

British Pugwash Group

Annual Report of the Executive Committee 2019

Developments in 2019

A year ago, we described the backdrop to British Pugwash Group activities in 2018 as sombre. In 2019 the setting got no brighter.

In August the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, a star achievement of Cold War nuclear disarmament, causing its demise. The United States blamed this debacle on Russia, referring to Russian deployment of a new ground-launched (GL) cruise missile, the 9M-729, believed by NATO to have a range well in excess of 500 km. During a visit to Moscow, however, a senior U.S. official volunteered that the United States would welcome release from the treaty's prohibition of US (and Russian) intermediate GL deployments in the Far East. Russia has proposed a moratorium on the deployment of INF systems in the European theatre. NATO has yet to respond.

At year-end it remained uncertain, maybe even doubtful, whether in February 2021 the United States would consent to a five-year extension for the 2011 New START agreement, which constrains long-range nuclear weapon system deployments. The Trump administration wants to replace New START with a US-Russia-China strategic nuclear agreement. China has rejected the idea. US arms control experts have pointed out the obvious: it would make sense to extend New START to buy time to change China's mind and undertake a complex negotiation. Can the Trump administration understand this?

The United States and Russia have also been at odds over chemical weapon (CW) use in Syria, especially at Douma in April 2018. Russia believes the Douma incident was staged by a rebel unit. The United States affirms certainty that the Syrian government was responsible, despite dissenting views from three experts employed by the OPCW. Russia also insists that the CW Convention does not offer a legal basis for the OPCW to engage in "attribution" (to attribute responsibility for incidents). The dispute is undermining consensus-based governance at the OPCW and is a setback for the CW regime.

In November the UN Secretary General convened a

meeting on the creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, in accordance with a resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 2018. Israel declined to attend. In Israel's absence the meeting failed to bring realisation of a Middle East zone any closer. However, it did at least establish that similar meetings will now take place annually. Whether this will reduce the disruptive salience of this issue at NPT review meetings remains to be seen.

In May, after a year of "strategic patience" and growing economic hardship as a result of US secondary sanctions, Iran started to slough off several of the nuclear restrictions it had volunteered in 2015. By early January 2020 all restrictions on uranium enrichment had gone. Extensive IAEA safeguards and monitoring continued, however, Iran remained a party to the NPT, and only low-enriched uranium was being produced. By shedding restrictions – a process which Iran affirmed to be reversible – Iran hoped to pressure Europe into obtaining the suspension of US secondary sanctions. Europe proved incapable of that.

2019 ended without any success for President Trump's Korean denuclearisation policy, with the modernisation of nuclear weapon systems continuing in several countries, without progress on nuclear risk reduction, without any of the eight ratifications needed for the CTBT to enter into force, without progress towards a Fissile Missile Cut-off treaty in the Conference on Disarmament, and without progress towards a verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention (due to be next reviewed in 2021).

These disturbing developments reinforced the Executive Committee's commitment to the traditional British Pugwash goals of WMD arms control and disarmament and ethical responsibility in science, as well as to the newer goals of drawing attention to the harmful potential of certain emerging technologies and contributing to global warming mitigation. The following pages detail the Group's activities in 2019.

Projects

Student/Young Pugwash (SYP) UK

2019 was another busy and productive year for SYP UK.

In January, three members of SYP UK attended the prestigious International School on Disarmament and Research on Conflicts (ISODARCO), held in Trento, Italy. ISODARCO is an annual, intensive course for scholars and practitioners, featuring high-profile lecturers from around the world. The title of this year's course was: 'The Past and Future of Arms Control, Non-proliferation and Disarmament' and guest lecturers included Ali A. Soltanieh (former Iranian Ambassador to the IAEA) and Jon Wolfsthal (former Advisor to President Obama).

In March, SYP UK organised its fourth Annual Conference, titled 'Pugwash Peace & Disarmament Conference' held at SOAS, London. Students and young researchers presented papers on nuclear arms control, international relations and emerging technologies, and heard from keynote speakers such as Dr Heather Williams (KCL) and Dr Tim Street (Oxford Research Group). The conference also hosted 'Technology 101' workshops, whereby senior scientists briefed non-technical attendees on the basics of different (and dangerous!) technologies. A multimedia report from the conference is online here: <https://tinyurl.com/tmfcp7g>

In May, SYP members from around the country met in Manchester to brainstorm their plans for the upcoming year and hold a formal Annual General Meeting, as well as a social trip to Manchester's bustling Northern Quarter.

In October, SYP UK co-hosted a mini-conference called 'Ethical Science?' with the University of Nottingham's Physics department. It covered issues in energy production and the defence industry, as well as Mike Cooley's idea of 'socially useful production'. SYP intends to launch a series of activities on this theme called 'Project on Ethical Science'.

In November, SYP UK was delighted to organise a media training day for its members and others, focusing on how to produce compelling videos to promote a cause, explain an issue and reach new audiences. They worked with ShortForm media, a video production company, to organise what they hope is the first of many media training events.

SYP also supported its campus groups in hosting discussion meetings on topics as diverse as chemical weapons proliferation (Leeds), the Iran Nuclear Deal (Warwick) and autonomous weapons (UCL).

SYP UK also announced plans to relaunch its University of Oxford SYP group, which will host its first event in 2020.

Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations

In January 2019 British Pugwash Group responded to a call for evidence from the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations, which was embarking on an inquiry into nuclear risk, disarmament and non-proliferation. Among the committee's conclusions and recommendations that were in line with the contents of the Group's submission were the following:

While preventing the proliferation of nuclear capabilities to Non-Nuclear Weapon States must remain a priority, the principal cause of increased risk is the continued and at times expanding reliance of nuclear possessor states on their nuclear weapons. (Paragraph 22)

The world is increasingly multipolar, which means approaches to managing nuclear risk cannot focus only on the US, NATO and Russia. Efforts must also include states such as China, as well as nuclear possessor states outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty. (Paragraph 30)

Notwithstanding current tensions, the Government should be prepared to talk to Russia about nuclear strategic stability. The risks of miscommunication, misperception and miscalculation are too grave to allow other aspects of Russia's behaviour to preclude talks on nuclear issues. (Paragraph 35)

The UK should stand by its commitment, as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and one of its three depositary powers, to implementing commitments across all three pillars of the NPT—non-proliferation, peaceful uses of nuclear technology and disarmament. (Paragraph 96)

The P5 is an important initiative in nuclear diplomacy, which could play a positive role in co-ordinating the implementation by the five Nuclear Weapon States of their Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty commitments. It must not become a 'cartel' of Nuclear Weapon States, simply lecturing others on why their continued possession of these weapons is justified. (Paragraph 124)

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains a critical part of international security. The success of the treaty will remain of central importance to the UK's security and to the rules-based international order as a whole. (Paragraph 167)

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The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's successes—near-universal membership, a considerable reduction in nuclear stockpiles since the 1980s, and the establishment of an international norm against new states acquiring nuclear weapons—should be lauded. (Paragraph 168)

Although nuclear possessor states outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are unlikely to disarm in the short term, the UK should continue to advocate for the universalisation of the treaty. (Paragraph 170)

Largely as a result of the worsening security environment, global progress towards disarmament has stalled. We urge the Government to set out its view on what the necessary global conditions for disarmament would be and to use its position in the P5 to encourage progress under this pillar of the NPT. (Paragraph 171)

Nuclear modernisation is a necessary part of the maintenance of nuclear weapons and can make these weapons more secure. However, the programmes of many nuclear possessor states go well beyond what can properly be described as modernisation, introducing new capabilities and potentially increasing nuclear risk. We are particularly concerned about new developments in the field of tactical nuclear weapons. (Paragraph 196)

The UK's nuclear modernisation programme, although not without its critics, focuses on the renewal of its existing capabilities for a minimum credible deterrent. The Government should encourage other nuclear-armed states to exercise restraint in their modernisation programmes and to avoid expanding their nuclear capabilities. (Paragraph 197)

Increasing signs of division between Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapon States are matters of concern, and the dissatisfaction of the Ban Treaty's proponents with the status quo on disarmament should be taken seriously. We therefore recommend that the Government should adopt a less aggressive tone about this treaty and seek opportunities to work with its supporters towards the aims of Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which concerns disarmament. (Paragraph 263)

Participation in an International Pugwash Mission to Moscow

In late January a Pugwash delegation comprising the Secretary General, Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, the Chairman of British Pugwash Group, Peter Jenkins, and Pugwash Council Member Götz Neuneck visited Moscow to explore the INF treaty's prospects. Meetings took place with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Ryabkov.

It emerged from these talks that the treaty's days were numbered. The Russian side was adamant that Russia was complying with its INF obligations. They denied that their new ground-launched cruise missile, the 9M-729, was capable of a range in excess of 500 km. They complained about the implications for Russian security of US missile defence launchers in Romania and Poland, since intermediate-range offensive cruise missiles could be flown from these launchers. They reported that then-US National Security Adviser John Bolton, visiting Moscow in late 2018, had spoken of a US intention to take advantage of the demise of the INF treaty to station systems prohibited by the treaty in the Far East theatre. They listed doubts about US compliance with New START.

EuroPugwash

EuroPugwash meetings bring together members of Europe's National Pugwash Groups (and the Canadian group). At the end of February and the start of March British Pugwash hosted a EuroPugwash meeting in Bristol. 17 participants discussed issues related to the themes of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Global Energy Policy / Climate Change.

Among the Pugwash members who made presentations were Prof. Tom Sauer on the stigmatizing potential of the Nuclear Ban Treaty; Prof Götz Neuneck on nuclear weapon verification work; Dr Ian Crossland on the role of nuclear power in sustainable energy provision; and Adele Buckley on the viability of 'carbon capture'. SYP members also presented on topics including the advent of hypersonic cruise and ballistic missiles (Matteo Frigoli), the interrelations between conventional and nuclear weapons policies (Kevin Miletic) and the role of SYP in the wider Pugwash community (Nicolas Arboleda).

Assessing robotic warfare

On 11th June, Prof. John Finney (British Pugwash) published an article for Responsible Science, an online journal managed by Scientists for Global Responsibility, about the the nature and risks of robotic warfare.

In it, John argued that we must act to prevent the 'morally repugnant' prospect of machines with the power and discretion to take human life. He also detailed the findings of a recent report by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), which John has contributed evidence to on behalf of British Pugwash.

On a positive note, he concluded that, although the future prospect of robotic warfare is chilling, the problem

is recognised in some of the highest quarters.

The article can be found online at:
<https://tinyurl.com/yx62777w>

Contribution to an International Pugwash Workshop on Hypersonic Weapons

In December International Pugwash brought together 30 participants from Asia, Europe and North America, including current and former government officials, natural scientists, engineers, political scientists and think tank/NGO experts to consider the implications of the advent of hypersonic weapon systems. British Pugwash Group initiated the project through a paper commissioned from Matteo Frigoli, an Italian postgraduate student, and written under the supervision of two members of the Group, which also made a modest financial contribution to the meeting, largely funded by the Netherlands government.

The goal of the workshop was to foster a common understanding of the technical characteristics of hypersonic ballistic and cruise missiles, factors driving their development, the strategic and tactical roles envisaged for them, risks likely to arise from their deployment, and possible risk mitigation measures. Participants identified as major risks, and strategically destabilising factors, warhead and target ambiguity, a shortening of reaction times, a heightening of threat perceptions, an arms race fuelling potential, and the encouragement of brinkmanship. A written summary of the proceedings will be circulated at a future date.

Report from PeaceJam UK

Community cohesion relies on good quality education that promotes non-violent solutions to problems around diversity, social justice and human rights, delivered within an environment that understands respect for human dignity, and the right to be different. There is a need for a sustained education engagement around these tensions, which PeaceJam provides through its youth leadership programme.

PeaceJam UK is an affiliate of the PeaceJam Foundation, founded in 1996, an international youth leadership programme that uses the inspirational experiences of 14 Nobel Peace Prize winners, to empower young people to take action and make positive change in themselves, their communities and in the world. PeaceJam achieves this through engaging young people from 5 to 25 years old in schools, youth groups and universities around the UK, through our model: inspiration, education and action.

In March 2019 we held our fifth conference at the University of Winchester when Nobel Laureate Betty Williams joined us and talked about her work in Northern Ireland and the peace villages she has created in Southern Italy for refugee children. Over 100 young people explored how to take non-violent action to solve problems in their communities with a particular focus on knife crime, which increasingly affects the lives of many teenagers.

PeaceJam UK carries out its work in a number of regional hubs where we work with local schools, youth groups, education authorities, faith groups and universities. At present we are active in the Leeds-Bradford area of South Yorkshire, South Wales, Coventry, the South of England (Southampton area) and Luton. We held one-day events in Bradford and Jersey.

We have been able to achieve so much with limited resources because of the partnerships we have forged with organisations that share our aims such as universities, Rotary, the Quakers, the Burns Price Foundation and the Building a Stronger Britain Together network which is funded by the Home Office. PeaceJam UK is undertaking work with hard-to-reach young people through a multi-country, multi-year Erasmus Plus grant from the EU, also focussed on reducing hatred and discrimination against minorities.

As of late 2019 PeaceJam UK has changed from being a charitable company limited by guarantee to a registered charity (No: 1185779).

Report prepared by Sally Milne, British Pugwash Group (BPG) Executive Committee

Events

Post-AGM talk: The Salisbury poisonings - one year after (26th April, SOAS)

Following the 2019 AGM, in association with SOAS' Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, Dr Richard Guthrie, a member of BPG's Executive Committee and an expert on chemical and biological weapons, delivered a lecture on the March 2018 Salisbury poisonings.

The lecture addressed both political and technical aspects of those dramatic events.

Multimedia from the event can be found at:
<https://tinyurl.com/w7hlc32>

British Pugwash at All Party Parliamentary Group on drones: 'Drones, swarming and the future of warfare' (11th June)

In early June, BPG Executive Committee member Sebastian Brixey-Williams spoke about some of his recent research on marine drones to a meeting organised by three different All Party Parliamentary Groups.

The presentation covered some of his Pugwash-funded research on how trends in unmanned underwater vehicles might impact submarine-based nuclear weapons systems.

A summary of the meeting can be found online at: <https://tinyurl.com/vj9xr35>

The End of Nuclear Weapons? (28th November, King's College London)

In late November, BPG screened the new, hour-long documentary – The Beginning of the End of Nuclear Weapons – about the ideas and campaigners behind the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear weapons.

Following this, Dr Salma Shaheen (War Studies, KCL) chaired a discussion between two Pugwash members: BASIC's Paul Ingram (a friendly critic of the Treaty) and KCL's Dr Lyndon Burford (a Treaty supporter) about the issues raised in the film.

British Pugwash development

Changes on BPG's Executive Committee

In 2019, the following members left BPG's Executive Committee: Prof. John Finney, Prof. David Caplin, Kevin Miletic, Dr Patricia Lewis and Prof. Arthur Petersen. We would like to thank these individuals for their (often many) years of thoughtful and impactful contributions to BPG. The 2019 Annual General Meeting approved the following nominations to the Executive Committee: Dr Mamdouh El-Shanawany, Dr David Ellwood and Nicolas Ayala Arboleda. The AGM also approved further terms for: Peter Jenkins CMG, Dr Ian Crossland, Dr Caitriona McLeish, Dr Ian Stewart, Dr Christopher Watson, Dr Nick Ritchie and Sebastian Brixey-Williams.

Changes at British Pugwash Trust

In 2019, Prof. Kit Hill resigned as a trustee of the British Pugwash Trust (BPT), following many years of distinguished service to both BPT and BPG.

Multimedia

Royal Society video on Sir Joseph Rotblat

In December, the Royal Society, in conjunction with the BBC, released a film of Lord Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal and long-term British Pugwash member, talking about Sir Joseph Rotblat, founder of British Pugwash. The film is part of a series hosted by Prof. Brian Cox, in which he interviews eminent scientists on impactful figures from the history of science. Lord Rees spoke about Sir Joseph's time on the Manhattan Project, his later contributions to the global peace movement, and his advocacy of a 'Hippocratic Oath for Scientists'.

The film can be found on YouTube at: <https://tinyurl.com/qlybz89>

The film can be found on BBC iPlayer at: <https://tinyurl.com/uecjyhy>

British Pugwash Group Executive Committee 2019

Chair: Peter Jenkins CMG

Hon. Treasurer: Dr Ian Crossland

Hon. Secretary: Dr Nick Ritchie

Dr Caitriona McLeish

Dr Ian Stewart

Dr Christopher Watson

Dr David Ellwood

Dr Mamdouh El-Shanawany

Sebastian Brixey-Williams

Nicolas Ayala Arboleda

For the British Pugwash Trust: Mark Ingram, Dr Richard Guthrie

For PeaceJamUK: Sally Milne

Staff (Secretary): Andrew Gibson

British Pugwash Trust Trustees 2019

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Professor John Finney FInstP, FRSC

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Dr Tom Milne

Professor Sir Andy Haines FRCGP, FMedSci

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