

Report back from the No to NATO, Yes to Peace People's Week of Action in Washington D.C.

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From July 4 to July 14, I went to Washington D.C. to protest the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during its 75th anniversary summit and to participate in the "No to NATO, Yes to Peace" week of actions. I represented the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom-Canada (WILPF) and the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW), which are both members of the new initiative Global Women for Peace United Against NATO (GWUAN).



With members of GWUAN, I stayed at the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple, which is a Buddhist peace order. The temple is a large house located in the northwest of Washington D.C. and has provided accommodations for activists for decades. On the ground floor of the temple is a room with an altar for the Buddha that is draped with a banner "Walk for Peace: Embrace Humanity and Stop War". One of the buttons that I brought "Abolish NATO, Build Peace" was placed on the altar. The mantel above was decorated with paper cranes and signs for nuclear disarmament, social justice and liberation.

Every morning at 6:00 a.m., the monk led an hour-long meditation with drumming and chanting "Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo". I'm not a Buddhist but it was interesting to learn about this spiritual tradition. After the morning ritual, I was out participating in actions and events to oppose NATO, end the genocide in Gaza and build peace until late in the evening every day for ten days.

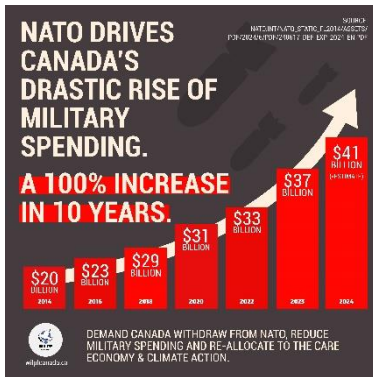
No to NATO, Yes to Peace People's Summit and Rally

On Friday, July 5, the "[No to NATO, Yes to Peace](#)" week of action kicked off with a great meet and greet held at the iconic restaurant and bookstore "Busboys and Poets". The venue was packed with activists from across the United States and Europe. David Swanson of World BEYOND War and Ann Wright of Veterans for Peace moderated the event. I spoke on a panel with Reiner Braun of the International Peace Bureau from Germany, Alain Rouy of Le Mouvement de la Paix from France and Ludo De Brabande of Vrede from Belgium about how NATO is adversely affecting our countries.



I explained that NATO is harming Canada in three major ways. First, the U.S.-led nuclear-armed military alliance is weaponizing Canadian foreign policy. With NATO, Canada illegally bombed the former Yugoslavia in 1999, engaged in a combat mission in Afghanistan from 2001-2014 and led the bombing of Libya in 2011. Canada continues to participate in the NATO occupation of Iraq and sends weapons to prolong the proxy war in Ukraine. Thousands of Canadian Armed Forces are on provocative NATO missions in Europe and Asia, but only 33 soldiers are on United Nations peace support operations. NATO has caused Canada to prioritize

warmaking over peacekeeping. I also mentioned that Canadians have not been consulted on a foreign policy statement in twenty years. Instead, Ottawa gets its “marching orders” from Washington and Brussels.



Second, the alliance is forcing Canada to increase military spending to 2% of GDP. According to the latest NATO defence expenditures report released a week before the summit, Canada’s military spending has increased 100% from \$20 billion to \$41 billion over the past decade. The Trudeau government plans to increase it further to \$50 billion, which will 1.76% of GDP, by 2030. At the Washington summit, Defence Minister Bill Blair announced that Canada would reach the NATO 2% GDP target for military spending by 2032, which will drive military spending to \$60 billion and divert public funds away from needed social programs and climate action

Third, NATO is militarizing the Arctic with fossil fuel-powered fighter jets, tactical helicopters and naval vessels. In April, the Trudeau government released its defence policy, *Our North Strong and Free*, that will spend \$38.6 billion to turn the Arctic into a new theatre of war for NATO and modernize NORAD with no consideration for the Indigenous communities or the climate impacts. The Arctic is a fragile oceanic ecosystem that regulates the climate and the ocean and it should be protected not militarized. I let the audience know that there is a [parliamentary e-petition #4979](#) that is calling for Canada to withdraw from NATO and that Canadian peace groups planned a “[Week of Action Against the Alliance](#)”.

On Saturday, July 6, the “No to NATO, Yes to Peace” People’s Summit was held at a local church. There were approximately 150 people in attendance with hundreds more watching the [livestream](#) of the event. The key note speaker was Sevim Dağdelen, a Member of the German Bundestag who just published a book, *NATO: A Reckoning with the Atlantic Alliance*. Dağdelen is with the leftist Sahra Wagenknecht party and is calling for an end to the war in Ukraine, an end to NATO and an end to the genocide in Gaza. In her speech, Dağdelen challenged NATO’s claims that it is a defensive alliance and is protecting values of democracy and human rights. She explained that the alliance has supported dictators and launched wars of aggression in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. The conference also included three panels of speakers who spoke about NATO’s destabilizing operations in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America and its dangerous nuclear deterrence. I presented NATO’s climate and environmental impacts and explained how its carbon-intensive militarism and rising military spending are making it impossible to achieve the Paris Agreement and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. I also promoted GWUAN and was pleased that our video of women around the world holding signs “[Women Against NATO](#)” was played during the conference.



Later that evening, Resist NATO, a new coalition of American anti-war and social justice groups, held a four-hour teach-in “Defend Peoples’ Struggle for Rights and Liberation”. The coalition includes the United National Antiwar Coalition, International League of Peoples’ Struggle, Palestine Youth Movement, Bayan, Diaspora Pa’lante Collectivism, Pan-African Community Action and others. The teach-in was held at a different church and attended by approximately three hundred people. It was opened by the Nicaraguan Ambassador to the U.S. who spoke about the revolution in Nicaragua and expressed his opposition to NATO and his solidarity. The first panel was moderated by long-time activist and journalist, Sarah Flounders who has opposed NATO wars and U.S. imperialism for over three decades. Sarah wrote a chapter in an important edited book, *NATO in the Balkans: Voices of Opposition*, that was published in 1998 and that documented the role of alliance in fomenting a civil war and destabilizing the former Yugoslavia.

On Sunday morning before the big “No to NATO” rally, GWUAN members had breakfast at a café with German Bundestag Member Sevim Dağdelen. We took a group photo “Abolish NATO.” Then we headed to McPherson Park with our banners and placards and marched to the White House shouting “Stop NATO” and “Stop the Genocide”. Across the street at Lafayette Square, we listened to speakers during a two-hour rally. The Federal Park Service required the rally to be moved from the shade to the open field directly in the hot sun, so that their surveillance cameras could monitor us unobstructed. Temperatures reached 38°C / 100.4°F with high humidity. Despite the heat, speakers powerfully shared how NATO was militarizing their countries and how we must mobilize to disband the alliance. I appreciated the speech of Josh Shurley, the National Vice President of Veterans for Peace (VFP), who condemned U.S. and NATO propaganda that makes enemies, keeps people in fear and leads to more militarism and endless wars. He called on people to challenge the lies and create peace.



Activism for Peace and Palestine at the Pentagon and Capitol Hill

Early on Monday morning July 8, Martha Hennessy, a member of the Catholic Workers’ Movement and I participated in the hour-long peace vigil outside the Pentagon. For forty years, the Catholic Workers’ Movement have held a weekly vigil from 7-8:00 a.m. to oppose the Pentagon’s militarism and wars. Hundreds of uniformed and civilian personnel walked past our banners “War is a Sacrilege”, “US and Israel are guilty of genocide,” “Abolish NATO” and “We want peace. Only one earth. Cooperation and Common Security.”



Then, we went to Capitol Hill for a day of lobbying members of Congress.

Timmon Wallis of US Nuclear Ban and author of the excellent book, *Warheads to Windmills: Preventing Climate Catastrophe and Nuclear War*, organized a meeting with Representative James McGovern, a Democrat from Massachusetts. Representative McGovern said he was supportive of nuclear disarmament and peace and that he would organize an event on the Hill in September. McGovern also explained that Congress was heavily influenced by oil and gas companies and weapons manufacturers and that money in politics was making global warming and wars worse.

We also went to all the offices of the Representatives who are on the Subcommittee on Europe of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to let them know that we are opposed to NATO and we want negotiations to end the war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza. We talked to the staff and left information. I was shocked to see so many “I stand with Israel” signs put next to Representatives’ doors. At lunch time, we went to the cafeteria and met with Julian Assange’s brother Gabriel. He was in the capital to thank people who supported the campaign to release his brother.

That evening, I went to the launch of David Swanson and Medea Benjamin’s new book “NATO: What you need to know” at “Bus Boys and Poets.” Then, I went to the Embassy of Nicaragua for an event that was organized by a coalition of groups including Black Alliance for Peace (BAP). The coalition is building a mass movement to support the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States’ (CELAC) 2014 call to make the Americas region a “Zone of Peace.” Around the corner, I noticed that the German Marshall Fund (GMF), a NATO think tank, adjoined the Nicaraguan Embassy. The Nicaraguan Ambassador told me that the GMF put up



surveillance cameras to monitor the embassy, but the embassy was finally able to force the cameras to be taken down.

On Wednesday evening, there was a protest outside the Library of Congress where U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was hosting the NATO Foreign Ministers' dinner. We held our signs and shouted through the bull horns "No to NATO, Yes to Peace", "Free Palestine", "Stop the Genocide" and "Gaza is starving!" We could see the Ministers and their guests drinking wine and eating canapes on the balcony. Afterward, I followed Palestinian activists to Kibbutz Blinken, the encampment in front of Blinken's gated mansion in Virginia. For six months, activists have had a 24/7 protest outside the residence. Two large vehicles are parked out front and several security cameras monitor the protestors. Activists have hoisted a Palestine flag to wave over Blinken's gate and have placed large billboards "Blinken is a war criminal" along the road.

Protesting the NATO Summit and Police State

The NATO summit was held from Tuesday, July 9 to Thursday, July 11 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. For blocks around the venue, there were high security fences and barricades installed that made it difficult to get around the city. At the gates, there were police and military personnel positioned and armoured vehicles that looked like small tanks stationed. This hyper-securitization fittingly reflected the nature of the NATO summit.

Over the three-day summit, anti-NATO and Pro-Palestine activists rallied at the gates as the leaders' motorcades went by. President Biden's huge motorcade drove right past our Palestinian flags and "Abolish NATO" banners. The Buddhist monks joined us with their drums and chants as the Japanese Prime Minister's motorcade went by. Our signs and shouting could not be missed by the NATO leaders.

One afternoon, I followed CODEPINK's co-founder Medea Benjamin to the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank, to protest House Speaker Mike Johnson as he gave an address "[Threats to the US-Led World Order](#)".



With gross exaggeration and aggression, Speaker Johnson stated that "We [Congress] do see a group of nations openly aligned against the United States. It's an interconnected web of threats. I refer to it as a China-led axis, composed of partner regimes in Russia, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and even Cuba. Now they each have their own cultures and their own specific sinister aims, but they all wake up every morning thinking how they can take down America." Johnson also made the ludicrous claim that NATO has secured "peace and prosperity" by failing to acknowledge the alliance's destructive wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Johnson's speech reflects the Republicans' dangerous views on foreign policy.

On the last day of the summit, we condemned NATO's [Washington declaration](#) that recklessly identifies Russia, China, Iran and North Korea as threats, prolongs the war in Ukraine and ramps up military spending and weapons manufacturing. NATO's declaration is a perilous plan for global war.

Challenging the Corporate-Funded Think Tanks for NATO and War

Throughout the week, I attended many events at other corporate funded-think tanks that surround Capitol Hill. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted a panel "[Is NATO a Good Deal? Making the Case for the Alliance to the Public](#)". The speakers were Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström, U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper, Former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, and CNN's Chief National Security Analyst Jim Sciutto. I challenged Billström and Hickenlooper and said that NATO was not a good deal, because it was increasing geopolitical tensions and worsening the climate crisis. At lunch time, I went the Heritage Foundation and attended its event "[Not Your Grandfather's NATO: Restoring the Alliance](#)" with former

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Elbridge Colby who argued that the U.S. has to reverse decades of decline and restore NATO with more military spending. After the event, I went up to Colby and told him that NATO is an anachronism and we needed to end the war in Ukraine, invest in peoples' needs and not have a war with China.

In the afternoon, I went to the CATO Institute's "[NATO at 75: Rebalancing the Transatlantic Alliance](#)" forum. The panelists argued that the U.S. carries too much of the military and financial responsibility for NATO and that there needs to be "burden shifting" with the allies doing so that they do more and spend more on their militaries. After the first panel, I asked a question about the influence of the weapons manufacturers in the alliance and mentioned how NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that "NATO was good for the U.S. economy." One of the panelists admitted that the defence industry was one of the key drivers of NATO.

On Thursday, July 11, I attended in the [Fourteenth Annual South China Sea Conference](#) at the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) (CSIS), a right-wing think tank. The key note speaker was Representative Darrell Issa, a senior Republican member of the House Foreign Relations Committee who recently secured billion dollars of weapons for Taiwan and a \$500 million "military aid" package to the Philippines. Issa shamefully called China a "threat" and deceitfully warned that the U.S. was in a new Cold War. He described how the U.S. was projecting its force and establishing more military bases in the region. Issa's speech was interrupted twice by protestors who called for the "U.S. bases to get out the Philippines" and to "Stop the U.S. militarization of Asia". I filmed the protestors' actions and they were quickly taken out of the event. The police arrived and stayed in front of the venue for the rest of the conference. In the afternoon, there was a panel that included Canada's Deputy Director General for International Security Policy at the Department of National Defence Ty Curran. He spoke about Canada's "[Indo-Pacific Strategy](#)" that was released in November 2022 and he lauded the fact that more Canadian naval assets were in the region. I went to the mic and told him that I oppose Canada's militarization of the Indo-Pacific and its warships off China's coast. I said to him that Canadians do not want a war with China.

On the morning of July 12, I went to the American Enterprise Institute to listen to Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski's give an address "[Europe's Security After the Washington Summit](#)." Before the event started while people were having coffee and chocolate croissants, I spotted Sikorski's security detail, a big Polish guy, standing next to a closed door and I stood next to him and talked about Poland and the war in Ukraine. I told him about my trip to Poland in November 2022 and how I met with Ukrainian men from both sides of the contact line who fled the country and were working in Warsaw. I said to Sikorski's body guard that the Ukrainian men told me, "We are brothers. We don't want to fight each other. We want to work." I also said how much I enjoyed Wroclaw and Polish food and that NATO should stop the war in Ukraine. He smiled at my comments about Polish food but frowned and said that we have to fight Russia. During his belligerent speech, Sikorski said that the NATO allies should stay the course in Ukraine until "victory" when Russia is forced to leave the country and that NATO should be prepared for a major war in five years.

The think tanks that I went to were housed in beautiful buildings with marble floors, impressive art work, libraries and auditoriums. These well-resourced institutions are funded by wealthy individuals and corporate donors. The donors' names are listed on plaques on the walls. At all the events, the think tanks offered free food and drinks. I noticed that there were many young interns working at these institutions. The interns and the audiences at these think tanks events were dressed in suits and were mostly white. Most of the speakers at the events were white men. The think tanks serve an important purpose of socializing the political elite to support the military-industrial complex. By attending these events, I could also see how the infamous "revolving door" among the think tanks, Congress, the universities and the military operates in in the capital.



Signs of suffering and signs of hope

Over the ten days that I was in the Washington D.C., I saw the many sad signs of poverty as I crossed the city on public transit. Homeless people in the parks. People on the streets with serious infections who need health care but are struggling without support. One evening, I took a bus in the wrong direction and found myself in a very poor racialized community in the southeast, the Anacostia neighborhood. The people on the bus told me about the struggles in their community, their financial insecurity and medical debt. Earlier this year, [ABC news](#) reported that the Anacostia neighborhood has the highest percentage of children in poverty at 48.5% and people unemployed at 21.9% and the lowest median household income in DC at \$31,139.

This bus ride made me see the stark contrast between the rich centre and the poor periphery of Washington D.C. The core, where Congress, the think tanks and universities are located is largely white, wealthy, privileged and protected. On the outskirts is mass poverty and over-policing. I noticed with irony that a group of poor Black men, the “victims of capitalism,” were sitting around the “Victims of Communism” monument.

While I was in the U.S. capital, I also visited the National Museum of the Native Indians. The displays traced the long tragic history of settler colonialism - the dispossession, displacement and racism against Indigenous peoples over the past three hundred years in the land now known as the United States.

Whenever I had free time, I went to the Library of Congress (LOC) to do some research related to my doctoral dissertation. Access to the LOC is free and the resources that are available to the public are incredible. I went to the Map and Geography reading room to see two-hundred-year-old maps of the Middle East that clearly show that the land where the State of Israel is now situated was Palestine. I thought about the legacy of the Palestinians and Indigenous peoples having their land stolen and illegally occupied and the need for justice.

As I walked around Washington DC, the heart of empire, I saw many of signs of resistance and hope. Posters with the messages “Stop Arming Israel”, “End the Genocide in Gaza” and “Free Palestine” were plastered to poles. There were also “Black Lives Matter” signs prominently hanging from buildings and churches and painted on 16th Street. I visited the “White House Peace Vigil” tent that was started by William Thomas in 1981 and is the longest continuous peace and nuclear disarmament protest in the U.S.

One of the highlights of my trip was attending the fantastic “Peace Growers Reception” organized by the local



chapter of WILPF US. It was held at Mita’s, a woman-led Ethio-Japanese restaurant in the north end of the city. It was wonderful to socialize with WILPF members over delicious food and drinks. The moderator Tara Vassefi shared the “Peace Herstory” book that documents the activities that the WILPF chapter has organized over the years. She also invited inspiring local Black activists to talk about their affordable housing campaigns, mutual aid projects, reparations for the Black community and their research on the impacts of climate change and Western imperialism in Grenada and the

Caribbean. The speakers said we need for more solidarity. It was an inspiring intersectional feminist event that exemplified the peaceful and hopeful future that we want to create. We ended the evening with a group photo “We want peace!” I returned to Canada with many new contacts and resources and more motivation to help grow the international “No to NATO, Yes to Peace” movement.