

I've very privileged today to have as a guest again Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Code Pink and Global Exchange. One of the most prominent members of the international movement for peace. Welcome, Medea.

Medea: Hey, Blase. Great to be on with you.

Blase: My please. I saw your article on Common Dreams together with Nicholas Davies about the Iraq death toll fifteen years after the US invasion, and I think it's important to take a look at that. Before we had bombings from 1991 until the new war, uninterrupted bombing. So we'd really like to have your comments about why you wrote that for Common Dreams.

Medea: First of all, I think very few people even recognize that it's been 15 years since our government invaded Iraq on the basis of lies. People have no idea the extent of the damage we've caused - that it has unleashed ISIS, it has become the basis for this terrible sectarian division that has been plaguing Iraq since the invasion and continuing today. Or that it has led to 3.5 million people who have been displaced internally - and on top of that, the question we have to ask is how many people have been killed. There was a Lancet Report that came out in 2001 and 2006 saying that the figures had been horrendous - close to 600,000, and it created controversy because people didn't believe it...well, I shouldn't say *people*, government and media said it was ridiculous and no where near the correct figures. Of course they wouldn't give there own. So there' s been very little accounting of how many people died, and that's why we thought it was important to gather the best information we have, starting with the Lancet study, and projecting from there to give people a sense of what the real numbers are. And we have killed literally millions of people, the best estimate being 2.4 million people have been killed as a result of the illegal invasion of 2003.

Blase: And commanding General Tommy Franks said *we don't do body counts*. No wonder they don't. It's a slaughter. And this has been going on since the end of WWII. People have tried to count - 25 - 30 million deaths as a result of our policies of endless war, which seems to be a signal of a dying empire, not a signal of any kind of success. If people read their history, they would be aware of this. Is it not self-evident.

Medea: Well, that's true because if the US was so good an invading and *liberating* other countries, then we *wouldn't be involved in Iraq militarily 16 years later*. Apparently still trying to manipulate the Iraqi government so that Iran doesn't have as much influence as it's had, and still trying to deal with the horrendous consequences such as the fight against ISIS that has led in Mosul alone to about 40,000 civilians being killed, something our media never tells us about. So this was isn't just history. This war is present day, and unfortunately, whether it's in the schoolbooks of students who should be learning about this tragic "mistake" or purposeful illegal invasion...or whether people should be learning about it as a lesson against involvement in another war against North Korea or Iran. It's so important, as you know, Blase, to tell people to reflect on what 15 years of destroying another country has done.

Blase: You say here that the number of Iraqi casualties is not just some historical dispute because the killing is still going on today. Several major cities in Iraq and Syria fell to the Islamic State in 2014, and the US has led the heaviest bombing campaign since the American war in Vietnam, dropping *105 thousand tons* of bombs and missiles, and reducing most of Mosul and other Iraqi

and Syrian cities to rubble. Well, this is...a *war crime*. And it continues. Maybe our high school student and their connection in trying to end the NRA will be able to call attention to the NRA / Military connection and how our military is the largest employer of people on the globe today. The students are coming out in large numbers, and I think people are beginning to see a relationship between perpetual war and perpetual shooting in the US with guns for everybody. Do you see a connection there?

Medea: Well certainly, and I think from my interactions with students like the thousands of students who marched from the White House to the Capitol last week in the school walk out, they see the connection because they recognize that US congresspeople are not passing the kind of gun violence prevention laws that they want because they're in the pocket of the NRA. And when I asked them, "What about the weapons manufacturers," they say yes, they're the ones who keep us in a perpetual state of war. So they are joining with us in a campaign called *Divest from the War Machine* that is asking our congresspeople to stop taking money from both the NRA and the weapons manufacturers.

Blase: Yes, it's all interconnected; so we have a military industrial government, it seems, regardless of who is president. If we look at presidents since the murder of Kennedy - some of them were smart, some were stupid, etc, but each and every one has been right there with the military industrial system. And that includes every democrat. You can find one of two, occasionally, who oppose this constant militarism, but they're rare. So there's a continuity going on here personified I think by Donald Trump, and maybe he's helping us to wake up. I wonder.

Medea: Well look at this 700 billion dollar Pentagon budget that most of the democrats are supporting, and during the Iraq War which some of the democrats denounced, they did vote for the funding for the war. So they would speak out against it on the one hand, and then keep the money on the other. So we've got to understand that when we spend almost 60 percent of our discretionary funds on the Pentagon, they're going to try to justify that money by keeping us in a state of perpetual war. You have connections between individual companies like Lockheed Martin that is now so connected and dialed in to the White House, so much so that when Jared Kushner is over in Saudi Arabia meeting with royalty there he picks up the phone to call the CEO of Lockheed Martin to secure a better deal for the Saudis. Our embassies overseas are working as subsidiaries of the weapons companies in the business of selling weapons. Weapons are now one of the only products that we manufacture in this country. It's such a twisted system. I was at an event the other day where there was a representative from the Machinists Union. They represent about 5,000 people in the "defense" industry - we call it military because we don't believe it's defending us - and they talked about how good paying these jobs are and that you can't compare the pay to other available jobs. There's no source of income for these companies like the Pentagon because the money there is pretty much limitless. The workers in the factories don't want to hear anything about how the weapons are being used because they are in very hollowed out places in this country so much of the other manufacturing base has been destroyed. They are making wages of at least 30 dollars an hour and some even get stock and retire as millionaires.

Blase: You know, a few decades back there was a Conversion meeting, sponsored by the US government. I was at one of them. Lockheed was there; all of the military was there. And there

were a few of us civilians there, too. One of the engineers explained to Lockheed that they would be by far the best place to manufacture high speed trains, local transport vehicles, and to bring our railroads out of 1940 and into the present. And oddly enough, the representative from Lockheed had but one comment: Well, we're accustomed to have only one customer. I mean, they really showed the fear of doing civilian production.

Medea: And the gravy train that they're part of - because they are *guaranteed profits* - and the kind of deals they get with the Pentagon is a no lose situation. It's either cost plus or cost plus plus plus. Whatever the bid was, they just keep upping the amount of money that they are charging to us as taxpayers. You look at the ridiculous costs for the F-35, which is nowhere near the official cost that it was supposed to be. Do heads roll? Do CEOs get taken down? Do people have to account for their tremendous cost overruns that are paid for by us the taxpayer? Not at all. In fact, they continue to get contract after contract with the Pentagon.

Blase: You know, it's hard for decent people to believe that this goes on. And I recall Lincoln writing, when he discovered that people were getting rich off the Civil War: *This frightens me more than the war*. That citizens don't care about the deaths of our young people. They just want to make money. That goes on and on. Lots of our young people mean nothing to them. And what about the so-called enemy? Most of these people we're talking about today are civilians who are not involved in any way and are being killed together with their families, and there's absolutely no excuse for it. This is a hard thing to believe, that people would betray their fellow citizens by sending them off to their deaths in places where they weren't wanted and not only that, but to betray the international community, the global community, by recklessly killing millions of people. It's very hard for decent human beings to hear that and believe it. We don't want to believe it, do we?

Medea: No, and that's why we ask your listeners to join this campaign. They can go to divestfromwarmachine.org and look at all the ways they can get involved. It's just interesting that people might think that because their congressperson is progressive, they're not taking money from the weapons companies. Well, we don't be so sure about that. Look it up, because the majority of republicans and democrats are taking money from the top five weapons manufacturers. It might not be a lot of money; it might be 5,000, but they don't reject it. And they have to be pressured by their constituents to say that this is blood money, and it's a conflict of interest. Every year you are voting on money that goes to the Pentagon, and about half that money goes back to private contractors. So they need to show that they do not have a conflict of interest by refusing to take money from the weapons manufacturers. All you listeners can go to divestfromwarmachine.org and work with us to make sure that your representatives are not on the gravy train with the Pentagon money that comes from us, the taxpayers, and goes right back into the pockets of these weapons makers.

Blase: This week I was in touch with Anne Wright and she was in Mai Lai in Vietnam. We were exchanging emails, and she reminded me that this is the 50 anniversary of that slaughter. And then I noted that after that there was the Korea International War Crimes Tribunal report on US war crimes in Korea, 1945 - 2001. This was an indictment by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark based on research findings, eye witness testimonies and presentations explaining the Korean War as on Mai Lai after another. It is just a whole book full of the slaughter of civilians

and possibly the killing of 25 - 30 percent of the people in the entire country. Does anyone know anything about the so-called Forgotten War?

Medea: Most people in the US have no idea that North Korea was decimated - 80 percent of its cities were completely destroyed. This is very fresh in the minds of people today, even though this was back in the early 1950s, because their government does teach about it on a regular basis. It uses this as a way to keep the people of North Korea in this constant state of fear. But the fear is justified because it's not something that just happened decades ago; it's the fact that they are surrounded by US bases in South Korea and warships and hostile military exercises that the South Koreans and the United States carry out several times a year. So the siege mentality is really on that is quite rational.

But it is exciting and important that progressives get on board with these peace talks. A lot of democrats have said that Donald Trump should not be talking to Kim Jong-un, that this is giving North Korea exactly what it wants; this is a bad idea to do it and on and on and on. This is *not the right position for progressives to take*. We have to say, thank you, particularly the people of South Korea who overthrew a repressive and corrupt regime, elected President Moon as somebody who is committed to dialogue with the North. And President Moon for being so skillful to take us to this point where there are summits planned between the North and South in April and between the US and the North in May. So it's an exciting time, and I think that many things could go wrong, but we can't be in the camp of those who are dissing this because Donald Trump has said he'll do it.

Blase: I notice that in the media also, indicating that many think this is a mistake for Donald Trump. But what is diplomacy about? I knew that North Korea's head of state has not met with other international leaders, but this would at least give the impression of leadership. And I think many people who are real experts on it are speaking out, like Chrisitine An, who said it was a mistake to think that maximum pressure forced North Korea to dialogue. It was Moon's masterful diplomatic stroke, and it's a dangerous rewriting of what happened and will be sure to be what causes Trump to fail in his talks with Kim. Moon showed a desire for peaceful resolution, which is why Kim reciprocated. Maximum pressure, strategic patience, does not work because it doesn't understand North Korea's genuine fears. Apparently there are some people who really know what's going on here, and there's a great desire for a reunion of that country.

Medea: And we can bring up, as we bring up North Korea and the talks, the danger of Mike Pompeo's upcoming tenure as Secretary of State. May 12 is when the president has to decide to waive or not waive the sanctions on Iran, and it seems like the president does not want to waive these sanctions anymore, which would reimpose the sanctions and the US would be breaking the Iran nuclear deal. Why should the North Koreans talk to the US if we can't keep up a deal that took years to negotiate with Iran? It sends a terrible signal, and those two are very much connected to each other.

Blase: I think we need to take a look at the Israeli component and its increase in pressure in Syria and its desire to see the Iran deal scapped. I think that's a terrible mistake, and I don't think they should be leading off. Do you have any thoughts?

Medea: A very scary thing, Blase, and you have Israel now working hand-in-glove with Saudis and the US to attack Iran. On Tuesday, we have the crowned prince of Saudi Arabia coming to the US for a two week visit. He will be going all around the country, from meetings in the White House and Congress to a talk at MIT to meetings with silicon valley representatives and going to Los Angeles to be with Hollywood folks and Houston to talk with oil executives. And all of this is to sell Saudi Arabia as some "enlightened kingdom." In the meantime, Saudi Arabia is not only destroying Yemen with a continuing bombing campaign, but is also working to find ways to push the US to get out of the Iran nuclear deal and attack Iran.

Blase: One of our generals recently claimed that we really don't know what's going on in Yemen. But we do know what's going on in Yemen - one of the great starvation centers of the world, and one of the greatest epidemics of cholera that we've ever seen. Is it just a matter of denial on the part of those people, or are they just living in fear?

Medea: They're just lying to us. There is a lot of movement now inside the congress to stop the US military assistance to the Saudis in their war in Yemen, and we are hoping that this Tuesday they will finally come to a vote using the War Powers Resolution, to say that the US cannot continue its military involvement because it is not authorized by congress and congress is the one that is supposed to declare war. So it's interesting that the Saudi prince's visit is coming just at the time when that resolution is supposed to be on the floor of the senate. And we will see which senators want to continue this wretched alliance with the repressive Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that pays many millions of dollars to PR firms to paint it as entering a new century of enlightenment while it is actually carrying out the most dastardly acts in Yemen and repressing anybody inside the Kingdom who dares to speak up.

Blase: We can join with people at divest from war machine dot org, we can do that. It's a wonderful non-violent movement constrain the war-profiteers so we might have a little money for healthcare, a little money for education, a little money to help people come out from under our freeways where a million of them are sleeping every night. Where some freeze to death during the night. Dying of hypothermia. This is the richest country in the world with the poorest distribution of wealth in the world. Any final thoughts?

Medea: It's very worrisome to see how all of this charging up and hatred of Russia is also happening at the same time of increasing enmity against Iran and the opposition to negotiations with North Korea - all of this is ramping up at a time when President Trump is desperate for things to distract us from the internal problems that he is facing. And as he brings on a known torturer to head the CIA, an Iran hawk to head the State Department, things are getting very very scary. We need to rebuild the peace movement that was so vibrant during the Bush years, we need to connect the peace movement with other issues that are critical to our country domestically. Maybe the time of Donald Trump's military parade, which is scheduled for Veteran's Day in November, would be a great time to get out on the streets and say: We Demand Peace.

Blase: Thank you so much for being with us today on World Focus.

Medea: Thank you, Blase.

Blase: And now I'm privileged to have Gwen Kirk. She has been kind enough to come on. I originally had Christine An, and she couldn't make it today and she felt that Gwen would be a wonderful to replace her on this segment. Welcome to you, Gwen Kirk.

Gwen: I'm grateful to have this opportunity to speak with you.

Blase: We're so happy to have you. You can tell us something, perhaps, about Women Crossing the DMZ?

Gwen: Yes, I'd love to. I'd also like to let the listeners know that in half an hour from now, Christine will be on a Global Call for Peace with Bernie Sanders and Raed Jarrar of Amnesty International focusing the world's attention on the need for a peace treaty in Korea. I've been listening to Medea's segment. She does a fabulous job of connecting so many issues.

I'd like to start with a little about Women Crossing the DMZ. This is a relatively new organization. It started in 2015, although there were some talking around kitchen tables before that. In 2015, the group was actually able to travel to North Korea and to cross from the into South Korea. This was an international group; Korean citizens are not allowed to do this. But Christine and others managed to convince Chung Yang that this would be a useful project that would bring international attention to the fact that there is no peace treaty ending the Korean war and that this has caused incredible political instability and military tension on the Korean Peninsula since 1953, when the armistice agreement was signed.

Blase: Well, that is...did your group have to deal with the North Koreans to make this possible?

Gwen: Yes, we had to deal with the North Koreans, the South Koreans, and the US command because they are the people in control of the demilitarized zone that separates North and South Korea. The two governments signed off on this and gave permission, and then the US command also did that.

Blase: What you're doing is more effective than what the entire Pentagon is doing. Agitating. You know what to do to make peace, which must come through dialogue. There's never been any unbridgable barrier to dialogue. We often see people in our own government saying, oh, we can't talk to them. They said for years that they couldn't talk to the Vietnamese, during that horrible slaughter. And right away our peace people started going over and talking. To Ho Chi Minh, no problem. Why do you say we can't talk? *Because you don't want to talk.* It's very easy to see. The head of state of North Korea has never met with someone at such a *high level as Mr. Trump.* And I hope that they have a decent meeting. It would be wonderful if all these people could spend a month there and eat kimchi and become friends, understand their problems and help them understand ours. The founder of Peace Studies said what we're going to have to do if we're going to hear both sides is to say, what are the real objections of the people on the other side. Then we understand them, we understand our own fears and desires to simply make money doing anything. Perhaps we could have a change of heart. Will there be other such crossings coming up?

Gwen: Well, the South Korean women are trying to organize one for May 5. May 24th is International Women's Day for Disarmament. It's been celebrated for at least a couple of decades.

And so, we crossed on May 24, 2015, and our delegation included some very well know people including two Nobel Peace Prize winners, Gloria Steinem, as well as others from many of the nations who were part of the UN coalition that fought in the Korean War. And since then, the South Korean women have become more revitalized partly, as Medea said, due to the election of Moon Jae-un as a more progressive president in South Korea has made that more possible. The previous, very dictatorial President Park Geun-hye, the daughter of a dictator from the 1980s, used all kinds of repressive measures against activists. So, we're seeing a resurgence of activism of all kinds in South Korea, including a plan to cross the DMZ in May this year, which has been backed by the South Korean Ministry for Gender Equality. So that will also have an international contingent as well as, we hope, people from South Korea.

At the moment, Trump has a travel ban for US citizens to go to the North, so that will be another thing to contend with.

Yes, our argument has been that what is needed is engagement. We don't have to be nieve about North Korea. We can acknowledge human rights violations. There are human rights violations in virtually every country in the world, I think. But certainly we don't have to be thrown off by some of these factors that people call "stumbling blocks" to talking. I think the first step is definitely to talk. So we're calling for maximum engagement in contrast with the government, which is calling for maximum sanctions. Although that too may change as they begin to figure out what this historic, as you said, Blase, this historic meeting between President Trump and Kim Jong-un.

Blase: Christine states in a recent release: "Moon engaged in diplomacy that treated North Korea with respect, with an eye to a long term solution, not a short term transaction. Trump should understand what Moon does. North Korea's long held desire for a peace treaty and normalized relations as key to achiving a nuclear-free Korea."

And earlier this year she wrote the piece, *Korea's Olympic Truce is a Good Place to Start*. I think that was an amazing gathering. Do you have any comments on the Olympics?

Gwen: Many listeners probably watched the opening ceremony of the recent Winter Olymics on television. And I must say seeing a Korean delegation of athletes carrying in that white and blue flag really gave me chills. I not sure it's something - you and I have been involved in this movement for a long time - it's not something I necessarily expected to see in my lifetime. And also the discussion that they got - the applause, the hooping and hollaring, the enthusiasm - the crowd went while, and this told us a lot I think about what could be possible and what people are yearning for.

Blase: It was a beautiful demonstration, and I know that Christine today is travelling with Bernie, or speaking with Bernie, is that correct?

Gwen: Yes, they're on something called Global Calls for Peace that starts in twenty minutes or so. We had to enroll for it, but I'm sure if people want to get onto you can go to a website called globalcallsforpece and just register.

Going back to what you said about diplomacy and that Olympic moment, North Korea sent cheerleaders, we saw them on television; they also sent athletes, and we saw them; they also sent Kim Jong-un's younger sister and an older government official, both of whom were greeted cordially by Moon and his wife. In that meeting, there was a letter inviting Moon to go to Pyongyang. When he was running for office last year, he made it clear he would be willing to go to Pyongyang, and it's taken a while for the invitation to come - but here it is. Now things are suddenly moving very quickly in ways that a only a few months ago seemed impossible. What this opportunity represents for Donald Trump is really quite remarkable.

In 2000 Madeline Albright went to Pyongyang and was in the process of paving the way for a visit by then president Bill Clinton. When the election went the wrong way for that to happen, that didn't happen. There have been other occasions when there have been talks between North and South Korea. Around 2000, South Korea had what it called Sunshine Policy toward the North. President Kim Jae-yung at the time won a Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic efforts. So there have been these encouraging moments, but when you talk about de-nuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, of course it's not just about North Korea and nuclear programs. It's also about the US nuclear umbrella that is sheltering South Korea and also Japan, and so this is a very thorny question. People may know that the US has about 30,000 troops based in South Korea on small and large bases. There's a huge restructuring program going. South Korean peace organizations have been very vocal and angry and organized, trying to stop the consolidation of new bases. They're just south of Seoul, Pyongchek, and they are also trying to oppose a new so-called "Korean" navy base on Jeju Islands. I say "Korean" with ironic emphasis, because that base will have Aegis destroyers which were produced in the US and the satellite technology is all linked to the US by Lockheed Martin. So it's not an entirely Korean base. You know, these strong military alliances between the US and Korea and also with Japan that have gone on since the end of WWII need to be on the table, too, at some point, if this whole tragic situation is to be unravelled and be resolved.

Blase: People should know about Honeymoon Island and how people have come out to protest from all over the world. It is going to be an ecological disaster and nobody wants it to be a symbol of militarism. So those issues have to be discussed as well. I have a thought here from Christine Ahn where she says: "As Moon says, that should be the ultimate goal of the peace process, but we have known that North Korea's position has been that they will be willing to give up their nuclear weapons as long as there was a security guarantee in the form of a peace treaty or a non-aggression pact from the US, and the US putting aside hostilities, whether in the form of military exercises, or the brutal sanctions that really hamper the growth of its economy." I think our listeners should know that these sanctions kill people, they are acts of war. We have used them against the Cuban people, we've used them against Iraq, and Medea brought out clearly before all the hundreds of thousands who died because of the sanctions. So Christine continues, saying: "So that's my concern. If we take this framework being put forward by the media, that maximum pressure is what worked to force North Korea to dialogue - first, it was Moon's fancy diplomatic footwork that really took into account North Korea's security concerns, and a genuine peace overture, whether it's the form of being respectful and listening closely..." You know, we have not heard diplomatic language spoken to North Korea. We've heard it from the South, and I think that's the point today. I think we have to simply treat people like human beings first, and then talk

and hopefully parties can come to a humane and reasonable solution to these problems before the world is decimated.

Here we are threatening to use planet-busting weapons which are totally illegal. It's illegal for any of our military to obey an illegal order. No one can obey an order to use a nuclear bomb. You can't obey an order to shoot civilians. You're forbidden. You could spend your life at Leavenworth because you followed orders to kill civilians. Well what about nuclear weapons? In law, they call it an a fortiori argument, for a greater reason you cannot obey and order to use a nuclear biocide weapon, and all of our troops should know that, whether they're in the silos or the air force or anywhere else. He could push the button, but nothing should ever happen if he does. That's the situation we're in.

Gwen: I certainly share your passionate belief in the absolutely unconscionable danger of flirting with nuclear weapons. You know, it's useful for people to get together at this time. Medea mentioned revitalizing a US peace movement. There are a lot of people with huge knowledge in this country about the danger of nuclear weapons, and at the same time I think the nuclear power industry has done a good job on young people trying to persuade them that nuclear power is safe and nuclear technology is safe. So that's something I think we have to face as activist who want to talk about this. Also there are a lot of Korean American organizations that have a lot of knowledge about Korea. Perhaps they can read - her family lives on the peninsula as well as in the diaspora, so that's another kind of potential area for networking and building connections and understanding on a people to people basis. There's a lot of pressure to be brought on the government, but you talked about changing hearts a while ago, Blase, and I just want to pick up on that thought again. I think that's what we're in the business of doing. Changing hearts. And part of that is having exposure and knowledge and information and understanding; and another part of it is re-humanizing people who have been defined as enemies. This has been true of people from Iran, and of Paletinians, indigenous people in many placed, black men in America. Japanese Americans during WWII, and so on. That kind of war machine, part of that is economic, political, cultural, and so on, and a piece of it is always creating a new enemy so you can justify building more weapons and keep people hopped up in a state of perpetual fear, rather than having a calm country that's trying to serve its citizens, provide for people both at home and abroad. That's something I think that we have to look at carefully - how we're manipulated, and the fact that there is so little knowledge about North Korea. That's a piece of it; it's much easier to demonize people if you know very little about them.

So I'm grateful to have this opportunity to speak with you and your KPFK listeners this morning about this very thorny and complex problem, the Korea situation. The country was divided at the end of WWII by two young US officials who basically took the map and a pen and drew a line at the 38th parallel. It's been a proxy war, and early proxy war, and so since then so much has festered. Either forgotten and festering under the surface, or remember and festering openly, which is more the case in North Korea, and that soverign nation wants to survive as a soverign nation with economic and political independence. It also is proud of its Korean culture. There's a lot for us to learn, hopefully very quickly, so that folks in this country can speak out loudly. The sense i have is that people generally have no idea what diplomacy means, the folks in power, or who are likely to be in power. We've heard many times that diplomacy doesn't work, because they've never tried it. So there's a big challenge facing the administration in this invitation to talk

with Kim Jong-un. Hopefully, and lots of things could go wrong, many people will be watching this and also *urging our representatives* and ordinary people we come in contact with to think about this differently as a possibility.

Blase: Gwen, I am so happy that you were able to come on with us today, and I'm so grateful to Christine Ahn for suggesting that you be the spokesperson. You've done such a wonderful job. I really want to thank you for being with us today on World Focus.