

Editorial

NATO? – No thanks!

NATO's regular bombardments of Tripoli have, so far, failed to silence Colonel Gaddafi. Meanwhile, helicopter gunships and drones are deployed against his forces elsewhere in the country, supplementing months of aerial bombing that involves barely half of NATO's 28 member states, as well as some non-members, too. (There is growing dissent about the campaign within the Organization itself, not least on the part of Germany.) Nevertheless, the skies over Libya are anything but a 'no-fly zone', at least as far as NATO is concerned.

It was with some foresight, then, 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. That was in 1949. In his memoir*, MacBride gives 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, notwithstanding that the dynamics of NATO's wars have sometimes appeared rather different, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, to what he anticipated. In the war on Yugoslavia in 1999, for example, European members of NATO, led by Tony Blair, pressed hard for air strikes, although Clinton initially seemed rather more cautious.

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, not to mention Georgia and Ukraine. The latter 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. In Britain, we have been informed that our bill for NATO’s bombardment of Libya runs at more than £260 million for six months. Does that include the cost of special forces’ boots-on-the-ground, recently filmed by Al Jazeera?

In this issue, Peter Dale Scott probes the deeper politics of NATO’s war on Libya, while Rick Rozoff updates us on the Organization’s military campaign against that country.

Tony Simpson

**That Day’s Struggle: A Memoir 1904-1951 by Seán MacBride, edited by Caitriona Lawlor, Currach Press, Dublin, 2005*

‘... 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.’

Nobel Lecture by Seán MacBride, December 1974