Nick Megoran speaking at the Monument Newcastle - 12-032022

We are here today in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, to oppose the Russian invasion; and with those right-minded people in Russia who oppose it; and with all peoples of the world who are for peace and against war. We meet in sorrow and grief and anger: Russia, get out of Ukraine!

As STW we are here to oppose this war, just as almost exactly 19 years ago this month we met in London in the biggest demo this country has every seen, against the planned Iraq war; another invasion of a small country by a large one, based, like this one, on a pack of lies. We warned what would happen, we sorrow over that, as we sorrow over this.

And we are also here to oppose the geopolitical games of big powers, of our own country and its allies in NATO and the EU, that have contributed to this war. We say: No to NATO expansion.

So our message is: yes to a peaceful Europe; No to war in Ukraine, no to NATO expansion. What is the link between them?

Can anyone here remember the Cold War? For those who can't, there was a constant fear of global nuclear war. This was real. For example, just after midnight on September 26th, 1983, the alarm went off inside a military bunker south of Moscow. Satellites warned that the Soviet Union was under attack from the United States. Screens indicated five incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles. The officer in charge, lieutenant colonel Stanislav Petrov, had only minutes to act before the expected impact. It was his job to initiate a counter-attack, before incoming US missiles hit Soviet weapons silos and made that impossible. He made a gut-level decision that the early-warning signals were false. Fortunately for the world, his decision was correct. It sounds like a film, but it occurred at a particularly tense time in US-Soviet relations, weeks after the USSR had downed a Korean passenger airline. Bizarrely, Petrov was allegedly disciplined for not following procedure.

The world was so dangerous because there were two aggressive, military blocs, eyeball to eyeball, the Warsaw Pact and NATO.

End of Cold War was welcomed. Warsaw Pact was abolished. Good riddance to it. Russian soldiers went home from Eastern Europe. Good.

NATO should have been abolished too, and US soldiers recalled home.

On the contrary, NATO expanded and US forces pushed Eastwards towards Russia. To Russia, this looked like aggression, like the West was continuing the Cold War. In 1998 NATO committed formally to allowing Ukraine – previously seen as a neutral state - to join NATO.

Many people warned of this at the time. One was George Kennan. In 1946, as a US military analyst in Moscow embassy, he wrote a famous 'long telegram' which laid the basis of the cold war and NATO policy. So he's an arch-conservative. But, as an old man, he wrote an op-ed in the NYT in 1997.

He said this: "expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the

entire post-cold-war era. Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking."

Everything Kennan warned has come true: NATO expansion has allowed Putin to fight his ghastly wars, and create an oppressive regime based on fear and antagonism of the West.

That is why we say: No to war in Ukraine; no to NATO expansion.

This week, blogging from besieged Kyiv, Yurii Sheliazhenko, executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, spoke of his opposition to the Russian invasion and also to the flooding in of arms to Ukraine from NATO and the Ukranian gov's call for a NATO no-fly zone. He said we want, 'Peace by peaceful means.'

We stand with him. We want a Europe free of aggressive military alliances, free of nuclear weapons, free of war. We repeat our message: No to war in Ukraine, No to NATO expansion.