

CHICAGO: Don't Believe the NATO Hype: Alternatives Exist to War, Economic Crises

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As the NATO summit in Chicago approaches, misplaced paranoia is striking deep. A near-police- state regime is being imposed, not only to “protect” heads of state from protesters, but also to severely limit the freedoms of speech and assembly. Even nurses — the United States’ most trusted medical professionals — have been deemed too dangerous to be allowed to rally.

Beyond this hysteria, peace, labor and immigrant rights activists and scholars are gathering in Chicago for the May 18-19 Counter-Summit for Peace and Economic Justice, to present the case against NATO-driven militarism. Here are 10 reasons why:

The U.S./NATO war in Afghanistan must end. Plans to use the summit to ratify fighting in Central Asia until 2024 spells death, suffering and disaster for all involved.

There is an alternative to creating stability in one of the world’s poorest nations: All-party Afghan negotiations — including civil society — and a regional peacemaking process.

The United States is in decline. Students can’t afford the world-class educations that are essential to both their economic security and the nation’s revitalization. Our infrastructure and transportation systems are in disrepair, lagging behind those in many other nations. U.S. defense spending nearly equals the next 17 countries’ military spending — combined! And the Bush tax cuts have made the one percent exceedingly richer. This slow motion debacle must be stopped.

There is an alternative: Cut military spending and restore a truly progressive income tax. Investing in civilian job creation for clean energy, health care, education and 21st century infrastructure could produce far more jobs than sending troops to fight in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Philippines.

NATO was never an entirely defensive alliance. Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski describes NATO allies as “vassals” and explained that NATO provides a foothold from which to dominate Eurasia. Most people and nations resist being dominated. Since the end of the Cold War, at great expense, NATO has not focused on Europe, but on “out of area” operations like the Afghan and Libyan wars and partnerships from Mauritania to Turkmenistan, with more to come in Latin America to East Asia.

There is an alternative: Retire NATO. Bring our troops and weapons home and close overseas bases. U.S. policy should not focus on preparing for and fighting wars that support

corrupt regimes or overthrow dictators while leaving nations divided among armed militias with no functioning national governments.

We suffer from 21st century Jim Crow segregation. More than two million people — most of them people of color — are in prison. An estimated 11 million undocumented people, the vast majority tax paying workers and their families, are forced to live in the shadows, fearing deportation and family separations due to draconian federal policies like “Secure Communities and “E-Verify.” Children of immigrants who have excelled in school are denied access to college educations.

There are alternatives: Suspend those police-state immigration policies. Enact comprehensive immigration reform to expedite the path to citizenship. Mandate in-state tuition for all in-state students.

Four years into the Bush Depression little has been done to address the “betrayal of American prosperity,” as detailed by Reagan-era trade tsar Clyde Prestowitz. The super-rich are getting richer. The middle class is shrinking. Millions of workers and their families suffer a jobless “recovery,” while corporations maximize profits and CEO salaries by sending manufacturing jobs abroad. And the campaign for European-style “austerity” means greater unemployment.

There are alternatives: Stop foreclosures. Revise tax laws to remove incentives for off-shoring jobs and restore progressive income tax policies like those of the (Republican) Eisenhower era. Invest in job creation by focusing on essential social services, 21st century education and training, and building modern infrastructures that our children will need to live decent lives and to hold their own in the global economy.

Frederick Douglass, the courageous abolitionist, taught that power cedes nothing without a struggle. And the old folk saying reminds us that “we make our road by walking.” That’s why we’re coming to Chicago from Boston and San Bernadine, Tennessee and Toronto, Afghanistan, Afghanistan, Africa and Asia.

The Counter Summit will be the forum to build the movement needed to follow the French in withdrawing from Afghanistan and overcoming nationally self-destructive austerity.

Peacefully, in the streets, we can support the Afghan and Iraq Vets whose discarded medals scream that war and military alliances are not the answer; that we need jobs, justice and a caring society if there is to be a 21st century American dream and greater peace in the world.

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