**Does NATO contribute to peace?**

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In my article today, I shall present a short history of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, also called the North Atlantic Alliance. It is talked about alot nowadays, not the least related to the Russian War in Ukraine, and in our region, also related to Afghanistan and Iraq. It is the world’s largest military alliance with 30 member countries and an annual budget more than ten times that of Russia’s military budget. In Europe, most people believe that NATO is a guarantor of peace, although a minority opposes the alliance and see it as part of military rearmament, even warmongering, as many in our region, too, would do.
On 8 May 2022, it was 77 years since the Second World War ended, and Nazi-Germany was conquered. Every year, the ‘Never Again’ event is marked by the countries of the Allied Forces all over Europe, America, and Oceania, while Russia always marks the victory on 9 May. At the time of WWII, Russia was the leader of the Soviet Union, which lost as many as 27 million people in the war, including 8 million from Ukraine, and also from other Eastern Bloc states, including Central Asia. About one-third died in battle; one-third starved or froze to death; and one-third was civilians. Kazakhstan lost one-tenth of its people, where the marking of the day this year was low key, as it also was in Ukraine, to make sure that it would not be seen as a pro-war celebration in a time when the Russian War in Ukraine rages. Russia on its side, though, had a mighty display of its military machinery and a main military parade in Moscow. Ordinary people said to foreign reports that they wanted to keep the marking of the end of WWII separate from the current ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, as Russia calls it.
During WWII, the Soviet Union was a key part of the Allied Forces. However, soon after the end of the war, the Cold War began, and the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc expanded. The US became the leader of the ‘free world’, helping to build up Europe after the war, including through the ‘Marshall Help’. Unlike the Soviet Union’s more direct interventions of its vassal states, the US tied the countries in its sphere of influence to it through industry and trade. Both superpowers used ideology behind their concrete policies, communism or socialism for the Soviet Union and private capitalism for the US. The US emphasised democracy while the Soviet Union had a centrally run economy with little democracy. However, it had as its Marxists goals that there should be equality and social services for all. USA’s ‘safety nets’ for the poorest have never reached all.
Following other discussions and temporary treaties by the West in the aftermath of WWII, on 4 April 1949, NATO was established by the US, UK, France, Canada, the Benelux countries, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland. It was a fairly dormant organisation till a way into the Korean War (1950-53). In 1952, Greece and Turkey became members, and in 1955, West Germany (BRD). The latter led to the establishment of the Soviet dominated Warsaw Pact, which became the opposing military organisation to NATO till the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. When the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, it is often said that NATO should also have been dissolved, or at least, its goals, aims, and territory should have been re-evaluated and re-oriented. That might even have led to the inclusion of Russia – and then the world would have looked entirely different today, and the military expenses would have been much lower, with more funds being available for social and economic development in the wealthy North and in poor countries in the South. Whether the US would then have been a member of such an alliance, can obviously be debated, and probably its opposition to it was the reason for it not happening; we shall never know.
The height of the Cold War was in 1961, at a time when the Berlin Wall was built and the US had as many as 400,000 troops stationed in Europe. The role of NATO was questioned by some, and, inter alia, France established its own nuclear strength and in 1966, it pulled out of the joint military command, but has now returned.
Over the years, NATO has been enlarged tremendously, especially in the decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, and today the alliance has 30 members, plus several partners in different categories, including countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Colombia, the latter the only one in Latin America. As we all know, Ukraine aspires to become a full NATO member, against the wishes of Russia; neighbouring Georgia also wants to become a member.
Currently, Finland and Sweden have political processes discussing their possible NATO membership; both countries have been neutral or non-aligned, Sweden for no less than 200 years. It is likely that they will become members this year, against Russia’s wishes. The countries already have close NATO cooperation and are certainly seen as Western-oriented and members of the EU.
If, or rather when, they become members, it gives an opportunity for them and the three other Nordic countries of Norway, Denmark and Iceland, to form a sub-block within NATO, objecting to the storing and use of nuclear weapons on their territories, and also working for the reduction and abolition of nuclear weapons worldwide. Sweden in particular has a long peace activist history and many Swedes would certainly like to continue that work even as a NATO member, well, then as members of a military alliance that has nuclear weapons as a major deterrence.
Like many Swedes, I believe that the world would be safer if the peace work goes on and is expanded, including questioning NATO’s traditional military rearmament agenda, currently asking all member states to spend at least two percent of their GDP on defence. NATO has in many ways become old-fashioned, being influenced by USA’s need for arms sale to maintain its economic development. In future, all countries should re-evaluate their understanding of defence and find alternatives to war and the use of arms in the 21st century and beyond.
In this short article about NATO, I have not covered all important aspects, positive and negative. At least, I should draw attention to the military operations the alliance has been involved in, and some quite questionable: the Bosnia and Herzegovina intervention in 1992; the Kosovo intervention in 1999; the War in Afghanistan from 2001-2021; the Iraq training mission from 2004-2011; the Gulf and Aden anti-piracy operation in 2009; and the Libya intervention from 2011-2013. Most of these operations were outside NATO territory, raising questions about the alliance only being for defence purposes, not aggression.
It should be noted that NATO is not involved in the ongoing Russian War in Ukraine. However, it clearly supports Ukraine’s cause and most NATO member countries provide military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. More than five million Ukraine people have become refugees in other European countries, mostly in NATO member countries, and as many as seven million are internally displaced. Whether NATO helped to reduce, or if it fuelled tension leading up to this war, will be discussed in future. Researchers, politicians, and all citizens must contribute more to peace in the world, also NATO, so that there will not be wars ever again, and so that the term ‘Never Again’ will really become true.