Armistice Day remarks

On behalf of WBW, I want to say how pleased I am to receive the annual Peace Prize from the US Peace Memorial Foundation. It was an honor just to be considered for this award, so actually *winning* it, is really thrilling. I also want to express my sincere thanks to Michael Knox for creating the US Peace Memorial Foundation and the US Peace Registry. It is such a wonderful idea to recognize those who work for peace and justice. For the most part, it is difficult to see progress in the massive mission we have all taken on, so the acknowledgment, appreciation and celebration of the work that is being done is really important.

On that note, I want to honor the tremendous work that is being done by our fellow nominees, Julian AG-WAN Aguon, a human rights lawyer working against the militarization of Guam, his homeland---Bruce Gagnon who began his anti-war activism in 1971 and is now the Coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space---Rick Jahnkow and our friends at the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth with whom we worked this past year in an effort to abolish the Selective Service System and the draft—and finally, David Hartsough, a lifelong peace activist and co-founder of WBW, without whom we would not exist! I would like to note that David, as well as 3 other prior US Peace Memorial Award winners: Medea Benjamin, Kathy Kelly, and Ann Wright, are all members of the WBW Advisory Board, so we are in very good hands.

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There are many countries which recognize November 11th as Armistice Day –a day to celebrate the cessation of killing in WWI, and to honor the soldiers who fought and died, but I don’t think there is any country that has turned the intention of Armistice Day on its head like the US has.

In 1954 President Eisenhower noted that Armistice Day was intended to honor the soldiers from WWI, but in WWII, Eisenhower served as [Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Commander_of_the_Allied_Expeditionary_Force) in Europe, and achieved the rare [five-star rank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five-star_rank) of [General of the Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_of_the_Army_(United_States)). He was responsible for planning and supervising the invasion of North Africa in [Operation Torch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Torch) in 1942 and the [invasion of Normandy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion_of_Normandy) in 1944. So he felt like we needed a holiday that would honor all the **Americans** who died in Europe and the Pacific in WWII as well. And oh yes, what about the Americans who died in Korea…they needed to be honored too, and Armistice Day just didn’t cut it. So instead of creating a separate holiday for those veterans, or **all** veterans past, present and future for that matter, he ditched the aspect of Armistice day that was actually about the armistice, and transformed the day into one which not only honors soldiers, but honors and glorifies WAR and called it “Veterans Day.” Older Americans will remember celebrating Victory over Europe (VE) Day on May 8th 1945, and Victory over Japan (VJ) Day on Aug 14th, 1945, but the “V” stands for “Victory,” which represents **power.** Those were considered days we **won,** not the days that brought peace; and that is a big difference. And even those two days have lost any significance for virtually all Americans. There is no US holiday that celebrates peace or marks the end of a war. As the most powerful, most aggressive military force in the world, that would be like a parent celebrating the day he stopped abusing his child. US foreign policy is not designed to create and maintain peace. This nation would rather be feared than liked. And we don’t even want ***other*** countries to have peace if it is not to our benefit, which is why there is no formal Korean peace treaty to this day despite the desires of Koreans to have one. The US military exists to “protect and defend US INTERESTS. The Pentagon defines the goal as “full spectrum dominance, which can only by addressed by almost 800 US military bases in more than 80 countries, and a massive military budget roughly equal to the rest of the world combined. And since protecting and defending US interests is an infinite mission, the US has been at war virtually all of its existence. I recommend reading “The United States of War,” by David Vine which discusses this shameful history.

Eisenhower is frequently quoted about war and the military; probably most famous is his warning against a “military industrial complex,” which he feared would produce “unwarranted influence,” and “misplaced power.” He could not have imagined how quickly the MIC gained that “unwarranted influence,” but also how it grew, not only in depth, but breadth. Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern now calls it the Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think Tank complex, or “MICIMATT.”

Eisenhower also described the cost of war as a zero sum game. Quoting:

*“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.”* End quote. And we have seen these prescient words completely ignored as well. The US spends half of its discretionary budget on war and the military, and that amount is never questioned— yet 1 in 5 American children live in poverty, and 530,000 people file for bankruptcy due to medical bills every year.

Ironically, it seems that Eisenhower’s desire to honor soldiers and dismiss the celebration of peace, may have set in motion the creation of the very Military Industrial Complex and grotesque military spending that he cautioned against.

So! That is one way that the US has perverted the original intention of Armistice Day, but there is another way which is just as typically American, and that is, the **commercialization** of it. Quoting now from the Veterans’ Administration website:

*“The Uniform Holiday Bill (Public Law 90) was signed on June 28, 1968, and was intended to ensure three-day weekends for Federal employees by celebrating four national holidays on Mondays: Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Columbus Day. It was thought that these extended weekends would* ***encourage travel, recreational and cultural activities and stimulate greater industrial and commercial production.”*** End quote. But as it turns out, this was confusing for some people, and some states continued to celebrate Veterans Day on November 11th, so eventually the law was changed back so that it would be observed on November 11th, regardless of what day of the week on which it fell. It was said then that quote: “*The restoration of the observance of Veterans Day to November 11th* ***not only preserves the historical significance of the date****, but helps focus attention on the* ***important purpose*** *of Veterans Day:* ***A celebration to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.”*** End quote.You may have noticed that there is no mention of peace as one of those important purposes. I would also question the words “common good,” —common good” for whom I ask? You may also have noticed that the stated purpose of Veterans’ Day does not mention the millions of civilians who needlessly died in the wars in which these “patriotic heroes” fought.

But even though US federal employees are not guaranteed a 3-day weekend for Veteran’s Day, I do have some good news to share for **everyone**, not just veterans! According to Readers Digest, *“there may be fewer Veterans Day sales this year because of supply-chain issues, but there are still plenty of amazing deals that can save you a bundle!”* Did you know that *“Veterans Day is typically one of the last, best times of the year to find discounts on*[*mattresses*](https://www.rd.com/list/non-toxic-mattress/)*?”* Also, you can *“find really good buys on housewares and appliances!”*

So between deifying veterans and getting a hot deal on a dishwasher, there isn’t much room left for honoring peace. I applaud the efforts of VFP and others to restore Armistice Day in the US to its original intent, but I am not holding my breath. The cooption of Armistice Day illustrates the general underlying attitude of Americans towards issues of war and peace, and that is why it is **so important** to recognize the people who think these issues are actually **paramount,** and dedicate their lives to ending war and bringing about peace. So it is with great humility that I accept the US Memorial Peace Award on behalf of WBW, and thank the Foundation for recognizing **our** work. Thank you.