



The Reporter

for Conscience' Sake

The Center on Conscience & War

Working to defend and extend the rights of Conscientious Objectors to war since 1940

Volume 79

Winter 2022-2023

Love Your Neighbor. No Exceptions

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the response through the lens of Conscience

The events of this year have raised difficult questions for people and communities of faith and conscience.

While there is no doubt that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was an act of aggression, what may seem less clear is how our values as conscientious objectors and their supporters move us to respond. Shouldn't Ukraine have the right to defend itself against the violent invasion?

If you have been asking yourself questions like this, you are not alone. We are considering these questions, too. And the answer we have come up with is always the same: for us, as conscientious objectors, we believe there can never be justification for war.

War inevitably will take innocent life. And what is innocent life? Is an 18-year old conscript less innocent, simply because they may wear the uniform of the opposing army? Both Russia and Ukraine have depended on conscripts to fight this war, forcing those otherwise unwilling to fight or kill in war to do so or face prosecution.

War inevitably will violate human rights, including the rights of conscience, religion and belief. Right from the early days of the invasion, Ukraine - supposedly "the good guys" in this conflict - prohibited men between the ages of 18 and 60 from leaving with the millions of other people fleeing the violence. Ukraine also has begun imprisoning COs and threatening to prosecute their defenders (*more details on this inside*). As the US and other NATO countries give billions of dollars,

weapons, and other military aid to Ukraine, we also should hold the Zelensky government accountable for these egregious violations of human rights.

"We must all be pacifists, wanting peace, not just a truce that maybe only serves to rearm, but a true peace, which is the fruit of dialogue. Peace is not achieved with weapons, because they don't defeat hatred and the thirst for domination, which will re-emerge, perhaps in other ways."
-Pope Francis

War inevitably will escalate.

The proxy war that the US and NATO are waging against Russia has driven the threat of nuclear war higher than it has been in decades. As we prepare this publication, reports have revealed Ukraine's drone attacks on targets inside Russia. Can these acts of aggression, made outside of Ukraine's borders, still be called defense? And what effect will these attacks have on the possibility that leaders will meet at the negotiation table anytime soon?

Peace is the only way to peace.

Peace and nonviolence must be practiced and planned for, just like war is. Resources and

energy must be devoted to peace, and diplomacy should always be prioritized. War against Ukraine was predicted, and therefore could have been prevented, had parties come to the table willing to negotiate in good faith. We consistently are told that we can't negotiate with Russia, and that Putin won't negotiate. This is not actually true, and in fact, important cooperative agreements have been achieved since the war began, including the Black Sea Grain initiative, allowing vital exports of grain to resume from Ukraine through the Black Sea, as well as

continued on page 2



Ukraine, continued from front

CCW

Board of Directors

- Ellen Barfield
- Richard Capron
- Dan Cole
- Ethan Foote
- Nolan Fontaine
- Jarrod Grammel
- Fritz Gutwein
- Chris Lombardi

Staff

- Maria Santelli
Executive Director
- Bill Galvin
Counseling Director
- Mike Leiter
Development Coordinator

prisoner exchanges, which have freed hundreds of prisoners on both sides.

As we consider realistic pathways to peace, it is important to acknowledge that **sanctions also are acts of violence**, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people, while those in power are easily shielded from their effects.

Nonviolence as resistance

Nonviolence scholars have identified at least 235 acts of nonviolent resistance that have taken place in Ukraine in response to the Russian Invasion (see Daza, F., "Ukrainian Nonviolent Resistance in the Face of War" [2022]). Ukrainians all across the country have engaged in a variety of actions, which have included **direct protest and disuasion**, such as street demonstrations, public graffiti, and distributing leaflets and posters calling for non-cooperation; **resistance and intervention**, including blockades of Russian convoys and a civilian protection system to create and maintain humanitarian and evacuation corridors; and **non-cooperation** with the Russian occupation, such as refusing to surrender IDs, and teachers refusing to teach Russian programs. The impacts of these actions have been effective in thwarting the goals of the Russian invasion and occupation and have protected many civilians, despite being hindered by the continued military

actions on both sides, as well as human rights violations by both governments.

Ukraine, and movements for democracy around the world, have a long history of successful nonviolent resistance, and studies of conflicts over the last roughly one hundred years prove that nonviolent campaigns are far and away more successful in achieving and sustaining democracy than violent campaigns (see Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistnace Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolet Conflict*, 2011).

So what can we do?

First and foremost, we hope you will share your CO beliefs - **declare yourself a conscientious objector to all war**. The media consistenly have shown us viewpoints in support of an armed response, and have suppressed or even ridiculed voices calling for nonviolence. This trend is so pervasive that earlier this year, the Congressional Progressive Caucus was shamed so swiftly and severely that they withdrew a statement calling on President Biden to support diplomacy in Ukraine *the day after it was released!*

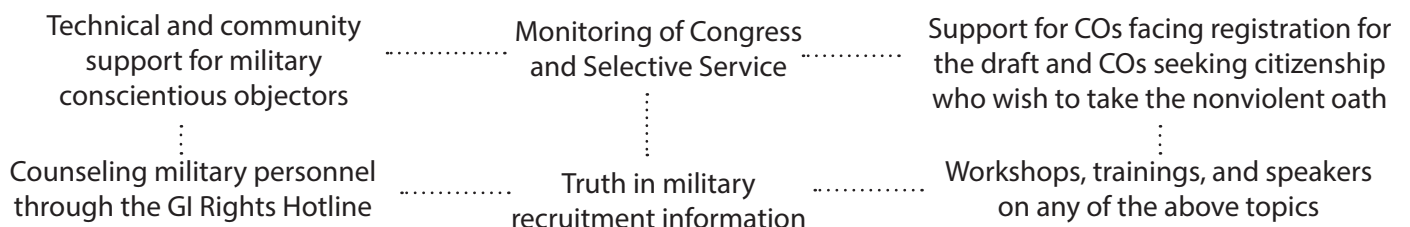
As conscientious objectors and their supporters, our most deeply held beliefs compel us to stand firm and resist the pressure to support a war - even a war like this one, which seemingly has broad and widespread support.

continued on page 3

Founded in 1940, the Center on Conscience & War works to extend and defend the rights of conscientious objectors to war.



In pursuit of this mission, the Center provides the following services free of charge:





Ukraine, continued from page 2

It is in this context in particular that our **voices of conscience** can mean so much. It is likely that, were we to look a little deeper, we would see that the popular support for war isn't as strong as media and political actors would like us to believe. Our friend and colleague, Yurii Sheliashenko, Executive Secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, and a leading advocate for COs in Ukraine, has summarized it this way:

"Total commitment to war is what the media show you, but it reflects wishful thinking of militarists, and they took a lot of efforts to create this picture deceiving themselves and [the] whole world. Indeed, [a recent] Rating Sociological Group public opinion poll shows that about 80% of respondents are involved in defense of Ukraine in one way or another, but only 6% took armed resistance serving in the military or in territorial defense..." (War Resisters International interview with Yurii Sheliashenko, posted on their website, wri-irg.org, May 2022).

We note a similar phenomenon in the United States, too. The Department of Defense spends billions in advertising, recruiting, and promotional propaganda - from funding Hollywood productions to sponsoring high school paint ball tournaments - attempting to normalize militarism in our culture, yet enlisting new recruits is challenging for every military branch, with **less than one percent** of Americans willing to volunteer to fight in war.

Supporting Rights of Conscience

As we work to bring an end to war, we must continue to be vocal advocates for the right to Conscientious Objection for all people, and specifically right now, for those in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. (See box in the center of page 5 for a link to a petition you can sign and share!)

By funding and supporting Ukraine's armed response to the Russian invasion, the US and other liberal democracies give tacit approval to the violations of human rights taking place there, specifically, the right to Conscientious Objection. From the beginning of the war, conscientious objection has been stigmatized and criminalized in Ukraine. In a report to the United Nations in November, Yurii notes that the current military mobilization (draft) by the Ukrainian government refuses to recognize the right to CO. As the people of conscience who may be subject to the draft have attempted to leave the country, the government "hunts" them down among the crowds fleeing or displaced by the violence!

continued on page 5

Please Consider a Gift in Support of Our Work to Extend and Defend the Rights of All Conscientious Objectors to War

The Center on Conscience & War is grateful for the many individuals and families who financially support our mission. Without you we would not be able to continue this work. In addition to regular donations, there are other ways to financially support CCW's mission. One very important way is with a **Legacy Gift**.

This type of gift, sometimes called **Planned Giving**, is a gift made in a donor's lifetime or upon their passing as part of their overall financial and/or estate planning. One of the easiest ways is to list CCW in your will to help sustain our work into the future.

Another way to give is by establishing a **Charitable Gift Annuity**. You make a gift to CCW and, based on your age and the amount of the gift, you receive regular payments from the gift annuity with a significant portion of the payment being tax free. If you itemize deductions on your federal tax return, you may also qualify for a tax deduction for this type of gift.

Another tax benefit could be realized if you have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) and you are required to take a yearly distribution. You can designate some or all of your **Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)** to CCW. Your IRA plan administrator can help you set it up. The amount you donate from your IRA does not get added to your income for tax purposes because the funds are going directly to a 501c3 charitable organization!

For more information and additional options, please contact Mike Leiter at mike@centeronconscience.org or give us a call. Please consult your tax and legal professionals to discuss your specific situation.

Thank you!

And here is another easy way to support CCW: If you are an Amazon shopper already, simply go to **smile.amazon.com** and choose The Center on Conscience & War (NISBCO) as your charity. We will automatically get a percentage of every purchase you make!



Selective Service, continued from page 6

The SSS is aware of the harm it causes, and they've admitted in their own reporting that the penalties for non-registration have the greatest affect on people already on the margins of our society. Yet they continue to uphold and seek to extend these extra-judicial, unconstitutional, often life-long penalties at the federal and state levels - coercive measures, **levied without due process**, designed to force an otherwise unwilling public to comply with a very unpopular law.

Selective Service allows human rights and freedoms to be violated. It is not only in a time of an active draft that we sacrifice our democratic values. Under the broad reach of the Selective Service System, conscientious objectors are forced to compromise their beliefs and participate with Selective Service, or they are punished, without prosecution, defense, or conviction. Most COs would gladly pay any price for living true to their values, and under systems that respect human rights, the terms should be finite once the "debt is paid," just as they are for any other "crime." COs who resist SSS registration have no opportunity to "pay their debt" and have their rights restored.

While the Federal Department of Education no longer requires SSS registration for federal student financial aid, 25 states still have such a requirement. Federal executive agency jobs are still out of reach for non-registrants. Twenty-one states require SSS registration in order to secure state employment; forty-four states have SSS requirements for driver's licenses and state IDs. A few states allow applicants to opt-in to be registered, but most require compliance with registration *in order to obtain* a driver's license or state ID. This is most chilling, as it threatens to disenfranchise COs, as voter ID laws become more prevalent, or to restrict a CO's ability to travel, as Real ID will soon be required for air travel, even domestically.

Selective Service registration status also can affect citizenship. Most US residents assigned male at birth, even if they are not citizens, are required to register, and failing or refusing to do so could make someone ineligible for US citizenship.

A draft makes us less safe, not more. Russia was emboldened by a draft and invaded Ukraine, sparking a war that has now lasted more than nine months, with no end in sight. Sometimes we hear - including from those working for peace - that abolishing Selective Service is a bad idea because a draft can help **curb militarism**. The facts simply don't bear that out. We had an active draft for all but one year between 1948 and 1973, during which time, the US engaged in cold and hot wars in many parts of the world. And why are so many in Congress now paying such close attention to the Selective Service, particularly through their support or opposition to expanding the draft to include women? The answer is that the Selective Service System is in jeopardy in its current form. As we've discussed before, a male-only draft has had legal justification until 2015, when the Obama administration lifted the combat restriction for women. Under scrutiny, in another legal challenge, single-gender registration could be struck down. And because war planners depend on knowing a draft is in their back pocket, and make their war plans accordingly, they are unwilling to see the draft abolished. SSS is the executive agency tasked with administering a military draft. That's why it exists - to draft those who otherwise would not volunteer to take part in war, to kill other living beings. So rather than curbing militarism, **Selective Service actually enables a more belligerent US foreign policy.**

For these reasons and others, the SSS is a failure. It's current **co-dependent, revolving door relationship with the Department of Defense renders its founding principle of civilian leadership a farce.** Selective Service exists to be in service of the ability to make war, even without an active draft. Registration lists are shared with DOD as potential recruits to our "all volunteer" military.

This is not a system that can be reformed; it must be abolished.

Let's make it happen! Please join us as we seek to reach out into **your community** this coming year to mobilize support to repeal the Selective Service Act. Expect to hear from us soon, and if you have ideas, please reach out. Together we will abolish the draft, once and for **all! Thank you!**



Ukraine, continued from page 3

And it is not only the COs themselves who find they are targets of repression from the Ukrainian leadership. From Yurii's reporting, we have learned that as the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement has petitioned their Parliament's Commissioner on Human Rights about the violations of the human right to freedom of conscience, their petitions have been labeled "a threat to the very existence of Ukrainian statehood and its citizens," and have been referred for criminal investigation to the Security Service.

With the imposition of martial law since the Russian invasion, the right to conscientious objection to military service has been criminalized, and there is no option for COs to perform alternative, civilian-directed service. While the Ukrainian Constitution guarantees the right to CO, the government argues that it is "not applicable" at this time, while the country is under a total military mobilization.

But even before this current draft and war, Ukraine's conscientious objector law was not in alignment with the guidance and standards set forth by the UN High Commission on Human Rights: COs could only be recognized if they belonged to ten specific religious groups; non-religious CO, based on moral or ethical beliefs is not recognized in Ukraine. Alternative, non-military terms of service are typically one and a half times longer than military terms of service. And even without current martial law directives, criticisms of the military and direct advocacy for conscientious objection are prohibited.

The Case of Vitaliy Alekseienco

Vitaliy Alekseienco is the first CO to be sentenced to jail time by Ukraine. Other COs have been prosecuted but have been given probation. Vitaliy was sentenced to one year in prison for the criminal offense of "Avoidance of Mobilization." Vitaliy is a conscientious objector who previously had served a term of alternative service between the years of 1996 and 1998.

Vitaliy is a Christian, and though he is not a member of any specific religious body, his conscience was formed by his study of Jesus' Gospel of Nonviolence, specifically the Sermon on the Mount.

When war began, Vitaliy fled his home and registered as a displaced person. From that registry, Vitaliy was found by the military authorities and issued an induction order. When he reported as ordered, Vitaliy declared his religious CO beliefs, but was arrested for refusing to comply with military orders. Vitaliy has stated he is willing to face the consequences of his actions and does not repent for following the teachings of his faith and the guidance of his conscience.

As of this writing, Vitaliy is awaiting a hearing on his appeal.

As people of conscience in solidarity with COs in the international community, we are calling for Vitaliy's conviction and sentence to be overturned and rights of conscience in Ukraine to be restored for all!

Please join us! Send a letter on Vitaliy's behalf to the Court of Appeals: visit War Resisters International (WRI) (<https://wri-irg.org>) and search for "Vitaliy."

Thank you!

**"EVERY RECRUIT CAN BE A
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR,
EVERY SOLDIER A DESERTER.
LET'S SUPPORT THOSE WHO
REFUSE TO KILL
AND
END WAR TOGETHER!"**

Open the borders to those who oppose war at great personal risk in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine!

Sign the petition to protect the right to asylum!
<https://you.wemove.eu/campaigns/russia-belarus-ukraine-protection-and-asylum-for-deserters-and-conscientious-objectors-to-military-service>

#ObjectWarCampaign

Supporting all COs - Everywhere

To date, millions of Russian civilians and military members have resisted and refused to support the war in Ukraine. They deserve our support. Please follow the address in the box above or visit WRI's website to sign the petition for asylum for COs who are fleeing rather than be forced to fight. Since the invasion, tens of thousands of Russians have arrived at the US southern border. As a country built on the foundation of **freedom of religion and belief, made possible largely by pacifists fleeing the violence of war**, the United States should welcome these brave resisters with open arms.

* * *

