

Enough is Enough: USA Must Listen to Its Own Rational and Caring Experts on War and Peace

Documenting Over 100 Voices for Peace in the Midst of More Frequent Roars of Aggression

By [Bharat Dogra](#)

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"The truth of the matter is that we are in a heavy militarized society driven by greed, lust for profit and wars are being created just to fuel that."

Words of truth such as these which are discomfiting need to be heard precisely because the present day extremely high costs (in terms of human lives) and high risks (in terms of possibility of sudden and steep escalation) of huge disruptions created by US security and foreign policy should be questioned and questioned repeatedly.

These words are from Dennis Kucinich, a former Presidential candidate who was also elected eight times to the House of Representatives.

He has been involved in many acts of great courage in his long and eventful political career, acts which others would not dare to touch, ranging from opposing the Iraq invasion with solid research-based facts and even stronger passion, even trying to impeach President Bush and Vice President Cheney, to repeatedly investigating/opposing Pentagon budgets and irregularities.

The quote from him with which this article started is taken from his recent conversation with eminent journalist Chris Hedges in a program at The Real News Network titled 'Democrats and the War Machine' (mid-December 2022).

This program raised an important issue—while several important leaders of the Democratic Party including J. William Fulbright, George McGovern, Gene McCarthy, Mike Gravel and of course Dennis Kucinich used to take anti-war positions earlier and counter the arms industry lobby, the scope for this has reduced considerably so that both the leading political parties

are increasingly similar in being supportive of war efforts and the powerful arms industry. This is deeply worrying for peace efforts.



Asked how this happened, Kucinich replied that this tendency started about three or four decades back with the Democratic Party also becoming more dependent on corporate funding.

It is important to note that in the understanding of someone who has seen the inner workings of the political system, the impact of corporate funding, in this particular context the funding by the powerful arms industry but in other contexts also by the oil industry, the medical industry etc., can be so serious as to change in basic ways the policy and internal democracy of a leading political party. In fact the enormously constructive political career of Kucinich was itself disrupted by sources within the Democratic Party. Further, Kucinich has pointed out that widespread financial irregularities are a part of the war-mongering. He has stated that while he was working on a government oversight committee, an inspector general testified that there are over one trillion dollar worth of accounts in the Pentagon that could not be reconciled and they have over 1100 accounting systems, probably deliberately to use for obfuscation.

Kucinich has stated that when he was in Congress, he tried to introduce legislation to forbid the USA to go into any war that NATO was operating because he felt that this was a subversion of the constitutional provision in Article 1 Section 8, which is that Congress of the US has the power to take the country from a condition of peace to war.

Kucinich was extremely critical of the way the USA has influenced the course of events in Ukraine starting with the coup there in 2014, the imposed distressing policy of hostility against the Russian speaking people of Eastern Ukraine resulting in the tragic loss of 14,000 lives among them. In his words,

“Suddenly Ukraine becomes a bloodbath for a chessboard where innocent people are just being used as pawns in a game of nations.”

Kucinich says that with NATO becoming “a cat’s paw for war”, people in many NATO member states are going to start asking –who in NATO making decisions for me?

Similarly people in their capacity as EU member countries are going to increasingly ask why very high energy costs are being imposed on them when this can be avoided easily? Hence both NATO and EU face a very uncertain future due to increasing opposition of people of member states, relating to highly distressing mishandling of Ukraine policy. Regarding the existing situation Kucinich says with great feeling, as someone who has represented the Ukrainian people in his constituency as well,

"I resent this on behalf of every decent person in Ukraine who is trying to keep his family together in Ukraine and who doesn't want to be dominated by anybody—US, Russia, anybody."

Regarding the role of media in all this, Kucinich is supportive of those who have referred to media as the spear-carriers of the government. At crucial times the drumbeat of the media has been 'war, war, war' echoing the war cry emanating from the White House.

What is most important is to heed this warning of Kucinich regarding the drift towards the possibility of a third World War:

"Our country—I love this country—is being done a disservice by people in power who have made book with interest groups who are going forward just to cash in on war. And I think it is horrific. And in this case we are playing with the flash of World War III...I am also concerned things could spin out of control, even now with respect to Russia, with respect to China, North Korea."

Kucinich quotes President Kennedy who said that we should learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or else we will perish as fools. Then he says,

"If there ever was a country that was in need of a process of truth and reconciliation, it is America. We really need to have people come forward and admit they were wrong, whatever their motives, so that we can heal this country."

Gerry Condon, former President of Veterans of Peace, a USA-based global organization of Military Veterans and allies with 140 chapters worldwide whose collective efforts are to build a culture for peace and end all wars, wrote a letter to President Biden in late 2022 which needs to be widely read by all those who are devoted to peace and deeply worried about the prolonged Ukraine war.

A very important feature of this letter is that it has been by a veteran who understands war and peace, who has followed US strategic thinking and actions for a long time and so is able to have a very good understanding of the wider context in which the recent Ukraine events should be seen.

Condon writes,

"I am writing you as a proud member of Veterans For Peace and its former president. We have been following the war in Ukraine closely, since well before the Russian invasion on February 24 of this year. We were alarmed when you and President Obama supported the regime-change coup in Ukraine in 2014, which was openly cheered on by the State Department's Victoria Nuland, and spearheaded by self-described Nazis.

"We watched in horror as those same self-described Nazis set fire to an Odessa union building full of Ukrainians who were protesting a new law outlawing the Russian language as an official language of Ukraine. 50 people were burned alive or shot and beaten to death. This in a country with a long history with Russia and millions of Russian speakers."

It is important for more people to know this background as these aspects have been brushed aside by US media generally and only Russian aggression has been highlighted.

Condon continues his letter,

“Appalled at the aforementioned atrocities, the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass in Eastern Ukraine declared their independence from Ukraine, and were soon attacked by Nazi militias. These self-described Nazi militias were then incorporated into the Ukrainian army, and the attacks continued. By the time that Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 of this year (2022), 14,000 Ukrainians had already been killed in that terrible civil war.”

“Russian president Putin repeatedly warned and almost begged the US and NATO: Do not push your hostile military forces any further onto Russia’s borders. Taking Ukraine into NATO would cross a serious ‘red line’. Russian troops then massed along the border with Ukraine, in a clear show of force.”

This is the real sequence of events which has not been told to most of US people and to most of the world as well. For the sake of brevity, Condon has not gone into some important pre-2014 events, which would have further confirmed his analysis and made his case stronger.

After having briefly provided this background, Condon comes to the real point of writing this letter to President Biden. He writes,

“Mr. President, you might have stopped this war from happening merely by announcing that Ukraine would not become part of NATO and that you would end the militarization of Ukraine. You could have accepted President Putin’s offer to negotiate a new security arrangement in Europe. We looked on in disbelief as you rather cavalierly brushed aside Russia’s legitimate concerns. It looked like you were saying, ‘Bring it on’! Well, Russia brought it on. We were horrified by the Russian invasion as well as by your response. You armed Ukraine to the teeth and fanned the flames of war.”

So this is what has actually happened. It is the highly provocative actions of the USA which caused the invasion. The USA could also have stopped the invasion at a very late stage but it chose not to.

What has been the result? Condon writes,

“Ukraine (and the Black market in Europe) is now awash with high-tech US weaponry. A full-on war has killed many thousands of civilians, made millions homeless, and destabilized much of the world. We are now facing economic disasters and fearing the all-too-real possibility of nuclear war.”

So clearly very big mistakes have been made. The question is—will these mistakes continue, leading to even more harm, or will the USA government take action to reverse its mistaken policies and take real steps in the direction of peace, which in turn can pave the way for Russia to end its invasion? Condon is very clear that he and other Veterans of Peace want the USA to correct its mistaken policies.

He writes,

“As veterans who have experienced the carnage of war, we are concerned about the young soldiers on both sides who are being killed and injured in the tens of thousands. We know all too well that the survivors will be traumatized and scarred for life. These

are additional reasons why the Ukraine war must end now.

“We ask you to listen to veterans who say “Enough is Enough – War is Not the Answer.” We want urgent, good faith diplomacy to end the war in Ukraine, not more US weapons, advisors, and endless war. And certainly not a nuclear war.”

Emphasizing how serious the situation is and how much is at stake this senior veteran for peace writes to President Biden,

“Show us a Profile of Courage and save the world from World War III, a war that could literally destroy human civilization as we know it. You must distance yourself from the neo-cons and weapons manufacturers who are giving you terrible advice. You must reverse course now. Drop the weapons and embrace diplomacy. For the sake of Ukraine. For the sake of Russia, Europe and the United States. For the sake of the all the people of the world. Negotiate, Don’t Escalate!”

This letter is extremely important, as it has been written by a veteran of armed forces who has fought for his country, whose commitment to his own country cannot be doubted and who at the same time, having seen the horrors of war, has a very deep commitment to peace. This also has the great virtue of being completely honest and telling the truth in very simple words. This letter should be widely read and circulated both to understand the Ukraine crisis from a perspective of peace and to find the path ahead, again from a perspective of peace

In recent debates over the Ukraine crisis, one aspect which should have received more attention is that many senior US and western experts, including those who have held senior official positions, have also been very critical of the USA’s uncalled for hostile policies towards Russia and more particularly of the eastward expansion of NATO close to Russia. The voices of these senior US experts need to be known more widely. Branko Marcetic has done well to fill in this gap by citing several of these senior US experts and their arguments in his recent essay titled ‘The Orwellian Attack on Critics of NATO Policy Must Stop’ (Jacobin, March 7 2022). The review here is based substantially on this essay.

Jack Matlock served as US ambassador to the Soviet Union under Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush after a decades-long career as one of the top Soviet experts in the US Foreign Service. He wrote recently

“there would have been no basis for the present crisis if there had been no expansion of the alliance following the end of the Cold War,” and that “the policies pursued by Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden have all contributed to bringing us to this point.” Matlock had called for a diplomatic solution (before the invasion started) to prevent war saying that “what Putin is demanding is eminently reasonable.”

A senior expert Prof John Mearsheimer told the New Yorker he believed “all the trouble in this case really started in April 2008,” when Bush made his infamous announcement on Ukraine and Georgia, despite Moscow making it clear that “they viewed this as an existential threat, and they drew a line in the sand.” Mearsheimer dismissed the idea Putin is bent on conquering a broader swath of Europe to restore the Russian Empire or Soviet Union as an argument “invented” by “the foreign-policy establishment in the United States, and in the West more generally.”

International relations professor Rajan Menon and former George W. Bush national security staffer Thomas Graham urged US officials in Politico in January to stave off war by “accommodating some of Russia’s principal security concerns,” and formalizing “a declared moratorium on the accession of Ukraine, or any other former Soviet state” into NATO for about 25 years.

Katrina vanden Heuvel wrote “NATO now largely exists to manage the risks created by its existence”. Eminent academic Prof Jeffrey Sachs gave repeated warnings of the grave harm likely to be caused by very aggressive policy on Ukraine. Kings College Ukraine expert Anatol Lieven, has repeatedly called for solutions like a neutral Ukraine and a moratorium on its entry into the NATO, first to prevent war and now to end it.



George Kennan, widely regarded as the father of the Cold War containment policy, warned as early as 1997 that expanding NATO eastward would “inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion,” “have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy,” and “impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.” 18 former diplomats said the present policy risked “significantly exacerbating the instability that now exists in the zone that lies between Germany and Russia, and convincing most Russians that the United States and the West are attempting to isolate, encircle, and subordinate them.”

As many as 50 prominent foreign-policy experts, including retired military officers, diplomats, and former senators, signed a letter calling NATO expansion “a policy error of historic proportions” that was “opposed across the entire political spectrum,” and would “strengthen the non-democratic opposition, undercut those who favour reform and cooperation with the West, [and] bring the Russians to question the entire post-Cold War settlement.”

Even Biden’s CIA director, William Burns, wrote from Moscow as a senior diplomat in 1995 that

“hostility to early NATO expansion is almost universally felt across the domestic political spectrum here,” and that the move was “premature at best, and needlessly provocative at worst.” 13 years later, in 2008, Burns informed the Bush administration that “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin),” and that “in more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian

players,” he had “yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.” As late as 2020, Burns wrote of how “Russians stewed in their grievance and sense of disadvantage” and how “a gathering storm of ‘stab in the back’ theories slowly swirled.”

Thus it is clear from even a quick review that some of the topmost US experts have also been very supportive of ideas built around a more friendly policy towards Russia, accommodating its legitimate security interests and avoiding provocative actions including eastward expansion of NATO. Why was such sane advice rejected in favour of needlessly provocative, hostile and aggressive policies towards Russia, against the advice of the topmost experts and even serving intelligence officials? This is a question that needs to be explored further to find out the real movers of US foreign policy and their real motives.

If so many top US experts have been warning against NATO expansion eastward and close to Russia and indicating that this will lead to war, and as it was clear that the USA will not get involved directly in the conflict, does not the USA policy amount to unjustly exposing Ukraine to more threats and danger from Russia, exactly what has happened now? Clearly in the interests of world peace it is important not just to stop the war and violence immediately but in addition it is also important for the USA to end uncalled for hostility and aggression towards Russia as well its provocation of expanding NATO close to Russian borders.

In the middle of the rapid building up of a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, several important voices have spoken for de-escalation and peace. As reviewing all such voices of peace would be difficult here, we are here confining ourselves only to the voices of peace first heard in very early days of the Gaza conflict in the USA. In the USA as many as 50 democrat legislators wrote to Present Biden that the mass evacuation in Gaza and other related actions should not result in serious violation of international humanitarian law. This communication, apart from making a strong statement on its own, also reminded the President and the Secretary of State of the USA that both the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the UN High Commission on Human Rights had said that imposing a complete siege on Gaza and depriving 2.3 million Palestinian civilians who have nowhere else to go—half of whom are children—of food, water and electricity would be a violation of international humanitarian law. The legislators stated that these people should not be deprived of basic necessities like food, water, fuel and electricity.

Jewish Voice for Peace, a US based human rights organization, released an important statement on October 11 2023, giving a call for ending the air strikes in Gaza. This statement further said,

“The US must work to immediately de-escalate to prevent the further loss of life, and not fuel and exacerbate the violence by sending more weapons to Israel. That is the only way to end violence: to address its root cause, 75 years of Israeli military occupation and apartheid. We must end US complicity in this systemic oppression.”

Human Rights Watch, USA, warned on October 12 against the use of very dangerous weapons, after its investigations revealed that white phosphorus had already been used by Israel in border area rural settlements of Lebanon and in densely inhabited parts of Gaza. As this organization has explained, “upon contact, white phosphorus can burn people thermally and chemically, down to the bone as it is highly soluble in fat and therefore in human flesh.’ These burns can result in multi-organ failure and in death.

Prominent US legislator Bernie Sanders said on October 11 that Israel's total siege of Gaza is a breach of international law and called upon the US government to mobilize the support of the global community to de-escalate violence.

More recently some of the top foreign policy experts of the USA such as Prof John Mearsheimer have repeatedly used strong words to critique the USA policy in Ukraine as well as Gaza, and have in particular expressed shock at the loss of life in Gaza, including the death of a very large number of children, and the responsibility of the USA policy makers in not stopping this loss of life.

So what is clear is that saner voices speaking on the basis of facts and evidence to plead urgently for policies of peace and non-aggression have been certainly present in recent times. These include very respectable names but despite this, these have been persistently side-lined, neglected, overruled while policies of aggression have become more and more the norm for the US foreign policy establishment. This is extremely unfortunate and dangerous for the USA, its allies as well as perceived enemies and also for the entire world. The peace movement in the USA and the entire world should strongly oppose these policies of aggression so that these can be soon given up in favour of the alternative policies of non-aggression, compromise and peace that have been advocated by so many rational, respected, well-meaning experts such as those quoted here.

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Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save the Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, Man over Machine, Protecting Earth for Children and A Day in 2071. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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