

‘NATO – PEACEMAKER OR WARMONGER?’

We were very grateful to Kate Hudson, General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), for racing back from the blockade of the DSEI arms fair in London to speak to Faringdon Peace Group on 4th September. Her subject was ‘NATO – Peacemaker or Warmonger?’ 2019 marks the 70th anniversary of this intergovernmental military alliance, and Kate discussed how it has expanded and evolved during this time.

It was a Labour Government which took the UK into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as a founding member alongside the US, France, Italy and Canada. There are now 29 North American and European member states, plus many more countries keen to join, and 9 ‘partners for peace’ across South America, Asia and Australasia, with whom NATO is developing relations. Unsurprisingly, the Labour front bench is split on NATO – some fully support it while others consider it a nuclear-armed terrorist organisation.

NATO’s role during the Cold War was as a defensive alliance against the Soviet threat. Under the terms of the Treaty, an attack against a member country would be considered an attack against them all and NATO could respond with force. For the first 40 years, no military action was undertaken. In the early 1990s, NATO quickly moved into the space created by the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the break up of the Soviet Union, creating a new cold war with Russia. Kate felt this was a missed opportunity for peace and NATO should have pulled back rather than rush forward.

Although NATO promotes itself as a crisis management organisation, preventing conflict, promoting democratic values and committed to peaceful resolution of disputes, Kate claims the reality is now very different: NATO has over 20,000 military personnel involved in military operations around the world - including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Libya and Somalia - and its objective is no longer purely for defence, but for military dominance. American arms manufacturers benefit from ‘interoperability’ where all countries need to use the same equipment, replacing what they already have.

There has been an acceleration of tensions under Trump, who in 2016 declared NATO obsolete and threatened US withdrawal unless other members pay more. NATO’s nuclear policies have always been clear; it is committed to a first use policy (illegal under international law) and believes nuclear weapons bring peace and are useable. As the UK is tied into NATO, we cannot have a no-first use policy ourselves. The US, under the auspices of NATO, has nuclear weapons sited in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands which those countries cannot get rid of.

Although NATO is not a power in itself with a purpose of its own, but rather a collective enterprise of member states which must agree by consensus, there are many departments within the organisation and not all issues are debated by national parliaments. Many countries are keen on joining, but is this a result of bullying and threats by the more powerful member states?

Kate can see nothing wrong with countries seeking the security provided by a ‘peace-making’ defensive alliance, but believes that NATO has gone way beyond this mission and has become an aggressive ‘war-mongering’ military force. The alternative is to work more closely with European partners through, for example, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); to encourage countries to sign up to the global UN Treaty to ban nuclear weapons; to support the United Nations as a body for peace; to change the way international systems operate for the benefit of all and to develop a new attitude towards foreign policy and our role in the world.

