



Peace Action New York State

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June 21, 2016

Dear New York Delegates to the Democratic National Convention:

Today, the Democratic party stands unopposed to war. In recent votes, Democrats in the House and Senate have supported measures to expand U.S. military engagement abroad and have failed to support legislation to audit the Pentagon or protect us from the next nuclear arms race. We are asking you to change that - to call on the Democratic party to oppose our endless wars, and to curtail our endless war spending.

Hillary Clinton is, today, the presumptive Democratic nominee. She has a long history of executive experience. However, even by her own admission, that experience has not prevented her from mistakes, or from repeating past mistakes. She acknowledges her vote for the Iraq War was a mistake, but she was a leading advocate for similar regime change policies in Libya and Syria. And, she advocates the provocation of Russia by calling for a no-fly zone in Syria.

If she is elected, the Democratic Party would be responsible for another “war president” at a time when we must learn from the mistakes of U.S. militarism abroad, and bring war money back to the U.S. to invest in our communities at home.

What is at stake today is nothing less than the stance of the Democratic party on peace and diplomacy, and the future of U.S. foreign policy. Because, if Democrats will not oppose reckless war and reckless war spending, who will?

That is why we, the undersigned organizations, are calling on you to add these measures to the Democratic Party Platform:

1. CANCEL THE \$1T NUCLEAR WEAPONS MODERNIZATION PLAN

The current Administration is moving forward with plans to upgrade our nuclear weapons arsenal with \$1 trillion of taxpayer money over the next 30 years. In April 2016, the New York Times ran a front-page story titled “*Race for Latest Class of Nuclear Arms Threatens to Revive Cold War.*” With USD \$1T we could, instead of creating redundant weapons systems that are too dangerous to ever be used, pay the salaries of 1.34M elementary school teachers for 10 years, or provide 30.11M four year, full-tuition scholarships to university students, according to the National Priorities Project.

2. CANCEL THE LONG RANGE STAND OFF (LRSO) WEAPON

One of the most dangerous proposals in the nuclear weapons modernization plan is the LRSO. A new nuclear-capable cruise missile, the LRSO program would cost \$25B and would undermine our national security because it can be armed with a nuclear or conventional warhead. If used, the targeted country would not know if the LRSO was a nuclear or conventional weapon, which opens up the probability of nuclear retaliation. If we build this weapon, it could lead to a new nuclear arms race and it will proliferate to other nations. If we were targeted with this weapon, and we did not know if it was nuclear-armed or not, how would the U.S. respond? With the dangers so great for an escalation of war into a nuclear war with this weapon, it must be opposed. William Perry (Secretary of Defense, 1994-97) and Andy Weber (Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs from 2009-14) are opposed to the LRSO, and [wrote an op-ed](#) in the Washington Post in October 2015, calling on the President to cancel plans to build it. In December 2015, 7 Senators, including Senator Sanders, [sent a letter](#) to President Obama asking him to cancel plans to build the LRSO.

3. CALL FOR A COMPLETE HALT TO U.S. DRONE ATTACKS AND A BAN ON EXPORTING ATTACK DRONES AND SUPPORTING SYSTEMS.

Drone strikes are acts of war, and the decision to use drones is made with no due process, limited oversight and no accountability. Acts of war shouldn't be so easy. Since U.S. drone attacks began in 2001, at least 7,180 people have been killed by U.S. drones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, according to the authoritative Bureau of Investigative Journalism. This is a gross underestimate in that the Bureau did not start its Afghanistan tally until the beginning of 2015, and the total does not include drone murders in Iraq, Syria, Libya and the Philippines. All of these killings violate international law because none of those killed were accorded due process. The vast majority of those killed were killed by the Obama Administration without any disclosure of a legal argument for the killings, any documentation of numbers of attacks, videos of attacks, numbers of casualties or accountability.

4. END THE WARS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Since 2001, the U.S. has been in a constant state of war. With the goal of countering terrorism, we have used military force in varying degrees in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia and Nigeria. We have given to the dedicated servicemen and women in our military an impossible mission: destroying terrorism through military force - putting out a fire with gasoline. And, we haven't given them an exit plan. From 2001-2015, 2,381 American soldiers were killed in the Afghanistan War and 4,495 American soldiers were killed in the Iraq War. And civilian deaths are even more sobering: 26,000 documented civilian deaths attributed to the Afghanistan War, and 165,000 documented civilian deaths attributed to the Iraq War. We have spent 1.67T fighting wars since 2001, which means that every hour taxpayers are paying \$8.36M on war. Before the Iraq War, Iraq had one of the strongest healthcare systems in the region, but today, it is a failed government. That crumbling infrastructure only gives terrorism more space to

grow. Militarism has not curbed violence in the world. Instead of continuing on this path of militarism escalating terror escalating militarism, we must end these wars. Rather than pouring money into planes, bombs and bullets, we need to invest in thoughtful diplomacy and robust humanitarian aid. War does not work for long-term security.

5. AUDIT THE PENTAGON

The Pentagon, a \$700B per year expense to U.S. taxpayers, has never been audited. The result is abundant waste: \$2.7 billion for an air surveillance balloon that doesn't work; \$8,000 for a single helicopter part that really costs \$500. In February 2016, the Center for International Policy reported 27 instances of staggering, unnecessary military spending, totaling more than \$33 billion of waste. The unchecked spending of the military must be reined in so those wasted billions of dollars can be redirected to domestic programs in need of additional funding. The first step is to demand of the Pentagon what we expect from any competent agency or business: an audited budget, and accurate financial records. Regardless of what program you want to see better funded, or the policies that you believe can benefit Americans, the money for it is tied up in war.

I'm sure we can agree on this: the United States needs a coherent foreign policy that will protect Americans in the short and long-term, allow domestic programs to be funded according to their own needs, and combat terrorism.

These proposals promote that vision of U.S. foreign policy and project U.S. leadership into the world as emblematic of prosperity, peace and security.

That is because there is no security in a world with nuclear weapons arms races. There is no peace in a world where the cycle of militarism and terrorism is not challenged. There is no prosperity in the U.S. when our own budget is tied up in an agency that wastes tens of billions of taxpayer dollars.

Peace is not an impossible goal: it is the product of thoughtful policy that emphasizes a shared humanity instead of religious, political or ethnic differences. And, those thoughtful policies work. They even demobilize terrorist organizations. Here's an example¹:

Colombia had been at war with FARC rebels for over 40 years. About 10 years ago, they decided to try a new approach: they hired LoweSSP3, an ad agency.

First, the agency recorded stories of rebels who had escaped from FARC and why they chose to leave. These stories were made into 30-second radio ads. Jose Miguel Sokoloff, who runs LoweSSP3, reports that at least 2,000 lower ranking guerrillas have demobilized since the radio spots first went live.

¹ "Poetry of Propaganda" This American Life. Natl. Public Radio. WNYC, New York. 18 December 2015. Radio.

They decided to do more, and then they saw a pattern: FARC rebels demobilized in larger numbers around Christmas. Instead of doing radio ads, Jose's team tried something else: they put up christmas trees in the jungle, in nine strategic pathways used by FARC rebels. The trees were lit up at night, and as rebels walked by, they triggered a motion sensor that lit up a sign, which read:

"If Christmas can come to the jungle, you can come home. Demobilize. It's Christmas. Everything is possible."

That effort alone demobilized 331 rebels, which at that time, was 5% of FARC's forces. They heard from these rebels that FARC forces traveled by river more than they did by foot. So, Jose's team did another Christmas operation the following year.

In Christmas 2011, 7,000 plastic, glowing, purple balls filled with small toys, trinkets and notes to Guerrilla fighters were floating on the rivers of Colombia. The following Christmas, they lit up beacons that shot straight into the sky with the message: "Guerrilla, this Christmas follow the light that will guide you to your family and your freedom."

The next year, peace talks began in Colombia.

This tactic will not work everywhere. But, this tactic did work - and it worked without a single civilian or soldier put in harm's way. We owe it to our own soldiers, to our federal budget, to our peace and security, that we don't wait for 40 years to look to non-military approaches to today's most entrenched crises. We need peace now.

With hope and encouragement,

Interfaith Peace Network of Western New York
KnowDrones.com
Peace Action New York State
WESPAC
Western New York Peace Center