



OXFORD CND

NEWSLETTER

December 2023



PEACE
NOT WAR



Israeli / Hamas captives deal Negotiated truce

A FOUR-DAY NEGOTIATED TRUCE and the release of some Palestinian prisoners and Israeli captives, brought some relief to a population who have endured almost seven weeks of Israeli bombardment. This was the first opportunity people have had to move around without the threat of Israeli air strikes since October the seventh.

Hamas has released 24 hostages who had been held in the Gaza Strip and Israel freed 39 Palestinian prisoners, as a temporary ceasefire took hold after more than six weeks of war. In the first such exchange since Hamas seized more than 200 hostages in its deadly October 7 attack, the militant group set free 13 Israeli women and children.

It also released 10 Thai nationals and one Filipino. Qatar, which mediated the deal, added Israel had freed 39 Palestinian prisoners, all women and children. The temporary truce was the first halt to hostilities since October 7 and set the stage for what is due to become the staggered release of 50 women and children held by Hamas and 150 Palestinian prisoners in Israel. US President Joe Biden on Friday said the hostage releases had involved "extensive US diplomacy", although none of the Americans held in Gaza were among the people freed on Friday. He suggested diplomacy could now turn to more lasting peace. "We also look to the future, we have to end this cycle of violence in the Middle East," The ceasefire, which is due to last four days if the two sides comply with the deal, also paved the way for the biggest humanitarian convoy into Gaza since the war started. The UN said 200 trucks carrying aid were dispatched to the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, but only 137 made it into the besieged strip. In addition, 129,000 litres of fuel were delivered to the enclave.

As the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza increases, CND condemns all killing of civilians and calls for the upholding of the laws of war and international humanitarian law. We call for a ceasefire. This is a widespread demand across society, supported by 76% according to polls. The Pope and other world leaders are calling for a ceasefire. As well as calling for a ceasefire, we urge a political solution to this long running and complex situation, on the basis of international law.

Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

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The First Casualty

THE DAILY, ALMOST HOURLY, accumulation of news from Gaza has been so horrendous that it is almost an affront to the thousands who have died, including the original victims of 7 October, to try to sort out fact from fiction in the various narratives that we hear. Yet if we cannot share their suffering from a distance, it is all the more incumbent on us to understand its causes. Never mind whether it was Aeschylus or Samuel Johnson who said that truth is the first casualty of war. That has been self-evident ever since rival combatants claimed that justice, often dressed up as a “just war”, was on their side – and who has ever failed to claim that? If the pause that has just begun as I am writing this should somehow lead to a permanent ceasefire, that will be a welcome miracle, although the task of restoration, both of the fabric of Gaza and the well-being of its citizens, will be phenomenal. But it will also mean a complete reversal of the Israeli principle which has been stated with increasing clarity, as in a recent interview with spokesperson Eylon Levy (BBC Today, 20 November).

It is that any action by Israel is justified and proportionate, following the atrocities of 7 October, when set against Hamas’s commitment to destroy the state of Israel. So, when an Israeli penetration bomb demolishes a crowded building, killing and wounding dozens or more innocent civilians, it is a proportionate action simply because the target is a presumed Hamas tunnel below. While the IDF claims to protect civilians, no amount of collateral damage can, by its own definition, ever be disproportionate. The opposing principle was enunciated early on (18 October) by the UN Secretary-General – he was excoriated or doing so. Although Hamas’s action should be unequivocally condemned, what the IDF is doing in Gaza, said Antonio Guterres, amounts to “collective punishment” of a civilian population which is contrary to international humanitarian law. And we also need to be “fully aware of the deep grievances of the Palestinian people after 56 years of occupation.”

Set against these basic principles, some of the

issues that have occupied the news can become a diversion if focussed on exclusively. If the denial of fuel and other essential supplies of life is an act of collective punishment, then these should be supplied whether or not Hamas may benefit in some degree. We have to avoid being led into futile rabbit holes, amply populated these days by social media – and several of them regrettably occupied by attempts to minimise Hamas’s war crimes. Yes, it turns out that some victims on 7 October were killed by a tardy and misdirected Israeli military response, rather than by gunmen from Gaza, but that does not vitiate the original crime.

Efforts to analyse Israel’s “evidence” of a Hamas

command and control centre beneath Al Shifa hospital also miss the point. Regardless of what lies underneath, the blockade and denial of critical aid to the hospital, to the point where it can no longer function as a hospital, is disproportionate and an act of collective



punishment. One might construct a scenario in which Israel had provided full medical facilities elsewhere for a peaceful transfer of the hospital’s resources, staff and patients, but that is a thousand miles from reality. The argument over Al Shifa also diverted attention from the denial of supplies to and military action against other hospitals where no “command centre” was even alleged. It diverted attention too from Israel’s continued bombing of the supposedly “safe” zone that it had declared in southern Gaza. Meanwhile there are dogmas on both sides that need to be questioned. I have never heard any media interviewer challenge the widespread Israeli claim that “Judea and Samaria” (aka the West Bank) were given by God to the Israelites in the first millennium BCE and that this justifies their occupation today. Nor have I heard Hamas being challenged on the doctrine of eternal happiness that drives so many young Palestinians to futile martyrdom. These are legitimate questions, though they cannot divert from the existential horror that began on 7 October and has to stop now. ■

John Gittings

Oxford



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Royal Navy nuclear submarine malfunctions

A ROYAL NAVY nuclear submarine suffered a 'concerning' malfunction while diving, the BBC has been told.

The incident on board the unnamed Vanguard class submarine, which carries the UK's trident nuclear missiles, happened more than a year ago while it was preparing to go out on patrol. A defence source said "there was a problem and it was concerning", but that

it was picked up by "the system".

A Royal Navy investigation into the incident took place, the source said. But they declined to give further details.

During the incident the main depth gauge on the submarine failed as it was diving, a defence source confirmed, but a secondary depth gauge was still working. ■



Gaza war aid from UK

RAF ADMITS TO MAKING 17 military flights to Israel since Gaza bombing began

But Declassified discovers 33 UK military transport flights to Tel Aviv in the last month, including every day for two weeks after the Gaza bombing began.

- British A400 military transport aircraft flew to Tel Aviv.
- Declassified could find no record of similar flights to Israel before Gaza bombing started.
- UK military denies sending “lethal aid” and says the planes supported Britain’s “diplomatic engagement” in Israel.
- Ministry of Defence refuses to provide detail of the cargo or personnel on flights.

Flight logs tracking aircraft from RAF Akrotiri, the UK’s vast air base in Cyprus, show the RAF flew military transport aircraft to Tel Aviv, Israel’s capital, every day from 13 to 26 October.

Declassified has counted 33 RAF flights from Cyprus to Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion Airport since Israel began bombing Gaza. The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) told Declassified it had sent 17 flights into Israel’s capital but the time period for this number is unclear.

Flight records going back to 6 August show no UK military flights from RAF Akrotiri to Israel before the bombing of Gaza began. The first flight went on 11 October from Brize Norton, the RAF’s major base in Oxfordshire. This was four days after the start of Israel’s brutal bombing campaign in Gaza, which has included flagrant war crimes, including targeting hospitals and ambulances, and the killing of over 10,000 Palestinians.

The exact nature of UK military aid to Israel remains unclear. The discovery of a large number of transport flights could make defence secretary Grant Shapps, who is in charge of the UK military, vulnerable to questioning by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC’s chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, has said the body is investigating evidence of war crimes perpetrated during the bombing campaign in Gaza. RAF Akrotiri, which has long been the staging post for British bombing campaigns in the Middle East, sits 180 miles from Tel Aviv. The flight time is 40 minutes and MoD spokesperson told Declassified: “The RAF has operated 17 flights into Tel Aviv in order to support the UK’s diplomatic engagement in country as well as to assist with the departure of British nationals.



The department added: “None of these flights transported any lethal aid for foreign nations.

UK military aircraft landing in Tel Aviv have mostly comprised the C-17A Globemaster III and A400M Atlas C1, both military transport vehicles. Britain has eight Globemaster and 21 Atlas vehicles.

The C-17 is capable of transporting 134 personnel and many types of military equipment, including Abrams tanks and three Black Hawk helicopters. The US military, which also operates C-17s, notes that its role is to “rapidly project and sustain an effective combat force close to a potential battle area.

Declassified is investigating whether the UK military is using these vehicles to transport personnel and/or military equipment to help Israel’s campaign in Gaza. The MoD would not provide Declassified with any detail.

During this two-week period when the RAF flew every day, most days saw more than one UK military transport plane go to Tel Aviv. On 15 October a total of six UK military flights went to Israel.

The flights stopped abruptly at the end of October for reasons that remain unclear. A new vehicle, the CN-235 military transport aircraft, then flew from RAF Akrotiri to Israel this week on November 5th and 7th.

UK companies can continue to supply components used in Israeli fighter jets, the government said. ■

Declassified

USAF Croughton rally 2023

ON SATURDAY 7TH OCTOBER members of local peace groups visited the main gate of the United States of America colony in Northamptonshire disguised as 'RAF Croughton'. The Croughton Rally is part of the annual 'Keep Space for Peace week and is organised by the Oxfordshire Peace Campaign. (OPC).

In 2016, US Space Command issued a report named 'Vision for 2020'. In this they stated that the US needed to dominate Space. 'Full Spectrum Dominance' is the chilling phrase they use – to be able to fight wars in and from Space, to defend the United States' interests. OPC feels the necessity to raise awareness of USAF Croughton as being one of the communication bases for these ambitions along with the better-known bases of Menwith Hill and Fylingdales in Yorkshire. USAF Croughton is an integral part of the US surveillance and listening strategy including facilitating drones warfare.

So, there we were with our banners and flags to also listen – but this time to speakers from the peace movement. The following is from memory, and my impressions of the speakers.

John Gittings is a former Foreign Affairs editor for the *Guardian* and he reminded us why we were at Croughton on this sunny Saturday afternoon. He used the example of the late Pat Arrowsmith and the Committee of 100 and praised us for 'keeping the faith' regarding the elusive concept of 'peace' and what it might mean.

Tom Unterrainer is now chair of CND. He spoke of the obscurity of places like USAF Croughton and praised the demonstrators for raising public awareness of such places. He also referred to the

situation at USAF Lakenheath in Suffolk where there is strong evidence that the US will once again store nuclear weapons at the base.

Peter Burt (speaker at the Faringdon Peace Group September meeting) from Drone Wars UK spoke of the current development of drones in modern warfare. Frightening stuff! If only the general public were made aware of the situation! It was also an opportunity for Peter to describe the basis of the Nukewatch initiative which involves volunteers to carry out, as far as possible, surveillance of nuclear convoys travelling on our roads to transfer nuclear materials to and from Burghfield near Reading to Faslane near Glasgow, and Derby (Rolls Royce). Brize Norton airbase is used for transportation to and from the USA. Incidentally, parts of a nuclear convoy got lost and turned up in Faringdon Market Place recently. Peter's talk will doubtless connect with what Chris Cole has to tell us in his talk on drones with special reference to the Gaza catastrophe, at Faringdon peace group Monthly Meeting on 1st November.

One might ponder the reasons why it is up to a few 'ordinary' people to spread awareness of the weapons that could bring the end of the world.

Why did we spend a glorious autumn day outside a place where wars are planned? The companionship of other like-minded people, all of us there because of our mutual concern about the future, together with the opportunity to listen to very inspirational and compelling speakers, led to a feeling that this was indeed time well spent. ■

Phil Chesterton
Faringdon Peace Group



ICAN report on TPNW

AS WE ARE ALL REELING in horror at the photos of dead and injured people almost total destruction of the bombed city of Gaza we need also to work against the potential devastation even one nuclear bomb would cause. From November 27 – December 1st, the Second Meeting of States Parties of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), took place at the UN in New York, meeting bringing together governments, scientists and campaigners from all over the world to build on this landmark treaty that comprehensively bans everything to do with nuclear weapons.

The meeting took place as the risk of nuclear weapons use is at its highest since the Cold War, with rising nuclear tensions, as well as the threat of renewed nuclear testing. The practice of nuclear sharing and spending billions on a new nuclear arms race of the 9 nuclear states only increase this risk.

But it does not have to be this way. The majority of the world's states are taking action, rallying behind the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons! The almost 100 countries that have ratified the Treaty know that nuclear weapons do not respect borders and any nuclear exchange will impact them and the whole world.

This treaty, adopted in 2017 and in force since January 2021, presents a reality-based plan to

get rid of nuclear weapons, a plan that involves governments, elected representatives, international organisations, civil society, the financial sector, and impacted communities, including indigenous communities and women and children who are disproportionately affected by nuclear weapons. It is where governments, scientists and campaigners from all over the world will come together to work on ending nuclear weapons, and it is the only place we will see real action towards nuclear disarmament in 2023. This landmark treaty comprehensively bans everything to do with nuclear weapons.

Global Day of Action

ICAN – International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons called for a global Day of Action to show the wider support for the Treaty. All groups that did actions were asked to send a photo to Trident Ploughshares and ICAN. In Oxford, women decided to make the Saturday Women in Black vigil one of those actions.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a coalition of non-governmental organisations in one hundred countries promoting adherence to and implementation of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. ■

Nuala Young



Every Saturday from 2 to 3pm – Women in Black at the Martyrs Memorial, St Giles, Oxford.

Gaza tragedy

As global calls for a ceasefire mount, CND's Chair, TOM UNTERRAINER, writes a guest blog on the catastrophe in Gaza, and the risks presented by Israeli nuclear weapons.

"WE MOVED TO A new phase in the war... Tonight, the ground in Gaza shook.". With these words, Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced an intensive escalation of the war against the Palestinian people in Gaza, on 28th October. This was a monstrous understatement. "Shook" hardly covers the murder, devastation and criminal disregard for humanity that is taking place in Palestine.

Midnight arrived for all-too-many in Gaza that evening and in the following days. Water, food and fuel supplies had already been cut. Hundreds of thousands had fled south. Others sought shelter wherever they could. Bombs were already falling. Then the lights went out: all telecommunications were severed; electricity cut.

Then the bombings intensified. Hundreds more corpses – men, women, children, the frail, the elderly, those yet to be born, those in incubators, those trying to find clean water and food – joined those already slaughtered. Names were written on the bodies of some of the slaughtered, the children in particular. "The world should know about these children who were murdered by Israel because they are not numbers, but names, stories and dreams killed by the Israeli occupation in Gaza" one parent told Aljazeera. strike group passed through the Strait of Gibraltar on their way to the Eastern Mediterranean.

The UK has already deployed two Royal Navy ships and surveillance aircraft to the region to "bolster security", according to the Prime Minister's spokespeople. But in the name of what concept of "security" have US and UK ships, aircraft and military personnel been dispatched to the region? It's not security for the people of Gaza, already subject to collective punishment and bombardment. If the people's security was a priority for the US and UK governments, they would be backing a ceasefire, rather than preventing it, and ensuring justice

and sovereignty for the Palestinian people. This is how they can ensure lasting peace and security in Palestine and Israel.

And let us not forget that Israel is the only nuclear-armed state in the region – a grave concern as the risk of wider conflict in the region escalates. The US and UK claim that their own possession of, threat to use, and development of new nuclear weapons are the ultimate guarantors

At around this time, a second US aircraft carrier and of "security". They will tell anyone daft enough to listen that maintaining the capability to unleash genocide is a reasonable and essential "security" measure. Nuclear-armed Israel no doubt feels

the same way. It refuses to acknowledge its nuclear arsenal, stands outside any nuclear treaties, and is subject to no inspections or international monitoring; yet it faces no sanctions or condemnation from its allies. So much for the 'rules based international order' – this is sheer double standards.

Members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament – who determine CND policy – met at our recent annual conference, and were clear on where we stand. We agreed an Emergency Resolution which notes that Israel's "aggression increases the risk of war in which nuclear weapons may be used" and which calls on the "British government to press for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the siege of Gaza".

We are also clear that our support for the mass national and local demonstrations coordinated with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War and others will continue. We will also work to support and engage with the growing number of trade unionists that oppose the production in Britain, of weapons for use on Palestine, and who – alongside other trade unionists internationally – are working to prevent their transportation to Israel. We will continue to work to remove all roadblocks to peace. We will continue to demand a ceasefire. ■



Diary

**Every Saturday 2 to 3pm
Women in Black at the Martyrs'
Memorial**

30th November Oxford CND AGM
6.15pm – Town Hall – refreshments.

December

2nd – Alternative Carols – 2.30pm – North Gate, Cornmarket, Oxford.

Wednesday 6th – Faringdon Peace Group – 7.30pm Zoom meeting – Net Zero Commitment.

8-9th – Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp – Nuala 01865 749459.

Tuesday 18th – Abingdon Peace - Group Christmas Social, Northcourt Centre, 8pm.
Vigil every Monday War Memorial 8.15-8.45 Peacemakers.

19th – Alternative Carols – 5.00pm – North Gate, Cornmarket, Oxford.

January

Wednesday 3rd – Faringdon Peace Group meeting – Social - 7.30pm.

11th – Oxford CND – Judges Room, Town Hall 6.15 – Fun jazz & Peace Concert planning – refreshments.

12th-13th – Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp – Nuala 01865 749459.

Monday 12th – Oxfordshire Peace Campaign meeting Zoom 2.00pm.

Tuesday 16th – Abingdon Peace Group – Zoom 8.00pm.

Vigil every Monday War Memorial 8.15-8.45 Peacemakers.

Best list of news items, webinars etc:

https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/news_items

<https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/events>

<https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk>



Latest News

Judicial review USAF Lakenheath

West Suffolk Council and the Ministry of Defence are facing a judicial review challenge from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) over the use of permitted development rights in relation to a development the campaign group believes is a precursor to stationing American nuclear weapons.

CND also argues that the two defendants failed to assess the environmental impact of potentially facilitating the weapons at the Suffolk airbase and has called on the MoD to halt development works at RAF Lakenheath while the necessary screening is carried out.

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liztaylor@virgin.net**

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Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Please contact: Nuala Young
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Contributions to the next issue...

Please send letters and items to:
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No later than: **Monday 1st January 2024**