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Dismantle NATO, or better yet, have the N stand for nonviolent

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

"NATO doesn't work anymore. Let's dismantle this arcane network of war makers whose fundamental purpose is the service of U.S. military interests and create a new global network for nonviolent conflict resolution, which serves the whole human race by leading us toward a new world of peace."

That's the message from the weekend, when thousands marched in Chicago against the largest meeting of NATO in its 63-year history.

We don't want NATO, they said. We can't afford NATO. We can't risk having NATO anymore. We need a paradigm shift, a new way of relating with the world. We don't want to be in perpetual preparation for the next war, they said. We want nonviolent relationships with every nation and strategic, well-funded, institutionalized, international structures that will make the world less militarized and more nonviolent.

For months, a diverse group of organizations, including unions, nurses, churches and the Occupy movement, has been planning the protest. Those plans, many believe, forced the Obama administration to move the G8 summit from Chicago to the woods of Camp David in Maryland. Meanwhile, the massive police presence throughout the week attempted to put the movement in a negative light. But despite the police, media and government pressure, thousands marched and proclaimed the message, "We want peace. End the U.S. war in Afghanistan now. No more NATO." That, for me, is a sign of hope.

"We don't need NATO," longtime Chicago activist Bernardine Dohrn said on Democracy Now! last week, when she was on the program with longtime activist Bill Ayers. "We need an end to the war in Afghanistan. We need a complete end to the war in Iraq. We need to rethink what just happened in Libya and what's going on every day in Pakistan."

She continued:

NATO is a global secret cabal. It is the military arm of the global 1 percent. NATO has become the background to how we hear the news: "NATO forces, NATO bombings ..." And when you try to find out what NATO is, you realize that it is the largest global military alliance in human history and that its key elements are that it is about permanent war, it is about dirty war, it is about nuclear war, and it is about hot wars -- really four of them right now. So we don't really know what it is. They are secretive. When I first went to look at a NATO website to see what it was, a dove floats across the screen on the first page of the official NATO website. By the end of the NATO website, it's helicopters, fighter planes and drones. So, we are not made safer by NATO. It is opposed to peace and to our future.

"We would like to see an end to NATO," Ayers added. "We would like to see in every member country of NATO a popular movement that asks its government to leave NATO. We want NATO disbanded. NATO is an instrument of war. And after 9/11, it transformed itself. Its name is an anomaly -- the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ... After 9/11, the Bush administration invoked Article 5, and it became the instrument of permanent war, pre-emptive war, and it really has no place in a free and peaceful and democratic world."

He continued:

What NATO does is it allows every government deniability. So the United States and every other country in NATO violates the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but they do it by saying, "It's not us who are violating it, it's NATO doing it. It's not U.S. nuclear bombs in Europe, it's NATO bombs in Europe." Well, that's just completely false. Afghanistan is a case in point: 90,000 American troops there, and the next largest force is Great Britain with 9,000. And that coalition is unraveling. The headlines in all the local papers are about the attempt of NATO to hold together through this summit. The election in France of the Socialist party gives new urgency to the fact that NATO is unraveling at the top. People are not in favor of these wars anywhere in the world. And in the United States, there's only something like 27 percent of Americans who support these wars, and yet the wars go on.

"Why protest a meeting of U.S. allies?" asked the Rev. Jesse Jackson in an editorial in the *Chicago Sun-Times* on May 14.

One major reason is that after the Soviet Union collapsed and Europe united, NATO became an organization in search of a mission. It was created as a defensive alliance to bolster the West against the Soviet threat. Now that threat is no longer. And NATO has slowly turned from a mutual defensive alliance to a mutual offensive alliance. In the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya, NATO has coordinated interventions into areas outside the alliance ... NATO is the symbol and the centerpiece of the U.S. commitment to global military intervention.

We have the most powerful military in the world, but our students aren't keeping up, our roads and bridges and basic infrastructure are in decline, poverty is spreading. And abroad, we're increasingly known not for the aid we provide but for the bombs we drop ... Last week in Washington, Republicans in Congress passed a budget resolution that increased military spending while cutting funding for food stamps and child nutrition. Republican Mitt Romney has called for raising military

spending -- already above its Cold War levels in comparable dollars -- even as he supports a budget that would require cutting Medicare and virtually eliminating domestic government investments in education, food safety, roads and bridges, new energy and more. Obama's budget is less unbalanced, but even he would sustain a military budget far higher than required for defense. Instead of diplomacy and peaceful engagement, the U.S. increasingly employs drones and remote-controlled missiles to "speak" to our adversaries. Too many scorn diplomacy as weak, as "soft power." But in fact, Americans would be better served if we had fewer smart bombs and more educated kids. We'd do better if our military were smaller, our diplomats more active and our economy stronger.

In that spirit, a group of Catholic Workers began the week of protests with a strong and peaceful protest at Obama's presidential campaign headquarters in Chicago's Prudential Building. More than 125 of them carried signs and banners that read, "No to NATO; Yes to Community" and called for "Works of Mercy, Not Works of War." Eight were arrested for nonviolent civil disobedience.

"Our hope for [the May 14] action was to create a narrative of possibility and hope in the power of community over NATO's continued war-making in Afghanistan and its role of corporate protector," wrote Jake Olzen of the Catholic Worker, describing the action. "Our protest -- nonviolent but assertive, invitational but clear -- was intended to counter the dominant myth that our only choices are violence or passivity. ... We can live in a world without NATO and the G8 by empowering our own communities to be places of justice, sustainability, peace and hope. ... For us, our alternative is love, community and powerfully confronting violence with creative nonviolence."

Sunday's march brought out a massive police force, but by and large, the marchers were peaceful. It was led by veterans from the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Toward the end, they threw down their medals in the road and renounced their participation in these wars.

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"For the most part, the day was incredible," Olzen told me on the phone. "To have several thousand Americans march against NATO shows an awakening discomfort of the large scale American militarization of the globe. That many people protesting NATO was unthinkable a few years ago. It's a promising sign that a movement is emerging which has strong critiques of capitalism, war and environmental destruction. That's why there was such a high police presence, and why the police kept tensions so high among protesters. They are trying to discredit the movement. But it's incredibly refreshing to be part of a growing movement that sees clearly that the emperor has no clothes."

Meanwhile, the U.S. war in Afghanistan continues at the rate of \$2 billion a week, and displaces about 400 people a day. With our drones, we breed terror and stir up the Taliban for further warmaking. In Chicago, city clinics are closing and city teachers are being laid off because of lack of funds, yet the city spent \$55 million to host the NATO summit for two days. As one protester said, "Our priorities are skewed."

Sunday's marchers tell us that war and NATO aren't working, that we can't afford them any longer and that we should create instead a "Nonviolent Atlantic Treaty Organization" -- or better, a "Nonviolent Global Treaty Organization" -- through the United Nations, to help us disarm, eliminate the root causes of war in systemic injustice and poverty, and institutionalize nonviolent methods of international conflict

resolution. I hope that vision of peace can one day be realized. Maybe then, we will start to obey Jesus' commandment to love our enemies. Until then, we'll have to keep on marching for peace.

John Dear will speak May 24 in El Paso, Texas, and June 22 and 23 at the Wildgoose Festival in North Carolina. He will lead a weeklong study of the Gospel of John at Ghost Ranch in northern New Mexico on Aug. 6. His new book, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, explores Jesus as the God of life calling humanity (in the symbol of the dead Lazarus) out of the tombs of the culture of war and death. To see John's 2012 speaking schedule, go to John Dear's website. John's talk at last year's Sabeel conference in Bethlehem is featured in the new book *Challenging Empire*. John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, *Divine Rebels* by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*; *Put Down Your Sword* and *A Persistent Peace*, are available from Amazon.com.

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