CREATING LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL
Independent American and Russian Women Speak Out On Eve of Biden-Putin Summit

We are concerned women from the United States and Russia who are looking to the upcoming summit between Presidents Biden and Putin to offer a ray of light on issues of national and human security. We are grounded in the world as it is, yet aspire to live in a world where peace is the norm and is considered a freedom, even a right.

At a time when U.S. former Secretary of Defense William Perry and many security experts say we are at a greater risk of a nuclear catastrophe than during the Cold War, we applaud the decision of our Presidents, as leaders of the two countries that still possess over 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons, to reopen a dialogue now.

In 2020, the U.S. and Russia’s combined military spending totaled an estimated $839.7 billion, including $45.4 billion on nuclear weapons. These billions are precious resources, which we could use right now to rebuild our two countries and fulfill the needs and aspirations that unite us -- jobs, livable pensions, equal access to good quality health care, to justice and a new sense of security across generations in the post-Covid era.

We seek a shared process of reimagining security. Military might does not make us safer. Many think it does, but history tells us otherwise. Violence, including against women, fuels more violence, not security. The concept of what strong leadership means also demands redefining. New thinking, not new weapons, is the better measure of a valued leader in this time.

We would like to see a new narrative in the media of both countries. Today, the predominant narrative too often focuses on military conflict and violence and this reinforces enemy stereotypes used to justify increases in military spending and the march toward unthinkable war. Its impact is reflected in polling data that show American attitudes towards Russians worsening, from 72% unfavorable in 2020 to 77% in 2021. Russians with a negative attitude towards Americans decreased from 46% to 43% but uncertainty rose with 5% saying "hard to answer." We need to keep the public space and airways of communication open to independent voices.

We see clear-eyed that relations between our two countries have deteriorated to such an extent that a necessary first step toward improving them is to bring our embassies back to capacity, enabling Americans to rehire the Russian staff who processed visas and did other non-security work, and enabling Russia to add to its embassy staff in Washington. Re-opening consulates on both sides should follow. These concrete steps are sorely needed to facilitate dialogue and exchanges -- of scholars and students, scientists, doctors and medical researchers, writers, artists and performers, those working on important environmental issues like climate change, and to restore people-to-people citizen diplomacy which helped to reduce tensions during the Cold War.
A few years ago, a wise Russian said, “We should not fear one another, we should all fear the same thing together.”

Right now a fear shared by over 50% of the people in both countries is a World War. We call on our leaders to have a summit conversation that points toward eliminating this fear, so we can concentrate on other shared ones demanding attention -- climate change, pandemics, extreme inequality and poverty.

In this time of peril and possibility, it’s time for a bold reimagining of security for the 21st century.

Imagine the American and Russian people partnering in a moonshot moment to plant a trillion trees which climate scientists say would reduce CO2 by 25% and could be game changing for the climate. Imagine they are joined by people all over the world, demonstrating that we can all do something together to benefit the Earth and humanity. This is the kind of life-affirming collective security initiative we need to preserve a future for our children and generations to come.

In 1985 at their historic summit in Geneva, Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev agreed that “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” We call on Presidents Biden and Putin to make their Geneva summit a second historic one by reaffirming this declaration on June 16th. This went a long way during the Cold War to reassure the peoples of the two countries and the world that even though we had deep differences we were committed to never fighting a nuclear war. It would go a long way to do the same today.