. Bios of all the participants can be found at pp. 31-32.

The multimedia records of all these conversations can be viewed at [bit.ly/JWE-UkraineCrisis](https://bit.ly/JWE-UkraineCrisis). This Report contains digests of all the conversations, along with a list of Policy Recommendations that, in the judgment of the JWE Board, arose clearly from them.

These Policy Recommendations are as follows:

1. Ukraine-wide ceasefire now!
2. An embargo on arms shipments into Ukraine by all countries.
3. Start negotiations now, involving all relevant parties, for a lasting peace arrangement for Ukraine, and commit to completion within six months.
4. Monitoring and verification of the ceasefire and arms embargo to be led by the United Nations and the OSCE, or any other party acceptable to both Ukraine and Russia.
5. Immediate aid for rebuilding in Ukraine, including for agriculture, ports, residential areas, and related systems.
6. Immediate international talks on implementation of 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, under which all signatory states including the United States and Russia committed to complete nuclear disarmament, and a call for all governments to support the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons .
7. Leaders of NATO countries should oppose all manifestations of Russophobia.
8. The United States should give up all efforts at regime change in Russia.

Of these recommendations, we give the highest priority to the first one: an unequivocal call for an immediate halt to the fighting by all sides within Ukraine. We were very moved by the judgment expressed by our guest Anatol Lieven, a long-time expert on Russian military affairs and on Ukraine-Russia relations, when he said that the outline and many details of a workable long term settlement between the two countries are already quite clear and *the nature of this settlement would be unlikely to change much even if the fighting should continue many more years*. For his part, Richard Falk noted

that the conflict inside Ukraine was also overlaid by a broader, "geopolitical" struggle between the United States and Russia. He warned against the temptation seemingly felt by many Americans to "fight Russia to the last Ukrainian."

We also noted with appreciation the many times on which Ukraine's President Zelensky has expressed himself eager to negotiate a resolution of the crisis with Russia directly, and his readiness to consider a future for Ukraine in which it would not, as some in the West want, be a member of the U.S.-led NATO alliance.

\* \* \*

One of the webinars in our series looked at the nuclear risks associated with it. While planning the series, we realized that a whole generation of Americans has come of age in a world in which the risks of nuclear war seemed very distant, and in which U.S. leaders could make decisions about the use of military power around the world without needing to worry about the risks of escalation to a nuclear exchange (or indeed, the risk of any significant pushback from the militaries of the countries they targeted.)

The three decades that followed 1991 were a period of unprecedented U.S. power in world affairs. This year's decision by nuclear-armed Russia to invade Ukraine has left Washington "deterred" from freely launching what military counter-action it might choose there, in a way it has not been "deterred" since the old Cold War. We therefore hope that the materials on the nuclear risks of this crisis that we provide here and in our Online Learning Hub will be of particular interest to all Americans in the under-45 age cohort.

\* \* \*

Here are some final notes about the report that follows:

1. We are extremely grateful to the 17 expert guests who agreed to share their expertise and their wisdom in these webinars. Three were from the Global South. They provided some much-needed perspective on the crisis from those countries, whose peoples, as one of them reminded us, comprise the majority of the world's population.
2. Several of our conversations exposed serious differences among the participants. But all the participants—co-hosts and guests—remained committed to exploring those differences in a collegial manner that would generate more light than heat. We hope that the records of those conversations might model how differences over the tough issues around this crisis might be constructively explored in other settings.
3. Any conversations that are, as ours were, relatively unstructured and freeflowing can be reported in a number of different ways. The digests that follow of our conversations are personal, bylined reports on the conversations prepared by Ms. Cobban.
4. We at Just World Educational learned a lot from all of our guests. But we make no claim to "representing" the views of any of them in the Policy Recommendations we drew up as a result of the conversations. Indeed, we guess that some of our guests might disagree strongly with some of our recommendations.

# Session 1: Talking military realities and global implications with Lyle Goldstein and Vijay Prashad

*by Helena Cobban*

In the first session of our webinar series, held March 2, **Richard Falk** and I discussed the military realities and global implications of the Ukraine crisis with the Indian leftist **Vijay Prashad** and the American military-affairs expert **Lyle Goldstein**. It was March 2, and the Russian invasion of parts of Ukraine was still a raw, new development.

**Lyle Goldstein** kicked off our conversation with this summary of the military situation: **"I think the Kremlin intended a shock and awe campaign. I think that failed."** He also presented a map showing the extent of the Russian forces' advances and the directions of their thrusts into (mainly) Eastern Ukraine, noting the possibility—if invasion forces from the north and south could join up—of the country being essentially split into two, with Russia bringing the whole of the east under its control. (As of this writing, that shows no signs of happening, and the situation on the ground has shifted little since March 2.)

Goldstein said, **"I condemn in the strongest terms what Russia has done. I do think the US has made major diplomatic mistakes over the last couple of years, really over the last decades, that have played a role. But I still think Russia needs to be punished and punished very severely."** He added that his main concern was on how to prevent escalation **"to a larger war in Europe and even a global war."**

**Vijay Prashad** was with us from Santiago de Chile. He started by laying out eight far-reaching theses about the global implications of the war. The first of these was a powerful call for war-ending diplomacy: **"Obviously war is terrible. I mean, everybody wants negotiations and diplomacy... Every war ends with some diplomacy. We might as well accelerate to diplomacy as quickly as possible!**

**So that's the first thing I think most people around the world are hoping for."**

His other theses surveyed several geopolitical aspects of the war, including:

- The thesis that the origin of the conflict should be traced back to a crude U.S. regime-change operation in Ukraine back in 2014, and two key developments that arose from that: the rise of sharp "Ukraine First" ethnic nationalism in many parts of the country, and the lengthy and damaging inter-ethnic battles in the eastern Donbas region that have continued to the present.
- His view that the war should be seen as part of a continuing U.S. attempt to reverse any trends towards the non-alignment or independence of European foreign policy. He defined the war as, **"a contest over whether the United States is going to continue to be able to subordinate Europe and whether Russia and China are going to have some role there."**
- His identification of a sharp double standard between the way much of Western public discourse has treated the suffering of war victims in Ukraine and that of war victims elsewhere: **"None of these people were so upset when Iraq was destroyed. None of these people were so upset when Libya was destroyed. I'm not prepared to be bullied... into crying special tears because this is happening inside Europe."**

**Richard Falk** responded to these initial remarks by focusing on what he identified as the two levels of world order, which he defined thus: **"It's a state-centric system in which international law supposedly governs the interstate behavior and is built on pursuit of national interest. And then**

there's this geopolitical overlay that has existed ever since the state system emerged, which is that the great powers use force as a matter of discretion, and in a way that was preserved, not eliminated, by the UN and the UN Charter and contemporary international law."

Falk picked up on Goldstein's reference to U.S. diplomatic "mistakes", noting, "It's more than diplomatic mistakes. It's the geopolitical atmosphere created by repeated US violations of national sovereignty and disregard of international law. You remember, George W. Bush at the time of the Iraq attack, said the UN would be irrelevant if it didn't endorse what the US was doing."

He added, "This doesn't morally excuse what the Russians are doing in Ukraine or the suffering inflicted on the Ukrainian people. But it's not different in kind from what the US has inflicted on a series of other countries. And indeed, Iraq was in many ways worse."

\* \* \*

The conversation that followed ranged widely over a number of themes, which I'll summarize as follows:

#### **Which entity might be best positioned to lead a ceasefire-plus-fuller-peace initiative between Ukraine and Russia?**

Prashad dismissed the suggestion that either the United Nations or the BRICS group of countries—which includes Russia—might be able to lead such a negotiation. He noted that on the first day of the Russian invasion, UN Sec-Gen. António Guterres had described it as "the worst war of this century," ignoring the record of the U.S. invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. "So it's not possible for the UN to operate!"

Goldstein, however, said he thought the UN could play a helpful role. And so could China: "They bring a lot to the table, and not just resources. They have a huge experience already in UN peace-keeping... Plus, among the countries that Russia trusts, they're trusting China more than

most... And that's critical. You can't have a mediator that's just going to push Russia aside."

(Since March 2, Turkey has emerged as the favored host for Russia-Ukraine peace talks.)

\* \* \*

#### **What might an eventual peace look like?**

Prashad and Goldstein agreed that a key war aim for the Russians was to create a land bridge between Russia and the territory of Crimea, which they annexed in 2014, but which is connected to Russia only by a vulnerable, 19-kilometer bridge over the mouth of the Sea of Azov.

There seemed to be general agreement that a longer-lasting peace agreement would need to address Russian security needs including that land bridge to Crimea; some formula to resolve the thorny ethnic conflicts in the eastern Donbas region—and solid assurances that Ukraine would be militarily neutral and would not join NATO.

Goldstein said, "I call myself a realist, and I'm one who thinks that spheres of influence are essential for global order. And to me, there's no question in my mind that Ukraine is part of Russia's sphere of influence. And it's kind of delusional to act otherwise. That is one of the foremost mistakes we've been making."

On a related note, Falk at one point said, "We're living in a world where the US is fighting to maintain hegemonic geopolitics, and Russia and China are trying to create what might be called symmetrical geopolitics. And in my view, that's the deepest way of understanding what are the larger strategic stakes of what's happening in Ukraine..."

\* \* \*

#### **The disparities in the way international entities have treated this invasion and earlier violations of international norms by the United States**

During our conversation, Prashad pointed to double standards between the ways Western corporate media have covered the Russian invasion of Ukraine and



numerous earlier U.S. invasions of other countries, but also in the way West-dominated international bodies have dealt with such different invasions.

Prashad noted he had been working as a journalist in Libya in early 2011 when a faction in the east of the country tried to secede and then, when Pres. Qadhafi's central government tried to crack down on the separatists, their leader Mahmoud Jibril called for Western help. The UN Security Council responded by passing a resolution that authorized creation of a no-fly zone, in order to ground Qadhafi's air force. The United States and several NATO allies then greatly exceeded the terms of the resolution by acting as, in Prashad's words, "Mahmoud Jibril's air force."

He commented, **"If you accept that the NATO countries violated the UN resolution, there's no difference to me between the NATO war in Libya and the Russian war in Ukraine. And yet the world is incensed by what's happening in Ukraine and nobody cares a fig about the destruction of a noble country like Libya, destroyed now, where slavery has returned... Why? Because it's Africa, friends. And in Africa, this is all allowed. In Europe, it is not allowed."**

For his part, Richard Falk pointed to an evident disparity in the way the (Western-dominated) International Criminal Court—of which the United States is notably not a member—has dealt with allegations of rights violations by different international actors: **"The ICC is very responsive when the issue involves something the west is concerned about. And it had been in its early years, mainly African abuses of state power, [but] it's been notoriously resistant to addressing Israeli crimes and U.S. crimes in Afghanistan. And it points to institutional double standards, which I think has been underlying much of what we've been saying: that the UN itself behaves differently with Ukraine than it does with either the Palestinian agenda or with the Iraqi agenda back in 2003."**

Falk endorsed a judgment Prashad had expressed, regarding **"the extent to which the west controls**

**the discourse even within the UN."** He also expressed pessimism about the prospects of any speedy reform of the UN system.

(Just hours before our conversation, the UN General Assembly had endorsed a special "Uniting for Peace" resolution that condemned Russia's invasion and called for an immediate Russian withdrawal from Ukraine. 141 states voted for the resolution; 5 against; and 35 had abstained. All the abstainers were countries of the Global South, including the two countries that are far and away the world's most populous: China and India.)

\* \*\*

### **Are Russians "paranoid" about Western intentions?**

This issue was the one that sparked the liveliest debate in our conversation. In the Q&A portion, Goldstein had said, **"I don't think that the activities of NATO in Ukraine were at this point a huge threat to Russia. But I've spent a lot of time in Russia. I speak Russian and I'm reading their press all the time. Russia: they are extremely paranoid. It's just deep in their soul... They're not going to wait for Ukraine to build up these larger military capabilities with NATO's help. They're going to strike first."**

Prashad's response was, **"That's not an explanation of anything, that Russians are paranoid! You know, Mr. Putin said in that speech that they're not prepared to allow hypersonic missiles and so on, six minutes to Moscow and other things. Is that paranoia?"**

After a little more discussion on this, Falk provided a synthesis that also served as a helpful summary of the whole conversation: **"I think there's a better argument for saying that the Russians are being prudent, not paranoid, in view of their own history. This historical experience is within the lifetime of the leadership of Russia... Before talking about Russian paranoia, one should talk simultaneously about NATO provocations and the two things are fused, it seems to me."**

## Session 2: Exploring the urgency of peace and the duality of the world order, with Katrina vanden Heuvel and Chas Freeman

*by Helena Cobban*

In our March 7 webinar, Richard Falk and I hosted *Nation* publisher **Katrina vanden Heuvel**, who is also the President of the American Committee for US-Russia Accord, and veteran American diplomatist **Amb. Chas W. Freeman, Jr.** We deeply explored the two-tier world governance system in place since 1945, which has been starkly revealed by the Ukraine crisis, along with the urgency of reaching a negotiated end to the very destructive fighting in Ukraine.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel** said early on that reporters she trusted, including Russian reporters, had been noting the extreme isolation in which Pres. Putin seems to have been living inside the Kremlin: **"It's reported he's been very paranoid about getting COVID, but how he's getting information, how he's processing it is a question because he's very isolated. ... And I think there was a terrible miscalculation."**

She noted the wide spread of anti-war protests inside Russia: **"The foreign policy elite issued a strong letter coming out of the school that [Foreign Minister Sergei] Lavrov graduated from. Twenty thousand cultural political figures, 150 regional elected figures, have protested. And of course, the media blackout is dangerous, but there is resistance, and I think that's important."**

She also warned about the risk of a dangerous nuclear escalation.

In his opening remarks, **Chas Freeman** stated, **"This is the end of the post-Cold War period. That's what we're seeing. But it's more than that. It's also, I fear, the end of the effort which began with the European Enlightenment to regulate international behavior with something resembling the rule of law. And we are seeing, I think, a reversion to the unprincipled uses of force that characterized the Napoleonic Wars."**

He characterized Putin's decision to invade Ukraine as, **"very likely... the worst strategic decision that any Russian government has made since Tsar Nicholas II decided to go to war with Japan in 1904."** He said that many of the war aims initially expressed by Putin were clear, and arguably achievable. **"But things have moved on with the invasion and the military incompetence that it has demonstrated."**

Freeman noted that if China steps forward to mediate between Russia and Ukraine, **"This would be a supreme irony, because 100 years ago, roughly, during the Versailles Treaty, European powers were redefining the spheres of influence they had established in China. For China now to be asked to redive the spheres of influence in Europe is a mark of its rise to global power. And a supreme irony."**

He built on vanden Heuvel's suggestion that a "reasonable peace" might be attained, sketching out that Ukraine's status might, in such a peace, be modeled on the Austrian State Treaty of 1955. But he also warned that, **"We face various scenarios which are really quite frightening."**

**Richard Falk** responded with a short but masterly description of the international order established in 1945: **"The UN was designed to give political space to geopolitical actors. Otherwise, the right of veto in the Security Council makes no sense. In effect, the UN was structured in ways that acknowledged that it did not have the capabilities or authority to govern geopolitics... International law governs the behavior of normal states. It does not govern the behavior of geopolitical actors dealing with war/peace issues or matters of grand strategy."**

He responded to a remark Freeman had made about spheres of influence in world politics. He noted these were a geopolitical norm, not an international law norm, and recalled that Putin had recently declared the need to end the "unipolar world." Falk commented, **"And that's what in some**

sense, Ukraine is all about, because in the unipolar world, the whole world became the US sphere of influence. It seemed like a revival of the Monroe Doctrine, but extended to encompass the planet as a whole."

\* \* \*

The conversation that followed explored these themes in greater depth, along with the need for urgency in attaining a "reasonable peace" and some other topics, as summarized here.

### **Nuclear risks of the war**

I had explicitly asked Chas Freeman about the risks of nuclear engagement over Ukraine. His response: **"I don't think tactical nuclear weapons are relevant to the military situation in Ukraine... That's not the issue. The danger is that Russia's basic claim to be a global power rests on its nuclear arsenal. And there might be a temptation to use a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine just to demonstrate the willingness to cross the nuclear threshold. And I think that is a frightening prospect."**

Later, Katrina vanden Heuvel noted that at the recent (mid-February) Munich Security Conference, Ukrainian President Zelensky recalled that in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine had given up the nuclear weapons stationed there in the Soviet era in return for security guarantees from all the major powers and that there might now be an attempt to rebuild their nuclear arsenal. She added, **"Now, this was said in an audacious moment, but inside Russia, inside Moscow, there was a kind of alarm at that."**

She recalled that in 1982, at the height of the (old) Cold War, **"On June 12, 1982, a million people were in Central Park, and their [anti-nuclear] protest on the eve of the Disarmament Conference at the UN played a role in moving the Agreement on Intermediate Nuclear Forces forward and the abolition of a class of weapons... One thing we haven't fixed on is the unraveling of the arms control infrastructure [since 2002.]"**

\* \* \*

### **More on the nature of the world system and America's role in it**

Richard Falk's presentation of the dual nature of the world system provoked a lively discussion. Chas Freeman described Putin's escalation of his aims in Ukraine as **"the culmination of a long process of deterioration [of the global order], much of it caused by U.S. unilateralism."** The examples he cited were, **"the vivisection of Serbia to produce an independent Kosovo, which was, I think, the precedent for Crimea going back to Russia. And, of course, the wars in the Middle East."**

Freeman agreed with Falk that the Ukraine war is **"all about spheres of influence."** He added, **"I don't think in circumstances [like today's] where balances of power are dynamic, spheres of influence are anything other than a provocation."**

He noted, **"The US in the period of unilateralism basically paid no attention to the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions, or various other pillars of international law. And then more recently, it has been expanding something called the 'rules-bound order,' which is not the same thing as the UN Charter and international law because it envisages the United States and a handful of former imperialist countries in the G-7 making the rules, and enforcing them, while determining which rules they should comply with or not. And this is understandably not acceptable to other major powers."**

Falk later stated, **"It is important and appropriate to both condemn the aggression and to condemn the provocative geopolitics that created a context where conflict would cross violent thresholds. There is a geopolitical dimension that cannot be excluded. And the idea that these few states have the discretion to use international force when their strategic interests are served by it is something that the rest**

of the world should not be willing to live with much longer."

\* \* \*

### **The morality and (in)effectiveness of sanctions**

Katrina vanden Heuvel judged that the sanctions applied against Russia, **"have been overused in ways that have harmed ordinary people.... And the oligarchs, they've made their pact, so they're not being harmed."**

Chas Freeman noted that sanctions have a long history: **"They have been in the American toolkit since Jefferson tried to impose them and caused the War of 1812. Woodrow Wilson was a great apostle of them and imagined that economic warfare through sanctions could obviate the need for military action. They have an almost unblemished record of failure!"**

Sanctions can have utility, he said, **"if they are accompanied by a yes-able proposition. They can help persuade the other side to change course. But that's not what we're doing. What we're doing is finding pleasure in torturing the Russian people in the hope that they will then overthrow Mr. Putin, which hasn't seemed to work, usually, elsewhere. I wonder why it should work in Russia?"**

\* \* \*

### **The rise of Russophobia**

Katrina vanden Heuvel raised the issue of the disturbing rise of Russophobia in the United States (and other NATO countries): **"The Russophobia is very dangerous in my mind, because there are Russians protesting the war... I don't know if you know David Cicilline, a good Democrat, he sponsored a piece of legislation to oust Russia from the UN. There's a piece of legislation by a good Democrat in California to oust Russian students who are studying here. The boycott in the cultural world is as severe as anything I've ever seen."**

Chas Freeman weighed in: **"There are few sights uglier than the American people in one of our bouts of moral indignation. This is what we do. It's morally reprehensible, but equally important, it's very dysfunctional in terms of statecraft because it substitutes rage for reason. And we're not seeing diplomacy addressing the question of how to preserve an independent Ukraine in circumstances of peace in Europe. What we're seeing is a set of punitive actions against Russia, which are enormously gratifying to the people who are experiencing Russophobia."**

## Session 3: Medea Benjamin and Marjorie Cohn discuss the impact of the crisis on the peace movement, the role of NATO, and international law

*by Helena Cobban*

In our March 9 conversation, our guests were activist and author **Medea Benjamin**, who was a co-founder of the antiwar organization Code Pink, and veteran international-law specialist **Marjorie Cohn**. With these two guests, **Richard Falk** and I surveyed the effects of the Ukraine crisis on the antiwar movement in the United States and globally, as well as the international-law aspects of the crisis.

**Marjorie Cohn** kicked off this very rich conversation by stating clearly that, "**Russia is currently waging a war of aggression in Ukraine... But I also want to say that it's very important to put that in context of the history since the fall of the Soviet Union, the role of NATO, the involvement of the United States in the 2014 coup, etcetera.**"

**Medea Benjamin** noted that, "**As Marjorie and Richard know well, the U.S. has not been a great complier with international law and really creates its own idea of what the rule of law should be, and it's 'might makes right.'** And so it's very hard in this context. We certainly want to condemn Russia for violating international law but also want to bring up the many times that the U.S. has violated international law."

She said, "**We hear members of Congress and people in the administration saying we've got to take Putin to the International Criminal Court—something that the U.S. it is not even a party to, and [the U.S.] sanctioned key members of the international criminal court when it even wanted to look into possible war crimes that the U.S. might have committed in Afghanistan.**"

Benjamin noted that the Ukraine crisis has seriously divided the already-small peace movement in the United States. She recalled that in the lead-up to

the U.S. invasion of Iraq, there was a huge peace movement, with people coming out by the hundreds of thousands to protest. But this time, in response to a call for an antiwar protest on February 26, "**we got about 75 cities doing... small protests.**" And the response was not much greater a week later.

She said that there had been many much larger protests called by Ukrainian-American organizations. "**And it is difficult for people who want to add, in addition to 'Russian troops out', 'Ceasefire now', a call for 'No expansion of NATO' because we actually get attacked when we go to some of these other rallies, because they're calling for more military intervention, no-fly zones and they have signs saying, you know, 'Thank you NATO! We need more intervention!'**"

Benjamin reported that some people from Code Pink had gone to talk to some of the Ukrainian-American demonstrators in front of the White House. "**We understand where they're coming from. Their loved ones are being killed, they're being displaced. They're terrified. And we try to argue that more war is not the answer and how horrific it would be if this became an even wider war, and we know that there is the pending possibility of even a nuclear war.**"

She pointed to the need to educate Americans about the true nature of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "**We hear ad nauseam that NATO is a defensive alliance. And we know that NATO is an aggressive alliance, that it has been even in its most recent history, aggressive in the case of Afghanistan, supporting the US in the case of Iraq, being on the aggression side in the case of Libya.**"

She said that the broad groundswell of support that NATO, and more funding for the military, that

had been spurred by the Ukraine crisis came at a bittersweet time. **"So much of the efforts of the anti-war groups has been to try to cut the Pentagon budget, and we've built up a strong alliance in the last year on the back of the disaster in Afghanistan, when it was Biden himself who revealed to the American people, that we were spending \$300 million a day, every day for 20 years, on war in Afghanistan. Making people really start to question, 'Wait, why were we doing that? And isn't this time then to move some of that money into the real needs of people to deal with COVID and healthcare, the climate crisis, student debt relief?'... And so suddenly, we're already seeing expedited calls for more money for the Pentagon, \$14 billion being added now to a must-pass budget that will be done by Friday."**

Her conclusion: **"I feel like we have gone backwards so much in terms of trying to call for, not only the cuts in the Pentagon budget, but demilitarization of our society in general. And then on a global scale with our friends in Europe, it's become very hard for them."**

**Richard Falk** picked up on Cohn's call to remember the degree to which the crisis had been provoked by the behavior of NATO and the U.S. **"We always need to understand conflicts from the perspective of the other, if we really want to understand them in a way that is productive of a peace-oriented perspective,"** he said. He also noted that by design, the 1945 UN Charter allowed all of the veto-wielding "Permanent Five" members of the Security Council—which include Russia, as well as U.S.—to opt out of normal Charter obligations at will. **"In other words, international law was deliberately subordinated to the primacy of geopolitics for the five most dangerous countries in the world."**

He recalled that, for its part, the U.S. had set precedents "going back to the Vietnam War" for disregarding the UN's prohibition on aggressive war. Regarding the norms for the behavior of the P-5 countries he said: **"They're set by precedent;**

**they're not made by agreement. And therefore the precedents that the U.S. set are really quite undermining of any kind of righteous indignation about what Russia has done—even though from a Westphalian, international-law point of view, it's a clear violation."**

Falk pointed to the very triumphalist attitude that arose in the U.S. after the end of the Cold War and the parallel growth in that period of **"all kinds of doctrines that... attempted to justify intervention and regime change, ignoring the sovereign rights of members of the international community. So that one way of looking at the broader implications of this [current] crisis is to say it's about restoring spheres of influence as they existed in a bipolar world."**

He noted: **"Another geopolitical norm that was sacrificed in this [post-Cold War] process was the idea of prudence and restraint. And it goes to what Medea was saying about how does one balance the tragedy, the humanitarian tragedies against the risks and dangers of a wider war? And that points to the desirability of prudent behavior on the part of the geopolitical actors."**

Marjorie Cohn dove back in to note that one antecedent of Russia's invasion of Ukraine had been an announcement by the United States that it was building a new military installation in Poland, just 100 miles from Russia's border, "from which the United States could deploy nuclear-armed missiles." She compared that development with the crisis in superpower relations that erupted in 1962, when Russia started installing missiles in Cuba, **"90 miles from the border of the United States; and we came very close to a nuclear war at that point."**

She framed the recent U.S. announcement about the new base in Poland as a culmination of a longer process whereby, since the end of the Cold War in 1990, the United States has pushed NATO to expand ever further eastward toward Russia's borders. She said, **"NATO was formed [in 1948] as a defensive alliance against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries. It has never really functioned as a defense alliance. It has functioned as an aggressive alliance and as such, it**

**violates the UN charter... US-led NATO (because the US does lead NATO, the head of NATO is always a high US general) illegally invaded Belgrade in 1999, Iraq in 2002, Libya in 2011, Syria, etcetera. The list goes on and on and on."**

Cohn recalled that George Kennan, the U.S. diplomat considered the architect of the post-WW-II policy of "containing" the Soviet Union, had long warned that eastward expansion of NATO would be very triggering for post-Soviet Russia and destabilizing for the global balance. Also, that in 1997, dozens of U.S. foreign policy veterans, including former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, sent a letter to Pres. Clinton explicitly warning that, **"the current US-led effort to expand NATO would be a policy error of historic proportions."**

She said, **"I'm not saying that Russia was justified by any means in its invasion and aggression in Ukraine. But Russia has come to this point because every step along the way, US-led NATO has refused to acknowledge Russia's real security concerns and how critical it is to Russia not to expand NATO to Ukraine."**

\* \* \*

The discussion that followed covered a range of topics, including: the troubling record of NATO expansion; the prospect of military escalation that might well be triggered by creation of a no-fly zone over Ukraine; the possibility that China could lead a peacemaking effort; the degree of neo-Nazi influence in Ukraine; the U.S.-instigated campaign against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange; and how anti-war activists can avoid being labeled as "Putin apologists".

The most distinctive parts of the discussion, however, were those addressing the current challenges facing the U.S. peace movement. Here, Medea Benjamin took the lead. **"It's a position that has to be very clearly stated from the beginning that we are absolutely opposed to the invasion and we call for Russian troops out. I think without starting from there nobody's going to listen to us,"** she said. But she added it is also important to

move on from there to note the historical roots of the conflict and to explain why that history remains important today. **"Because there will be no negotiated solution that Russia will agree to, if it doesn't include the issues, not only about Ukraine not getting into NATO, but also about the way that NATO has so much taken over so many of...the countries that are close to [Russia's] Eastern border."**

She warned about reports that a number of people running for office in this year's elections are starting to "backtrack" from earlier movements they had been making towards supporting the peace camp. **"Now, being attacked so much by mostly the media, I would say, they are strengthening their support for... a very robust and growing Pentagon budget. And so we have to be the counterweight to that."**

Later, she returned to the role of the corporate media: **"I feel like the media is egging on the White House, is egging on the politicians, is really pushing: 'Why aren't you doing more? Why aren't you cutting off all trade with Russia? Why aren't you sending them [the Ukrainians] the real weapons that they need? Why aren't you creating this no-fly zone?' And it does such a disservice to the complexity of this issue! Almost never do I hear the media saying, 'Why aren't you, Biden, pushing harder for negotiations? Why aren't you calling upon this leader or that leader to convince Putin to sit down and get serious about talks?' You don't see that kind of questioning."**

At the end of the session, I asked our two guests to summarize the short lesson each wanted viewers to take away from it. Benjamin's takeaway was that people should visit the website [Codepink.org](http://Codepink.org). **"We keep really up to the minute on what's going on and give you some good direction in terms of what you can do to work for peace."**

Cohn's response was to quote the words of historic union organizer Joe Hill: **"Don't mourn, organize!"**

## Session 4: The impact of the crisis on U.S. domestic politics, with Bill Fletcher, Jr., Erik Sperling, and Marcus Stanley

*by Helena Cobban*

The guests in our March 14 webinar were the veteran civil rights and labor activist **Bill Fletcher, Jr.**, **Erik Sperling**, the Executive Director of Just Foreign Policy, and **Marcus Stanley**, Advocacy Director of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. During the conversation, these guests expressed some disagreements, especially over the weight that people in the Western anti-war movement should assign to Pres. Putin's ties to far-right forces worldwide. But the conversation always remained collegial. It threw light on a broad range of issues and the participants ended up acknowledging that they agreed on most of the topics discussed.

The first presenter was **Bill Fletcher, Jr.** He stressed that, **"the principal matter here is one of Russian aggression against Ukraine: around that there should be no ambivalence."** He noted that as a result of the invasion, **"There will now be a new round of discussions about strengthening NATO or new military hardware... And this is something that progressives need to vehemently oppose. It once again becomes a reason to move resources away from domestic and non-military priorities. And there is no good end to this."**

He then pointed to the ties between Pres. Putin and the U.S. right wing. He noted that there are **"fascists on both sides of this battle."** But he added that: **"I think that the danger of Putin's influence over the far right in the United States is a really important danger that has been understated and underestimated by forces among progressives in the United States."**

**Marcus Stanley** spoke next. He agreed with Fletcher that **"This is an aggressive war and a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty that is inexcusable"** and that **"Ukraine has a right to self-defense"**. But, he added, **"Our question as Americans is what is our own government doing here to either bring**

**peace or to feed into an escalation spiral that creates barriers to peace, barriers to settling the conflict, or escalates the war."**

He recalled that, **"In the 1990s, the U.S. succeeded in regime change in Russia, and we actually had significant control there over Russia's domestic politics, and Russia really collapsed into a kind of corrupt kleptocracy... So there's a history of US regime change in Russia already that has made Russia and the Russian people very wary and suspicious of the U.S."**

Stanley warned that, in the absence of a far-reaching peace settlement, Europe could be re-militarized, defense spending massively increased, and a new Cold War started against Russia. And, **"If you think about a settlement that prevents and avoids that then we have to come to grips with these Russian issues about their security concerns on their borders. And these are not simply Putin concerns. These are Russian concerns."**

He argued that a diplomatic resolution of the crisis is still possible, and that the likely terms of such a settlement **"are compatible with meaningful sovereignty and freedom for the people of Ukraine. And they're even compatible with Ukrainian economic openness to the west. They're compatible with Ukrainian EU membership. They're compatible with rebuilding Ukraine and Ukraine getting economic assistance from the west. So there are possibilities here diplomatically that I think we have to stand for"**

When **Erik Sperling** spoke, his focus was on the need to prevent nuclear war: **"I think it has to be number one! And I think we've made some progress on that: Just Foreign Policy, working**



with groups like Quincy and... a coalition of members of Congress on the left and right insisted [on] backing President Biden's decision to keep US troops out. And we worked to ensure that he actually would pull out troops that were already there."

He said that he and others in the progressive anti-war movement had already, previously, built good alliances with some anti-war figures on the U.S. far right, and in response to the Ukraine crisis they had persuaded nearly 20 Republican members of Congress to sign a letter to Pres. Biden saying, "you cannot send troops without congressional approval and you have to pull any troops you have out."

He reported that Pres. Biden and just about all the leadership of the House and Senate agreed that they would not be sending troops in. He noted that some figures were still pushing for a no-fly zone that would likely get US troops involved. **"But we feel that we have a pretty strong group in Congress that'll say you cannot do any of those actions without congressional authorization... There isn't a huge appetite for people to want to be on the record supporting war. They saw Hillary Clinton lost to Barack Obama in large part because of her vote [on the Iraq war]."**

Sperling stressed that, **"looking at the root causes of conflicts such as this is not the same as justifying anything that's being done."** He said, **"The only way to protect Ukrainian lives is not to plunge them into a 10-year long insurgency. Yes, that might bleed Russia, and a lot of hawks want that, but it's going to also harm the Ukrainian people horrifically... So I think that one place where we should really be clear is that it's the people who are supporting diplomacy that are most looking out for the Ukrainian people's interests."**

He also pointed to the danger posed by far-right activists from around the world who have been flocking to Ukraine and receiving military training there. **"It doesn't only threaten Ukrainian minorities in the future. It also endangers the potential for Zelensky to sign a peace deal because these far-right groups have accused him of treason... and have threatened to overthrow**

**him if he would sign a deal. But these are going to be battle-trained, battle-hardened fighters that can return to other parts of the world as well, when they're done."**

In Richard Falk's response to the three presentations, he said, **"I think the point of consensus that's very valuable to underscore is that the condemnation of Russian aggression is not an excuse for not looking at the irresponsible behavior of NATO and the US in provoking the crisis."**

He noted that the United States has, **"consistently intervened in behalf of regime change and... turned a blind eye to anti-democratic autocratic regimes that were geopolitically aligned with us. So that the self-righteous aspect of the response to the situation in Ukraine is really very misleading and deceptive and paves the way for this new surge of excessive militarization and a withdrawal of resources from domestic priorities."**

Falk noted the urgency of what he termed **"geopolitical de-escalation"**, noting that the tensions built up between the United States and China, and now between the United States and Russia, **"prevents not only the domestic agenda, but it also makes it much more difficult to respond constructively to the climate-change crisis and to a bunch of other global priorities."** He stressed that, **"Stopping the aggression does not justify aggravating the geopolitical tensions."**

\* \* \*

Here were some of the main contributions to the discussion that followed:

**Bill Fletcher** stressed the need to look at Pres. Putin's many ties to far-right movements not just in the United States, but also globally.

He also made a very thought-provoking reference to the Budapest Accords of 1994, under which Ukraine had agreed to give up the large nuclear arsenal established there earlier when it was still part

of the Soviet Union, in return for international guarantees that the country would never be invaded. Fletcher said, **"When we talk about geopolitics, let's understand the lesson that Russia has taught the world, which is don't give up your damned nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction, because the reality is you make a deal with one of these big boys and they may violate it when it's in their interest and boom, right?"**

He noted that the eastward expansion of NATO that occurred in the years after the Soviet Union and its big European alliance, the Warsaw Pact, collapsed as a result not only of NATO "machinations" but also because the leaders of many former Warsaw Pact nations, **"were fearful of Russian invasion and aggression, and desperately sought to join NATO. So in other words, a security discussion is not about who gets close to Russia's borders. It's about how do we guarantee the security of the region."**

**Erik Sperling** noted regarding global attitudes to the conflict that, **"The reality is, the world isn't united... You have countries at the UN representing about 50% of the world population that wouldn't vote against Russia on this."** But by contrast, **"There's a good part of the security establishment in the United States that... is just thrilled to have Russia enmeshed in a conflict in Ukraine. These are not US bodies that are being sacrificed there."**

On the matter of various far-right forces having links variously to either Russia or Ukraine, Sperling said, **"We have a unique responsibility, at least as Americans. I think people in the UK and other NATO countries have a responsibility as well... Our focus is on what the US is doing,**

**which is arming and training groups that, there's already a lot of evidence these groups have done harmful things."** He called on the U.S. to, **"take basic actions to screen out those folks from receiving US weapons and training."**

**Marcus Stanley** repeatedly noted the importance of pushing for a diplomatic solution, **"Because we have a lot of people [who] have been saying in DC that we need to look forward to a 10- to 15-year war, an insurgency; to Ukraine becoming like Afghanistan, which would be a disaster for the Ukrainian people... So we have to stand up for those diplomatic possibilities."**

He noted that, **"Diplomacy always involves compromise,"** and that while this might appear painful to some, the alternatives of a prolonged, very damaging war or escalation to a broader, even nuclear, confrontation would be far worse.

Toward the end, **Bill Fletcher** summarized the points of agreement, thus: **"I think: an immediate cease-fire; mediated peace talks; a focus on regional security; and de-nuclearization. I think that this last point is something that progressive forces around the world, and certainly here in the United States, have to really look at."**

For his part, **Richard Falk** stressed the urgency of achieving geopolitical de-escalation. He also underscored the points of agreement identified by Fletcher and said that the major remaining point of disagreement was over whether, **"Putin's support of rightwing autocracies around the world and in the US... is symmetrical with, or asymmetrical to, the role of neo-Nazis and fascists in the Ukrainian context."**

## Session 5: India's Radha Kumar and Britain's Mary Kaldor discuss war goals, diplomacy, and war-crimes prosecutions

*by Helena Cobban*

In our March 16 webinar, our guests were two veteran peace activists from outside the United States: **Dr. Radha Kumar**, a board member of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), who was with us from Tamil Nadu, India; and **Dr. Mary Kaldor**, Professor of Global Governance at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

This session saw some sharp divergences of opinion, but my co-host **Richard Falk** and I explored them with our guests in a way that, we hope, deepened everyone's understanding of the issues.

**Radha Kumar** spoke first. She noted that India had long had a high military dependency on Moscow: **"The debate [over Ukraine] has been: to what extent can we risk that dependency? How do we get out of it? ...On the other side there were 20,000 Indian students in Ukraine. They faced the war in the same way that the Ukrainians did... So you had the moral issue very much to the fore, which I'm sad to say doesn't happen very often in India."** She also pointed to "Cold War cynicisms" coming back to the fore in much Indian discourse.

She noted that last year's exit of NATO and allied forces from Afghanistan was the most destabilizing challenge that India was facing, and also that pro-peace forces in India continued to be hampered in their efforts to organize publicly by the country's anti-Covid restrictions.

**Mary Kaldor** spoke next, describing the "huge shock" that Russia's invasion of Ukraine had caused in Western Europe and noting the very large increase in defense spending announced by Germany's Chancellor, Olaf Scholz. She added, **"I think the immediate impact has been... a much greater unity on the part of the European Union in the face of what Russia is doing. It looks as though there's a greater commitment to NATO, but... there's also lots of questioning**

**about what happened after the Cold War and the expansion of NATO."**

She recalled that at the end of the Cold War, **"Many of us hoped that both NATO and the Warsaw Pact would be dissolved and we would have a strengthened Helsinki security system; and that didn't happen. NATO stayed, and expanded. And though I think Putin would've acted as he acted whether or not NATO had expanded, I do think it was a mistake to give him a pretext for invasion."**

She expressed the hope that the multi-dimensional kind of a security system defined for Europe in the 1975 Helsinki Accords could be reinstated, and noted that, **"We have to cooperate with Russia and China on climate change and pandemics and global issues!"**

Kaldor said it was, **"really, really important for the peace movement"** to bear in mind that: **"The only good way this war could end is if Putin falls or if there's a very strong opposition within Russia."**

She added that, based on her contacts with peace activists inside Russia, she judged that the sanctions the Western countries have imposed on Russia have been far too broad. **"We ought to argue against those kinds of sanctions, but also we should try and make contacts with as many of the Russian anti-war activists as possible and... ask them what they need, and help empower them."**

In **Richard Falk's** response, he said, **"the peace movement should use all its energies to support the idea that the opportunities at the end of the Cold War were wasted. And now is the time. This is a second chance to make European security into something viable and oriented toward the wellbeing of European people and not get caught in a geopolitical contest for ascendancy."**

He said: **"One of the things that should be put into the mix is the U.S. attempt to impose a Monroe doctrine for the world after the end of the Cold War. In other words... to be the sole geopolitical actor with spheres of influence that extend throughout the planet."** From a geopolitical point of view, he said, **"the responses of China and Russia are not so deviant as we would like to think."**

Falk warned that the global turbulence generated by the crisis, **"is very costly ecologically because it takes the mind of the political elites off of climate change... and it also undermines the attempt to achieve a more equitable way of constituting the world economy."**

Radha Kumar jumped back in and said that after she recently wrote an article about Ukraine, many of her Indian readers asked, **"So where were the U.S., Europe, other countries when China had actually captured parts of territory that were not in their jurisdiction?... The last three years, China has been systematically carving out pieces of Indian territory!"**

She was pessimistic about the prospects of countries from the Global South taking the initiative to try to mediate Ukraine's conflict with Russia. She noted that many countries in the Global South, including India, **"have a huge set of challenges to deal with in terms of autocratization or the growth of populist currents that have weakened and undermined our democracies."**

\* \* \*

During the discussion that followed, I pressed Mary Kaldor on the call she had voiced for Pres. Putin's overthrow, which I described as, **"a rather startling way to look at things when surely the priority must be to end the war, and to end the war you need an interlocutor."** I also noted that NATO's previous "successful" regime-change operation, in Libya, had left that country in horrendous shape.

Kaldor clarified that, **"I'm certainly not advocating that the West overthrow Putin... I was**

**talking about Russian domestic opposition, which is slightly different."**

She also said that though many on the left had argued that it was NATO expansion that had pushed Russia to invade Ukraine, she thought, **"There's a much stronger argument... that it was all to do with market fundamentalism—that when communism ended, somehow there was this dream that you could convert communist countries into bourgeois capitalist countries, liberal democracies, and all you needed to do was to privatize... And instead, what you produced was oligarchies."**

Those oligarchies, she said, became combined with ethnic nationalism, misogyny and homophobia into a **"toxic mixture that we see in the Trump phenomenon, that we see in the Brexit phenomenon, that we see in the Modi phenomenon. So I think Radha's absolutely right. And that's what we need a kind of common front when dealing with it."**

She indicated that Pres. Putin was of this same ilk, and said she was **"doubtful, despite what Zelensky is saying, that negotiations will end the war. I think they'll go on forever... I think the most likely outcome, which is terribly depressing, is an endless conflict in both places."** Regarding the longer-term effects of the sanctions on Russia, she said, **"You could have a Venezuela-type situation with nuclear weapons, which is absolutely terrifying."**

Kaldor spoke about the huge solidarity that Europeans had expressed with Ukraine, and Kumar described a similar phenomenon in India: **"The upsurge of simple human concern for Ukrainians is universal... And I think that is a very positive thing to look at. I just wish we could broaden it a bit. Two hours ago I saw somebody on television saying that we are not even talking about the fact that the Yemen war is going on. There are still starvation deaths."**

Kaldor said she thought the Ukraine crisis was having a good effect on the campaign against climate change because it had spurred the UK and Germany to reduce their dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. Richard Falk demurred on that point,

noting that the pressure was mounting in the U.S. to drill more on federal lands.

Falk also stressed the need to, **"give some attention to what prudent geopolitics means in a world where you have this confrontation between the west and Russia, both of which have nuclear weapons, and both of which are tempted in various ways... to use those weapons as a dimension of their diplomacy. That is the way bigger wars get started!"**

He added: **"I think the priorities of the peace movement, as well as the struggle against populist autocratic tendencies, should also be on what it means to have prudent geopolitics, which I would say involves denuclearization."**

He also noted that, **"The hawkish elements in the American elite were very happy with the confrontation and it's meant surges in military spending and lots of unfortunate effects."**

As the session drew to a close, I picked up on Mary Kaldor's apparent lack of urgency on ending the fighting in Ukraine. I noted the suffering its continuation imposes on not only Ukrainians and Russians but also the peoples of the Global South, adding: **"I don't think that people in the global peace movement can easily accept the idea that this is going to be a protracted conflict."**

Kaldor replied, **"I'm skeptical about whether it can be ended through negotiations. If it can, that will be great. Escalation is horrible. I think much more likely is this ongoing long war, which is what we've seen in Afghanistan. We've seen it in Syria. We've seen it in Libya. We're seeing it in Yemen and it's a disaster for the world."**

A little later, she commented, **"It's really interesting listening to you and Richard, because it makes me realize how incredibly different the**

**American context is from the European context, which didn't used to be true."** She also argued, **"It's a new world. It's not back to the old Cold War. It's a different world in which we all have the shared interest in opposing populist autocrats."**

\* \* \*

We also had a good discussion of the value of threatening Pres. Putin with prosecution for war crimes. Radha Kumar urged caution: **"If you start threatening them while a war is ongoing, then you've already sent out a message to... Putin that you might as well go the whole hog because you are finished anyway."** Kaldor countered that it was important to send the message that such actions as bombing hospitals and schools "is a horrible crime", and that it was very important to document any war crimes.

Falk commented, **"We should keep in mind... that the UN itself was designed to give the most dangerous countries in the world a veto power, which in effect meant they didn't have to respect international law unless they wanted to... So the primacy of geopolitics in relation to international law is nothing new and it was deliberately introduced into the peace diplomacy after World War II."**

He concluded: **"We can be self righteously condemning Russia, and it's horrible what has happened. But it shouldn't be seen as a departure from a pattern of behavior that was of Western origin, both European and North American, and was reinforced by the behavior, over the years, in conflict situations that served the strategic interests of the west."**

## Session 6: Probing Russian decisionmaking and options with Anatol Lieven and Ray McGovern

*by Helena Cobban*

In our session on March 21, Richard Falk and I hosted two long-time experts in Russian affairs: British writer and analyst Anatol Lieven, and Ray McGovern, formerly a decades-long career analyst with the CIA.

A few days earlier, **Anatol Lieven** had published an article titled "Ukraine has already won", so in his opening presentation, he summarized the arguments he had made there: **"My argument in that article was that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was clearly predicated on the belief that Ukraine is not really a nation, that the Ukrainian defense would collapse easily, and that Russia would be able to take over large parts of Ukraine with very little fighting.... Now, all of those premises have been proved to be false."** He added that the Russian government seemed to have recognized this and to have reduced the scope of its war aims accordingly.

In **Ray McGovern's** opening comments, he admitted that he had been wrong in the prediction he had made back in February, that Pres. Putin would not invade Ukraine but was seeking only to bring pressure on it through a large force build-up. He said what he realized only later was that the presidents of both Russia and China had become fed up with Pres. Biden's arrogance and machinations: **"Long story short, Putin and Xi made it their business to tutor Biden."**

He recalled that Pres. Putin had visited Beijing at the opening of the Olympics and said that Putin likely gave Xi a heads-up on the possibility Russia would invade Ukraine and got Xi's tacit approval (although this is not the view of some China experts). McGovern speculated that Xi's response had been to say, "Can you wait until the Olympics are over?" And, then, he noted, just three days after the Olympics were over, Russia launched the invasion of Ukraine. **"This means that Putin is feeling his oats, okay? He's got a big brother."**

McGovern said, **"The Russian victory is inevitable on the ground. Their aim was never to take over the whole Ukraine. Their aim, as Putin explicitly said, was denazification... and demilitarization."** He said he expected the Russian military to be able to connect up from the north and south of the country and to encircle and cut off the Ukrainian forces in the east. **"What's the solution? The solution, in my view, is a ceasefire immediately."**

In **Richard Falk's** response, he thanked McGovern for mentioning the geopolitical dimensions of the crisis, **"because I think that has taken priority over what's good for Ukraine and the Ukrainians, and it's become maybe... a virtual proxy war between Russia and the US. That's worth reflecting upon."**

In my response, I noted that we'd heard two very different assessments from Lieven and McGovern regarding which side was winning. **"But however we want to assess victory or defeat, I think all of us in this gathering want the fighting to end ASAP."**

I added, **"It might be somewhat easier to end the fighting if each side can think that it has won something of value to it. You don't want to grind everybody's noses into a defeat. We tried that with Germany after World War One."**

In a follow-up, **Anatol Lieven** described the balance between Ukraine and Russia as **"a mutually hurting stalemate."** He said that Russia had been suffering casualties at politically unsustainable rate. **"So they have an incentive to stop and negotiate once they have occupied what they regard as enough, A, for their territorial claims and, B, to put pressure on the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians, on the other hand, put up a tremendous**

fight, but they are also losing heavily. We hear less about that because, frankly, the Western media is very biased in favor of Ukraine."

Thus, he concluded, **"You have a situation... in which, frankly, the Ukrainians are unlikely to get a better deal, five years, ten years down the line than they would get now."**

Lieven expressed agreement with a judgment McGovern had voiced that, **"There are people in Washington who have no problem with that because they don't give a damn about the Ukrainians and how many Ukrainians die."** He recalled his time as a war reporter in Afghanistan in the 1980s and noted that you could hear Americans and Europeans talking now about how the Afghan war of that era was such a great victory that was won very cheaply. But he noted, **"It wasn't cheap in terms of Afghan lives—a million or so!—and the destruction of the Afghan state, with consequences that came back to hit America, terribly, ten years later."**

He stressed that in Ukraine, **"We must really focus on the fact that there are the grounds for a peace agreement now."** He then revisited the outline of a possible political agreement that he had laid out in his article regarding: military neutrality for Ukraine; language rights for the country's Russian speakers; and some kind of territorial arrangements for Crimea, and the Donbas anchored in special voting on their preferences for the people of those regions.

He concluded, **"In a reasonable world, all of this seems to me fairly obvious and negotiable, and it also seems to be the kind of thing which in other circumstances, the west itself would put forward as a solution for a conflict of this kind. But A, of course, we don't live in a reasonable world... And secondly, the west is hardly a neutral broker in this. As Ray has said, you have powerful elements in Washington who are perfectly happy to fight to the last Ukrainian in pursuit of American geopolitical agendas of, basically, overthrowing Putin, and also weakening or destroying Russia in order to isolate China."**

He also warned clearly that, **"If this war goes on for ten years, the ultimate solution will probably look the same."**

\* \* \*

In the discussion that followed, we covered many different aspects of the war in Ukraine, and how people in the anti-war and pro-restraint movements could best argue for a speedy ceasefire.

\* \* \*

Ray McGovern noted that, **"We have a very difficult situation in Washington where Biden has very sensibly said no no-fly zone. And then Pelosi and Schumer invite Zelensky to say, oh, why can't we have a no-fly zone! ... What's wrong with that picture?"**

He recalled that in 2015, the Pope had similarly come to address Congress; and the Pope had explicitly said then that "the main problem today is the blood-soaked arms traders." McGovern commented, **"All those congressmen got up and then they looked to see if the latest check from Raytheon was there, maybe it fell out while we were clapping... Now, why do I mention that? Because that's at the root of all this thing. There are people that profiteer from this tension, profiteer from going up to almost-war with Russia."**

On the matter of Putin's rationality, McGovern said, **"Is Putin deranged now or is he still a calculating kind that we thought he was? I think it's the latter. But he's got a big brother now. He's got China right behind him."** He added that Putin was possibly also "a little bit emotional" about the losses the Russian speakers in the Donbas region had suffered from the fighting there since 2014, and his inability (until recently) to protect them.

We had a brief discussion of which body might be best positioned to broker or lead the diplomacy needed to end the conflict.

Anatol Lieven said he thought Israel might have the best chance. He judged the UN would be unable to take the lead because, **"Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has basically made**

**it a program to subjugate the United Nations and turn it into a powerless institution."**

Lieven warned that in spite of the criticisms of U.S. policy we had all voiced, **"We should not seem to let Putin too much off the hook here. The fact of the matter is that he did launch this invasion."** He spoke, too, of the repression of dissident voices that Putin had pursued inside Russia for some years now: **"It is a terrifying sight to see just how many Russians who should be playing a key part in their country have been excluded from Putin's inner circle over the years. And that is one key reason why he was clearly very badly informed before launching this war... In terms of the economic consequences, there are no senior economists or economic officials or financial officials in his inner circle... So the onus is also clearly on the Putin regime also to seek a reasonable end to this war."**

I noted that Pres. Zelensky had made some important statements, including recognizing that Ukraine will not be part of NATO, and that his people have continued to talk directly to the Russians. I asked what people in the peace movement in NATO countries could do to press for support for such peace efforts.

Falk said we should stress the economic costs of continuing the war. McGovern, in his answer, stressed that he was primarily interested in stopping the carnage.

He also recalled that when the Soviets invaded Hungary in 1956, the US-backed broadcaster Radio Free Europe had urged the Hungarians to step up their resistance—and thousands of Hungarians had risen up and had ended up dying. But he said the CIA, for which he worked then, learned a lesson. Years later, when trouble was brewing in then-Czechoslovakia, he was sent to Prague to work with RFE expressly to make sure that RFE would *not* be inciting people there to do as the Hungarians had done.

McGovern said, **"I just felt very proud of being able to play that role. Now, what are we doing? Are we doing a Hungary? Are we doing Czechoslovakia?"**

Anatol Lieven came back to the question of how Americans can be persuaded to push harder for

peace efforts: **"I think they can be influenced, amongst other things, by the growing threat of a global economic crisis and also—how much they care about starvation in other parts of the world, I don't know. But they might well care about food riots and political instability in the Middle East, where key US allies, client states like Egypt, are critically dependent on Russian and Ukrainian wheat imports..."**

McGovern then turned to arguments around global warming. He noted that he has ten grandchildren, and added, **"To the degree this kind of unnecessary killing persists, then over the long term it will just make it quicker that my grandchildren will meet an untimely end with no fresh air and no water to drink. So this is an opportunity cost that should be taken into account. That's why we need a ceasefire right away. That's why we have to tuck in our pride and make sure we make a deal."**

Lieven, whose latest book is about climate change, fully agreed with that.

We discussed the role of international law and international war-crimes prosecutions. Richard Falk said that the threat of launching such prosecutions against Pres. Putin, **"seems like it works against what we all believe imperative, which is an immediate stopping of the killing; and to ratchet up this personalization of the consequences for Russia of the war seems to me to be geopolitically dysfunctional at this stage."**

He stressed that, **"What we're alleging about Russia is what we've done repeatedly around the world"** and said that when international law is used as a "geopolitical policy tool, **"it has no credibility... and in fact, it diminishes the whole idea of a normative order. When Blinken, for instance, talks about a rule-governed world, he makes it clear that the rules are generated in Washington, not in The Hague."**

Falk said that, **"World order is governed by the discretion of the geopolitical actors. And this was written into the Charter by giving the most dangerous countries in the world the veto power. That was part of the design of**



**world order. International law was for the weak, not for the strong. So that's why I distinguish between world order, where you acknowledge that, and international law which purports, like all law, to treat equals equally."**

One questioner asked which media the guests relied on. McGovern was immediately scathing in his criticism of all the Western corporate media. Lieven's view: **"I suppose the BBC and the Financial Times are my basic sources, but of course, I am very careful to balance them with as much information as I can from people who I trust on the ground and independent voices in the west. I began to be disillusioned with Western media when I was a journalist myself. Certainly what happened over Iraq put several nails in**

**that coffin."** He decried the disappearance of any objectivity from CNN and MSNBC.

We had a short, fairly speculative discussion of ways China's leaders might be expected to view the crisis in Ukraine. Then, as we wrapped up, Lieven's parting words were, **"I think that a reasonable peace settlement is becoming possible now. And I really hope it can be reached because I think the basic terms will be the same months or years down the line, and the only difference will be that tens or hundreds of thousands of people have died. So I would urge everybody to do their utmost to try to help bring about an early peace settlement and to make sure that the United States and other democracies actually support a peace settlement instead of covertly undermining that prospect."**

## Session 7: Exploring global impacts, and priorities for anti-war activism in the 'West', with Phyllis Bennis and Indi Samarajiva

*by Helena Cobban*

The session we held March 23 was a lively one. My co-host **Richard Falk** and I were joined by a sharp-eyed and iconoclastic writer/analyst from Sri Lanka, **Indi Samarajiva**, and the veteran Washington DC-based scholar and justice activist **Phyllis Bennis**. In his introduction, Falk noted, "People forget that it's not only Ukraine that will be victimized by the continuation of the war, but lots of people in all parts of the world that will suffer from the adverse consequences, particularly the shutdown of food exports from Ukraine and Russia." (The deep, inflation-fueled social unrest that has erupted in Sri Lanka and other countries of the Global South in recent weeks has underscored that point.)

In her opening remarks, **Phyllis Bennis** stressed these priorities: **"We have an immediate need for a ceasefire, for the Russian forces to be withdrawn, for Ukraine to make clear that they are going to be a neutral country, say no to NATO, and begin the process of disarmament. All of that is urgently needed right now."** She warned of the risks of escalation, including possibly to a nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia. **"Whenever there's a global threat, it's always worse in the Global South, where the people are the most vulnerable, where the land is most vulnerable to the environmental results of these catastrophes,"** she added.

Bennis addressed the proposals, widely floated in Washington, that the U.S. establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine, and quoted what former Defense Secretary Robert Gates had said when that proposal was first mooted for Libya, in 2011. **"He said, 'Let's be clear, a no-fly zone in Libya starts with going to war against Libya; it starts with attacking Libya,'"** she recalled.

She noted the pre-invasion role that NATO had played, by expanding eastward over the years to the borders of Russia and said that today, **"Crucially, we're seeing militarism spreading across Europe. We're seeing NATO bigger and stronger than ever... PAnd who's making a profit from this? Who's gaining from this? It's the producers of military weapons."**

She also identified the extreme hypocrisy between how Western governments and media have responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and how they have treated other wars in places like Myanmar or Yemen. The "humanizing" way war victims are treated in Ukraine should be a model for their treatment everywhere, she said, **"yet we're only seeing it when white Europeans are the victims."**

For his part, **Indi Samarajiva** opened with some gentle (but pointed) mockery of the idea that "some random idiot in Sri Lanka" should be expected to have a view on events in distant Ukraine. **"Have people in Sri Lanka been like, hey, yeah, should we go impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine? No, that's not a conversation we have. And that's not really a conversation you should be having either, because your village idiots are no better than our village idiots,"** he said.

**"So when you ask what should activists be doing? I think of the Hippocratic Oath, which is 'Do no harm.' Because there's this sense—and I grew up in America—there's a sense when you watch the TV shows and you're like, 'Oh, we need to go and save the day and get the crew together and bomb our way through things!' And every time America tries to go in, they just sell more bombs to drop on generally poor people, and it just makes things worse."**

He said that he had actually lived through war. **"I would just start by saying war is hell....There's that sort of hubris when you say that, yeah, war is hell. You think that maybe more war is going to get out of that hell, but it's usually just more hell."**

He surveyed the ways in which Washington's wide use of sanctions has been undermining the global hegemony the U.S. dollar has long enjoyed, and concluded, **"The dollar hegemony that enables you to... run this eternal war machine: at some point that golden goose will be plucked."**

He warned that, **"This is just all very unpredictable and dangerous. So we're playing with World War III here. We're playing with nuclear weapons. We're playing with food supplies which affect people in Africa and the Middle East. We're playing with nickel supplies, we're playing with titanium supplies, steel... And then we're throwing climate change in there, and you're just getting the recipe for chaos, violence, and a lot of problems all over the world. And the best thing we can do now is not jump in and fix these problems with bombs"—** but rather, to return to Hippocrates' injunction to "do no harm."

In his response, **Richard Falk** welcomed Samarajiva's urge that Americans seek to "do no harm", and asked what it would mean to take those words seriously.

He then built on what Phyllis Bennis had said about the post-Cold War expansion of NATO, and urged a broader reflection on the end of the Cold War: **"Instead of finding a way of strengthening UN, strengthening international law, taking the opportunity to get rid of nuclear weapons, there was a triumphalist mood that suggested now the U.S. could impose a global system of security, and only the U.S. would have the geopolitical prerogative of going anywhere in the world to pursue our strategic interests."**

He described that as **"a unilateral kind of radical reform of geopolitics"** and indicated that from that perspective, Russia's actions could be seen as protecting its traditional sphere of influence.

\* \* \*

In the conversation that followed we discussed, among other topics, these themes: the urgent need for a ceasefire in Ukraine; the double standards and hypocrisy of most of the Western media; and the common American urge to "do something" in response to reports of atrocities abroad—with that "something" most often, as Phyllis Bennis noted, being something military.

On that note, Samarajiva noted that the Buddha **"got to where he got by first actually doing nothing, by sitting."**

Regarding double standards in the media, Bennis commented on the fulsome coverage the corporate media had given the war in Ukraine, and said: **"I keep thinking, what if these had been the pictures from 2014 in Gaza, from Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and '09 in Gaza? Would the most recent [Israeli] assault on Gaza in 2021 have happened, or would it have been different?"**

Samarajiva had this comment about Western media coverage of the war: **"It's like the Roman circuses. People like watching other people get eaten by lions...My general rule is just follow the money. So the media makes money on this. Like it's good for business. And the arms dealers make money on this. So you, the American population are the ones getting sort of robbed because this is money—you guys could have health care, you guys could have better lives. But you get this bloody circus and no bread."**

Richard Falk said at one point that it is hard these days for the U.S. anti-war movement to get political traction, "because Americans aren't dying." He underlined, though, that U.S. wars abroad have all failed: **"There's no success story**

of a post-Cold War intervention... From a realist point of view, these are all losses. Iraq was a loss. Afghanistan was a colossal loss. Going back to Vietnam: Vietnam was a colossal loss. And the interesting thing is the political elites here cannot learn that lesson, because learning that lesson would undermine the idea that over-investing in the military is a rational way of upholding security."

Samarajiva agreed with that, and added: "I think the great innovation of American Empire is that there's more money in losing wars. So if you lose a war for 20 years, you're selling a lot of bombs! ...In the same way Americans discovered there's more money in having bad health care."

\* \* \*

As the conversation wrapped up, Phyllis Bennis underlined the urgency of achieving a negotiated peace in Ukraine: "**We know basically what it's going to look like. There's a few things that are unclear... What's not uncertain is that**

**Russia will pull out in some form. Ukraine will be neutral. Ukraine will not be part of NATO. Those are the things that are kind of a given. But what we need to do is push harder for getting to the table."**

She concluded: "**Our focus right now needs to be on getting negotiations underway that can stop the killing."**

Richard Falk also called for a speedy cease-fire, adding, "**The humanitarian crisis and the spillover of the Ukrainian war to the rest of the world will only get far worse if we continue, yet the outcome will likely be the same as it would be if we stopped the killing now."**

Indi Samarajiva's parting advice to Americans was blunt: "**Maybe you have a general strike, overthrow your leaders... break up into constituent states, and maybe just stop trying to fix the world. Give us a century and maybe just sit the rest of the century out. That's what I would recommend to Americans."**

## Session 8: Nuclear risks and realities of the Ukraine crisis, with David Barash and Cynthia Lazaroff

*by Helena Cobban*

For our March 28 conversation, **Richard Falk** and I were delighted to have as our guests two very experienced anti-nuclear scholar/activists, **Cynthia Lazaroff** and **David Barash**.

In my introduction I noted, "**Most people who are under, say, 45 years old have no vivid memory of having lived in a situation of possible war between two heavily armed nuclear superpowers. But this is a scenario that looks very close today.**" This was thus a conversation we felt it was important to include in our series.

**David Barash** opened his remarks with a stark warning that many observers might conclude from Russia's invasion of Ukraine that Ukraine should never have agreed, as it did in 1994, to give up its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal, and that therefore, "**We must adhere all the more closely to nuclear weapons and if anything obtain even more of them.**"

He warned that the war could also "**serve as a massive impetus for nuclear proliferation in the future, both horizontal, other countries trying to derive a message from this, and also vertical proliferation, with individual countries, the US almost certainly among them, maintaining that we need more and 'better' nuclear weapons. So those of us in the anti-nuclear world have our work cut out for ourselves, perhaps more than ever.**"

Barash said people should understand, however, that historically, "**There are many cases in which having nuclear weapons did not work as a deterrent.**" The cases he cited were: non-nuclear China sending 300,000 soldiers into Korea in 1950 to fight against the U.S. there, at a time when the U.S. had already demonstrated and used its nuclear arsenal and China had none; Argentina invading the British-controlled

Falklands/Malvinas in 1982; and Iraq sending 39 SCUD missiles against nuclear-armed Israel in 1991. Of this latter case Barash said, "**Clearly he [Saddam Hussein] was not deterred by Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and Israel didn't do anything about it.**"

He concluded: "**We all have a responsibility to declare a just war against nuclear deterrence, which in my mind is really at the heart of the whole nuclear problem that we all face.**"

**Cynthia Lazaroff** started with by noting an assessment former Defense Secretary William Perry had recently made, namely that, "**The danger of some sort of nuclear catastrophe is greater than it was during the Cold War, and most people are blissfully unaware of this danger.** He said, '**We're allowing ourselves sleepwalk into another catastrophe, and we must wake up.**'"

She continued, "**The US and Russia still possess over 90% of the estimated 13,000 nuclear weapons. We still have dangers that existed during the Cold War, such as the risk of inadvertent nuclear war due to accident, blunder, miscalculation, or mistake. We still have ICBMs on launch-on-warning postures with the presidents just having minutes to decide upon receiving warning of a nuclear attack. And these missiles have triggered many false alarms in the past. Plus, we have a whole host of new dangers that didn't exist during the Cold War. These include destabilizing new weapons and missile defense systems, cyber warfare and the cyber-nuclear nexus, emerging technologies, and more.**"

She said, "**We're in a moment of extremely high tensions, in some ways more dangerous than the Cuban Missile Crisis. And... I'm most**

concerned about two things. First, we have to find our way to a ceasefire to stop the killing, bloodshed, and immense human suffering. And I'm deeply concerned about the risk of escalation which could lead to a nuclear exchange."

Regarding the risk of escalation, Lazaroff said, **"We have both state and non-state actors who could take action that could escalate the conflict, inadvertently or intentionally. We have large numbers of NATO and Russian troops now in close proximity in the region. And this multiplies the risk of possible incidents of escalation. And we have uncertainty about where the 'red lines' are for NATO and Russia. There are so many pathways to escalation."**

Among the risks she noted was this: **"The ambiguity in weapons systems that can lead to miscalculation and escalation such as dual-capable missiles that can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads that Russia is now using in Ukraine. And there's no way to know what kind of warhead is mounted on the missile until it strikes its target."**

Turning to the question: "Would Putin actually push the button?" her assessment was, **"The probability may be low, but the risk is not zero. And I believe... that the longer this war goes on, the more Putin feels frustrated, pressured, backed into a corner—the more he feels like he's losing, the more his perception is that he and Russia are threatened—I think the more likely we could see some kind of intentional escalation to nuclear use."**

She said she did not know how the U.S. and NATO might respond, but that a simulation done at Princeton that started with just one nuclear launch by Russia during a conventional war had **"escalate[d] to a nuclear war with 90 million dead and injured within the first few hours."**

Her strong recommendations were: **"We have to end this war to make sure that we don't have an escalation that could lead to something like this or worse... We need to reduce the risk of escalation. And we need to**

**prioritize diplomacy, dialogue, and negotiations to secure a ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian troops and work out all the points of a peace agreement. To achieve this we need better and more open channels of communication at all levels, diplomatic and military... It's omniscidal behavior to stop talking to your nuclear adversary and words matter. We need to stop the inflammatory and escalatory rhetoric on all sides."**

She ended by quoting Dimitri Muratov, the editor in chief of Russia's independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, who won the Nobel Peace Prize last fall, who said, **"Only a global anti-war movement can save life on this planet."**

In his response, **Richard Falk** identified the inequity baked into the non-proliferation regime in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1970, that allowed only five countries to possess nuclear weapons, while those that do not are left in the position Iraq was in when the United States invaded it in 2003. He concluded that, **"Both the critique of nuclear deterrence and the complementary critique of the non-proliferation regime lead us in the direction that Cynthia was eloquently suggesting as the only morally and rationally coherent position, which is abolition."**

He endorsed Lazaroff's call for a speedy ceasefire in Ukraine and added, **"Once that's done, there is an incentive to once more look around and see what can be done to reduce the nuclear danger. And I think... that we need the language of elimination and abolition."**

He also underscored Lazaroff's stress on the importance of rhetoric. Just two days before our session, Pres. Biden stated in Poland that Putin "cannot remain in power." U.S. officials tried to walk back that rhetoric, but widespread suspicion remained that Biden indeed entertained an ambition to achieve regime change in Russia.

In our session, Falk termed Biden's rhetoric "inflammatory" and added: **"He even hinted at**

**regime change as a goal. Not only does that increase nuclear risks and nuclear dangers, but it also is a guaranteed way of prolonging the war, and fighting metaphorically till the last Ukrainian in order to satisfy these geopolitical objectives... Having a leader like Putin in Moscow and a leader like Biden in Washington and their interaction to me is one of the salient dangers."**

\* \* \*

The conversation that followed ranged over a number of issues including:

- the very risky fact that there is much less communication between Washington and Moscow today than there was in the 1980s;
- the erosion of the global "security architecture" that had been built up during the pre-1990 Cold War, including through steps Washington took after 2000 to abrogate treaties like the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty and through Pres. Putin's decision in 2015 to cancel what bilateral nuclear cooperation remained;
- more on the riskiness of Pres. Biden's hawkishness;
- the consequences of the United States' failure to publicly adopt a posture of "No First Use"; and
- the importance of working to maintain people-to-people (as well as military-to-military) contacts between Americans and Russians.

What follows is a rough guide to some of what we said.

\* \* \*

At one point, I asked David Barash how we should look at the risks of nuclear-relevant miscommunication and accident. He replied: **"My immediate reaction is to say we should look at these risks with enormous fear and trembling."** He noted that his wife was a prominent member of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, a group with members in Russia, the U.S., and other countries, and said: **"IPPNW people say there is no communication of the sort that was going on during the 1980s. My understanding is there is no comparable communication going on between high-ranking US military officers and those of Russia... Certainly with regard to communication, I would have to say things are worse than they were in the 1980s."**

Later, Cynthia Lazaroff noted that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and JCS Chairman Mark Milley reportedly had tried to contact their counterparts in Moscow, but were met with no response. She noted that, **"The longer this war goes on, the risk of escalation goes on, and I think increases... I would like to hear Biden calling every day for a ceasefire. I would like to be hearing him using the words. 'We need a peace agreement. We need to end this war.' I'm not hearing that kind of language."**

Cynthia Lazaroff talked about the setbacks she has suffered recently in the efforts she has pursued since the 1970s to conduct people-to-people diplomacy with Russian counterparts. She said that one project she is involved with, to bring together young and Indigenous people from each side of the Bering Strait, had already suffered long delays because of Covid, and now might need even more postponing. But she noted that a Soviet-era (then Russian) general with whom she worked, Gen. Maslin, had told her shortly before his recent death that **"If there are young people still thinking about improving relations in the Bering Strait and coming together from our two countries, all hope is not lost."**

She commented, **"We have to really make those contacts robust again. We have to get different kinds of people collaborating... Climate scientists! We have such a potential for cooperation, and it seems so idealistic to talk about it right now, but I think the work has never been more important."**

Lazaroff talked about the importance of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by a number of (non-nuclear) nations in 2017. She described it as **"a response to the injustices of the nonproliferation regime and the way the NPT has not fulfilled what it originally said it was going to do in Article Six, which is to... achieve eventual, total and complete disarmament. And the Treaty is a demonstration of what the world can do when we come together in alignment. People said this treaty would never happen. Then they said it would never be ratified. And now it's in force and just last week, another country [joined]. So we're now at 60 countries that have ratified it!"**

She said there is, **"a growing movement in the nuclear space for divestment, from the banks that fund the nuclear weapons producers. When you do the research, you discover**

**that the biggest offender banks funding nuclear weapons are, many of them, the same ones funding fossil fuels. And we know that there's a divestment movement in the climate justice movement. So I am calling for bringing our movements together and for massive divestment... We're seeing who's profiting from this war in Ukraine. It's the arms dealers and it's the fossil fuel providers' companies. So there is a huge obvious intersection here."**

In his closing, Richard Falk said, **"The Ukraine crisis has generated the most serious danger of escalation close to or over the nuclear threshold since the Cuban missile crisis, in 1962. And it's a moment when... all citizens of conscience should awaken to the dangers, not only that Russia is causing, but that our own government is contributing to."**

At the end, I noted that Lazaroff had been taking part with us from Hawai'i, where it was still early morning and occasionally we could all hear roosters crowing in the farmland behind her. I suggested they provided **"a wake-up call for all of us!"**



## Contributors

**Dr. David Barash** is an evolutionary biologist and emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Washington in Seattle. An expert analyst of the psychology of nuclear deterrence, his books include *The Caveman and the Bomb: Human nature, evolution, and nuclear war* (1985).

**Medea Benjamin** is the co-founder of the women-led peace group CODEPINK and the human rights group Global Exchange. A prolific writer, her most recent book, *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, is part of a continuing campaign to prevent a U.S. war with Iran.

**Phyllis Bennis** is the director of the New Internationalism Project at the DC-based Institute for Policy Studies. She is a Fellow of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, a founder of the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, and serves on the national board of Jewish Voice for Peace.

**Helena Cobban**, the Executive Director of Just World Ed, has had a long career as an analyst of international affairs. For two decades she contributed regular columns to *The Christian Science Monitor*. Of her seven books, four deal with the Middle East and the rest with global issues.

**Marjorie Cohn** is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and former president of the National Lawyers Guild. Cohn authored *Cowboy Republic: Six Ways the Bush Gang Has Defied the Law* and has contributed to anthologies on the United States, torture and the impact of military drones.

**Prof. Richard Falk** is a board member of Just World Educational and a world-renowned expert on international law. He spent six years, 2008-14, as the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories.

**Bill Fletcher, Jr.**, the former president of TransAfrica Forum, is an author and veteran activist for labor rights, decolonization, and racial justice. He is a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, a widely syndicated columnist, and a regular media commentator.

**Amb. Chas W. Freeman, Jr.** is a retired American diplomat and an insightful writer on international issues. In the course of his career, he interpreted for Pres. Richard Nixon in his breakthrough 1972 visit to China, negotiated over Angola with Fidel Castro, and was ambassador to Riyadh during Operation Desert Storm.

**Dr. Lyle Goldstein** is the Director of Asia Engagement at Defense Priorities and a visiting fellow at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. For 20 years he was a research professor at the U.S. Naval War College. He is an expert on both Chinese and Russian maritime affairs.

**Dr. Mary Kaldor** is the Professor of Global Governance and Director of the Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit at the London School of Economics, and CEO of the Conflict Research Programme. Her books include *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War and International Law* and *New Wars*.

**Dr. Radha Kumar** was the founding director of the Delhi Policy Group and director of the Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia University. She sits on the board of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the Council of the United Nations University.

**Cynthia Lazaroff** is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, the founder and director of Women Transforming Our Nuclear Legacy and NuclearWakeUpCall.Earth, and serves on the boards of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and the American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord. She is the author of *Dawn of a New Armageddon*.

**Anatol Lieven** is a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. From 1985 to 1998, he worked as a journalist in South Asia, the then-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, covering the wars in Afghanistan, Chechnya and the Caucasus. His seven books include *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry* (1999).

**Ray McGovern** is a former 27-year CIA analyst on Russia who has spent more recent decades as a whistle-blower on the excesses of the U.S. intelligence agencies and the institutional bias of the Western corporate media. In 2003, he co-created Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), which exposed the falsification of intelligence by the U.S. administration.

**Vijay Prashad** is an Indian peace-and-justice activist, the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, the Chief Editor of LeftWord Books, and a senior non-resident fellow at Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China. He is the author of 30 books, including *The Darker Nations*, and *Karma of Brown Folk*. His latest book is *Washington Bullets*.

**Indi Samarajiva** is a Sri Lankan writer who's a keen observer of the grave imbalance between the Global North and Global South. You can learn more about his writings on the JWE blog or check out his website: [indi.ca](http://indi.ca)

**Dr. Marcus Stanley** is the Advocacy Director of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Prior to joining the Quincy Institute, he earlier worked for a decade at Americans for Financial Reform. He has a Ph.D. in public policy from Harvard, with a focus on economics.

**Erik Sperling** is the Executive Director of Just Foreign Policy. He earlier worked as Senior Adviser and Counsel in the offices of Congressmen Ro Khanna and John Conyers. He has a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel** is the editorial director, publisher, and former editor of *The Nation* and a columnist for *The Washington Post*. She is the author of *The Change I Believe In: Fighting for Progress in The Age of Obama*, and co-author (with Stephen F. Cohen) of *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers*.

This page intentionally blank

# Ukraine: Stop the Carnage, Build the Peace!

In March 2022, Just World Educational held eight webinars on the international crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The sessions were co-hosted by JWE President Helena Cobban and Board Member Richard Falk. In each, they conducted a broad public conversation on issues raised by the crisis with two—or in one case, three—superbly well-qualified and thoughtful guests.

The multimedia records of these conversations can be viewed at [bit.ly/JWE-UkraineCrisis](https://bit.ly/JWE-UkraineCrisis). This Report contains digests of the conversations, along with a list of Policy Recommendations that, in the judgment of the JWE Board, arose clearly from them. These Policy Recommendations are:

1. Ukraine-wide ceasefire now!
2. An embargo on arms shipments into Ukraine by all countries.
3. Start negotiations now, involving all relevant parties, for a lasting peace arrangement for Ukraine, and commit to completion within six months.
4. Monitoring and verification of the ceasefire and arms embargo to be led by the United Nations and the OSCE, or any other party acceptable to both Ukraine and Russia.
5. Immediate aid for rebuilding in Ukraine, including for agriculture, ports, residential areas, and related systems.
6. Immediate international talks on implementation of 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, under which all signatory states including the United States and Russia committed to complete nuclear disarmament, and a call for all governments to support the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
7. Leaders of NATO countries should oppose all manifestations of Russophobia.
8. The United States should give up all efforts at regime change in Russia.

The following organizations are co-sponsors of this Report, and have endorsed the above Policy Recommendations:

CODEPINK | Environmentalists Against War | World Beyond War



Just World  
EDUCATIONAL

[www.justworldeducational.org](http://www.justworldeducational.org)