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New menace from Russia?

NATO is the real threat

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The sky is darkening across the continent of Europe as we rush towards a new Cold War. The narrative is familiar. Leading politicians issue dire warnings about Russian aggression. Vladimir Putin is accused of 'waging war on the West –and winning'¹. And the West, we are told, will have to ramp up its defence spending and its nuclear weapons programme to confront this new threat.

Russia and the Yanukovich government in Ukraine have been far from blameless. But this briefing will argue that the massive expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) up to the western and southern borders of Russia has been the main factor in provoking this crisis. It has deliberately and recklessly posed a major threat to the security of the Russian Federation. NATO was expanded aggressively, not because of any objective threat to its member countries, but to suit the foreign policy interests of the United States. The overthrow of the democratically elected Yanukovich government in Ukraine was the final straw.

NATO has, therefore, provoked the very Russian threat it ostensibly seeks to deter. That 'threat' is already being used to ratchet up the arms race, creating a new NATO 'Spearhead' rapid reaction force and new military bases across eastern Europe. It has also been used to legitimise Britain's nuclear weapons system which is assigned to NATO. For the peace movement in Scotland and across the world, NATO and the events in Ukraine are issues that we cannot ignore. Challenging the aggressive expansion of the military alliance, the dark forces behind the Ukrainian coup and the one-sided media narrative that goes with it will be essential if we are to explain and counter this new threat to world peace.

On Monday 15th September 2014, soldiers from 15 countries started an 11 day battalion-sized military exercise near the city of Lviv in Ukraine. For the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation military exercises are commonplace – the US armed forces participate in hundreds of such exercises worldwide every year. What was different about this exercise was that it took place in the west of Ukraine while a civil war raged in the east. And it took place just seven months after the violent overthrow of the democratically elected government of Victor Yanukovich in what many Ukrainians describe as a coup d'état. This exercise was about providing NATO and Western endorsement of the newly installed government – a government composed of right wing, nationalist, and neo-nazi forces.

And it was a brazen demonstration of the expansionary ambitions of the military alliance. In addition to 11 established NATO members, the exercises included troops from four 'Partnership for Peace' members (see page 6) – Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova – countries which are being targeted for future membership.

Destabilising Ukraine

Of course, Ukraine is not a member of NATO nor of the European Union. But it has been wooed

assiduously by both. At its Bucharest summit in 2008, NATO issued a statement that both Ukraine and Georgia would become full members of the Atlantic alliance without specifying a date. And in June 2014 Ukraine, along with Georgia and Moldova, signed up to an EU Association agreement which will prepare these countries for full EU membership. The measures include a 'deep and comprehensive free trade agreement' opening Ukraine to tariff-free EU goods at a time when it is struggling with unpayable debts. Now IMF/EU imposed 'shock therapy' has tipped Ukraine's privatised economy into a downward spiral driving the great majority of its people deeper into poverty.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ukraine, like its Russian neighbour, went through a very rapid privatisation process creating powerful clans of industrial oligarchs. All of Ukraine's subsequent leaders have represented one or other of these clans – and all have been accused (and some convicted) of corruption. Viktor Yanukovich is no exception. He represented oligarch interests principally oriented towards trading with Russia but has pursued highly opportunist policies – playing off the EU and Russia for the best results. In October 2013 he won a vote in parliament allowing him to negotiate for associate membership of the EU. Then in December he

reversed his position. He rejected the EU plan to impose harsh austerity and instead accepted a \$15 billion loan from Russia, the promise of discounted natural gas and a closer relationship with the proposed customs union of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. This resulted in mass protests in which right wing nationalists and fascists played a leading role.

Ukraine is an important case study because its geo-strategic location puts it on the frontline of NATO's expansionary thrust. It is also being used by a western media campaign to demonise Russia and its president. The conventional wisdom is that it is Russian meddling in Ukraine which has led to the crisis. And there has undoubtedly been Russian intervention in the form of military support for the rebels in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea – historically, culturally and linguistically Russian – but internationally recognised as an autonomous part of Ukraine since 1954.

But, viewed from another perspective, NATO expansion up to the borders of Russia can be better seen as the cause of Russia's military action in Ukraine in 2014. Rarely mentioned is the prior intervention by the United States and its allies. Taped telephone conversations² confirm that US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, Victoria Nuland, among others from the US intelligence community, was directly involved in the preparations for regime change in Ukraine, even down to naming the individual who should become (and did become) Prime Minister following the coup. In December 2013 she told an international business conference in Ukraine that the US had spent a staggering \$5 billion promoting 'democracy' in Ukraine over the past two decades. Victoria Nuland was previously foreign policy advisor to Dick Cheney and is married to Robert Kagan, co-founder of the Project for a New American Century, and himself a prominent neoconservative. She is part of a cabal of neoconservatives who have consolidated their positions in the State Department and the Pentagon under the influence of George W Bush's Defence Secretary Robert Gates and General Petraeus (both kept on by Obama) and the hawkish Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State.

In order to overcome resistance within the State Department and the Pentagon, Obama came to rely for foreign policy advice on his own inner circle built around Vice President Joe Biden and a few White House advisors with support from chosen CIA advisors and CIA director Leon Panetta³. After Putin's re-election in 2012, the neoconservatives in the State Department were becoming increasingly concerned by the growing relationship between Putin and Obama and by Russia's role in heading off US military action against Syria and helping to broker the opening to Iran. The neo-cons were determined to drive a wedge between Obama and Putin and put Syria and Iran back on the Pentagon's hit list. The crisis in Ukraine was their opportunity. The United States did not create the mass movement which generated the Maidan protests. But it played a crucial part in fanning the flames. Imagine how the injection of \$5 billion and the active intervention of dozens of US-funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could distort the democratic process in Britain and then multiply that several times

for an impoverished country like Ukraine. Far from promoting 'democracy', state department officials were complicit, with the aid of violent neo-nazi street gangs, in overthrowing a democratically elected government and tearing that country away from its popular foreign policy of non-alignment. The role of extreme right organisations was highlighted by David Speedie writing for CNN:

There are some known facts: First, far-right, anti-Semitic, anti-Russian and openly fascist groups have existed and do exist as a blight on modern Ukraine. A 2012 European Parliament resolution condemned the main – but by no means most extreme – ultra-right party, Svoboda, as 'racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic.'⁴

Svodoba went on to secure several key posts in the post-coup government including that of deputy prime minister, head of national security and defence and the ministries of agriculture and ecology while the Right Sector, an even more extreme group, held that of deputy chair. In February 2014 the remnants of the Rada (after the forcible exclusion of the left MPs) voted to end the legal status of Russian, Hungarian, Polish and Romanian languages in Ukraine, playing a key part in triggering the rebellion among Russian speaking Ukrainians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

Just imagine how the United States would react if it was Russia intervening in the internal politics of Canada or Mexico and attempting to recruit them to a hostile military alliance on the borders of the United States?

Buying consent

The wider story of exactly how the US uses its wealth to buy consent in strategically sensitive regions deserves to be heard by a wider audience. In the early years of the Reagan administration the CIA was seen as a toxic brand and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was established to do quietly but openly what the CIA used to do covertly – channel funds to political groups, trade unions and civic organisations which the US supports. Although described as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) it is, in fact, almost totally funded by the US government. Its role, and that of its related organisations⁵, is to intervene in the internal politics of states around the world undermining democracy and helping to build opposition groups and mass mobilisations which would challenge governments that the US opposes. NED funding was used in all of the 'colour' revolutions in Eastern Europe including that in Serbia that ousted Milosevic in 2000, Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. In Ukraine the NED has funded more than 60 projects aimed at promoting civil society and US objectives. The NED president, Carl Gershman, has described Ukraine as 'the biggest prize' and in a September 2013 article in the *Washington Post* went on to suggest that the ultimate target of US policy in Eastern Europe was Russia itself: 'Ukraine's choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents.... Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.'⁶

Another shadowy organisation on the American right was also working to increase US influence in the post Cold War period. The 'US Committee to Expand NATO' was founded in the mid 1990s. It was stuffed with prominent figures from the Republican right such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Stephen Hadley. Bruce Jackson who co-founded the organisation was vice president of Lockheed Martin and represented 'the nexus between the defence industry and the neoconservatives'⁷. In the run up to the war in Iraq, Jackson helped draft the declaration of the Vilnius Ten governments supporting a US invasion of Iraq with or without UN approval. The committee was later renamed the 'US Committee on NATO' and was disbanded late 2003.

How the United States dominates NATO

The Washington Treaty which established NATO was signed in 1949 as a mutual defence alliance to counter the perceived threat from the Soviet Union. The terms of the treaty were purely defensive. They have never been rewritten but they have been 'updated' by a series of Strategic Concepts. The most recent of these, agreed in 2010, is entitled 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence'. It talks of new functions such as 'preventing crises', 'managing conflicts', 'stabilising post-conflict situations' and 'working with partners' including the United Nations and the European Union. There is still an emphasis that 'NATO's essential purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of its members' and a commitment to 'peaceful resolution of disputes'. Military force, it claims, 'under article 5 of the Treaty' is used only if diplomatic efforts fail. In fact, article 5, which states that an attack on one member can be considered an attack on all, has been invoked only once in NATO history – by the United States after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. The emphasis of the language throughout is about defence, security and protection.

Yet the reality of its practice is different. Over the past two decades an enlarged NATO has fought wars against a range of adversaries on three continents. None of these was in response to any threat to its members in Europe or North America.

There has never been any doubt about which nation dominates the alliance. From international financial institutions to military alliances, those who make the biggest financial contribution inevitably come to control the decision making process. Nowhere is that more true than in NATO where the US is by far the biggest contributor. It finances almost 75% of NATO spending⁸ – up from 63% in 2001. Only three countries (the US, UK and Greece) currently meet NATO military spending guidelines of 2% of GDP.

Moreover, the United States holds the key military commands. While the civilian post of NATO Secretary General is traditionally held by a European, the Supreme Commanders have almost always been US military officers. Their chain of command goes back to the Pentagon and the White House. In September 2012 a French officer was appointed to the second highest post of Supreme Allied Commander Transformation.

Perhaps most important of all, the US holds a virtual monopoly of the instruments of modern high intensity warfare. And it is the only country with globally based military forces and with the capacity to wage war on land, sea and air against any adversary on the planet.

The United States may frequently complain that it wants other European countries to share its military 'burden' but this is a situation which it has itself largely engineered. NATO members are encouraged to develop niche or specialist military capabilities that complement rather than duplicate US capabilities. Indeed, even the best equipped of NATO European allies like the UK and France, are almost wholly dependent on the United States for air defence suppression, ISTAR (intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance) and ariel refuelling. That dependency was exposed during the largely European-led NATO military interventions in Libya and Mali which would have been difficult, if not impossible, without US support.

Moreover, the US has tried to obstruct the development of a European defence manufacturing industry that could rival the US military industrial complex. Even European defence manufacturing companies that own US defence subsidiaries, are often not allowed access to certain technology held by their subsidiaries. And they often have great difficulty gaining access to the lucrative US defence market – by far the biggest in the world – since the Pentagon's military procurement policy favours domestic US suppliers. Yet penetration of the fragmented European defence market by US defence giants such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon presents no such problems. This is enhanced by the NATO insistence on 'interoperability' which tends to push member countries towards US manufacturers. All this has helped to prevent the development of a rival European defence manufacturing industry, a problem exacerbated by falling European defence budgets since the recession of 2008.

Similarly NATO's decision making process where decisions are reached by consensus means that dissenting members do not block a decision but can abstain from contributing. This is an important issue especially in a rapidly expanding military alliance so that the dominant group of nations are not vetoed from taking military action by a dissenting minority. Thus Germany's opposition to military intervention in Libya or Mali did not prevent other members of the alliance, with US logistic support, taking action. Only in the case of the war in Iraq was NATO effectively paralysed because of the deep divisions between the Anglo-American and the Franco-German axis over a war which was blatantly unjust, illegal and deeply unpopular across the world. But even this opposition was undermined later the same year (2003) when NATO agreed to take over command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and in August 2004 formed the NATO military training mission in Iraq, effectively freeing the US and UK to concentrate their forces on combat in Iraq.

Manufacturing fear

In short, NATO is a military alliance which was created by – and is largely controlled by – the United States to suit its wider geo-

strategic interests. Countering a Soviet ‘threat’ was never the central objective. When the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact collapsed and that ‘threat’ disappeared, NATO suffered a crisis of identity and legitimacy. Many assumed that it had outlived its usefulness. NATO enthusiasts, such as the German analyst Joseph Joffe, observed that retreating Soviet military forces were taking ‘home the threat that gave NATO its resilience and raison d’être’⁹. Frank Costigliola wrote:

All through the Cold War, dread of the Soviet Union had obscured NATO’s role as a vehicle for American national interests in Europe, but as that melted away, NATO’s underlying political purpose stood starkly revealed.’

Instead of disappearing, at US prompting NATO expanded rapidly and adopted new strategic missions. Without the Soviet ‘menace’ this required some creative thinking. New ‘threats’ had to be found to justify the continuation of the alliance and America’s role in it. NATO would now be needed to provide ‘stability’ to an uncertain world. Ultimately the threat from ‘rogue states’, terrorism and cyber attack would be invoked. In testifying before Congress in 1990, deputy assistant secretary of state for European Affairs, James Dobbins, stated: ‘We need NATO now for the same reasons NATO was created’. Without the ‘glue’ of US leadership in NATO, he argued, West Europeans would revert to their bad old ways, ‘renationalising’ their armed forces, playing old geopolitical games and shifting alliances. Without the United States as the

‘stabiliser’, the states of Western Europe could return to their ‘historic conflicts’.¹⁰

Thus, the argument ran, the US role in NATO is to protect the states of Europe from themselves. A hegemonic America was still needed as Europe’s pacifier and stabiliser to ‘keep the Germans down’. According to Chris Layne, NATO met three key US objectives:

It forestalled the rise of European power centers that could challenge US preponderance; it provided stability for the Continent by keeping the lid on Europe’s latent geopolitical rivalries; and, by stabilizing the Continent’s core and its peripheries, it created the security framework for the Open Door. In short, post-cold war NATO was the instrument through which the United States perpetuated its hegemonic role in Europe.¹¹

For US policymakers, however, the real ‘threat’ comes, not from resurgent imperial rivalries or external ‘rogue’ states, but from a Europe composed of truly independent states, especially if they seek to challenge US supremacy in Europe.

Hidden by all the lofty (and misleading) rhetoric about NATO and the transatlantic partnership is a simple fact: US policy in Europe aims not to counter others’ bid for hegemony but to perpetuate America’s own supremacy. American policy makers seem not to understand that while hegemons love themselves,

NATO Partnership Organisations				
NATO Members	Partnership for Peace	Mediterranean Dialogue	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative	Global Partners
Albania Belgium Bulgaria Canada Croatia Czech Republic Denmark Estonia France Germany Greece Hungary Iceland Italy Latvia Lithuania Luxembourg Netherlands Norway Poland Portugal Romania Slovakia Slovenia Spain Turkey United Kingdom United States	Armenia Austria Azerbaijan Belarus Bosnia Finland Georgia Ireland Kazakhstan Kyrgystan Macedonia Malta Moldova Montenegro Russia Serbia Sweden Switzerland Tajikistan Turkmenistan Ukraine Uzbekistan	Algeria Egypt Israel Jordan Mauritania Morocco Tunisia	Bahrain Kuwait Qatar United Arab Emirates	Afghanistan Australia Colombia Iraq Japan Mongolia Pakistan New Zealand South Korea

other states inevitably fear them and form alliances to balance against them.¹²

NATO expansion

Thus the expansion of NATO and its new strategic missions – projecting stability, international crisis management, ‘humanitarian’ intervention, energy security and disaster relief – provides the ideal pretext for the covert exercise of US power over an expanding region. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s former national security advisor, argued that NATO ‘entrenches American political influence and military power on the Eurasian Mainland’ and that ‘any expansion of Europe’s political scope is automatically an expansion of US influence.’¹³

And that expansion into ‘the Eurasian mainland’ has taken place remarkably quickly. From a stable Cold War alliance of 16 members, NATO has grown to 28 members today incorporating many of the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union. And further expansion is planned. The key to this are NATO’s partnership organisations. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) with 22 members is a vehicle for preparing selected ‘partners’ for full membership of the alliance. Its Mediterranean Dialogue draws in countries in north Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean – Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative pulls in key Gulf states such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates while NATO’s ‘global partners’ or ‘contact countries’ include countries as far afield as Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Pakistan and Colombia.

NATO’s new European missile defence system is a thinly veiled attempt to gain US nuclear primacy. Components of the system have been installed in several European countries. Spain provides the base for Aegis missile defence ships, Turkey is the site for a new x-band radar and SM-3 interceptors are based in Poland and Romania. The official story was that missile defence was necessary to counter a potential missile threat from Iran. But Iran has no nuclear weapons and lacks an effective delivery system. Everyone, above all the Russians, knew that the real target was Russia. Missile defence is the ‘shield’ which complements the nuclear ‘sword’ giving the United States and its allies the potential to conduct a nuclear first strike with impunity.

Russia has every reason to feel threatened by these developments. The overthrow of the Ukrainian government was the final straw. Predictably it has provoked exactly the kind of reaction – the annexation of Crimea and support for a civil war in the east – it was ostensibly intended to deter.

And now, in response, NATO is planning a new 5,000-strong very rapid response Spearhead Force, backed up by a 25,000-strong rapid intervention force capable of launching conventional warfare attacks within a month against Russia as well as new long-term NATO troop deployments in six countries of eastern Europe – Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

The economic push

NATO is the military wing of a much wider project. As David

Rothkopf, former Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade during the Clinton administration observed:

Pax Americana came with an implicit price tag to nations that accepted the US security umbrella. If a country depended on the United States for security protection, it dealt with the United States on trade and commercial matters.¹⁴

If the real purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty today is to implement US policy around the world, then it exists ultimately to open the world to business for US companies. This starts in Europe by ensuring that NATO members, old and new, support US values and policies such as free trade, privatisation, deregulation and open economies. Indeed, much of what NATO does is about eliminating resistance to such policies at home and abroad. That’s why NATO works closely in tandem with the EU.

It is remarkable how the growth of NATO and the EU go hand in hand and step by step. Each alliance has currently 28 members and 22 of these are members of both organisations. The economic drive accompanies the military drive.

The European Union implements the policies of what used to be called the ‘Washington Consensus’ on the European continent. Thatcherite neo-liberal economics is written into its constitution and is enforced on every member state in virtually every sector of the economy. The EU is driving a savage and deflationary austerity programme across Europe, not just in the highly indebted south, but in almost every other EU member state including Britain.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2004 to prepare neighbouring countries for EU membership. These include bilateral agreements called Action Plans and a Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). The macro-economic reforms include streamlining and standardising policies in line with those of the EU, receiving funding to help open up markets, cuts in public spending programmes, privatisation of state assets and deregulation to remove barriers on the sale of these assets to EU companies. The policies are similar to the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Recipients of ENP funding include Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Morocco and Jordan. Countries which did not implement their Action Plans included Algeria, Belarus, Libya and Syria.

In many cases NATO membership has paved the way for EU membership. In others it is EU membership which comes first and generates the political and ideological commitment among elite groups, preparing the way for militarisation – building defence capabilities and interoperability – and eventual absorption into NATO.

Anglo-American versus Franco-German

Just as the United States dominates NATO, it exerts growing influence in the European Union, as that organisation expands east and south across Europe. The differences that emerged in NATO around the time of the Iraq war have been mirrored in the

EU. French and German leaders, such as then French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, were vilified in the United States for their opposition to US war plans in Iraq. US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld castigated the 'old Europe' of the Franco-German alliance and compared it to the 'new Europe' of Britain and new Eastern Europe member states whose elites broadly supported US policy. Indeed, for many years Britain has been seen as the Trojan Horse for the United States in the EU, willing to do its bidding. President Charles De Gaulle twice vetoed UK entry into the European Economic Community precisely for that reason – not because he was anti-British but because he saw it as an entry point for the United States which could come to dominate the alliance. France under de Gaulle was always suspicious of US power in Europe and favoured a pan-European integration which would be independent of the United States. It also resented Anglo-American efforts to muscle in on what it saw as its sphere of interests – former French colonies in the Magreb and West Africa. As a result De Gaulle adopted a semi-detached attitude towards NATO and in 1966 removed French forces from its integrated command structure and all non-French forces from French soil. It also, around the same time, pushed ahead with plans to develop its own nuclear weapons system – the Force de Frappe. Under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy France moved some way back towards an atlanticist position – it resumed full membership of NATO and rejoined NATO's unified command system in 2009 – but it never completely abandoned the alliance with Germany.

The EU may have been created by France and Germany but increasingly over the past decade it has become a shared body between the original members and an Anglo-American alliance. The Franco-German axis (including Belgium, Austria and Luxembourg) stands for land power in Europe and inclines towards the inclusion of Russia to create a powerful Eurasian bloc stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. For the Anglo-American alliance, however, the idea of a European (or Eurasian) superstate outside US control would be their worst nightmare. They represent Atlanticist sea power, with North America joining forces with Europe to drive into eastern Europe and the Caucasus and Russia vilified as the enemy to be isolated and encircled¹⁵. Thus, while both camps favour expansion, the Franco-German alliance supports a slower pace of expansion which would give more time to consolidate their influence among newer countries before further enlargement. Rapid expansion, however, has suited US and UK interests and has strengthened US influence inside the EU.

Despite the intra-NATO and intra-EU rivalries both sides recognise that they need each other. The Anglo-American alliance recognise that the prominent role of France and Germany is crucial in providing cover for US policy, to win Atlanticist influence over Europe for further expansion into Eurasia.

Indeed, often the interests of the Anglo-American and the Franco-German camps have coincided. Germany was first to recognise the secessionist movements in Yugoslavia (Slovenia and Croatia) and the first to provide support for Albanian separatists in Kosovo. It benefitted greatly from the subsequent NATO

'humanitarian' interventions. In just a few years Yugoslavia was transformed from a relatively strong independent state to a series of successor states which are small, weak, indebted and unable to protect their resources or their populations from the 'demands' of the free market or from the predation of transnational investment capital. Any doubt about the ultimate purpose of military intervention in former Yugoslavia should be dispelled by reading article 1 of the Rambouillet 'Agreement' which stipulates that: 'The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles'. Moreover the 'agreement' demanded that NATO forces should not only occupy and exert political control over Kosovo, but also conduct an effective NATO occupation of the rest of Yugoslavia. If ever a 'peace proposal' was designed to be rejected, this was it. In Kosovo, as in the other new ethnic statelets, privatised assets were handed over to foreign investors (mainly German and US) at bargain prices according to debt rescheduling and structural adjustment programmes. Kosovo itself is the location of Camp Bondsteel, one of the biggest US bases outside the US mainland and straddling an important route to the Caucasus and central Asia.

In Britain the dominant elites in all three major UK political parties – Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats – are proud of their 'special relationship' with the United States and have traditionally supported Atlanticist objectives in NATO and the EU. That dominant consensus may be under threat on the political right from the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and many Tory back bench MPs who call for Britain's withdrawal from the EU. It is also opposed by much of the political left and the trade union movement who view the EU as the creation of big business to entrench neoliberal economics across the continent, undermining trade union rights and bypassing the democracy of individual member states. But the position of the United States was made clear by Phil Gordon, Obama's Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. On a visit to London in January 2013 he declared:

We welcome an outward-looking European Union with Britain in it. We benefit when the EU is unified, speaking with a single voice and focused on our shared interests around the world and in Europe... We want to see a strong British voice in that European Union. That is in the American interest.¹⁶

Transatlantic trade and investment partnership

It is not just through its 'special relationship' with the UK and the newer EU members that the US maintains its influence in the EU. It also has a huge stake in the EU's financial system. The City of London is now dominated by US banks which use the City to access markets across the 500 million people of the EU. By 2011 the stock of US foreign direct investment (FDI) in the EU amounted to a massive \$2.1 trillion¹⁷. The United States also controls much of global economic policy through its dominance of key financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Perhaps the final piece of the jigsaw will be the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). This is a new free trade agreement that is currently being negotiated by the EU and the

United States. It will undermine most of the remaining regulation on the European side and threaten environmental, health and safety and trade union legislation that has been fought for over decades. It is also likely to open up new markets such as health, education and social provision to the private sector. By merging the economies of the EU and North America into a single huge transatlantic market of 850 million people it will cement the power of the biggest transnational companies on both sides of the Atlantic and increase the dominance of the United States over the economies of the European Union. Moreover, control over such a huge market – and its corresponding transpacific equivalent, the TPP – could create the critical mass that allows the US to ‘set market standards’ for the rest of the world. A key part of this ‘setting of market standards’ would be to make illegal the forms of state and quasi-state ownership, subsidy and strategic direction that has been a key element in Chinese growth – as well as some other members of the BRICS alliance.

Much of the controversy has been around the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). This would provide the means for companies to take individual countries to a court staffed by corporate lawyers to remove any barriers to trade which might impede their profits. The TTIP has exposed conflicts between the major powers of Europe and North America. The EU (especially France and Germany) have demanded that the agreement should include financial services. The US opposes this to protect its unregulated trading through the City of London and UK crown dependencies. The US wants to include the ISDS and wants equal access to markets for public services including health and education. France and Germany are opposed to ISDS. The EU wants access to US markets for agricultural products and wants an end to US agricultural subsidies. The US in turn wants access to the EU for GM foods. Whatever the outcome of these negotiations, the United States is likely to emerge from the TTIP with increased influence over the economies of Europe.

We have already seen how US military preponderance allows it to dominate the decision making process in NATO and how its Atlanticist strategic objectives become those of the alliance. A similar process takes place in the EU where US influence through the UK government and other allies has prevented any major military challenge to US power on the continent. Fifteen years ago the EU had ambitious plans for its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and initially set a goal of a 60,000 strong rapid deployment force. This was quietly abandoned and replaced by battlegroups of 1500 troops, two of which would be available for deployment on a rotating basis. Now two battle-groups has been reduced to one. At each stage these proposals were seen as a threat to NATO and US hegemony in Europe and were opposed by the Anglo-American camp. The new agreement is that EU intervention would only take place where NATO had opted not to intervene, giving NATO the right of first refusal. This has, for the meantime, secured the dominance of NATO over its EU equivalent.

The drive into Central Asia

With former Yugoslavia dismembered and subdued, and Ukraine still being fought over, NATO’s new thrust is into the Caucasus

and Central Asia – described by Brzezinski as the ‘Eurasian Balkans’. This covers a vast area between the eastern shore of the Black Sea and China and includes the Caspian Sea and its crucial oil and gas resources. Throughout history this region has been at the centre of a clash of empires. In the 19th century it was the focus of the ‘Great Game’ between the empires of Tsarist Russia and Great Britain. And today it is the ‘Black Hole’ of post-Soviet Central Asia where Russia, China and the United States (and to a lesser extent also Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India) project power and compete for influence.

Above all US strategy wants to prevent a grand alliance between Russia, China and Iran which draws in most of the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Brzezinski clearly saw Central Asia as the next major battlefield. Washington was heavily involved in the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia which overthrew Eduard Shevardnadze¹⁸ in favour of the fiercely pro-American Mikheil Saakashvili (now wanted by the Georgian authorities for embezzlement and corruption charges). Georgia has been promised future NATO membership and the alliance has also made overtures to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan for membership. Azerbaijan, which has a policy of ‘neutrality’ but is considered to be pro-Western, has remained silent on the issue and Kazakhstan (like Belarus and Armenia) has said it will not join NATO. In the meantime NATO has drawn up plans to strengthen its military cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova including joint military exercises, increasing ‘interoperability’ of their armed forces with those of NATO and participation in ‘smart defence’ operations¹⁹.

Thus NATO, having expanded eastwards right up to the western border of Russia, is now seeking to expand the alliance by drawing in countries directly bordering Russia’s southern flank. Brzezinski was pretty candid about his geo-strategy towards Russia. He viewed Russia as the greatest threat to US ambitions in the region and wanted to see it broken up into ‘a European Russia, a Siberian Russia and a Far Eastern Republic’²⁰. Such a ‘loosely federated’ structure based on free market principles would open up Russia and its vast resources to US and European transnational companies.

But US military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan built during the Afghan war have recently been closed at the request of the respective governments. Russia retains considerable influence in the region. Increasingly, so also does China. It has recently signed a series of energy deals which will make China much less dependent on the long and vulnerable sea route around South East Asia. In particular, Turkmenistan has agreed to supply its eastern neighbour with 65 bcm of gas a year by 2020. Two new gas pipelines (making four in total) passing through all five Central Asian states to the western Chinese city of Alashankou came on-stream in 2014. This means that within the next decade Central Asia will supply around 40% of China’s natural gas and China will be easily Central Asia’s largest trade partner. Central Asian leaders may be reluctant to respond to overtures from NATO and the United States if it would mean jeopardising relations with their two heavyweight neighbours – China and Russia – who also happen to be their biggest trading partners.

The South Caucasus and Central Asia



Moreover, in this part of the world NATO faces a rival alliance. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a regional political, economic and military grouping which brings together China, Russia and four countries of Central Asia (excluding Turkmenistan) and will soon admit four new members – India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia. Although security is the main concern of the organisation there is increasing economic integration and energy is at the heart of the new regional grouping. SCO members will soon account for 20% of the world's oil and over 50% of its natural gas reserves. The SCO is clearly emerging as a major counterbalance to the role of NATO in Eurasia.

The impact of the War on Terror

But to fully understand NATO's role in the conflicts of today, we need to go back 15 years. The attacks on New York and Washington on 11th September 2001 were 'manna from heaven' for the administration of George W Bush. In a single terrorist act they provided a new and credible 'enemy' for the United States and NATO alike – a threat which justified the projection of US power across the world and the expansion of the Western military alliance. The scale of that threat and the geographic spread of the Al-Qaeda network were hugely exaggerated. But in the emotional aftermath of 9/11 most Americans were willing to follow where George Bush led. Under the cover of the open-ended War Against Terror, the Pentagon attacked first Afghanistan and then Iraq and subjected them to regime change and long term occupation. Saddam Hussain's Iraq, of course, had nothing to do

with al-Qaeda or 9/11, but this was about settling old scores, shifting the balance of power in the Middle East and securing US control over that country's huge oil reserves.

Without 9/11 and the globalisation of the 'War on Terror' it is unlikely that either of these wars would have taken place, nor that NATO's out-of-area operations would have been accepted or normalised. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, just like the earlier one in Kosovo, were used to build new US bases in the region. Afghanistan, for example, despite the recent NATO 'withdrawal', still plays host to nine major US bases and 10,000 US troops. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) links NATO with a host of new and strengthened US bases in the Gulf – Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Bahrain where the US 5th Fleet is based and where the UK government is building a new British naval base²¹. Some of these bases are currently being used to launch military operations against Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria. They are also part of a wider military ring that encircles Russia, Iran and China. Completing the encirclement in the Far East are NATO's 'global partners' in the region – Japan, South Korea and Australia – where 28,500 US troops are based in South Korea, 40,000 in Japan and new US bases have been established in Australia, Singapore, Philippines, South Korea, Guam and Okinawa. America's 'pivot' to Asia is adding a further twist to the militarisation of this volatile region, transferring 60% of its global naval and air force assets (including nuclear armed submarines) to the Asia-Pacific region by 2020.

Towards a global NATO?

Does this mean that NATO is going 'global' and is about to open its doors to full membership from any part of the world? Well not quite. Or at least not yet. The internal debate about whether it has a remit for out-of-area operations appears to be over. Over two decades the alliance has fought wars across the Middle East, Africa and Europe. It already interprets its role as dealing with problems and contingencies around the world.

The transformation of NATO from a North Atlantic organisation to one which will be a truly global alliance has powerful advocates in high places. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, until last year NATO Secretary General, and Ivo Daalder, US ambassador to NATO until 2013, both argued forcefully that NATO membership should be open to any democratic state regardless of location²². They point out that NATO operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan have included substantial numbers of troops from non-NATO countries and that Australia, Japan and South Korea have sent troops to Iraq. They contend that global members of the alliance would take some of the pressure off European military forces. This change would require the amendment of Article 10 of the Treaty which limits membership to Europe and North America. So far the alliance has declined to follow that track.

Existing members are concerned about such an open ended commitment to defend any country in the world under article 5. Would Denmark or Latvia, for example, want to make a commitment to defend Japan in a conflict over disputed islands in the East China Sea? Probably not. Perhaps more importantly, such a development would create a permanent 'Coalition of the Willing' ready-made to support any US intervention across the globe. This would undoubtedly be used to sideline the United Nations – which the United States is increasingly unable to control – as the only international organisation which can confer legitimacy on collective military action. Indeed, for many Republicans this is one of its main advantages – to create a 'league of democracies' that will kill off the UN.

As a step towards this, NATO now has a category of 'enhanced partners' that includes Australia and South Korea as well as Georgia, Finland, Sweden and Jordan. This takes selected non-NATO states closer to full membership. Whether this will result in a fully Global NATO is not yet clear. At the moment the 'pivot' to Asia consists of a series of bilateral relationships between the United States and other countries in the region. The US, not NATO, is the main actor in the Asia-Pacific. It is, of course, entirely possible that an attempt will be made at some stage to create a new regional alliance – a NATO of the Far East. A previous attempt to do that – the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) – was less than successful and was disbanded in 1977.

What is clear is that NATO remains a serious threat to world peace and that it is now being used for military intervention well beyond the European theatre. It is the world's foremost military alliance and it remains firmly under the control of the world's dominant military power – the United States. But the world is changing fast. The era of an unchallenged single

superpower is gone. Instead we are moving towards a multi-polar world.

NATO – a threat to world peace

Over the past 15 years the US has suffered serious reverses in major wars across the Middle East. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, US-led military intervention has been nothing short of disastrous, creating power vacuums where Islamic State has moved in to establish its brutal 'caliphate'. If al-Qaeda was the product of blowback from large-scale CIA support for the Afghan Mujahideen during the 1980s²³, then the current war against Islamic State is blowback from the US-led wars against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. In Syria, NATO members such as the US, UK and Turkey, supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, provided training, weapons and money for anti-Assad forces most of whom later joined Islamic State or the al-Qaeda affiliated Al Nusra Front. And an attempt to launch a direct US-led assault against the Assad regime in August 2013 was only defeated by widespread public opposition on both sides of the Atlantic and a vote in the UK parliament.

Perhaps even more important is the long term economic decline of Europe and America. Both were paralysed for many years by a deep and damaging recession and remain trapped in a cycle of debt and slow growth. Their economies are being rapidly overhauled by China and other developing countries.

This is best illustrated by the rise of BRICS. The alliance between Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa is emerging as an alternative to the G7 western powers and is challenging the Washington-dominated Bretton Woods system and the role of the dollar as the global reserve currency. In 2014 BRICS set up the New Development Bank with an initial capitalisation of \$100bn mainly to finance infrastructure projects in the developing world. In 2015 China launched a new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which quickly attracted around 50 supporting countries including the UK despite the opposition of the Obama administration.

The Obama administration is attempting to respond to this crisis by changing tack. The Bush era left America's bid for global dominance starkly exposed, relatively isolated and deeply unpopular. Obama's aims are no different but his methods are. In contrast to Bush's unilateralism, Obama seeks to maintain US hegemony through creating new regional and global alliances that to a considerable extent conceal the hand of the United States. The US is currently negotiating new free trade agreements across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to put itself at the centre of an enormous free trade area that includes most of the world's population but excludes China, thus boosting the US economy and generating new jobs.

In military terms, it has favoured the rapid growth of NATO, behind which it conceals the iron fist of global enforcement. There is a rationale to this strategy. It plays to US strengths. America's economy may be in long term decline but its global war machine is unparalleled in history. Despite its \$18 trillion national debt America continues to account for almost 40% of

global arms spending. And it does this for a reason. At the end of the Cold War defence budgets were falling year by year. Arms manufacturing, however, is an important and highly profitable part of what remains of America's productive economy. And peace is bad for business. NATO expansion is one way to get countries to spend more on defence and buy weapons that they don't need to counter a threat they don't face. And if they do this from US defence contractors so much the better. They also buy into supporting US policy around the world. A world of free trade and open economies suits the US business community. Even if the Obama administration does not actually seek war with Russia it is willing to engage in a game of brinkmanship to get its way. But this is a high risk game in which there is no room for mistake or miscalculation. At stake is peace in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The risks of all-out conventional and even nuclear war are higher than they have been for decades.

That's why the peace movement has a responsibility to respond to these events. A new and one-sided propaganda war is under way which demonises Russia and its president and beats the drums of war. It is already being used to legitimise the renewal of Trident. The expansion of NATO and the targeting of countries on the western and southern borders of Russia has already provoked a Russian reaction in Ukraine. Tomorrow it could be Georgia, Moldova or Central Asia. None of this should be taken to identify with the deposed and corrupt Yanukovich government or justify the Russian annexation of Crimea or the military support given to the rebels in eastern Ukraine, but these are complex issues which require a negotiated settlement, not a return to the Cold War. And such a settlement requires an end to NATO expansionism, dismantling Europe's provocative missile defence system and the opening of negotiations for a global ban on nuclear weapons as supported by the great majority of nations. This is the key challenge facing the peace movement in our era.

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 - 4 Speedy, David. Rein in Ukraine's neo-fascists. 6th March 2014. <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/06/opinion/speedie-ukraine-far-right/>
 - 5 The International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the American Center for International Labour Solidarity (an affiliate of the AFL-CIO), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (an affiliate of the Chamber of Commerce). These organisations channel funds to centrist and right wing trade unions and other organisations. The NED board of directors is drawn from the elite of US government policy making. Past members include Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Frank Carlucci, General Wesley Clark and Paul Wolfowitz.
 - 6 http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/former-soviet-states-stand-up-to-russia-will-the-us/2013/09/26/b5ad2be4-246a-11e3-b75d-5b7f66349852_story.html
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 - 14 Rothkopf, David. 'Beyond Manic Mercantilism'. Council on Foreign Relations, 1998.
 - 15 This is part of a wider US geo-strategic position where the challenge to US global hegemony comes from an alliance between Russia, China and Iran which controls much of Eurasia including the lion's share of its oil and gas resources.
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 - 21 www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30355953
 - 22 Daadler, Ivo. Goldgeier, James. *Global NATO*. Foreign Affairs, Sep/Oct 2006.
 - 23 There is good evidence that the 9/11 atrocities were made-in-the-USA. During the 1980s Osama Bin Laden and the Mujahideen were armed by the CIA and funded by Saudi Arabia to wage jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. In particular the supply of very large numbers of US-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles tipped the balance of the war decisively in favour of the Mujahideen. These forces later morphed into the Taliban and al-Qaeda which came to identify the United States as its principal enemy.



