The world is an increasingly dangerous place, whether we’re talking about nuclear modernisation and increasing militarism, threats of nuclear use, the rise of the far right and reactionary nationalism, the increasing incidence of racism and xenophobia, or the rapid increase in climate change and environmental degradation.

We are all trying to understand what is going on, what are the global dynamics and trends that are taking us, at an accelerating rate, towards a new and very unpleasant reality, based on intolerance, exclusion and ‘might makes right’; which means on the one hand, an end to the values and rights that we have pretty much taken for granted, and on the other, a race towards nuclear annihilation. And we want to understand what’s going on in the world because we want to work out what to do about it.

Over the past months I have been increasingly drawn to thinking about our work in the early years of this century – the great struggles against the war on Iraq, and the whole framework of the so-called ‘war on terror’ of Bush and Blair.

There are of course some obvious parallels: not least Trump at the UN recently. What a throwback to 2002 and George Bush’s Axis of Evil speech. At that time, Bush name-checked Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Trump referred to a ‘small group of rogue regimes’. Of course this time Iraq wasn’t on the list – we all know what’s happened to Iraq – but he repeated Iran and North Korea, and also Syria, which had been on Bush’s nuclear hit-list in 2002. And this time Cuba and Venezuela were added. So it’s an expanding target list.

But thinking back fifteen years, I also remember the many discussions we had about what was driving US policy, our analysis of the Project for a New American Century, driven by the neo-cons around Bush. And of course we were much assisted in our work at that time, not only by the internationalisation of the anti-war movement, but by two other powerful global movements: the anti-neo-liberal globalisation movement whose strength was such that it overthrew the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) by building an alliance of civil society organisations and developing countries; and of course the World Social Forum movement which drew together all these forces in an unprecedented level of global solidarity and global cooperation.

There were a number of explanations and conclusions we drew then which I think are equally relevant for today, if not more so.

The first is that the US is a declining economy which seeks to maintain its global role through military expansion, intervention and its overwhelming military might. At the time there was much theorising about the behaviour of declining empires and the damage they do as they go down. Again we see the same, yet now more extreme, with greater dangers.

The US approach to the economic rise of China has not been to accept a multi-polar world where we cooperate to solve the existential threats posed by climate change but to engage in increasingly threatening behaviour, from the global expansion of NATO, to the US ‘Pivot to Asia’, to the proliferation of bases and so-called missile ‘defence’ systems across Europe and Asia; these are clearly posed against Russia and China, not as the US laughably claims, against Iran and North Korea.

And despite Trump’s early claims that suggested he would oppose interventionism, on the contrary we have seen a militant reorientation towards it, a drive towards greater confrontation, whether in North Korea, where US policy under Bush has directly led to the current crisis, and has been much exacerbated by Trump. Or whether in Iran, where his attempts to sabotage the Iranian nuclear deal will just lead to nuclear proliferation and war. Or in Venezuela, where he has ratcheted up the threats, going beyond the sanctions he recently imposed, to effectively put Venezuela on notice of military intervention.

The other conclusion we drew then was that it is through international solidarity and cooperation amongst peoples and movements that change can be brought about, that our voices can be heard, that we can understand our power and act upon it.

That is a profound lesson for us today, because of the tendency coming from the political right, to withdraw behind national boundaries, to exclude the ‘other’, to blame other ordinary people, people like us, from other countries, for the social and economic ills we face, rather than putting the blame squarely where it lies: thirty years of neo-liberal economic policy and the systematic dismantling of our welfare state and the social values that underpin it.

And this must also shape our understanding of what cooperation is and what kind of cooperation we are seeking and supporting. Because we rightly urge cooperation between states, in diplomacy and negotiation, such as achieved the Iranian nuclear deal. And in the same way we urge a resumption of the Six Party talks to resolve the North Korean issue. This is cooperation from above, and we seek it and welcome it.

But that’s not enough. We must also recognise the crucial and pre-eminent importance of cooperation from below, because this is what will truly make change possible. And by this I mean the way we work together, within and between our organisations, cooperating across national boundaries, strengthening our movement globally. For it is only through our international solidarity, our international cooperation as peoples and movements, that we will be able to bring enough pressure to bear, to bring about real global change. We have indeed seen the power of this approach recently with the achievement of the UN global ban treaty – cooperation not only between states to produce the treaty, but made possible through working with civil society too – a powerful role which has been explicitly recognised.

So the challenges are many but the pathway is clear and it is possible – the unity of our movements in renewed international cooperation, as a force for change – a true global counterbalance to the forces of confrontation.