



NATO at 60 years

On April 4th 2009, NATO will celebrate its 60th anniversary with a summit meeting in Strasbourg, France. NATO has emerged as a broad military alliance that integrates the foreign policy and decision making of its member countries into its own policy, strategy and military decisions.

History has shown that the dangers posed to peace and international security come precisely from the military alliances of various powers striving to dominate the world. NATO is such an alliance and for that reason Strasbourg will be the scene of mass demonstrations against the NATO alliance and what it represents.

The formation of NATO

NATO was established on April 4th 1949. The values which created it 60 years ago have been expanded so that today NATO is a global political and military alliance.

Canada played a significant role in the formation of NATO and, in particular, the concept that NATO should be a political, economic and military alliance of its constituent members. Articles 2 and 4 of the NATO charter, which lay out this mandate, were key contributions by Canada at the time of NATO's founding.

NATO's formation just five years after the end of the Second World War signaled the beginning of 40 years of military tension between the countries of the NATO alliance and the Soviet Union. The Warsaw Pact was formed in 1955 after the Soviet Union's request to join NATO as a way of preserving peace in Europe was rejected.

The Cold War was NATO's raison d'etre. It was based on the premise that western

democracies (and their "values") faced an imminent threat to their existence -- a concept that has been resurrected by the proponents of the "war on terror".

NATO precludes an independent policy

NATO is both a military and a political partnership that impacts a member country's foreign policy and integrates it militarily into the NATO decision making structure.

Member countries consistently invoke their "NATO commitment" to engage in aggressive foreign policy and huge military spending. Canada tested Cruise missiles in the 1980's as part of its commitment to NATO. NATO countries account for more than 75 percent of all global military expenditures.

Mutual assistance and defence in the face of aggression is one of the fundamental tenets of the NATO charter. NATO membership obliges all countries to come to the aid and assistance of any member country that is attacked. Georgia could have requested NATO (and thereby Canadian) assistance had Georgia been a full member of NATO in August 2008 when war between Georgia and Russia broke out.

Canada participated in the war in Yugoslavia in 1999 as part of its NATO commitments. NATO undertook the bombing of Yugoslavia without authorization from the United Nations Security Council, in defiance of its own charter and Canadian forces were engaged without decision by Parliament. The Kosovo engagement marked a turning point in NATO policy and signaled its new role as a military force to intervene beyond a defensive role and to carry out political decisions independent of its member states

and their representative assemblies.

Afghanistan became the second NATO war in August 2003 when it took over the command of the International Security Assistance Force. Canada's military operations in the south of Afghanistan have been as part of a NATO led force.

NATO expansion and increasing tensions with Russia

The end of the Cold War in the 1989-1990 period did not mark the end of NATO. The original 12 countries has now grown to 28 member states.

The first post-Cold War expansion of NATO came in 1990 when the former Democratic Republic of Germany became part of the alliance with the re-unification of Germany.

In 2004 Estonia, Latvia, Lithuanian, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania received membership in NATO. In April 2008 Croatia and Albania took the first step to admission as full NATO members. On January 14, 2009 Canada ratified the Accession Protocol for Albania and Croatia.

The 2008 Communiqué from the NATO summit in Bucharest named the Ukraine and Georgia as the next members of NATO.

The expansion of NATO along with the deployment of missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech Republic has been seen by Russia as a military threat. It has responded with threats of targeting nuclear weapons on any country that accepts the deployment of missile defence systems and with an increase in weapons production and research, creating a new arms race.



NATO's global reach

NATO now has global connections and partnerships, and some strategists propose to develop it into a "global alliance of democracies". This global alliance is being proposed as an alternative to the perceived shortcomings of the UN and NATO would be its armed force to implement policy.

NATO has co-operation arrangements with 24 "partner countries" and relations with the "contact countries" Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan. NATO is also courting India, a potential key partner of NATO against China. NATO's

Mediterranean Dialogue (since 1995 with six countries – Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Algeria joined in 2000) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative ICI (since 2004) are aimed at expanding NATO's influence into the Gulf region, with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates being formally part of ICI, and Saudi Arabia and Oman "showing great interest".

Canada and NATO

It is often thought that Canada is a junior partner in NATO. However, Canada's contributions to NATO are second to none. They show the extent Canada is integrated into the NATO command structure and its readiness for wars such as in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

Since its inception Canada has been the sixth largest contributor to NATO's military and civil budgets. In 2005-06 Canada contributed some \$160 million and 114 personnel. A Canadian general is Chairman of the Military Committee, NATO's top military position.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs NATO is "the cornerstone of Canada's relations with Europe. Canada benefits significantly from the diplomatic weight, technical expertise and military capabilities of NATO."

Canada is the third largest contributor to NATO's airborne early warning system.

Canada provides training grounds for NATO forces. Operation Maple Flag is held at Cold Lake and it is one of the largest combat aircraft exercises in the world. One of the most controversial training facilities is at Goose Bay, Labrador. The aboriginal people have been opposed to the use of the base as disruptive to their use of the land. Goose Bay is being expanded as a training facility for special operations and expeditionary force exercises.

What this shows is that Canadian foreign and military policy is linked with that of NATO and its emergence as a new global military force to pursue interventions such as in Afghanistan.

NATO and Nuclear Weapons

NATO's Nuclear Weapons Policy Includes:

1. indefinite retention of nuclear weapons by the Nuclear Weapons States
2. continued planning for the use of nuclear weapons
3. retention of the option to use nuclear weapons in conflict, including possible first-use of nuclear weapons and use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states
4. stationing of nuclear weapons at NATO sites in Europe
5. deployment of nuclear weapons in, and plans for their use by non-nuclear weapons states (nuclear sharing)
6. use of Depleted Uranium weapons
7. continuation of these nuclear policies for the "foreseeable future".
8. recognition of nuclear weapons as "essential to preserve peace" and to provide an "essential link" between Europe and North America.

Canada supports NATO's nuclear weapons by helping to pay the cost of maintaining nuclear weapons in Europe for NATO use, and contributing to NATO's nuclear policy as a member of the Nuclear Planning Group. These positions disregard not only global opinion, but also the legal obligations of Canada to pursue negotiations toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).