60 years of NATO are enough!

Confronting the war alliance with mass protests

In spite of all predictions of its imminent dissolution, in recent years NATO has developed a frightening war dynamic. On all levels, the alliance is preparing itself for future wars.

From a nuclear first strike strategy, the escalation of counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan and the intensification of NATO-EU cooperation, through to a institutional re-creation: there are more than enough reasons to confront the 60th jubilee of the war alliance, due to be celebrated on 3 and 4 April 2009 in Kehl and Strasbourg, with mass protests.

Nuclear first strike strategy and missile defence shield

In a position paper by five high-level NATO strategists, published in early 2008 (“Towards a new Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World”), the nuclear first strike strategy is being promoted openly. “The first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the quiver of escalation” – promoted openly. “The first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the quiver of escalation” – means that the nuclear sword a matching solution, in recent years NATO has developed a frightening war dynamic. On all levels, the alliance is preparing itself for future wars.

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The NATO military operation in Afghanistan set into motion a cruel escalation. Since NATO’s ISAF troops act more and more in an offensive manner, the armed skirmishes and deaths among the civilian Afghan population increase dramatically.

Under the military occupation, the structure of a liberal market economy has been created, which completely fail to reduce stagnant poverty in Afghanistan. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) the humanitarian situation has changed for the worse since the NATO operation began: 61% of the population are chronically undernourished, 68% do not have access to drinking water. Even when it comes to women’s rights, improvements are minimal according to UNDP.

NATO’s occupation of Afghanistan is the problem and not the solution for this oppressed country. Therefore immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan is badly needed. Instead, NATO wants to send more troops to the country. Also the German government has decided to “put more robust measures at the centre”, as Minister of Defence Franz-Josef Jung announced in March 2008.

Via the civil-military cooperation as it is practised in Afghanistan, even development aid is being integrated into the NATO war efforts. Caritas International criticised NATO in June 2008, saying that “the distribution of aid money is not linked to the real need for aid, but oriented towards the need of counter-insurgency”. At the NATO summit in Rambouillet it was decided to implant an – also kept secret – “action plan”, which will make civil-military counter-insurgency generally the focus of present and future NATO missions.

Brothers in spirit: intensification of NATO-EU cooperation

Shortly after he took office, the newly elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy started a real NATO charm offensive. He announced that France would fully re-integrate itself into NATO's military structures after being absent for more than 40 years. Already both organisations co-operate closely, for example within the framework of the Berlin Plus agreement, which allows the EU to use NATO resources for its operations. But France, which until the end of 2008 has the EU Council presidency, will now intensify co-operation at all levels. For this, the Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) proposes a stronger interlinking of both organisations by creating a “civil—military planning and conduct capability within NATO”, which would “co-ordinate the civilian and military capabilities of the EU and the military capabilities of NATO in one place [...] Under the motto of ‘Berlin Plus Reversed’ NATO could be granted the opportunity to draw on the EU’s civilian capacities.”

Institutional renewal

Just in time for the 60th jubilee in 2009 NATO, want to agree, or at least set in motion, a new NATO Strategic Concept. The position paper “Towards a New Grand Strategy”, referred to earlier, proposes a wide range of measures, among them that a UN mandate should no longer be a prerequisite for future NATO wars. Another demand that stands out is that the alliance in the future “should abandon the consensus principle at all levels below the NATO Council, and introduce at the committee and working-group levels a majority voting rule”. In addition, the authors
**War tax resistance**

Nonviolent action against paying for war

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, and the beginning of the war on terror, War Resisters’ International began to practice tax resistance – the withholding of a proportion of the income tax of its staff. The logic is simple: a certain percentage of every state’s budget is allocated to the military – the fighting of or preparation for war. As a consequence, tax resisters withhold this proportion from the tax they are supposed to pay to the state – an act of civil disobedience, as presently no state makes provisions for “civilian objection to military taxation”.

For example, Britain’s defence budget has been €32.6 billion in the financial year 2007/08, and it is set to increase to €36.9 billion in 2010/11. Even according to the Ministry of Defence, “the UK is the second highest spender (in cash terms) on Defence in the world behind only the United States. At 2.5% of GDP, the Defence Spending of the UK is above the NATO European average”. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “World military expenditure is estimated to have been US$1339 billion in 2007 – a real-terms increase of 6 per cent over 2006, and 43 per cent since 1998. This corresponded to 2.5 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) and US$202 for each person in the world. The USA’s military spending accounted for 45 per cent of the world total in 2007, followed by the UK, China, France and Japan, with 4–5 per cent each. All these are more than enough reason to withhold the part of the tax which goes to financing this insane expenditure.”

Tax resistance is not very visible – it happens a lot on paper: filling in tax forms, writing letters, etc. However, it can get more “exciting” when you get taken to court, or when the bailiffs threaten to confiscate part of your property for failure to pay your tax. These confrontations with the authorities can provide some scope for action and publicity.

From 5-7 September 2008, tax resisters from all over the world will meet in Manchester for the 12th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns. You can find out more at http://www.peacetax2008.org.uk/

If you want to know more about WRI’s struggle with the tax office, check out http://wri-rug.org/wtr.htm.

Andrea Speck

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**Key military bases in Europe**

Key to the military bases

1. Brunssum
2. Potsdam
3. Mont Valérien
4. EUCOM
5. Ramstein
6. Brize Norton
7. Lyneham
8. Leipzig
9. Papa
10. Vicenza
11. Aviano
12. Strasbourg
13. Fairford
14. Rota
15. Souda Bay

Key military bases in Europe

- United States bases
  - Ramstein (Germany)
  - Souda Bay (Greece)
  - Fairford (UK)

- European bases
  - Potsdam (Germany)
  - Lyneham (UK)
  - Eindhoven (Netherlands)

Europe has a significant defence budget, amounting to 2.5% of GDP. This is far higher than the EU average and even higher than the NATO European average. The USA is the second highest spender (in cash terms) on Defence in the world, behind only the United States. At 2.5% of GDP, the Defence Spending of the UK is above the NATO European average.

The war on terror has led to a significant increase in military expenditure, particularly in the USA and the UK. The USA’s military spending accounted for 45% of the world total in 2007, followed by the UK, China, France and Japan, with 4-5% each. All these are more than enough reason to withhold the part of the tax which goes to financing this insane expenditure.

The war in Iraq and Afghanistan is funded through military bases in Europe. The largest base in Europe is Ramstein, which is a central hub for airlift towards Asia. Other important bases include Souda Bay (Greece) and Fairford (UK). These bases support the deployment and command of NATO forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The war on terror has also led to an increase in military spending in Europe. The UK and the USA are the two largest spenders, followed by France, Germany and Italy. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan is funded through military bases in Europe, with Ramstein being the largest base in Europe. These bases support the deployment and command of NATO forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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most important role in the upcoming decisions. NATO aims to have 40% of its land forces spread across a lot of bases all over Europe. These bases being involved. So we have to limit ourselves to some examples. Vicenza in northern Italy houses the main part of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade in the Ederle barracks; 2900 military. There are plans to concentrate the whole brigade in Vicenza and to build a new base on the Dal Molin civilian airfield. This would raise the US military presence to 5000 soldiers. The 173rd AB is one of the three main US combat brigades destined to remain based in Europe. In 2003, 1000 soldiers from this brigade did a parachute jump into northern Iraq, taking off from Aviano military airport (Italy). Later this brigade deployed to Afghanistan as well. The new base enlargement would make Vicenza one of the main military intervention bases in Europe, a prospect which provoked demonstrations of more than 100,000 people.

But this US base is not the only intervention force in Vicenza. It also houses the headquarters of the European Gendarmerie Force. This is a European intervention force consisting of militarised police and specialised in crisis management. It was started by France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. Operations will be led from this headquarters in Vicenza.

An example of European combat forces is the Eurocorps based in Strasbourg. This is a headquarters for land forces, originally formed by France and Germany and later joined by Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg and Poland. It permanently has about 1000 personnel, and national forces are earmarked for operations under this command. The Eurocorps can be used for EU and UN operations, and it was used in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

One brigade is permanently earmarked for this headquarters: the French-German Brigade. This brigade is a major army unit with about 5000 soldiers coming from both countries. It is based at several places in the German region of Baden-Württemberg. This brigade was deployed together with the Eurocorps HQ to Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Not only land forces are involved in interventions. Fighter planes based in Europe are often deployed to Afghanistan to give close air support for the land troops, in other words bombing. And sometimes the bombing flights take off directly from European bases: during the last Iraq war from Fairford (Britain), in 1991 also from Rota (Spain), in the Kosovo war from Italian bases.

These are just a few examples of the foot-print of war in Europe, as 1000 military bases are impossible to describe in 1000 words.

Hans Lammerant

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propose that countries, which do not want to be part of a certain mission, would in future not have any right to take part in it. This would mean that only those who take part in the combat should take part in decisions: "It has always been left to individual nations to contribute what capabilities or forces they can. But nations that do not contribute forces should also not have a say in the conduct of military operations. We therefore propose [...] that only those nations that contribute to a mission – that is, military forces in a military operation – should have the right to a say in the process of the operation."

How much of these and other demands will be part of a new Strategic Concept is at present unclear, but they will play an important role in the upcoming debate.

60th NATO jubilee – call for protests in Strasbourg and Kehl

NATO will – presumably – on 3 and 4 April 2009 in Strasbourg and Kehl celebrate its 60 years of existence. This is an invitation to us, the peace and anti-war movement. NATO stands for the military enforcement of Western interests, and it is more and more an alliance to fight wars. We should start a campaign to delegitimise NATO – it is thoroughly and should be dissolved. A highlight of this campaign could be international actions against the 60 years of NATO summit in Strasbourg and Kehl.

Tobias Pflüger WRI Council member and member of the European Parliament

Donate to War Resisters' International

How to make a donation to WRI?

► by standing order which enables us to plan but let us know (see bank details overleaf).
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War Resists! 14–15 November 2008: European day of action against military infrastructure

In the previous two articles we have looked at how Europe is part of the war machinery, by looking at the various infrastructures and military bodies used for military interventions. So as we are now clear how these interventions are implemented, we can start to do what we can to disrupt them! Groups all around Europe are campaigning against militarism, each group choosing their own way of acting depending on their own context and their own group principles and strategies. Within the groups involved in the call for the day of action, the common starting point is undertaking nonviolent direct action against militarism.

A European antimilitarist network

There are many experiences, through the years, of regional antimilitarist actions so this latest effort is nothing new, but it’s an important effort in keeping alive the antimilitarist movement in Europe – re-energising it and expanding it, getting to new countries and movements.

The process of co-operating regionally has always been an aim of antimilitarists in Europe, but these more concrete plans started at the WRI 2006 Triennial Conference in Germany 2006, “Globalising Nonviolence”, where some of the groups participated in a workshop on the nonviolent citizen interventions facilitated by Vredesactie (WRI’s affiliate in Belgium). After the conference, Vredesactie held a meeting in Brussels, to continue the process of working together regionally – it was here where a more concrete plan was designed, with the idea of supporting each other’s actions, creating a common space on the web for sharing resources on military infrastructure and the transport of weaponry and to share action strategies and reports from actions done by the different groups. The website www.mcarmilit.org was created, a wiki which makes it possible for different groups to post on it. Groups present were from Belgium, the UK, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands and France.

Campaign examples

These are examples of campaigns carried out by the network

- Faslane 365: This was organised by Trident Ploughshares and others in Scotland, with the aim of blocking the base at Faslane, where the Trident nuclear submarines are based every day for one year. During the year of blockades, the campaign managed to bring activists from all over the UK and also from many other countries in Europe to do their own blockades. Each group had its own style, showing the diversity of the movement.
- Bombspotting: This Belgian campaign started as a call to campaign on the mass nonviolent action against nuclear weapons. In March 2008 the campaign organised the NATO Game Over action, a nonviolent action at the headquarters of NATO, involving around 300 internationals in a total of around 1000 people taking part. There were 500 arrests and 50 activists managed to climb over the fence of the NATO headquarters. This was an important occasion for the network to come together in an active way.

- Reclaim the base (State of Spain): For a number of years the groups around Alternativa Antimilitarista MOC in the State of Spain have been active following the WRI initiative on reclaiming the bases. Every May in what they call Mayo Caliente (Hot May), they carry out nonviolent direct actions at military bases around the country, with a special focus on bases which are part of the NATO structure.
- Disarm: The Swedish antimilitarist group ofog organises a Disarm Camp during the summer in Sweden, during which they carry out nonviolent action against Swedish weapons manufacturers.

Call for a decentralised day of action

As result of NATO Game Over, there is a proposal for a joint decentralised day of action, focusing on the role that Europe plays in military interventions. The dates set for the 14–15 November 2008. Each group should choose their own target for their action – it can be a military base, the facilities of weapons manufacturers, defence institutions, etc. The character of the action should be decided by each group, the only requirement being that it has to be nonviolent. But we encourage groups to do actions that can directly disrupt the normal functioning of military-related activities.

There is a website at http://europeanspaceaction.org/ which will provide the space for groups to say what actions they are planning and for reports from the actions themselves. Also on this website you can read the call for the day of action. There is also a list-serve for discussing and sharing information about the actions – if you want to join the list, just contact the WRI office at info@wri-irg.org.

If we want to stop militarism we need to act at a local and global scale – for this join the European day of action against military infrastructure!

For more information contact the WRI office.

Javier Garate