Most accounts of the Ukraine crisis still ignore the extraordinary expansion of NATO in the 1990s and the 2014 coup against the elected government of Ukraine carried out with the covert support of the United States. Including this in the accounts today adds important context, not for determining “good guys and bad guys,” but for figuring out where peace forces should stand. Reflection on this context DOES NOT DENY THE IMMORAL AND INHUMANE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE.

My takeaways so far are the following:
1. Russia has fallen into a trap that will significantly and negatively impact on its economy.
2. The invasion gives fuel to the emerging anti-China Cold War rhetoric for politicians of both parties and the corporate media who suggest that Taiwan will be next, presumably after a Chinese invasion.
3. The Ukraine war is an enormous plus for military/industrial complexes in the US and in Russia as well.
4. The Ukraine story transforms the global narrative from the critical discussion of exploitation by the Global North of the Global South to the Biden narrative of “authoritarians” vs. “democracies.” For example, see the powerful presentation by V J Prashad of the essential nature of the North/South struggle. https://youtu.be/Lg9c0jv6wTA
5. The impacts of the debate on progressive forces in the US and elsewhere are potentially devastating. In the US, our discourse is shifting from a progressive agenda including President Biden’s 2021 Build Back Better program for example to stories about the relationships between Putin and former President Trump and so-called “national security.”

The Russian invasion and the incomplete and war-oriented narrative of the Ukraine crisis dominating the news from such sources as the Washington Post, the New York Times, National Public Radio, and CNN/MSNBC constitute a real setback for us. Media news is a commodity. War and portraits of American exceptionalism are profitable commodities for the increasingly concentrated corporate media.

For these reasons and more, I endorse the Code Pink demands that all parties cease fighting and negotiate all outstanding issues. The 12-point Chinese proposed peace plan is a good place to start. Russian withdrawal of its troops from Ukraine and the United States and its allies pulling back NATO forces from its presence in Eastern Europe are desirable goals. In addition, diplomatic efforts should ensue to replace NATO with an organization that can provide security for Europe and the Global South. The Code Pink frame gives appropriate recognition to both the immorality of the Russian action and the context, including NATO expansion and the events in Ukraine since 2014.

Finally, I want to reintroduce the concept of “historical memory.” These memories are important for people and they are legitimate ways to think about what needs to change. The historical memory for many Russians probably includes the 27 million of their ancestors killed during World War II largely from invading German armies crossing through Ukraine.
Will We Lose Our Right To Speak?

by Ann Batiza

There are so many current threats to our speech freedoms, it is hard to keep up. Most of these threats attempt to eliminate any voice outside of our dictated legacy media. For those who question the servility of legacy media, the New York Times recently aided the FBI in the identification of a leader and then wrote stories about the information this source revealed. As Matt Taibbi wrote, “Future sources who might have very different motives than this one will obviously hesitate to go to the press if they think they might be served up to authorities.”

Perhaps this overreach pales in comparison to the draconian Restrict Act that is gaining momentum in Congress. The Restrict Act would open the door to broad surveillance and censorship that arrogates the first amendment by invoking risks to national security. According to the Freedom of the Press Foundation, “It is well-established that the government is required to show a grave, imminent danger to national security before imposing a ‘prior restraint’ on speech. But the bill contains no such requirement.”

As Julian Assange begins his fifth year of incarceration for publishing the truth, and as Democrats have seemingly abandoned support for freedom of speech, it is more imperative than ever that these sounds the volume of a scream. Without our right to speak, all other freedoms are in danger of being extinguished.

Assange’s Father and Brother Visit Milwaukee with the Movie Ihaka

by Ann Batiza

The father and brother of Julian Assange, John and Gabriel Shipton, appeared at the Oriental Theatre on April 8 with the movie Ihaka. They graciously mingled with the almost full house both before and after the show and answered questions during the Q and A enuncied by Emilio De Torre, executive director of the Milwaukee Turners.

Thank you to all the members of Peace Action of Wisconsin, Assange Defense MKE, Veterans for Peace and the National Lawyers Guild (Milwaukee Chapters,) and the Milwaukee Turners, who helped to promote the event by posting flyers, handing out leaflets, sending emails, and in the case of Chris Borg – busking with his guitar and amp connected to his car battery (with some help acoustically from James Oldenburg.)

The movie describes the efforts of Julian’s father, John, and other members of his family, including Julian’s wife Stella (with glimpses of his two small children), as they seek justice for Julian across Europe and the UK.

The Q and A, filmed by Tom Rodman and Jess Devitt, elicited thoughtful audience questions and often lyrical answers from Julian’s father. Many of these queries and responses, with links to the appropriate timestamp in the video, are captured in this thread of 19 tweets. You can access that thread by copying this URL into your browser.

https://twitter.com/AnnBatiza/status/1646502083203445405

Award-winning photojournalist, Lee Matz of the Milwaukee Independent, captured much of the Q and A while documenting the evening in pictures.

Peace Action of Wisconsin Rally for International Women’s Day

by Chris Breihan

Close to one hundred hardy souls braved the blustery weather on Saturday, March 11th to march and rally for International Women’s Day. Stepping off from Dorento, Hamilton Park, the activists convened inside the Village Church where literature tables, warm-up snacks, and an array of speakers awaited them.

Calling for “Hands off our hands, our bodies, and our healthcare for everyone,” the Milwaukee International Women’s Day Coalition had invited Peace Action members to take part. Pam Richard handed out our brochures and flyers from our literature table, and Chris Breihan spoke about the enormity of the US military budget (greater than that of the nine biggest spenders added together) contrasted with the demands for healthcare, childcare, and family leave that we are told are too expensive.

The Wisconsin Coalition for Normalized Relations with Cuba, part of the Peace Action coalition, also had a table and a speaker. Lex Nutile spoke about Cuba’s new, groundbreaking inclusively family-focused Code and the democratic process that had led to its development and adoption—and acceptance, among the Cuban people. In this time of almost daily attacks on the rights of women and the LGBTQ+ community in this country, it was important to come together for International Women’s Day and reaffirm our vision for a just society, and a peaceful world.

Contact the White House and Congress

To reach your representative and senators: Call the Congressional Switchboard at 202-224-3121. Access www.congress.gov/members

How to Call the White House

The Biden White House has very limited phone line hours. Call 1-202-456-1111 to be connected to the White House public comment line. Please note, you must call between the hours of 10am - 2pm CT, Tuesdays - Thursdays while the phone line is open.

Send letters to First St SE, Washington, DC 20004

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Steering Committee: Chair Tom Seery, Treasurer Chris Breihan, Secretary Bruce Ware, Harry Targ, Ann Batiza, Luka Kukor Shea, Bruce Brown, Babette Grunow

Mail Crew: Marsha Vila, Julie Emsloy, Mary Laan, Babette Grunow, Sue Cottrell, David Lindberg, Tom Neibler, Trish Beausang, Joyce Ellwanger, Barbara Markoff, Roger Dineen

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Movers to our new office: Brian Bunzel, Mike Trokan, Ken Gass, Babette Grunow, Liz Richardson, and Paul Host, Marsha Vila, Laura Kukor Shea, Chris Breihan, Trish Beausang, Elder Carpenter.

Samir Moukaddam for keeping the Peace Center on Keefe Ave going over the past 5 years.

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The Mobilizer Committee:
Ann Batiza, Christy Breihan, Jim Carpenter, Babette Grunow, Pam Richard, and Harry Targ

Peace Action of Wisconsin
Phone: 414-269-9525
Email: info@peaceactionwi.org
Website: peaceactionwi.org
Facebook: facebook.com/peaceactionwi


May 6, Layton/Howell
May 13, Wisconsin/Prospect (by orange sunburst)
May 20, 92nd/Burleigh
May 27, Lincoln Memorial/Lafayette Hill

June 3: King/Locust
June 10: 16th/Greenfield
June 17: 35th/Fond du Lac/Burleigh
June 24: Farewell/North

Tell Biden to stop following Trump on Cuba by Art Heitzer

Cuba is cash-strapped, very short on fuel, food, and even medicine. The Biden administration appears to be more interested in seeking advantage from the extreme hardship of our neighbors, than acting in a reasonable or rational way.

The main rationales for this listing early in 2021 was that Cuba had granted asylum to several U.S. figures such as Assata Shakur some 40 years ago, and also that it had allowed Colombian rebels to remain in Cuba as part of internationally sponsored ongoing peace negotiations with the Colombian government. But last October Colombia’s elected president Gustavo Petro declared in front of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that this continued US listing of Cuba “is an injustice … that does need to be corrected.”

Rather than defend its position, Blinken other Biden administration spokespeople have said repeatedly in the last two years that they are “studying” this issue.

While and the president could and should use his unilateral authority to remove this listing, other efforts, including ongoing peace negotiations with the Colombian government. But last October Colombia’s elected president Gustavo Petro declared in front of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that this continued US listing of Cuba “is an injustice … that does need to be corrected.”

Further, solely because of this designation, citizens of 40 countries including all of Western Europe are now barred from eligibility for normal expedited permission to visit the US — if they’ve visited Cuba — risking their ability to enter the US at all, and at a minimum delaying any planned trips by many months and costing hundreds of dollars to seek a US visa.

For more information visit ACERE.org and please use this easy tool kit to send a message to both the White House and your representatives in Congress to take Cuba off this list: acere.org/acere-advocacy-toolkit/

Peace Action has just been informed that our former Treasurer and Steering Committee Member, Bruce Andrews, tragically died in a house fire on October 14, 2022.

He is remembered for his dedication and selflessness as a willing volunteer for peace and justice.
A contradiction that still needs an explanation is this: while the US has continued to engage in war after war, for the most part the American people oppose war and intervention. This is particularly so in the twenty-first century when so much pain and suffering has been caused by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The answer can be found in a variety of explanations of United States imperialism including what Mike Lofgren has called the “deep state.” Lofgren defined the “deep state” as, “... a hybrid (or competitive) system of government and parts of top-level finance and industry that is effectively able to govern the United States without reference to the consent of the governed as expressed through the formal political process.”

The power to make critical decisions resides not in the superstructure of the political process - the place where competitive games are played for all to see - but in powerful institutions embedded in society that can make decisions without requiring popular approval. In the end these institutions have involved the United States in death and destruction across the globe.

There is a split in the American left concerning the war in Ukraine. The one thing we in the peace movement should all agree upon is the need to stop the bloodshed and the terrible loss of lives in Ukraine. The question is how best to accomplish this. There are many who are opposed to the murderous war and the illegal Russian invasion but see it in the historical context of the threat of NATO expansion right up to the borders of Russia. Although they strongly disagree with Russia’s decision to invade, they do not support endless transfer of weapons to feed the conflict, but hope to move quickly to a negotiated settlement. They are also appalled that the US and UK administrations directed Ukrainian President Zelensky NOT to negotiate with Putin before the war began. A violent conflict with Russia was seen as an opportunity to weaken Russia and hopefully remove Putin from power. This was stated clearly by top US military officials to Congress and by former Secretary of Defense Austin. On the other hand, there are those on the left who see the obligation of the US and NATO countries to support the Ukrainian resistance to the illegal Russian invasion by providing weapons, intelligence and financial support, even at the risk of escalating the war to dangerous levels with two nuclear powers going nose to nose.

Is there not a third way that we all can support? What if we put aside arguments about the historical background that led up to the Russian invasion? What if we just look at how we can stop the bleeding as soon as possible? We are all opposed to war. We all want this conflict to end and save the lives of Ukrainians. We all want to prevent an expansion of the war into other European countries. No one in the US wants the disruption that would see this evolve into a nuclear conflict and a possible WWIII.

Can we all agree that most wars end through negotiated ceasefire and peace agreements? In this case the question seems to be: When is the best time to negotiate? And does the Biden administration have the moral right to discourage Ukraine from negotiating in order to weaken Russia, thus prolonging the war and increasing the number of Ukrainian victims?

There are many of us see this conflict as a proxy war between US/NATO and Russia played out on the backs of the Ukrainian people. This does not negate the fact that Russia started this war with an illegal invasion. But it does explain why both Biden and Boris Johnson of the UK discouraged Zelensky from negotiating when the opportunity arose early on and why negotiations are not a top priority now.

Is it possible for the peace movement on the left to compromise and have a united voice?

• Can we all agree that a negotiated ceasefire and a just end to the conflict is desirable?
• Can we all call for Russian forces to be removed from Ukraine?
• Can we all support defensive weapons for Ukraine that deter the Russian aggression and protect against Russian missiles but do not escalate the conflict and increase the threat of nuclear weapons? Can we agree that the influx of weapons on both sides should end during a ceasefire?
• Can we all support humanitarian aid to Ukraine? Can we support both Russian and Ukrainian dissidents who refuse to participate in war as conscientious objectors?
• Can the possibility be considered for Ukraine to give up some of the disputed territory (Crimea, some or all of the Donbas region) in exchange for withdrawal of Russian troops and an end to the war? Is this an acceptable trade-off to prevent a nuclear war?
• Can we agree that the negotiated settlement is up to the Ukrainians and Russians but that the US/NATO encouragement for negotiations and a peaceful outcome is an essential part of the process?
• It isn’t just Ukraine’s decision. The war is being funded and supplied by the US and its NATO allies. We want to be able to debate the current policy. Escalating the weaponization of Ukraine has consequences that can impact the whole world, and even lead to war. Nuclear war leaders from around the planet are calling for negotiations and a ceasefire now.

These are questions upon which to build a rational discussion. This should happen as soon as possible. The longer this war grinds on, the more precious lives it chews up and spits out. Enough is enough.

Stop the Bleeding by Julie Byrnes Enslow

The event was preceded by two excellent interviews, both of which can still be accessed online. One was Chuck Peterson’s on WUMW Radio’s “Lake Effect” and the other was Gary Grass and Babette Grunow’s on Riverwest Radio’s “Grass is Greener.”

Julian remains in the UK’s maximum security prison with murderers and rapists as his lawyers continue to wait for a response from the High Commission as to whether he will hear Julian’s latest and last appeal. This is the start of his 5th year of imprisonment for publishing the truth.

Notably, Milwaukee’s Rep Gwen Moore did not sign onto Rashida Tlaib’s “dear colleague” letter requesting Assange’s freedom. Please call her DC office at 202-224-3121 to request that she do so. For all our sakes, it is time that this award-winning journalist was set free.