



# OXFORD CND

## NEWSLETTER

July/August 2020



# ican

international campaign  
to abolish nuclear weapons

## NUKEWATCH



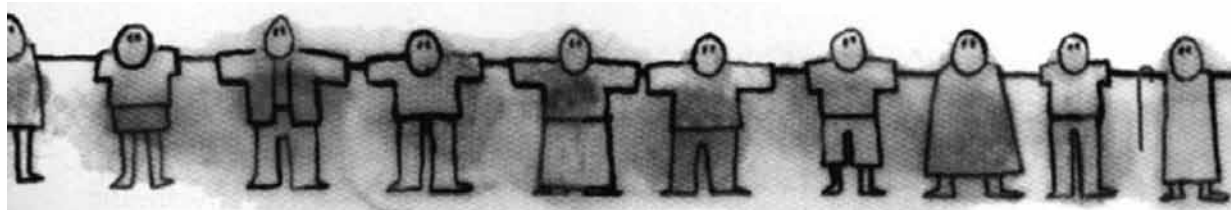
resisting nuclear weapons  
since 1982



Shining a spotlight  
on military drones



## STOP THE WAR COALITION



# 'STILL HERE AND STRONGER THAN EVER!'

Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

# Weighing the Risks

The coronavirus pandemic has brought the issue of risks and their avoidance right into the foreground, but it is with us all the time. We calculate risk in our daily lives, often without knowing that we are doing so. We expect risk assessments to be made in the work place, on public transport, in stadiums and in theatres. And all the more do we expect our government to weigh up the possible risks facing us as a community whether from natural or human-made causes. Sometimes a risk may be taken if it is outweighed by a high priority, but this has to be calculated intelligently, and we need to know what calculations are being made on our behalf.

So, when in 2008 the Labour government decided to publish its National Risk Register, previously a confidential document, that was a good step forward. The principle behind it and subsequent reviews was to “assess the impact and likelihood of the major risks, both hazards and threats, that the country could face over a five-year period, enabling prioritisation of the UK’s planning for emergencies.” Today we may note ruefully that in its assessment of “the high consequence risks facing the United Kingdom”, it already placed “pandemic influenza” at the top of the table. However, the review was not confined to natural

threats such as epidemics or extreme weather. Civil emergencies were defined in an Act of 2004 to include acts of war, as well as terrorism, “which threaten serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom.” These come under the heading of “malicious attacks”, and in the 2008 section under this heading, the Register made a significant assessment. One could not rule out a terrorist attempt to obtain nuclear substances to use against the UK. But as far as hostile state action was concerned, the assessment was that “for the foreseeable future, no state or alliance will have both the intent and capability to threaten the UK militarily.”

From 2008 to 2017 a new edition of the Register appeared every two years, and the general picture given by it was unchanged. Indeed, the 2017 edition significantly raised

its assessment of the danger of epidemic disease. Top of its list of increasing risks was that of “emerging infectious diseases”. These were “unpredictable but evidence indicates [they] may become more frequent”. Under the “malicious attack” heading, the danger of terrorists obtaining nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological devices was rated medium to low.

What about the military/nuclear threat from a state actor? From the 2012 Register onwards, such a threat has not been mentioned at all. Its consideration appears to have been removed from the exercise even though it comes under the definition of a “civil emergency”.

It is not hard to see why. Military planners do not want any argument about the likelihood of such a threat to be considered elsewhere, not least because it might lead to the conclusion that the threat is very low. So, the risk of a nuclear attack, which in their eyes justifies Britain remaining a nuclear power, is reserved for an entirely separate exercise: the National Security Strategy, last published in 2015. Other states have nuclear weapons, it argues, and they may use their nuclear capability to threaten Britain, to influence decisions, or to sponsor nuclear terrorism. But in setting out this risk, the document does not assess

whether it is likely or unlikely: it simply says that it exists. As has been the case over decades of justification for British nuclear weapons, these are assertions that are impervious to debate. The bottom line is the Catch-22 argument first deployed, regrettably, by Tony Blair when in 2007 he rushed parliament into approving the renewal of Trident. This is that we cannot tell what may happen in “20 to 50 years” times, and so we can never let down our nuclear guard.

The result is that assessing military threats occupies a parallel universe to assessing civil threats such as a pandemic. While the notional military threat is immune to challenge and claims tens of billions of pounds annually, the very real threat of a pandemic has been starved of funds. And we are now paying the cost. ■

**John Gittings**

## National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review

# US, Russia nuclear arms talks end with plans for second round

US and Russian negotiators have concluded a round of nuclear arms control talks in Austria’s capital, Vienna, aimed at producing a new agreement to replace the New START treaty that expires next year. US negotiator Marshall Billingslea told reporters on Tuesday that the day of high-level “marathon discussions” ended late on Monday.

Billingslea said the talks had been productive enough to establish several technical working groups to delve deeper into the issues in order to pave the way for a second round of talks by late July or early August.

“We both agreed at the termination of our talks that the strategic environment has changed significantly since the New START treaty was signed,” he told reporters. “We can all remember back 10 years ago, the world is, in fact, a radically different place.”

New START imposes limits on the number of

US and Russian long-range nuclear warheads and launchers. The deal was made in 2010, but the limits did not take effect until 2018.

It became the last nuclear arms pact between the two nations after the US last year scrapped the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia, a Cold War-era agreement that both sides had repeatedly accused the other of violating.

The INF treaty was also criticised because it did not cover China or missile technology that did not exist a generation ago.

At a news conference held by the US delegation, Billingslea said any new agreement must include all nuclear weapons and not just strategic nuclear weapons, and should also subject China to restrictions.

US says any new agreement on curbing nuclear weapons should include China, a condition Russia calls ‘unrealistic’.

# US drives RECORD global spending on atomic weapons

The world’s nuclear powers are increasingly pouring money into their atomic arsenals, a new report shows, with Washington leading the way.

Nine nuclear-armed nations spent an estimated \$72.9 billion on their 13,000-plus atomic weapons in 2019, according to a new paper by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). At \$35.4 billion in spending, the US accounts for nearly half the global total, ICAN says.

However, ICAN pointed out, all this money and all these bombs have done nothing to protect any of these countries from Covid-19.

“It’s clear now more than ever that nuclear weapons do not provide security for the world in the midst of a global pandemic,” said Alicia Sanders-Zakre, the lead author of the report, “particularly when there are documented deficits of healthcare supplies and exhausted medical professionals.”

Washington contributed the lion’s share of the world’s \$7.1 billion increase in nuclear expenditures between 2018 and 2019, with \$5.8 billion in additional spending.



Russia, which ICAN estimated had more warheads than the US, spent \$8.5 billion on them in 2019 – a quarter of the US’ nuclear expenditure, according to ICAN’s methodology – trailing China (\$10.5 billion) and the UK (\$8.9 billion).

While ICAN noted that their figures are estimates based on a consistent methodology, the true cost of nuclear weapons would have to include the expenses of compensating the victims of testing and cleaning up the environmental contamination. ■

# Sizewell C – climate change and coastal erosion dangers

Last week in June was the deadline for the planning inspectorate to allow or reject the application from France's EDF and China's CGN to build Sizewell C – the nuclear disaster planned for the Suffolk coast. It'll be a miracle if the project falls at that hurdle, radioactive though it is. It just starts the planning process. Yet at least it means EDF and CGN will have to make public their detailed plans for the 3,200-megawatt nuke.

And that'll include their view of the risk of the plant being marooned in the sea, thanks to climate change and coastal erosion. Some experts reckon Sizewell C is at "high risk" of flooding. They include Nick Scarr, from the Nuclear Consulting Group, a collection of academics and experts. The consulting engineer believes Sizewell C is in a "dangerous location", a position set out in a peer-reviewed paper. But, when his views were reported here almost a fortnight ago, EDF dismissed them. It



claimed his analysis of the protective effects of the offshore Sizewell-Dunwich bank and a coralline crag was both confused and wrong. EDF made its point in a background briefing, since when it has repeatedly refused to provide any on-the-record statement to back its opinion. So, having given the company plenty of time, here's one conclusion to draw. That Mr Scarr is bang-on. As he points out, "all the spent fuel generated by Sizewell C will be stored onsite in a high-risk flood zone", potentially for more than a century. EDF will have to respond to this in its planning application. So, there's no reason for its high-handed carry-on. How untrustworthy does it want to look? Big nuclear's already toxic enough: exploding costs, endless delays, pricey electricity and lethal waste. To that, Sizewell C adds China and flood risk. The inspectorate should really save everyone the trouble and can the project now. ■

## Proposed Bradwell B

Campaigners fighting plans for a new nuclear power station at Bradwell are calling for the proposals to be scrapped. Opposition group Banng – Blackwater Against New Nuclear Group – has prepared a 13,000-word response to the stage one public consultation. It says the Bradwell site is "unsustainable, unsuitable and unacceptable". The Bradwell B project is a joint operation between CGN and EDF Energy. Banng chairman Andy Blowers said: "This is not a done deal as CGN would

have us believe. A new nuclear power station is not needed, and especially it is not needed at this site." Campaigners say the site is not sustainable because climate change and rising sea levels leave it at risk of flooding. They also say it will destroy the landscape. Mr Blowers said: "The blunt truth is that we cannot tell what conditions will be like by the end of the century let alone beyond, when highly radioactive spent fuel and other nuclear wastes will still be on a site that could be unviable. ■

## Hinkley mud

A coalition of high-profile environmental groups has urged Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford to insist on the further testing of mud from a nuclear power station in Somerset before it is dumped in the Severn Estuary off Cardiff. In 2018 around 120,000 tonnes of mud from adjacent to Hinkley Point power station were dumped in the face of significant public opposition amid concerns that it could be radioactive and pose a threat to health. Now there are plans to dump a further 600,000

tonnes of mud in the same location. Low Level Radiation campaign secretary Richard Bramhall said: "The law requires Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government to take full account of uncertainties. There is abundant evidence in the scientific literature that uranium and plutonium particles are blown ashore and cause cancer, leukaemia and birth defects, yet Westminster's advisory committee COMARE refuses to address them and EDF's tests can't detect them." ■

# Drones – The Future

## Drone Wars: Future Challenges

Rather unbelievably, Drone Wars is now ten years old. We spent some time reflecting on what we have learned and achieved over the past decade, but it's worth setting out what we are facing in the next few years in relation to drone warfare

## Secret deployments of drones

Most immediately, there is a need to discover where British armed drones have been deployed outside of operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. All the MoD will currently say is that RAF Reapers have been undertaking missions outside of Operation Shader, but refuse to give any other details.

The deployment of UK drones for unknown purposes and without public accountability or oversight by MPs is very worrying. The UK should not be following the US down the path of secret drone deployments and unaccountable use of armed force. It is vital that proper parliamentary and public accountability over the deployment of British armed drones is established now, else unaccountable deployments will become the norm over the next few years.

## Opening UK skies to military drones

Another area that is likely to be a focus of our work over the coming years is the push to open UK airspace to military drones. The MoD have initiated proceedings to allow the UK's new armed drones, which the UK is choosing to call 'Protector' to fly initially in and around the area where RAF Waddington is situated in Lincolnshire as a first step to gaining authorisation to fly it in unsegregated airspace across the UK

There are serious safety, privacy and civil liberties concerns about this proposal and we are determined that there should be proper public engagement in the decision to open UK skies to military drones. The fact that the MoD have already pressurised the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) into changing safety procedures to prevent peace campaign protests at RAF Fairford when a drone flew into there in 2018 bodes ill.

## The next generation of drones

While the UK is currently acquiring the latest, updated version of the Predator drone – the Protector – work is continuing, behind the scenes on the next generation of armed drones. BAE

Systems' advanced stealth drone, Taranis, has reportedly ended its development journey and is sitting quietly somewhere in a hangar. Officially, at least, lessons learned from developing, building, trialling and testing this advanced drone are simply being fed into the UK's next generation aircraft, the Tempest.

However, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the work done on Taranis (and the vast sums spent on it) are being used to develop a Taranis-like drone in secret. Separate from this, the UK is investing and developing a number of smaller, swarming drone projects and a separate 'loyal wingman' drone programme.

Both of these projects are to enable air defences to be overwhelmed in order to carry out armed attacks.

## Autonomy, AI and LAWS

Taranis and early swarming drones, mentioned above, rely to some degree on being able to operate autonomously and raise concerns about the ethics and legality of autonomous weapons. Beyond those specific systems however, there are now real worries that the building blocks for the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) are being put in place.

Although many envisage and fear a Terminator-style, fully autonomous weapons systems, what is more concerning over the next decade is the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the intelligence and targeting chain. General Atomics are developing and promoting systems that use AI to 'transform data into actionable intelligence' for drones, while BAE Systems, another key drone manufacturer want to 'expedite machine learning adoption across the US defense and intelligence communities' through using AI to turn 'unstructured and semi-structured data into relevant and actionable intelligence for its customers'.

While some of this may no doubt be hyperbole and marketing spin, the push to use AI to search through thousands of hours of drone surveillance video and other electronic data in order to be able to 'find, fix and finish' targets is all too real and all too dangerous. Lessons from the killing of innocent civilians due to misreading of intelligence and data are simply not being learned. ■

Chris Cole, June 2020

## Elsie Hinkes

Elsie Hinkes passed away peacefully on Easter Saturday 11th April in Sobell House Hospice. She was 94, mother of 5 and foster mother of 3, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Elsie was the widow of the late Rev. Sidney Hinkes and together they campaigned for many years in the early Aldermaston marches, Christian CND and the Anglican Pacifist

Fellowship. Elsie provided constant support and co-provided hospitality and generosity to many later at the vicarage of St. Mary's in Bayswater Road in Headington, Oxford.

Elsie was a member of the British Soviet Friendship Society, Memory Lane and Oxford CND, and will be remembered as a strong believer in activism, social justice and peace. ■

## Trump 'unaware' that the UK has nuclear weapons

Former US National Security Advisor, John Bolton, has claimed that President Trump did not know that Britain was a nuclear power. Trump is alleged to have made these comments during a meeting with former British Prime Minister, Theresa May, where he asked her, 'Oh, are you a nuclear power?' a comment which, according to John Bolton, was not intended as a joke.

Unfortunately, at CND we are all too aware of Britain's nuclear status and of the US's completely dominant role within that, so we were particularly shocked to hear of these alleged comments by the US President.

During the early 1950s, Britain had begun to test and develop its own nuclear bomb in response to the US's refusal to share nuclear intelligence with its ally. But subsequently, the history of Britain's nuclear weapons has been intimately tied to its so-called 'Special Relationship' with the US.

Since 1958, the US and the UK have been party to the Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA) ensuring nuclear weapons co-operation – indeed it's the most extensive nuclear sharing agreement in the world. This allows the two countries to exchange nuclear materials, technology, and information. This agreement was a cornerstone of NATO's cold war defence and was so highly valued when signed that, then UK Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan called it 'the great prize'.

This enabled Britain to purchase the submarine-based Polaris missile system, with the US supplying the missiles, launch tubes, and the fire control system. This has since been replaced by Trident. These missiles are leased from the US, and the

submarines have to return regularly to the US base, for the maintenance and replacement of the missiles. The UK pays an annual contribution towards the cost of this base. The site at which the UK's nuclear warheads are made, the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, is part-managed by Lockheed Martin, a US corporation.

As well as being technically dependent on the US, Trident is also far from being politically independent. As a member of US-dominated NATO, Trident

could be used against a country that has attacked another NATO state. Worse still, since NATO has not adopted a no-first-use policy, it could also be used pre-emptively against another country that was perceived to be a threat. Moreover, earlier this year it was announced by Pentagon officials that a deal had been struck to replace the UK's nuclear warheads with new US-made technology. This decision was revealed by Pentagon officials before any

announcement from the UK government, further demonstrating that Trident compromises, rather than asserts, British independence.

The MDA between the US and UK is renewed by Parliament once a decade – a process that is pretty much a rubber stamp. But when it next comes up for renewal in 2024, we need to ensure that government and parliament actually rethink this relationship. If our nuclear weapons are of so little interest to the president of the country on which they are totally dependent, then our government would do well to move on from the MDA and consign it – and our nuclear weapons – to the dustbin of history. ■



## The first nuclear warhead convoy since lockdown

The first nuclear warhead convoy since lockdown passed through Oxfordshire on Wednesday 13th May 2020.

The convoy travelled northbound through Oxfordshire passing Didcot, Abingdon Oxford and Kidlington on the A34, and then past Bicester and Banbury on the M40.

It was monitored and tracked by Oxford CND

nukewatchers from Oxfordshire to the Midlands, as it headed from Atomic weapons Establishment Burghfield near Reading to the royal Naval Ammunition Depot at Coulport in Scotland.

People in England were being told not to travel to Scotland under the new coronavirus guidance.

This convoy defied that requirement, and is the most dangerous cargo on our roads.



## Second nuclear warhead convoy – June



The second nuclear warhead convoy since the Covid-19 outbreak passed through Oxfordshire on Saturday 20th June 2020.

The convoy travelled northbound through Oxfordshire on the M40, passing Thame, Bicester, Oxford and Banbury. It stopped briefly at MOD Kineton, before heading north east to Nottingham and then to Yorkshire. It stayed overnight at RAF Leeming and then travelled into Scotland the next day.

It was monitored and tracked by Oxford CND nukewatchers during its travel from AWE Burghfield to Coulport, next to the Trident submarine base at Faslane.

To repeat, these convoys are the most deadly cargoes on our roads.



Thank you



Peace is for all of us.

Peace is for all of us

No one is excluded

The stars reach out to other planets

Further than we know

The stars glittering beyond

Our eyesight – Brexit and Pandemics

We have brought upon ourselves

By stupidity and the abuse of the  
Animal Kingdom!

Peace and the stars are for us all...

Love

Robert Stredder

Theatre des Bicyclettes.



## Latest News

### Hiroshima – Nagasaki 75th year Commemoration

Sunday 9th August 11.00am commemoration at  
Peace Plaque, Bonn Square, Oxford, OX1 1EU.  
Vigil, readings to mark the atomic bombings of  
Japan. Please bring banners and poems.



### Membership subscriptions 2020 Please pay your subscription soon!

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needs that money to campaign and send you  
information and newsletters. We are also very  
grateful for extra donations.

Subs are very reasonable – £10 or £5 low wage,  
but are essential for us to continue to campaign.  
Standing orders can continue as before.

Make cheques for 2020 payable to Oxford CND  
and send to: Membership, 22 Downside Road,  
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### Oxford CND Newsletter by email

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newsletter only by email. If you would also  
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### Contributions to the next issue...

Please send letters and items to:  
Newsletter, 22 Downside Road, Oxford, OX3 8HP  
No later than **28th August 2020**.

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