

MHAC NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 7 WINTER 2020/2021



NSA/NRO Menwith Hill: any pause for a pandemic?

We apologise for the long pause since the last newsletter and hope this one will give some idea of the Menwith Hill Accountability Campaign's activities and concerns over the Summer and Autumn.

Menwith Hill US surveillance and military base is part of a massive network of US bases across the UK and the world.



US or NATO bases encircling Russia and China, graphic courtesy of the Global Network Against Weapons and Power in Space

Despite a pandemic and a climate emergency, US military and surveillance operations have proceeded apace.

A CALL TO HALT NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

On Saturday 24 October Honduras became the 50th state to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which will now come into force on 22 January 2021, making nuclear weapons illegal. Despite more than 120 states voting in support of the Treaty and the widespread support it has received from every continent, the nuclear-armed states, including the US and the UK, have so far failed to engage in any way.

But no pause in US missile 'Defense'

Menwith Hill's involvement in US Missile 'Defense', through the two radomes that are part of the Space-Based Infrared System, makes us a target and could make us complicit in any US nuclear attack – by making a US nuclear first strike possible.

Missile 'Defense' still, unfortunately, enjoys bipartisan support in the US Congress and Senate and is likely to continue to receive massive funding.¹

Another satellite for missile-defence warning is to be launched next year, lauded as a "massive achievement" in the context of the pandemic.²

And no pause for US Space Force

The US 460th Space Operations, which operated the SBIRS (as at Menwith Hill), became part of Space Force. In July it was inactivated and replaced by Space Delta 4 (Missile Warning).³

In the context of the pandemic, Space Force is already having to justify its existence and increased funding. It claims "huge" space responsibilities. Paradoxically, it seems many more countries are now developing space weapons precisely because US dependence on space is seen as its Achilles' heel.⁴

- <https://thebulletin.org/2020/09/why-does-missile-defense-still-enjoy-bipartisan-support-in-congress/>
- <https://www.c4isrnet.com/space/2020/12/02/the-space-forces-next-missile-warning-satellite-ready-for-2021-launch/>
- <https://www.buckley.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Article/322399/460th-space-wing/>,
<https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104549/space-based-infrared-system/>,
<https://www.airforcemag.com/space-force-organizations-take-shape-as-selection-boards-meet>
- <https://time.com/5869987/spaceforce/>

As many predicted, a space arms race is taking place in which the UK cooperates with the US.⁵

Any progress on new treaties?

The good news is that President-elect Biden has pledged to extend New Start. In addition, a bipartisan congressional task force is also recommending renewing the treaty.⁶

However the US is against negotiating a treaty limiting military activities in space. They claim such a treaty would be "impossible to verify".⁷ They have, nevertheless, criticised Russia for employing in space what they describe as an anti-satellite weapon. The US seeks voluntary norms, Russia a treaty.

In October the US-led Space Artemis Accords were signed by eight nations including the UK – but these are all US allies, with space interests:

"The accords, named after NASA's Artemis moon program, seek to build on existing international space law by establishing "safety zones" that would surround future moon bases to prevent conflict between states operating there, and by allowing private companies to own the lunar resources they mine.

... "NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine . . . said the accords are consistent with a 1967 treaty [The Outer Space Treaty] holding that the moon and other celestial bodies are exempt from national claims of ownership."⁸

We disagree.

- <https://www.aerotechnews.com/blog/2020/08/27/space-control-squadron-certifies-first-uk-operator/>
- <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/518800-bipartisan-congressional-task-force-recommends-extending-nuclear-treaty-with?>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/24/us-russia-vienna-talks-space-militarisation>
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-russia-hold-talks-on-space-security-11595889453>
- <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-space-exploration-artemis/eight-nations-sign-u-s-led-artemis-moon-agreements-idUKKBN26Y2OV>

No pause in "collecting it all", making targeted killings possible

In July the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killing, Agnes Callamard, stated that the US drone strike that killed Qassem Soleimani, Iran's top general, and nine other people on 2 January 2020 was a violation of international law.⁹

This strike could well have been targeted using information gathered by Menwith Hill, as the last newsletter explained (Issue 6, Spring 2020, p. 4).¹⁰

According to an email from Reprieve received in August:

"The algorithms used to identify and kill people around the world are flawed. They are embedded with mistakes. And because of these mistakes, innocent people die. . . .

"In Yemen alone, 94% of those killed by lethal drones since 2002 were not militant leaders. [1]

[1] The War in Yemen: Militant Leader Deaths as a Percentage of All Deaths in Yemen, New America

The US National Reconnaissance Organisation (NRO), which runs (for example from Menwith Hill) the satellites that collect the information to feed these algorithms, has launched four new satellites this year.¹¹

Watch the recent video by Will Griffin: How Military Satellites Spy on You, <https://youtu.be/ybJBHH7yY-s>

More about new antennae and new radomes at Menwith Hill and at USAF Croughton, and about Will Griffin, below.

- <https://nypost.com/2020/07/07/un-slams-us-drone-killing-of-qassem-soleimani-as-unlawful/>
- [Ryan Gallagher, Inside Menwith Hill: The NSA's British Base at the heart of US targeted Killing, The Intercept, 6 September 2016](https://theintercept.com/2016/09/06/nsa-menwith-hill-targeted-killing-surveillance/)
<https://theintercept.com/2016/09/06/nsa-menwith-hill-targeted-killing-surveillance/>
- <https://www.c4isrnet.com/battlefield-tech/space/2020/11/16/national-reconnaissance-office-launches-new-intelligence-satellite/>

No lasting pause of military 'exercises'

US Global Strike has prided itself on keeping going throughout the pandemic, sending bombers and their crews to the Western Pacific, Europe and the Arctic.

To give a taste of US operations in the UK, the 422 Air Base Group, which has its headquarters at Croughton, enables global command and control, global intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and global strike operations. The 422 ABG operates at Croughton global communications base, USAF Fairford – the only US bomber forward operating unit in Europe – and USAF Welford, the second-largest USAF munitions facility in Europe.



At the start of the year USAF in Europe conducted large-force exercises with just USAF units because of COVID-19-related restrictions. Point Blank, a regular set of exercises involving NATO allies, which was initially postponed because of COVID-19, started again in May and involved the 48th Fighter Wing at USAF Lakenheath, refuelling tankers from USAF Mildenhall and B-52s deployed to Fairford.

Six B-52 bombers arrived at Fairford at the end of August. B-52s participated in Exercise Point Blank for the first time, "competing every day" over Europe to send a message to Russia, according to a top US Air Force officer. According to the Russian Defence minister NATO surveillance flights "close to Russian borders" increased from 87 in August 2019 to about 120 in August 2020.¹²

The ageing B-52s are nuclear-capable and from 2021 they could also carry hypersonic weapons.¹³ In September and again in December B-52s had to make emergency landings in the UK. What does this suggest about the likelihood of a catastrophic accident? The US is hoping to acquire a new long-range bomber (the

B-21) and a new long-range standoff (LRSO) cruise missile during the 2020s.¹⁴ Will these also operate from the UK?

Because US personnel are being withdrawn from Germany, 2,500 personnel responsible for aerial refuelling and special operations, and scheduled to move to Germany, will remain at Mildenhall.

¹² <https://www.businessinsider.com/air-force-bombers-competing-every-day-over-europe-officer-says-2020-9?r=US&IR=T>

¹³ <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/35369/army-shows-first-ever-footage-of-new-hypersonic-missile-in-flight-and-impacting>

¹⁴ <https://news.usni.org/2020/12/11/report-to-congress-on-u-s-strategic-nuclear-weapons-2>

No pause in Covid-19 infections

Many Pacific nations have signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, hoping to spare others from having to undergo their own horrific experiences following nuclear testing. A new book, *Poisoning the Pacific*, by Jon Mitchell, a Japan-based journalist, outlines the environmental impact of the US post-war military presence.¹⁵

Contamination by US Pacific bases continues¹⁶ and investigations face problems similar to those facing the investigation of a new hazard: Covid-19 cases.

On Guam

Guam, with its massive US bases, has been the place in the Pacific hardest hit by the pandemic, and military transmission is clear.¹⁷ The US military has been accused of flouting the Guam lockdown; commanders on the bases have been able to “flex” local quarantine rules.

In Japan and especially on Okinawa

The governor of Okinawa has refused to accept nuclear missiles prohibited under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty from which the US has withdrawn, and coronavirus cases at US bases in Okinawa have fuelled historic tensions about Okinawa’s role as host of a disproportionate number of bases.¹⁸ (Okinawa is also exempt from Japan’s aviation laws. Frequent low flying leads to noise complaints.)

The initial ban on reporting cases of Coronavirus on US bases was lifted and all US military began to be tested on arrival after Coronavirus surges on the bases. Previously the status of forces agreement had meant US military arrivals could avoid the rigorous Japanese testing regime.

Large numbers of US arrivals continue to test positive.¹⁹

In Europe

US arrivals at bases in Europe have also bumped up the number of cases.²⁰

¹⁵ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/how-the-us-military-wound-up-poisoning-the-pacific/>;
<https://theintercept.com/2020/11/07/military-pfas-pollution-japan/>

¹⁶ <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13452724>

¹⁷ <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2020/09/12/pandemic-pacific-us-military-bases-are-hot-spots-more-just-covid-19-they-also-make>

¹⁸ <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/11/covid-19-outbreak-at-us-military-bases-in-okinawa-fuels-local-tensions>

¹⁹ <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20201201/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

²⁰ <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-arrivals-bump-coronavirus-cases-at-some-europe-bases-higher-1.636997>

– And at US bases in the UK, including Menwith Hill?

All the following written Parliamentary Questions were formatted by Lindis Percy (Co-founder of the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases) and asked by Alex Sobel, Labour (Coop) MP for Leeds North East and Shadow Minister (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport).

They were answered by James Heapey, Conservative MP for Wells Somerset, and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence.

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) US and (b) UK personnel working at US bases in the UK have been admitted to hospital with covid-19; and how many of those people were admitted to (i) an NHS hospital in the UK and (ii) a US hospital.

A. The Ministry of Defence does not require the US authorities to share information regarding COVID-19 for their personnel based in the UK. The Department has no reported instances of UK Armed Forces personnel working on US bases in the UK being hospitalised as a result of the COVID-19. Hansard source (Citation: HC Deb, 22 October 2020, cA)

.....

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many US personnel at (a) USAF Lakenheath, (b) USAF Mildenhall, (c) the Joint Intelligence and Analysis Center at Molesworth, (d) USAF Croughton, (e) USAF Fairford and (e) USAF Feltwell have tested positive for covid-19 since March 2020.

A. The Ministry of Defence does not currently require the US authorities to share information regarding COVID-19 test results for their personnel based in the UK. There is however a requirement for any positive results to be communicated to the UK’s National Testing Programme. (Citation: HC Deb, 22 October 2020, cW)

.....

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many British personnel working at NSA/NRO Menwith Hill have tested positive for covid-19 since March 2020.

A. There have been no positive test results for members of the UK Armed Forces working at RAF Menwith Hill reported. Hansard source (Citation: HC Deb, 22 October 2020, cW)

The questions were therefore not answered. (The answer to a Written Parliamentary Question asked on 7 November 2017 stated there were seven UK military working at Menwith Hill in a total of 579 UK personnel.)

No pause in building works but some delays in planning applications

At Menwith Hill

Radomes 34, 35, 36 and 37 . . .

The 34th radome which, it was claimed, would make no appreciable difference to the base’s visual impact, now obtrudes at the western edge of the site adjoining the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The building of the 35th, 36th and 37th radomes proceeds at the site’s southern edge.

A new main gate, involving the removal of the tree planted in memory of Bob Cryer MP?

An application was lodged with Harrogate Borough Council in September for the creation of a new junction with the public highway and associated modifications to the existing highway, construction of a front gate vehicle control canopy and a new gate house.

This development requires the removal or relocation of the alder tree outside the base planted by his wife, Ann Cryer (later Labour MP for Keithley) in memory of the late Bob Cryer (MP for Bradford South), killed on 12 April 1994. See the last newsletter (Issue 6, Spring 2020, p. 5) for more details.

Mr Cryer was committed in his work for peace, bringing the activities of Menwith Hill to the attention of a wider public. In 1994, he achieved an Adjournment Debate on Menwith Hill.²¹

The memorial tree is not mentioned in the application (it was noted in the previous request for an Environmental Impact Screening Opinion for the development).

An objection was lodged, noting that the alder has already been moved once and that careful arrangements need to be made if it is to be moved successfully again. However, a response from HBC Arboricultural Section also failed to recognise that the tree is a significant memorial tree. A further objection has pointed out that this is a value to be appraised in an arboricultural impact assessment.



The memorial alder tree in May 2020.

Orchids in the section of hedge that will be removed (photographed in July 2020)

It is essential that the tree is saved and a third plaque placed on it – two plaques with Bob Cryer’s name and dates, placed by peace campaigners, have disappeared.

²¹ https://wikispooks.com/wiki/Menwith_Hill#Bob_Cryer

Radome 38?

The last date for comments on a new (to be 38th) radome was originally 6 July. However HBC queried the height of the new radome in August and asked for more details – the new radome will be very high and to the northeast of existing radomes.

At Croughton

Similar developments proposed at Croughton have been slowed by the impressive efforts of Harry Dunn’s family and the team supporting them in their struggle for justice for Harry.

Harry Dunn died when his motorbike crashed into Anne Sacoolas’s car outside Croughton on 27 August. Mrs Sacoolas, the wife of a US intelligence official at Croughton, was driving on the wrong side of the road. She claimed diplomatic immunity. The UK Foreign Office endorsed this claim and she was able to return to the US.

In December 2019 Mrs Sacoolas was charged with causing death by dangerous driving but a request for her extradition to the UK was refused by the US government in January 2020. (See MHAC newsletter, Issue 6, Spring 2020, p. 7.)

The parents and their legal team question whether Mrs Sacoolas was entitled to diplomatic immunity at the time of the accident: a 1995 agreement covering technical workers at Croughton like Mr Sacoolas was apparently intended to exclude dangerous driving cases or other actions not related to their work at the base.

The judges in a judicial review decided on 24 November 2020 that Mrs Sacoolas was entitled to diplomatic immunity. However, they gave the family permission

to appeal their decision and the Crown Prosecution Service are pursuing their prosecution.

After a fourth near-miss near the base involving a driver on the wrong side of the road, Andrea Leadsom, MP for South Northamptonshire, gained a formal adjournment debate in the House of Commons in July 2020, on the diplomatic implications of plans for the base's expansion.

She called for a block of any plans for the base while the issue of justice for Harry was unresolved, including on plans for a new entrance (similar to that proposed at Menwith Hill) onto the B road where Harry was killed. She claimed the new entrance would be the precursor of the massive expansion at the base revealed in 2015.²² (The Pentagon did not confirm that these plans had been shelved after the decision in July 2019 to develop Molesworth Joint Analysis Center.)²³

South Northamptonshire Council is now requiring a formal Environmental Impact Assessment of the development of the new entrance, meaning costly delay for the application.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, delayed but decided not to call in the plans on a proposal to build two radomes and antennas at Croughton. SNC has therefore approved this application.

After meeting Harry's parents and hearing their concerns about newly arrived American drivers, the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, has said the Road Safety Foundation will review the roads around ten visiting forces bases in England and recommend safety interventions.

The bases are: Croughton, USAF Barford St John, USAF Alconbury, Molesworth JAC, USAF Lakenheath, USAF Mildenhall, USAF Feltwell, USAF Fairford, USAF Welford and, finally, NSA/NRO Menwith Hill.

MHAC has been working with Lindis Percy and Insp S Breen of North Yorkshire Police in relation to road safety around Menwith Hill.



A sign on the busy road past Nessfield Gate at Menwith Hill, appearing to remind drivers that they can go at 60mph past the entrance.

22 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-07-09/debates/EBB85D12-1500-43F6-9C8F-716682F79B8C/RAFCroughtonExpansionDiplomaticImplications>

23 <https://www.stripes.com/news/pentagon-reconsiders-plan-to-relocate-key-us-intelligence-hub-within-britain-1.590824>

Protest continues . . .

The regular Tuesday-evening demonstrations outside NSA/NRO Menwith Hill have been paused.

Individuals have protested at other times.

Independence from America at Menwith Hill, 4 July 2020

Although in 2020 the annual Independence from America Day peace demonstration on 4 July was held by webinar, a small number of people was at the main gate of the base at the same time. They handed a letter to the US Chief of Station and displayed banners and flags to show that the protest is ongoing.



Up at the base on 4th July 2020, Barbara Penny and Priscilla Truss

Down with US/UK armed drones

The speakers on 4 July 2020 included Chris Cole, founder of Drone Wars UK and author of *Convenient Killing: Armed Drones and the PlayStation Mentality (2010)* and *Drone Wars: Out of Sight, Out of Mind, Out of Control (2016)*. Chris talked about the use of the base for directing deadly US drone attacks.

Drones, he explained, are part of a push to rehabilitate the acceptability of warfare. It should instead be acknowledged that risk-free war is nonsense.

Social problems, he said, need social solutions.

Don't let's collect it all

Professor Dave Webb, chair of CND and convenor of the Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space, spoke of the ability of the Torus antenna at Menwith to receive the signals from up to 35 communications satellites at any one time, quadrupling interceptions of communications for the

secret US computer system XKeyscore to search and analyse.

Let's count the human cost of war

Brigid-Mary Oates, a specialised trauma therapist and mental-health practitioner for children and families, read a poem based on her experiences of protesting at the base. She introduced it by explaining how she is motivated by the image of a boy in Yemen, Osama Hassan.²⁴

Poet and publisher Andy Croft also read poems, and music was contributed by local favourites the Peace Artistes and by the East Lancs Clarion Choir.



Photo by Brigid-Mary Oates

Two members of the Choir read the Declaration of Independence FROM America, written by members of Otley Peace Action Group in the 1980s. It has been read every year at the main gate at protests organised until recently by CAAB, to emphasise the lack of accountability of the base and its occupants.

24 www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-civil-war-trapped-families-ask-which-children-save-a7448996.html

Keeping Space for Peace at Menwith Hill, October 2020

In 2020 MHAC and the Yorkshire branch of CND worked together to hold an online event on Saturday 10 October. It featured speakers, film and an on-line link with protesters at the base.

The Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space organises Keep Space for Peace Week annually. Our event focused on the two US bases in Yorkshire – Fylingdales and Menwith Hill.

Fylingdales, on the North York Moors, is an operational military base supporting the developing US Missile 'Defence' system. After an introduction from Cath Bann at a windy Menwith Hill, an excellent short film

about Fylingdales made by YCND was shown.

<https://yorkshirecnd.org.uk/campaigns/fylingdales/>

The main speaker, Will Griffin of Global Network, introduced himself as a veteran of US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Will challenged us to "think outside the box" to further the cause of peace.

He showed a section of his informative new film about the role of Menwith Hill. <https://youtu.be/Hs3zbJvpdTw>

Research about the base proceeds apace

Supporters of MHAC try to keep up with changes at the base, especially changes that affect its role and the military-related activities carried out there.

This information is made available in newsletters and a leaflet, both of which are distributed as widely as possible.

Recently members applied for a grant to pay a researcher to pull together information that has become available in the last few years about, for example, increased use of drone warfare and the revelations of Edward Snowden.

The group is very pleased to have been successful in obtaining the grant, which will pay for a researcher and for written and visual (film) results to be published. The researcher, Barnaby Pace, has now started work, and it is hoped that the outcomes will be available during 2021. There will be a launch event for the updated material so please keep a lookout for the date and venue!

On the other hand

Like many organisations MHAC has been unable to hold or attend the events that usually enable us to fund-raise and to spread the word about the base.

Please consider making a donation at www.themhac.uk or by using the contact details on the back page.

Please also consider passing your copy of the newsletter on to a friend (taking due precautions, of course) or, if you receive the e-version, forwarding it to just one more person!

Many thanks.

We look forward to seeing you on-line or in person soon.

£ MONEY MATTERS

There are several ways of supporting MHAC financially (see the MHAC website).
Accounts can be seen by application to the Treasurer.

MHAC Account No: 50095311 **Sort Code:** 089229

The Cooperative Bank,
1 Balloon Street, Manchester, M60 4EP

DONATE BY POST:

Please send a cheque, payable to MHAC, to
MHAC Honorary Treasurer, Judith Rushby, 31
Blossomgate, Ripon, HG4 2AJ

Please also enclose your address so that we can write
to thank you!

DONATE USING BACS:

BACS payments are also welcome to our account
with the Cooperative Bank:

Sort code: 089229.

Account number: 5009531100

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MHAC IS ON FACEBOOK: search for 'Menwith Hill
Accountability Campaign'

AND ON TWITTER: @MenwithCampaign

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please email mail@themhac.uk to update your preferences.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support us.

Please contact us if you would like more references for statements made in this newsletter or more information on the issues raised, or go to the MHAC **website:** www.themhac.uk

Please also contact us if you have well-sourced information on any of the issues or if you would like to join the campaign. We need your energy and ideas, whether you are an activist or have clerical, academic, professional or artistic expertise!

MHAC has regular meetings advertised on the website. Let us know if you would like to be contacted by telephone or email about them.

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