

NATO – NO, TA!

Tony Simpson

This Tony Simpson is editor of The Spokesman, published in Nottingham. Others with the same name include the author of No Bunkers Here, a classic account of successful non-violent action in a Welsh community in the early 1980s, and a third Tony Simpson, based in Honiton, who writes letters to the Morning Star.

'Approaching along the M4 from the Severn Bridge, Newport is announced by a glowering Monte Cassino-like fortress above the wooded escarpment, which turns out to be a monstrous modern hotel. How on earth was this eyesore ever permitted? Well, such is the power of golf, the great hope for a diversified economic future. It was the HQ of the 2010 Ryder Cup.'

*Towns in Britain
Adrian Jones & Chris Matthews
(Five Leaves, 2014)*

It was also the shakedown for heads of government and their retinues attending NATO's summit meeting in early September 2014. Incongruously, 'replicas' of armoured personnel carriers and the latest strike aircraft were parked around Celtic Manor's golf links while the world's press did its 30 seconds to camera. Was this an attempt to disabuse sceptical viewers that all the political and military brass might engage in some 19th hole junket?

What follows is based on the Russell Foundation's public statement at the time of the NATO Summit in Newport.

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The leaders of 28 NATO member countries and many others gathered for a summit meeting in Newport, the third city of Wales, on 4/5 September 2014. For days together, this small city was besieged while fences, gates and barricades were erected to protect those attending. The cost was substantial, and there was considerable inconvenience to the people of Newport and to the thousands of peace movement activists who gathered there to protest at the nuclear-

armed Alliance's profligacy and increasing belligerence. NATO's uselessness is never more apparent than when it rudely disrupts people's lives in order to exult in 65 costly years of existence.

It was with some foresight, in 1949, that the distinguished Irish Foreign Minister, Seán MacBride, rejected an invitation, sent through the American Ambassador in Dublin, to participate in a meeting to discuss the formation of the North Atlantic Alliance. Later, MacBride gave several reasons for his opposition:

'First of all I regarded NATO as being a rather dangerous military alliance that might well involve Europe in another war at more or less the wish of the United States. I could quite well see the American anti-communist view pushing NATO into a cold war first, and then into an active war.'

How prescient MacBride was. Nowadays, Russia may no longer be communist, but it remains the target of large-scale NATO expansion; in the Baltics, in Poland and elsewhere in central Europe, in the Balkans (Serbia included), around the Black Sea, especially in Georgia and Ukraine. Ukraine shares a long border with Russia. Planned missile 'defence' installations in Poland and Romania underline the aggressive posture towards Russia which the US maintains.

It should never be forgotten that the United States runs NATO in its own interests. When the US wanted to go to war in Afghanistan in 2001, immediately after 9/11, it spurned NATO's offers of assistance, made by the then Secretary-General, George Robertson. Only later did the US identify a useful, and expensive, role for NATO in that theatre of operations.

Be that as it may, Ireland had a particularly compelling reason not to join NATO, according to Mr MacBride:

'... it was completely illogical for us to enter into a military alliance with Britain while a part of our country was still being occupied by British forces. We would be condoning and accepting the British occupation of Northern Ireland by entering a military alliance with Britain.'

The fundamentals of that situation endure, notwithstanding the real achievements of the peace process in Ireland. MacBride went on:

'I can't think of any good reason why Ireland should join NATO, then or now. NATO is a dangerous military alliance and I have noticed that there is a great deal of hesitancy among many of the NATO countries. I am very glad that we didn't join and that we didn't spend vast sums of money on quite unnecessary armament.'

There have been few statesmen with such clear vision. Currently, Ireland spends less than half of one per cent of its gross domestic product on the military, while Greece, which, like Ireland, has suffered greatly from austerity policies imposed by others, still spends more than NATO's two per cent target.

Seán MacBride developed his critique of NATO when accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1974. He said:

‘ ... It would be foolish to underrate the massive influence of the organized lobbies of military-industrial complexes in the United States and Western Europe. They constitute an unseen and unmentioned powerful force operating silently in the corridors of NATO and of most Western governments. Their resources are unlimited and their influence is great. This constitutes a huge vested interest which works silently against General and Complete Disarmament.’

The world much needs statesmen with MacBride's experience and vision. Unfortunately, there was little sign of such in the ghastly halls of Celtic Manor, fenced off from the people of South Wales. Symbolically, that second-hand fence has now been offered to France to keep at bay the refugees of NATO'S wars in Libya and elsewhere, who gather at Calais *en route* to Britain.

NATO's profligacy has not gone unnoticed in The Netherlands, where the Court of Auditors are investigating. We publish their initial letter as The Netherlands prepares to host the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in November 2014, together with David Vine's perceptive analysis of contractors' profiteering amidst the US military's vast overseas estate, including the 'British Indian Ocean Territory' of Diego Garcia, where wars begin.