I am a member of Veterans for Peace UK and we do not believe that war is the solution to the problems of the 21st Century. I am also a member of the Movement for the Abolition of War whose message here at COP26 is “War Causes Climate Change and Climate Change Causes War.”

I served in the Royal Marines and I am not here to criticise those men and women who have served in past wars or those serving in the armed forces of today, unless they are responsible either personally or by giving orders, for war crimes or breaches of the Geneva convention. Yes we need sound defence, however we do not need the aggressive foreign policies which have resulted in a series of futile and catastrophic interventions and wars since WW2.

Given that it was exactly one month after President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan, following 21 years of Bush and Blair’s “War on Terror”, the professional Head of the British Army, General Carlton - Smith, with responsibility for developing and generating military capability would appear to be a man well worth listening to at the International Arms Fair held in London this September, however the armourers and arms dealers of the world were not to hear any regrets nor lessons to be learned from the multiple human catastrophes in Afghanistan, or the wars in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. Not even a word on the link between war and global warming, the vital role of peacekeeping at the United Nations, serious diplomacy to avoid war nor the devastating effects of war on civilians – the “**collateral damage**” as these war crimes are described. No call even to mourn *“the children of war who have experienced more trauma — physical and emotional — than the medical professionals who care for them have ever seen: the shredded remains of their mum or dad, blown apart by bombs……many of them British, as in Yemen.”*

No, quite the reverse, because even as the General spoke, a new UK budget was about to be announced which, as you have already heard in the excellent analysis by Stuart Parkinson of SGRreveals that in this parliament the UK government is to cut its budget for reducing national carbon emissions and foreign aid and transfer the balance saved to the military including a substantial increase in nuclear weapons in contravention of international treaties. In no other sphere would the spectacular failure of government policy in its catastrophic foreign military interventions remain unchallenged and indeed richly rewarded.

A report by The Oxford Research Group has established that Ministry of Defence advice to policy makers is governed by the principle that even a 1% chance of a security risk materialising is unacceptable, and justifies more expenditure to “make us safe”, using the outdated mindset that military force is the principal safeguard against external threats. Yet the 100% certainty of the climate crisis is side-lined.

Yet the UK International Climate Finance (ICF), administered by 3 government Departments (DFID, BEIS and Defra) , directly contradicts this strategy and states that *“Investing our climate finance today helps reduce costs tomorrow. Every £1 invested well in climate-related risk reduction saves more than £3 (and up to £50) in avoided disaster impacts. Similarly, every pound spent cutting* CO2 *pays for itself between five- and twenty-fold by offsetting the future costs of climate change.* That is a verbatim quote from a current government website.

Meaning that preventative action to slow and reverse global climate change, represents **overwhelmingly** **better value for money** than a securitised military approach that seeks to address only the symptoms of a changing climate in the form of increasing conflict across the Global South.

As for the COP26 we argue against recent attempts at merging and hiding military emissions within peaceful categories such as, arms within manufacture, warplanes amongst transport and warships under the guise of shipping; this shows that war is being normalised – and this culture has to change.

How prescient were the words of US President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s farewell speech on 17th January 1961; “*In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.*”

Eisenhower would probably have appreciated reading the 4th of Keir Starmer’s, now abandoned, original ten election pledges, entitled “***To promote peace and human rights****”: “No more illegal wars. Introduce a Prevention of Military Intervention Act and put human rights at the heart of foreign policy. Review all UK arms sales and make us a force for international peace and justice.*”

Veterans for Peace, including men and women from several countries, has regularly marched at the **cenotaph** in London under a banner with just two words chosen by the generation that fought in the First World War. **NEVER AGAIN**. Yes, **NEVER AGAIN**. But In Bob Dylan’s words - When will they **ever** learn**?** When **WILL** they ever learnthat war is NOT the solution to the problems of the 21st Century?