

The Coalition for Peace Action in Pennsylvania:

July 2nd : Diplomacy Not War Action, and Workshops

SIX WORKSHOPS, AND RESULTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

OVERVIEW: In addition to the workshop on Diplomacy not War with Iran, we had five additional workshops, and the film, Groundswell Rising. Summaries of each are found below.

Iran Diplomacy (Kate Gould and Ann Lesch). We discussed the talks between Iran and 6 world powers (China, France, Germany, Russia, UK, and USA), which reached a Joint Action Plan in November; they now seek a Final Agreement on Iran's nuclear energy program.

There are hopeful signs and proposals.

1. Iran has complied with the Joint Action Plan, e.g., reducing its level of uranium enrichment from 20% (considered marginal) to 3.5% (safe, usable only for electric power production) at its nuclear reactors; and has stopped progress on Arak plutonium reactor construction. But this is only an interim agreement.
2. The Six Powers have also complied so far, returning to Iran some \$5 billion in Iranian bank funds which were frozen in Western accounts due to sanctions. This is only a fraction of the funds which will be released in stages, as further compliance is shown, by international inspectors.
3. Negotiations have reached a critical stage, and marathon talks began on July 2nd, to continue until July 20th, in hopes of resolving remaining issues.
4. **Action Steps: Make the Nuclear Agreement Final.**
 - President Obama will recommend an extension of talks, he has said, given progress so far. The contours of a final deal have been posed in various places¹, including innovative ideas from the Princeton Program on Global Security, in [Arms Control Today](#), led by Prof. Frank von Hippel.²
 - **We need to tell Congress: Let the negotiators with Iran do their job; don't pass interfering new sanctions; give time for the agreement to work; and finally, honor the agreement to phase out economic sanctions if a final deal is reached, and compliance is occurring. (Congressional Switchboard: (202) 224-3121 – Call now, before August Recess.)**

Green Energy (Susan Kerin) [Maryland Peace Action](#), wrote:

1. **Economic Conversion – Philadelphia** was able to get a resolution passed in City Council on this (conversion of a former military base to useful civilian use) but after that happened, everyone disbanded. Perhaps the legislative work in Maryland and Connecticut might be a good model for revitalizing the initiative among our Philly groups. (Peace Action Montgomery, MD, Email above for more information)

¹ See, Frank von Hippel, et al., [Arms Control Today](#), April, 2014, [A Win-Win Solution for Iran's Arak Reactor](#), and, July-August 2014, [Agreeing on Limits for Iran's Centrifuge Program: A Two-Stage Strategy](#) by Alexander Glaser, Zia Mian, Hossein Mousavian, and Frank von Hippel.

² See, [Myths About Iranian Nuclear Program](#), (citation)

2. Local versus National – One of the participants commented that this is a national issue and that local municipalities don't have much input. Showed a few examples of how and why local entities should be engaged (to exert pressure and because the spending problem impacts their budgets)
3. Department of Defense Support—The DoD actually has an Office of Economic Adjustment that encourages states to diversity and provided technical assistance. The Maryland folks used the DoD's playbook which added a lot of credibility to the cause.
4. Reaching beyond the peace community – The coalition in Maryland included the NAACP, environmental groups and labor unions.
5. Army Experience Center – Three of us (in the workshop) had participated in those demonstrations and noted that it inspired the peace and justice community to believe that you can actually triumph in a cause that seems like a David and Goliath challenge.

Conference Organizers' Response: Thanks to Susan. We hope you can send us more details on this green energy project, so we can explore viability in Pennsylvania! We have teamed with peace, justice, and environmental groups, in an alliance.

Syria – Janet Amighi led the workshop, and wrote a report:

1. Some members of our group believed that there should be no American intervention in Iraq and Syria; that we have done enough damage, and would only make things worse.
2. One suggestion was to arm the moderates in Syria.
3. Another argument was that it would be hard to identify those with moderate views, so easy to skew your real perspective while asking for arms. And so easy for a group to change sides. And of course so easy for moderates to lose their weapons to extremists.
4. One point was raised that isolationism is dangerous and not humanitarian.
5. In Iraq, the US, Iran, Russia, and even Assad are fighting on the same side (though on opposite sides in Syria). This could form the basis for stronger cooperation and possibly a peace conference where pressure could be applied on Assad and others to reach some accommodation, and work together against the Islamic State (former ISIL-ed).

(ACTION ITEMS)

6. Pressure all outside participants to stop arming the various factions.
7. Press US to negotiate in good faith without pre-conditions, with all parties, including (Basher al-) Assad.

(Note: Basher al-Assad is president of the central government of Syria. A rebellion in 2/3 of the country resulted from a 5-year drought, and perceived indifference by the Assad government. There have been attempts at brokering peace, by Russia and the U.S., with two Geneva meetings – however, neither of these went very far. Meanwhile, Assad has triumphed in the South and on the coast, while Aleppo, the largest city after the capital, is held by various rebel factions, including the self-declared “Islamic State” which claims to be the new caliphate, succeeding the Prophet Mohammed's caliphate.)

Conference Organizers Note:

- The one success in the Syrian tragedy is that the U.S. and Russia collaborated to force Basher el-Assad to give up his stockpile of chemical weapons. We agree with Janet Amighi, who has lived in Syria and knows it well, that good-faith diplomacy is needed

to pressure all sides for a permanent cease-fire, leading to talks for a political solution to a long-standing crisis. Also, the Peace Coalition is working to promote increased humanitarian assistance to the 9 million displaced Syrians, including some 3 million now in neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. This humanitarian catastrophe is threatening to destabilize these neighbors. See the Peace Coalition Web site, for links to aid organizations to help civilians and refugees.

- In response to these and other efforts, Senator Bob Casey has spoken out in the Senate, to increase aid to Syrian refugees. Unfortunately, the House Appropriations Committee has voted to cut the President's State Department budget (under which these appropriations are included), by \$277 million, while claiming to increase refugee relief. See, <http://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=384656>

Action Item Proposed: Restore the \$277 million cut in the State Department budget. We need a full appropriation for diplomacy, embassy security, and equally important, so we can keep our promises of increased refugee aid in Jordan, Syria, and neighboring countries housing 3 million Syrian refugees.

4. Mass Incarceration and Police Militarization (Jondhi Harrell and David Gibson)

A lively discussion covered both the plight and needs of formerly incarcerated individuals, now referred to as “returning citizens” and the kinds of support needed for families and those still in jail, and efforts to help returning citizens successfully re-enter society. We related how the rise of mass incarceration parallels growing militarization of police from creation of “Special Weapons and Tactics” (SWAT teams) whose original mission was hostage-taking situations. This increase in SWAT use grew largely from the “War on Drugs” which, not coincidentally was a driving cause of the increase in mass incarceration.

We connected the dots on the practice of cash-strapped states turning to private corporations to run prisons for a profit, and explored the next big jump in high tech modern war fighting materiel either given to or sold to local police after 9/11/01. The picture that emerges is one of a very real war come home that is targeted at people of color, women and people facing poverty or homelessness.

Action Items: Mass Incarceration and Returning Citizens

1. Support and participation in youth prevention programs & public school funding to prevent incarceration. Programs in the arts, sports etc., are good examples; also programs specifically on mass incarceration.
2. Endorse and lobby for Preparation Programs for returning citizens & full restoration of their rights.
3. Legislative Campaigns designed to change sentencing laws & ending the drug war to stop mass incarceration. Note: Jondhi Harrell spoke at the plenary, about the need for returning citizens to exercise their voting rights, to help make change. The Peace Voter Campaign, below, can help all citizens, including returning citizens, to do so.

Militarization of Police

- 1) Fight the loss of our rights, including mass surveillance, through education forums, media, and local resistance in the form of town hall meetings, direct action and media campaigns (on) militarization of local police forces.
- 2) Question need for SWAT Teams & demand full disclosure of information about their use.
- 3) Use legal means and direct community pressure through negotiation and direct action to press for an end to civil asset forfeiture, check points; create independent review boards to investigate

reports of police misconduct, & end stop & frisk.

4) A Join the National Campaign being coordinated by Friends Committee on National Legislation (and others) to end the Federal Government's 1033 program; Congress should immediately roll back this program—a relic of the failed War on Drugs. <http://fcn.org/issues/endlesswar/>. (1033 lets LEA's acquire vehicles (land, air, sea), weapons, computers, fingerprint equipment, night vision, radios, televisions, first aid equipment, tents, sleeping bags, photographic equipment and more.)

By David Gibson. (Jondhi Harrell, Center for Returning Citizens Director, may wish to add to this report.)

Veterans, War and Peace. John Grant, of Veterans for Peace, led this workshop.

The attendees of the workshop spoke about the relationship between military veterans, the peace movement, and how veterans have been useful for the movement. We talked about the history of WWI and the notion of vainglorious, corrupt leadership setting the war loose on Europe that led to 20 million dead, including 10 million young men in uniform. The countervailing force of that kind of "war-monger" leadership can be found in the voices of disillusion that came out of the trenches in poetry, memoir and fiction. That upper and lower dialogue of sorts still exists with many wonderful voices of disillusion coming out of Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan.

Need we mention Dick Cheney is appearing now to blame President Obama for the Iraq War's unpleasant outcome -- in effect presenting America with a new call for war?

We talked about the Veterans Administration crisis, a perennial problem traceable to the tendency of a militarized culture like ours to pump up war fever to solve a problem, then hose out trillions of dollars and, then, suddenly when the war is over and the wounded come home to suddenly get tight-fisted about caring for the wounded properly. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders (Indep.) is the chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and he knows this better than most.

ACTION ITEMS

1. There are two bills now in a House/Senate conference committee: HR4810 and HR3230. Sanders says what's needed to fix the VA health care program is three things: better accountability, more transparency and more doctors.
2. This latter means more budget funds. There is no cheap way to solve this problem.
3. We also talked about the idea of National Service other than the military being given the respect it needs. We talked about a plan to use abandoned military bases as solar farms to generate electricity. We talked about countering militarism through culture, which is too often saturated with militarism.

A good event. I enjoyed it. –John Grant.

Pat Albright led “Invest in Caring, Not Killing” (originally styled “Rise Out of Poverty”):

“Invest in Caring, Not Killing” featured members of DHS- Give Us Back Our Children, the Every Mother is a Working Mother Network, Global Women's Strike, and Payday Men's Network. It connected war and poverty, mass incarceration, the growing child welfare industry, whistle-blowers, military refusers, and unrecognized and unsupported work of mothers and caregivers. The workshop discussed [local participation](#) in the July 8 commemoration of the [1st anniversary of the \(California State Prisoners\) Hunger Strike](#) -- the largest (prisoners' hunger strike) in US history with 30,000 people involved.

Action items:

1. [Stop the War on the Poor, July 14th](#) week: including pots and pans protest outside the White House on Monday July 14, 11 a.m. in DC, and [leafleting outside Somerset Welfare Office](#) 2701 N. Broad St. (at Lehigh Ave) 12 noon on Tuesday July 15.
 2. Carolyn Hill – fighting to get her nieces back taken unjustly by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services due to false allegations and bias against her for being low-income and not having a high school diploma or GED; she is asking for signatures and endorsement on her [Petition](#).
 3. RISE Out of Poverty Act – Support the campaign for passage and implementation of RISE which would make ending child poverty and reducing the numbers of children detained by the child welfare industry the goal of federal welfare policy. (Workshop members) ask individuals to sign the online petition and groups asked to add their names to the endorser list. [Online petition](#).
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Conclusion: Much was discussed, and much accomplished on July 2nd. We invite you to join the Coalition for Peace Action in these supportive campaigns:

- **Peace Voter Campaign** – This brings all these elements together, for Pennsylvania voters. We encourage all to check out our Peace Voter Guides for November elections. This election will be important not just for the Senate and House, but also, Pennsylvania will be electing a governor, and green energy and hydraulic fracking will be major issues, as will your Congress Member's votes on peace, Pentagon budgets, veterans, and the poor. We will ask candidates to fill out our Peace Voter questionnaires, so voters can contrast and compare them with their opponents, and see who stands for peace, social justice, and positive action on climate change.
 - **Visit Congress, call, write letters**, and make your voice heard. Tell Congress: Support a final deal with Iran, make diplomacy not war, and let's put an end to sanctions that affect the health and well-being of average citizens.
 - **Ask House of Representatives members to support H.R. 783** – that's the Bipartisan "Prevent Iran Nuclear Weapons, and Stop War Through Diplomacy Act", introduced by Rep. Barbara Lee (CA), which would *prohibit a pre-emptive attack* on Iran, without Congressional authorization. Call toll-free, (855)-686-6927, and just ask for your Congress member by name – they will connect you to the office. It takes a minute, can help save lives.
 - **Stop the Drone Command Center in Horsham** – See [Coming Events](#), on the Web site!
 - **Volunteers** – We're looking for an additional student intern/ volunteer for the Fall campaign – contact the Peace Coalition at Friends Center, 215-480-7744.
 - **More on Fracking in Pennsylvania:** Go to [PennEnvironment.org](#); and [Groundswellrising.com](#)!
 - We'll see you at Friends Center on September 18th or please contact us at the numbers below.
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