



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

April 2022

New CAAT report

"Missing in action: UK arms export controls during war and armed conflict" by Prof. Anna Stavrianakis of the University of Sussex, has just been launched

Despite the UK's commitment to a 'rigorous and robust' arms export control regime the outbreak of war or conflict has had little or no restraining effect on UK arms exports. Even where violations of human rights and humanitarian law are documented, UK arms export controls have not restricted transfers in any meaningful way.

As Paul Rogers said in his talk (see right), "It's a great time to be an armoureder"!

Read the report at:

<https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/2022/03/15/uk-arms-export-controls-during-armed-conflict/>

In this edition:

John Gittings: first principles first - p2

Our last meeting: Virginia Moffat on Peace Activism in a Time of War p3

A letter from Perm pp3-4

Progress on Eliminating Nuclear Weapons cannot come soon enough! pp4-5

Links to articles and reports in current Peace News p5

Next meeting: Tuesday, 19th April 2022, at 8pm, online

Paul Rogers on the Ukraine Crisis & discussion

Paul Rogers, emeritus professor of peace studies at Bradford University, gave a talk on the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on March 9th. The talk was sober in tone and sobering to see and hear, and much the more effective for its calmness. It was hosted by Peace News and runs for 35 minutes. We plan to screen it to members, but if there are major developments between the date of publication of this newsletter and April 19, we may limit ourselves to selected elements of Paul's talk to make time for a longer discussion.

In the discussion, we would like to not only focus on Paul's talk, but also on some key issues in former Guardian correspondent John Gittings' article in the current edition of the Oxford CND newsletter, which we are reprinting on page 2. It seems to us to complement Paul's talk very helpfully and we urge you to read it before the meeting, if you have time. (Many thanks to John and Nigel at CND for authorising this).

What comes up in our discussion is up to the members present, of course. But we think the points raised by John towards the end of his piece should be a major part of it; and also the question: Have nuclear weapons really 'kept the peace' over the last 75 years'?

Incidentally, John's recent blogpost 'Can Beijing stop the war? Calling out the Chinese contradiction' makes very interesting reading, looking at the difficulties for the regime that the invasion has created and suggesting the subtle signs to look out for that might indicate Beijing wants Putin to call it a day.

<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/china-institute/2022/03/08/can-beijing-stop-the-war-calling-out-the-chinese-contradiction/>

This meeting will be a zoom call. To join us either use the link below or look out for a message with the link on April 19th. If you don't receive it and would like to take part, simply email us (abingdonpeace@gmail.com).

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101>

pwd=RmxHLzBQaXIHjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09 Meeting ID: 913 1513
Passcode:015836

First principles first

In our shock and despair at the tragedy of Ukraine, the principled position adopted by Noam Chomsky gives us the right starting point. The Russian invasion, he says (in his Truthout interview available online*), is “a major war crime”, comparable to the Iraq war and the 1939 double invasion of Poland. And before analyzing the folly of NATO expansion, he emphasises this: “It always makes sense to seek explanations, but there is no justification, no extenuation [for the invasion]” (my italics)

Russia’s aggression is the clearest possible breach of the UN Charter. This is set out fully in the UN General Assembly resolution of 3 March, supported by a large majority – 141 nation-states against five, with 35 abstentions, or 77 percent of those taking part, and worth reading in full. Among many prohibitions, it cites the 1974 UN definition of aggression as “the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State”. This fits Ukraine entirely.

So, first principles first. The left and peace community has a particular obligation to be clear about this illegality, before we present an analysis that does not chime with the dominant view. The temptation to engage in relativism or “what-aboutism” has to be avoided. One breach of international law can never justify another. Otherwise we will end up with China, refusing to use the word “aggression” because “the situation has a complex historical background”.

That background does of course include very prominently the malign consequence of NATO expansion. This was a grievous historical error, as pointed out long ago by the veteran US diplomat George Kennan (architect of the cold war theory of containment) and many others. It is part of a much wider failure of imagination when the cold war ended: in spite of the rhetoric about new thinking and a new start, little changed. Nuclear disarmament was only tinkered with at the edges; the Middle East crisis was never solved, and ideas for a new European “architecture” were never carried through.

The problem was, and still is, that military-political elites will always default to the zero-sum security mindset that they have held for decades. It is easier and from a career point of view safer, and those arguing for radical change will be regarded as outriders. We should be clear that this applies as much on the Russian as on the American side. The obliteration of Grozny and Russian support for Assad had nothing to do with NATO expansion – and we now fear a repeat of the horror of Aleppo. The ideology of Russian imperialism now being openly expressed by Putin is as threatening to the world as the doctrine of American supremacy.

Three lessons, I suggest, stand out from the current crisis.

1. The phenomenon of neo-authoritarian rule is a new global feature, though with echoes from the past, and should be opposed wherever it appears. We must not allow dislike for the limitations and hypocrisies of “liberal” democracy to lead to down-playing the benefits of “democracy” tout court.
2. Unless this crisis leads to an actual nuclear conflict, it will result in more support for the claim that “we need them to deter a madman”, not less. This presents a dilemma for the peace movement. Just when events justify our case more emphatically, they will encourage pro-nuclear entrenchment. While highlighting the existential danger, we need to focus in more detail on areas of potential common ground – such as the JCPOA with Iran, no-first-use commitments and nuclear-free zones. And we should be louder in our support for the UN (Reaching Critical Will has set the example).
3. The Ukraine crisis also makes the case for a different approach to European security more difficult. Russia’s neighbours, understandably, are more likely to want the protection of NATO than before, and schemes for neutrality will be scorned by Ukrainians who are being hit by missiles. We not only have to imagine a new world order, based on principles of peace, equality, and justice, but we have to find a new range of arguments with which to advocate it. That is the challenge and it may be our last chance.

(John Gittings)

- <https://truthout.org/articles/noam-chomsky-us-military-escalation-against-russia-would-have-no-victors/>

Our last meeting: Virginia Moffat on Peace Activism in a Time of War

At our March meeting Virginia spoke of the roles peace campaigners can play before, during and after a war. She is the author of *Echo Hall*, which follows two families, one military, the other pacifist, through the generations experiencing the three wars she focusses on.

Virginia's first comment was that it felt just too easy to be a pacifist at the present time. In the face of the heroic (but far from pacifist) response of the Ukrainians to the Russian military invasion, how can one advocate a non-violent response? There are certainly well-documented historical incidents of brave and effective n-v resistance, for example to the occupying Nazi forces in Denmark during WW2, but do we feel able to say, from our position of relative safety, this is the what Ukrainians should now be undertaking? Would we be strong enough to practise what we preached?

But all that said, Virginia pointed out that there is a history of principled and often brave active resistance to war and militarism in our country and she outlined its inspiring history, beginning with Emily Hobhouse actions during the second Boer War, continuing with the WW1 anti-conscription movements, through the founding of the Peace Pledge Union in the 1930s and the resistance to nuclear weapons and Middle East militarism, to name but a few campaigning areas that continue to this day.

Listen to Virginia on our You Tube channel here: <https://youtu.be/XZdqJc1myKE> (Mike Bloom)

A letter from Perm

Sergei Ponomarev is a political analyst and a citizen of the city of Perm, twinned with Oxford, which he visited in 2014. We are assured he wishes this incisive and moving letter to be publicised and his name given.

Perm, Russia, 26/02/2022

My dear international friends,

All those I have met and worked with in Switzerland, UK, USA, Germany, France, Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, as well as my friends from Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and other countries.

48 hours ago the world changed. Russia has started a war with Ukraine. There is no justification for it and there can be no justification for it! This is a humanitarian disaster! I and the vast majority of my friends, colleagues and acquaintances do not support this war. The bloodshed must stop! We need peace!

I have lost several friends and acquaintances over the past few months because of COVID-19, now I have the feeling that I am losing my country and its future. This war is a cruel, senseless and criminal gamble. And I am well aware that Russia has already lost it and that the consequences will be dire and last for years. I, my family, my fellow citizens, will pay a heavy price.

All these two days, I can't think of anything else, trying to make any sense out of what is happening. Yes, the political and international situation has been difficult. Since 2014, when the DNR and LNR emerged with Russia's active help, it has been a constant point of tension. The second factor is Ukraine's increasing orientation towards Europe and the US, which has proved unacceptable to President Putin, who continues to perceive it as a breakaway piece of the Soviet Union, whose collapse he considers the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. Ukraine's withdrawal from Russia's sphere of political influence is unpleasant in itself, but it poses even greater strategic threats on the level of Russia-NATO relations on the European continent. The whole conflict resembles a Russian Matryoshka doll, which has several sprawling levels: LNR and DNR - Ukraine and Russia - Russia and NATO. All these issues have different agendas and must be resolved at different negotiating tables. Putin has decided to eliminate them with one blow. This is often the case in Russia, the more complex and confusing the problem, the more primitive the solution. Recognize the LNR and DNR, bring Ukraine back under Russian control and have the European security architecture revised. European politicians, it seems to me, have failed to appreciate this scale, and have focused on the problems at the Russian-Ukrainian border, whereas the battlefield for Putin has long stretched much further.

Does he want to take over Europe? I think not. But he is willing to wage such a fight for the Russian world that no stone will be left unturned. As strange as it may seem to write under the circumstances, Putin genuinely loves Russia. In his perceptions, he is protecting it from a future imminent threat from the West. The problem is that these perceptions are built on Cold War stereotypes, his own understanding of history, his service to the Soviet KGB, his detachment from the country's internal problems, his phobias and fears.

Because of this preoccupation with the future, real people on both sides are dying today. The worst thing is that the data on the deaths of Russian soldiers are classified. We do not know how many young guys will die these days for the sake of another "bright future". The lightning offensive did not work; the operation to demilitarise military facilities turned into protracted fighting in the cities, which inevitably increases the number of casualties, with the prospect of becoming a second Afghanistan for Russia. According to reports on social media (I understand that they cannot be fully trusted), we may already be talking about thousands of dead Russian soldiers. For Russia, which has just lost over a million people to COVID-19, this is a new national tragedy.

Anyone who survives will be impoverished. On the first day, the war caused the rouble to plummet, the Moscow Stock Exchange cancelled trading, and the capitalization of major Russian companies collapsed by 6.6 trillion roubles. This is the record collapse since 2008. A number of Western countries, including the UK and the US, have announced serious new sanctions against Russia. Inflation in 2022 is forecast at 10-15%. Yes, Russia has accumulated large reserves in the Sovereign Wealth Fund, but even these will not last long in the face of international isolation and a ban on equipment and technology supplies. Many industries will shut down and hundreds of thousands of people will lose their job.

In the international arena, Russia is becoming a pariah. The question of expelling Russian athletes from world sport has already been raised. Musicians' concerts are being cancelled. Humanitarian, cultural and educational ties are being severed. Even air links with Europe are already in question. All relations that have been built up over many years are being suspended and severed. The main task of any politician is to increase the number of friends. In this case we have a complete failure of international politics. Not a single country supported Putin's operation. Even President Lukashenko, who is totally dependent on Moscow, distanced himself. In this isolation, all social institutions, which were already not in the best shape, will start to degrade quickly, and the number of local conflicts and problems will increase.

Most importantly, the political regime's main backbone - "Russia, the country that defeated fascism" - would be destroyed. Pride of victory in 1945, the annual parades on May 9, all this will collapse and we will experience an unprecedented humiliation both before the memory of our ancestors and before the future of our children.

This madness must be stopped as soon as possible. No more war!

I just want you to know that most Russians don't want this war. We love our children and want a peaceful sky for them so that they live in friendship with all people around the world! Peace!

With respect, Sergei Ponomarev

Progress on Eliminating Nuclear Weapons cannot come soon enough!

We are delighted to report that June will see the first meeting of the States Party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into force on 22 January 2021. In Vienna, the global nuclear disarmament movement will gather for a full week of events which will include an ICAN Conference for civil society (18-19 June); an International governmental Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (20 June) and the First Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW (21-23 June). Details will be on [ICAN - International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons \(icanw.org\)](https://www.icanw.org).

As Beatrice Fihn says, "The meeting will take place in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and threats to use nuclear weapons. The past month has made it clear that nuclear weapons do not prevent war, and nuclear war is closer than ever. The only solution is to immediately prioritize nuclear

disarmament. Nuclear weapons and nuclear threats are terrifying and disempowering, but ICAN has a plan. States that have not yet joined the treaty can attend as observers, as Germany and Norway have already committed to do. But an even more concrete way to reassure their citizens' legitimate fears of nuclear war would be to step up and take part in this global process by joining the TPNW."

One action we could all take is to write to our MP, or to Ben Wallace, the Secretary of State for Defence, or to the Prime Minister. ICAN have a helpful template here: [Write to your government - Get your country on board \(icanw.org\)](#) (Sally Reynolds)

The latest Peace News

The latest edition of Peace News is now out, both in print and online at <https://peacenews.info/issue/2659>. As ever, it's a marvel of high class radical and anti-militarist journalism. Here are some of the many items well worth reading:

- * Britain helps Saudi Arabia commit the same crimes it (rightly) punishes Russia for - *a comparison of the wars in Ukraine and Yemen - and the west's response* - <https://peacenews.info/node/10187/britain-helps-saudi-arabia-commit-same-crimes-it-rightly-punishes-russia>
- * How the West paved the way for Russia's nuclear threats over Ukraine - *Western commentators who rush to condemn Putin's nuclear madness would do well to remember Western nuclear madness of the past, argues Milan Rai* - <https://peacenews.info/node/10192/how-west-paved-way-russias-nuclear-threats-over-ukraine>
- * War is a crime - *statements from Ukrainian pacifist Yurii Sheliashenko* [You might see this item as a corrective to any implication that we have made earlier in this newsletter there are no pacifists in Ukraine – Ed]. Includes a link to a You Tube video '*Don't lie like Johnson*'. <https://peacenews.info/node/10191/war-crime>
- * Ukraine – a British pacifist responds - *people on the streets are pointing the way out of war, says Symon Hill* [Symon of course is well known to Abingdon Peace Group]. Here is a line from the piece: 'The International Institute of Strategic Studies now calculates that the UK has the third highest military spending in the world – ahead of Russia'. <https://peacenews.info/node/10186/ukraine-british-pacifist-responds>
- * Beyond the barricades - *Ambrose Musiyiwa exposes the racism directed at Africans and other people of colour trying to flee Ukraine*. [We should surely also note the white European racism inherent in much of Europe's response to the Ukraine crisis. The invasion is a depraved action absolutely requiring immediate assistance to refugees not because Ukrainians are mostly white-skinned and Christian, but for obviously humanitarian reasons]. <https://peacenews.info/node/10198/beyond-barricades>

Diary

Fri Apr 1 – Sat Sep 24: - Exhibition: Of Ordinary Things – Iraqi women share their life stories through art. Curated by Iraqi Women and Art and War Group. 10 -5 daily (not Sundays), at Museum of Oxford museumofoxford.gov.uk – 01865 252 334. Free entry.

Tu Apr 5 – Sun May 1: Exhibition: The Glorious Art of Peace - paintings, sculpture, textile art and texts about the impact of war. Exhibition presented by The Movement for the Abolition of War at Cornerstone Arts Centre. Didcot. OX11 7NE (www.cornerstone-arts.org/), Monday – Saturday 10am – 8pm. Closed Sundays.

Mo Apr 11: The War in Ukraine and its Implications for our Nuclear Future - discussion of recent developments – webinar presented by The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, featuring nuclear experts Francesca Giovannini, Pavel Podvig, and Manpreet Sethi in conversation addressing questions about nuclear risk, the future of nuclear arms control, and much more. “12:00 PM in Central Time (US and Canada)” 5pm in our local time (? please check). More info and to register:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_c29eiRpASoyoffl7diremg?](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_c29eiRpASoyoffl7diremg?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=SocialMedia&utm_campaign=TwitterPost03282022&utm_content=Bulletin_April)

[utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=SocialMedia&utm_campaign=TwitterPost03282022&utm_content=Bulletin_April](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_c29eiRpASoyoffl7diremg?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=SocialMedia&utm_campaign=TwitterPost03282022&utm_content=Bulletin_April)
VP_03282022

Fr Apr 8 -Sat Apr 9: Aldermaston Women’s Peace Camp – Nuala 01865 749459

Thu Apr 21: Live Event: War, Peace and Care for the Earth. 7-9pm An evening of poetry, talks and songs with Frankie Armstrong, John Gittings, Sally Mears, Sue Gilmurray and Rona Topaz. Free event at Cornerstone Arts Centre. Didcot. OX11 7NE For more information contact Ali Lochhead 07976 272765.

Tue Apr 26: Digital Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Deception, Disinformation and Social Media – book launch at CAABU. Author Marc Owen-Jones will introduce and discuss his book. For further information or to register go to caabu.org.uk

Th Apr 28: Caabu online briefing on the future of diplomacy in the Gulf - how relations between Gulf powers have developed in recent years - with the end of the blockade of Qatar, tensions with Iran, varying policy positions on Yemen and Syria. What will be the role of the US and UK in years to come? How can lasting peace and security be brought to this vital region of the world? At 2pm. Sign up at: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZErd-ChqDliH9zbnlkpvnZxHyJDoUd0o55C>

Wed May 4: issues around the pulling down of the Colston Statue – Cllr. Christine Townsend from Bristol, on the legacy of the British Empire and how it receives only scant attention in the school curriculum. Faringdon Peace Group, venue tba. Please ring Jennie for details - 01367 710308.

Sun May 15: International Conscientious Objectors’ Day - People around the globe will speak out in solidarity with conscientious objectors in prison today and in grateful memory of conscientious objectors of the past. At 12 am. <https://www.ppu.org.uk/civicism/event/info%3Fid%3D255%26reset%3D1>

Sat May 21: Levellers’ Day (Burford) <https://levellersday.wordpress.com/whats-happening-2022/>

Sat Oct 1: Abingdon Peace Group Jumble Sale – Doors open for the sale: 3 – 4pm at the Northcourt Centre (in Tatham Hall). Please deliver items for sale between 1.30 and 3pm and stay on (or return) to help with clear up. Please note different timings from past jumble sales!

Please note: we strongly recommend <https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/events> (and the rest of this website) for up-to-date news and listings.

Abingdon Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month except August. At present our meetings are taking place online. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part. The Group has no party political affiliations. abingdonpeace@gmail.com. Our telephone numbers are (01235) 526265 & 522163