



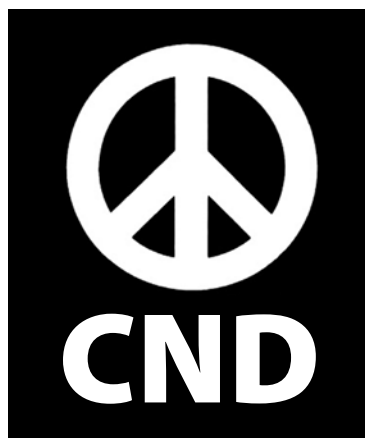
OXFORD CND

NEWSLETTER

January / February 2024



PEACE



Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

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How to be truthful

THE BBC'S FOOD PROGRAMME is not where one would look first for a serious discussion on Gaza, but six weeks into the war (26 November) it was entirely devoted to it. The presenter interviewed aid agencies who described how vast numbers of Gazans were displaced, how the shops were emptied of food, hunger was spreading, and the huge difficulties of getting aid into the territory. There was also time for a nostalgic look back at the delights of Gazan food when it was still possible.

A few days later (1 December), the Feedback programme which responds to listeners' opinions interviewed the BBC's international editor Jeremy Bowen. How do you make sure you are being impartial, was the first question, and he replied: "Well, for me, impartiality is about being truthful. That is my lodestar". This was a brilliant reply that cuts through endless discussion about "balance" and "objectivity".

It is tempting to dismiss the whole mainstream media and become so enraged by its failures that one misses the more positive (as a former mainstream journalist I declare my own interest). So, to what extent does this media help establish the truth over the Palestinian tragedy that assumed its latest and most acute phase on 7 October?

During the Vietnam War, it was said that the real facts could always be found if one had the patience to turn to page 96 of the *New York Times*. Today one does not have to go so far, and I would cite from many examples these stories, published prominently in three days before Christmas.

The Al-Shifa hospital

The Washington Post published (21 December) a detailed investigation based on open-source visuals, satellite imagery and all of the publicly released IDF materials, to conclude that these fell short of justifying the Israeli claim that the hospital has been used as a Hamas headquarters. This raised critical questions about whether "the civilian harm caused by Israel's military operations against the hospital... were proportionate to the assessed threat."

Gaza Bombing

Also on 21 December, and based on video investigation, the New York Times published a

report showing that "during the first six weeks of the war in Gaza, Israel routinely used one of its biggest and most destructive bombs in areas it designated safe for civilians". The use of these 2,000-pound bombs posed a "pervasive threat" to civilian safety". CNN reported the next day that according to US intelligence, 40 to 45% of the 29,000 air-to-surface munitions dropped on Gaza by then were "so-called dumb bombs, unguided munitions that can pose a greater threat to civilians."

Gaza death toll

BBC News reported (20 December) a detailed assessment by BBC Verify that supported the Gazan Health Ministry figures, highlighting the use of unguided bombs and quoting expert opinion from the WHO and other analysts, including UNICEF that Gaza was "the most dangerous place in the world to be a child".

There is another side to the media coin of reporting on Gaza. Interviews with Israeli spokespersons often pull punches – journalists may be wary of losing future access – although Mishal Husain on BBC Today consistently gives them a hard time. With foreign journalists denied direct access to Gaza by Israel, some of the worst horrors are ignored because these come only through on the spot and eye-witness reporting on Al Jazeera (an indispensable source).

Israel barely denies that these reporters and their families have been targeted: "We have a free press in Israel", was the non-reply of chief spokesperson Mark Regev on 7 January, after the eldest son of the AJ bureau chief was killed in an Israeli strike. Defenders of Israel's war often claim that the Western media, and the British in particular, has downplayed the loss and suffering caused by the Hamas attack on 7 October. This is untrue: what happened then is habitually referenced and has been the subject of full-length reports – as are the protests by hostage families.

We should criticise media lapses and omissions (and applaud the positive too). But sharper criticism should be directed to politicians of all parties who take refuge in platitudes about the right of self-defence, providing abundant evidence of Western double standards. ■

John Gittings

Gaza

AT OUR OCND MEETING in October, we agreed that it would be better to join and support the main local and national protests than set up our own stalls or actions. There have been protests organised by the Oxford Palestine Solidarity Campaign most Saturdays gathering at Manzil Way at 12 noon and marching into town either to Bonn Square or Broad St. for speeches including those of Oxford doctors who had trained doctors from Gaza. These doctors have read out the most heart-rending accounts of doctors having to operate on children without anaesthetics.

Already in the first weeks of the Israeli bombing of Gaza 104 health workers had been killed. A very moving vigil took place in Radcliffe Square on November 4th. where the names of each of the health workers were read out and the deep bell of St Mary the Virgin church nearby, tolled with each name. At the time of writing, 22,000 Palestinians are reported to have been killed and it is estimated that over 1000 children have had limbs amputated.

At the rally, this January Dr Harrington of the John Radcliffe Hospital read from a letter that he had just received from one of his former trainee doctors working in Gaza, explaining that they had lost many doctors when their families had been told to leave the area. Of course, these doctors had understandably gone with their families.

The Gazan doctor explained that now with the continuing bombing that day 500 people had come in for emergency treatment, but there was only one doctor available.

What can we do about this atrocity and genocide being carried out by a supposedly civilised country with the unopposed acquiescence of our government? Labour has refused to oppose it. To my concern and that of many of her constituents and councillors, Anneliese Dodds followed her leader and did not support the Parliamentary proposal for a Ceasefire. I was sorry not to live in Oxford West and have the more principled Leila Moran as my MP.

Let's try again with our MPs. asking them to press for support for the South African move to appeal to the International Court of Justice to condemn the atrocities as Genocide and the setting of an arms embargo on Israel. (See page 8, Latest News).

In late December the Biden Administration approved an £118m. sale of military equipment to Israel. We don't know what is in the RAF planes flying from Brize Norton to Cyprus and then on to Israel. Do contact your MP urging them to support the South African appeal to the ICJ. and ask what is being sent to Israel from UK bases. ■

Nuala Young

Oxford



IMPORTANT

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Oxford



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Details on page 8.

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High postage costs mean that we need more members to receive the newsletter by email.

The coloured email edition will now be emailed to all members.

If you require the printed edition and posted newsletter from

January 2024 onwards please email:

liz.taylor5@virgin.net AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Sellafield

IN EARLY DECEMBER, *The Guardian* reported the results of a year-long “special investigation” it had carried out into health and safety risks posed by the two square miles large Sellafield nuclear site in Cumbria, which it characterised as “Europe’s most hazardous nuclear site.” It houses more plutonium than anywhere else on the planet.

A major finding by the investigation was that a decaying building known as the “swarf storage silo” (which is actually made up of 22 older concrete silos and some later double-layered ones) has been leaking radioactive liquid since at least 2019 when Sellafield reported the leak to the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR).

Concerns over safety at the crumbling building, as well as cracks in a reservoir of toxic sludge known as B30, have caused diplomatic tensions with countries including the US, Norway and Ireland, which fear Sellafield has failed to get a grip of the problems. (Similar storage buildings B29 and B41 were also found to be crumbling).

A deputy managing director at Sellafield some years ago described B30 as “the most hazardous industrial building in western Europe” and the cracks in the building are recently reported as getting worse, so it’s getting more and more dangerous.

Both Ireland and Norway are concerned about the risk of contamination from Sellafield. In 2006 the Irish government tried to take action against Sellafield by referring it to a tribunal over concern about the impact on the environment, in particular by radioactive contamination from radioactive material entering the Irish Sea from the plant. Norwegian officials are concerned that an accident at the site could lead to a plume of radioactive particles being carried by the prevailing south-west wind across the North Sea, harming its food production and wildlife.

The Guardian investigation also reported that Sellafield cyber security was deficient and had indeed been breached by cyber groups closely linked to Russia and China as far back at least to 2015 when experts discovered “sleeper” malware (malware that can lurk in to spy on or attack systems) had been embedded in Sellafield’s computer networks. Last year, Sellafield, with 11,000 staff, was placed in “**special measures**” for consistent failings in cybersecurity. Senior figures at the site had been aware of cyber problems for



at least a decade, according to an internal report seen by *The Guardian* which warned that there were “critical security vulnerabilities” that needed to be addressed immediately. These vulnerabilities include staff at an external site found that they could access Sellafield’s servers and that external contractors could plug memory sticks into the system while unsupervised. *The Guardian* has discovered that the authorities do not know exactly when the IT systems were first compromised. It may mean some of Sellafield’s most sensitive activities, such as moving radioactive waste, monitoring for leaks of dangerous material and checking for fires, have been compromised. Sources suggest it is likely foreign hackers have accessed the highest echelons of confidential material at the site

Sellafield, then named “Windscale” was the site for a 2-reactor plant for producing the plutonium required for the UK’s nuclear weapons. This began building in 1947 and was producing plutonium by October 1950. One of these reactors was responsible for the UK’s worst-ever nuclear accident, in 1957, when it overheated and caught fire and radioactive particles were carried over to Europe. In 1959 Sellafield began receiving thousands of tonnes of highly-radioactive spent nuclear rods from all the UK’s growing number of civil nuclear power stations and rods from abroad at a price (indeed such contracts have yielded the UK some £9 billion) from such countries as Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Italy and Sweden. However, the amount of UK high-level waste stored at Sellafield continues to grow, unprocessed and unwanted.

The long-term plan, forecast to cost between £20bn and £53bn, is to bury the UK’s high-level and medium-level nuclear waste deep underground in a “geological disposal facility” (essentially a very deep hole in the ground. Out of sight, out of mind?) But not even a site for such a depository has yet been found, so the waste will continue to remain at Sellafield, Sizewell B and any new nuclear power stations for the foreseeable future. ■

USAF Lakenheath

USAF LAKENHEATH IS HOME to USAF's 48th Fighter Wing and hosted nuclear weapons until 2008. A USAF report showed plans to build a "surety dormitory" at RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk, which experts said implied a return of nuclear arms. US Air Force budget documents included a justification for a 144-bed dormitory "to house the increase in enlisted personnel as the result of the potential Surety Mission." The word "surety" is often used by the US Government to refer to the concept of ensuring American nuclear weapons are kept safe and secure. The Federation of American Scientists (FAS), said they "strongly imply" the intention to re-establish nuclear arms at Lakenheath, which hosted them until 2008. ensuring American nuclear weapons are kept safe and secure.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) said it would be "beyond irresponsible" and put the UK at risk. The Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon said they would not comment on the location of weapons. CND general secretary, Kate Hudson, said: "It's increasingly clear that Lakenheath is once again a vital cog in Washington's overseas nuclear machine. "The deployment of the new B61-12 (gravity bombs) to Europe undermines any prospects for global peace and ensures Britain will be a target in a nuclear conflict between the US/NATO and Russia. "It's beyond irresponsible that the UK government is

allowing this deployment."

RAF Lakenheath is home to USAF's 48th Fighter Wing, which consists of more than 4,000 military members and 1,500 civilians. Control of the base transferred from the RAF to USAF in 1948.

Last year more than 200 people protested outside the base after the US added the UK to a list of nuclear weapons storage site locations in Europe.

B61-13 bomb

The U.S. Defense Department unexpectedly announced its intention to develop an additional variant of the B61 nuclear gravity bomb, to be known as the B61-13.

"The B61-13 will provide the President with additional options against certain harder and large-area military targets, even while the department works to retire legacy systems such as the B83-1," according to a Pentagon fact sheet.

The B61-13 would be deliverable by modern aircraft and have a maximum yield similar to the 360-kiloton B61-7 variant, a massive increase when compared to the most recent 50-kiloton B61-12. The B61-12 is scheduled for initial deployment this year, replacing the 100 B61-3/4 bombs believed to be stationed across Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey under the NATO nuclear sharing mission. ■



Technicians test load a new nuclear-capable B61-12 gravity bomb.

Spiralling nuclear weapon costs

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE'S plan for equipment acquisition over the next decade has once again been branded unaffordable, with overspending on its nuclear programme now clearly responsible for the overall insolvency of the plan. After two years where the plan was predicting a modest surplus, due to the greatest increase in UK military spending since the Korean war the apparently inexorable rising costs of the government's nuclear weapon upgrades have created the largest deficit since the government started publishing these plans in 2012.

The MOD's own figures show that there is a £16.9bn shortfall in the plan, compared to the £2.6bn surplus in the previous year's plan. While there are shortfalls in every 'Top Level Budget' (TLB) in the plan, huge increases in the forecast cost of the MOD's nuclear weapon upgrades are the most significant driver of these deficits.

The Defence Nuclear Organisation (DNO), the TLB which oversees the majority of the MOD's spending on its programme, has seen its spending on the equipment plan increase 62% since last year to £99.5bn. The DNO appear to have been given approval to spend whatever is deemed necessary to avoid delays in the production of the Dreadnought submarine class, as the NAO says it has prioritised delivery to schedule "over immediate cost constraints". This approach is apparently supported by the Treasury, and although it is hard to dispute their claim that fewer delays will in general lead to lower overall costs, it is a questionable approach to financial management.

Over the full life of the Dreadnought programme, it is estimated that costs will be £4bn higher, a substantial increase from their estimate last year of costs being £1.2bn above current forecasts.

The estimates for the remainder of the budget for the Defence Nuclear Organisation saw its "costs increased by £38.2 billion (62 percent) to £99.5 billion" in 2023. Founded in 2016, the DNO is a body within the Ministry of Defence that oversees what's called Britain's Nuclear Defence Enterprise – ie. nuclear weapons infrastructure, procurement, research, equipment – including the delivery of Britain's new nuclear-armed Dreadnought-class submarines.

Equipment plan appears initially to contain better news for the MOD, as they predict that the other 50 projects will be delivered for £1.5bn less than current forecasts. However, this figure is largely due

to two factors, both of which entail problems in the nuclear programme. Firstly, predictions that delays to the SSN – AUKUS submarines which are intended to replace the current Astute-class fleet, will lead to £2bn of costs being spent after the 10-years covered by the current plan. Secondly, estimates that another £1bn will not be spent on supporting in-service submarines due to budgetary constraints. It is difficult to imagine that this money can be saved without seriously affecting submarine availability or safety, given the current reliability problems in the Vanguard fleet and the maintenance backlog in both the Vanguard and Astute fleets.

The gulf in the MOD's equipment plan finances in general, and nuclear project finances in particular, is emerging despite substantial increases in funding from the Treasury. In the 2023 Spring Budget £3bn of additional funding was announced alongside the IRR, and current budgets allow for annual increases of £2bn, both specifically for nuclear projects. £2bn of the Dreadnought programmes nominal £10bn contingency fund had already been spent by March 2023, and the current forecast cost for the project appears to anticipate another £1bn being spent.

While the stated commitment of the MOD and Treasury to funding the Dreadnought programme above any other considerations is clearly intended to dispel any doubts about the viability of that project, it is hard to see any resolution to the current state of the equipment plan that does not involve spending on conventional equipment projects being cut.

The MOD's refusal to take difficult decisions now merely increases the number of tough choices that will await an incoming government after the next election. The most likely outcome of those choices is that once again conventional military spending will be cut to fund the government's nuclear ambitions. ■



The role of U.S. Menwith Hill NSA base and the UK in Gaza

EVERY TUESDAY AT 6pm, rain or shine, a small group of protestors stand outside a U.S. base in North Yorkshire with banners and flags. Members and supporters of the Menwith Hill Accountability Campaign (MHAC) are there to protest at the unaccountable and highly secret activities that go on inside the U.S. spy base nominally called 'RAF' Menwith Hill but run by the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA). In recent weeks the focus has been on the UK's role in events in Gaza.

One role will be through the activities at Menwith Hill. Operatives there are busy supplying the U.S. intelligence services with information, some of which will be used to help the Israeli Defence Forces target their attacks in Gaza.

In 2016 top secret documents obtained by Edward Snowden showed that Menwith Hill collects and analyses satellite data obtained by intercepting electronic communications (emails, texts, telephone calls, etc) and passes on anything of interest to the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA).

In the past, the information gathered has helped target armed drone strikes across the Middle East and North Africa and Menwith Hill has provided support for British and American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it has also been used to assist with covert missions in countries where the U.S. has not declared war.

As Ryan Gallagher wrote in the Intercept "NSA employees at Menwith Hill have collaborated on a project to help 'eliminate' terrorism targets in Yemen, for example, where the U.S. has waged a controversial drone bombing campaign that has resulted in dozens of civilian deaths". In 2021 MHAC and Yorkshire CND jointly published a booklet called "Menwith Hill in 3D" explores the issues around the legality of the activities of the base, including the disclosures made by Edward Snowden.

Documents leaked by Snowden have revealed that the NSA "maintains a far-reaching technical and analytic relationship with the Israeli SIGINT National Unit (ISNU)" and the documents show that the NSA and ISNU are "sharing information on access, intercept, targeting, language, analysis and reporting." There can be little doubt then, that Menwith Hill will have been working all hours over the last few weeks to provide information to help

the Israeli attack particular targets identified by the intercepted information.

Matt Kennard and Mark Curtis, writing in Declassified UK, have described how the UK military and intelligence services may be aiding Israel's attack on Gaza. In December 2020, a military cooperation agreement was signed by Britain and Israel. Despite the UK MoD describing it as an "important piece of defence diplomacy" which "strengthens" military ties, the British parliament and public has never seen what is in it. The MoD has refused to publish it and has only briefly mentioned it in parliament once, in a response to a direct question from an MP.

Declassified UK has also revealed that, since the bombing of Gaza began, the RAF has made over 30 military transport flights to Tel Aviv. The MoD is now censoring requests for information by MPs about flights from the RAF base at Akrotiri in Cyprus, which is only 40 minutes from Tel Aviv by plane.

There are also reports that the US is using RAF Akrotiri to send arms to Israel. RAF Akrotiri has, for a long time, been the base from which British bombing campaigns have been carried out across the Middle East and it was recently revealed that 129 US airmen are permanently based there. The government has denied sending 'lethal aid' to Israel, but the censoring of MPs' requests indicates that RAF Akrotiri is being for just that purpose.

Information from electronic communications is also being collected by aircraft and the MoD has sent the Israeli forces several Shadow R1 reconnaissance aircraft to help the Israeli forces find and rescue hostages.

So, the UK is helping Israel's slaughter of Palestinians not only by supplying arms, but also by supplying intelligence information to help target the attacks. The protestors standing outside the Menwith Hill base in the cold and the rain, are reminding the British public and politicians that the U.S. spy base at Menwith Hill continues to play a crucial role in conflicts that are of concern to the U.S. – which means any conflict, anywhere on Earth. ■

Dave Webb

Dave Webb is the board convenor of the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space.

He also chairs Yorkshire Region CND

Diary



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

January

Wednesday 3rd – Faringdon Peace Group – New Year social.

Thursday 11th – Oxford CND – Judges Room, Town Hall – Nuala 01865 749459.

12th-14th – Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp –

13th TPNW talk by Rebecca Johnson – Nuala 01865 749459.

Tuesday 16th – Abingdon Peace 8pm – Zoom meeting.

Vigil every Monday War Memorial 8.15-8.45 Peacemakers

Tuesday 23rd – Free Palestine planning meeting – Town Hall 7.00pm.

Wednesday 24th – Faringdon Peace Group – Planning Big Meeting.

Sunday 28th – Upper Heyford Holocaust Memorial 2024 – 11.00am – Daniel 07949 159 430.

February

Sunday 4th online Trident Ploughshares meeting.
Wednesday 7th - Faringdon Peace Group meeting – 7.30pm.

9th-11th - Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp – Nuala 01865 749459.

Tuesday 20th – Abingdon Peace Group – 8.00pm

Vigil every Monday War Memorial 8.15-8.45 Peacemakers

Monday 23rd – Oxfordshire Peace Campaign meeting Zoom 2.00pm.

Thursday 28th – Oxford CND meeting – 6.35pm Town Hall.

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

South Africa invokes Genocide Convention against Israel

SOUTH AFRICA FILED AN application instituting proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), concerning alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the "Genocide Convention") in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

From the Application: *This section provides an overview of the acts in which Israel has engaged that are genocidal in character, having regard to their nature, scope and context. These acts are ongoing, and ongoing in a conflict context, where Israel is deliberately imposing telecommunications blackouts on Gaza and restricting access by fact-finding bodies and the international media. At the same time Palestinian journalists are being killed at a rate significantly higher than has occurred in any conflict in the past 100 years. In the two months since 7 October 2023, the number of journalists killed already exceeded that of the entirety of World War Two.*

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Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Please contact: Nuala Young
nualayoung@hotmail.com



Contributions to the next issue...

Please send letters and items to:

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No later than: **Saturday 24th February 2024**