

# British Pugwash

## Annual Report of the Executive Committee 2021

### Developments in 2021

2021 opened promisingly. In early February the United States and Russia agreed to extend New START to February 2026. The US government portrayed the extension as creating time “to pursue with the Russian Federation arms control that addresses all of its nuclear weapons.”

Thereafter the nuclear risk reduction front was largely devoid of good news. On the contrary, the United States and Russia continued to pursue a qualitative nuclear arms race and China continued to expand its holding of nuclear warheads and its delivery options.

SIPRI estimated that the development of five out of six new Russian and Chinese delivery systems was linked to their belief that US missile defence systems threatened or would threaten their ability to deter a US first strike by an assured second-strike capability.

Biden administration officials worked on a new iteration of the US Nuclear Posture Review. Concerned NGOs lobbied for the administration to rule out first use of nuclear weapons. British Pugwash made a small contribution to their efforts by publicising the results of a survey: two thirds of the British public would be opposed to nuclear first use on NATO’s Baltic front. However, press reporting suggested strong Allied resistance to US renunciation of the first use option, notwithstanding the risk of nuclear escalation and catastrophe that it entails.

In March, citing a deterioration in the UK’s security environment, the British government announced that it would be increasing its nuclear warhead stock and deploying a larger number of nuclear-armed Trident missiles on routine naval patrols.

There was also disappointment on the nuclear non-proliferation front. The Biden administration passed up an early opportunity to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran by re-joining it. Instead, it conditioned US re-entry (and the lifting of primary and secondary US sanctions) on fresh Iranian concessions. This turned revival into a marathon. The year ended with the

outcome still in the balance.

Owing to the pandemic, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference was once more postponed; it is now due in August 2022. The pandemic also disrupted the timing of Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) meetings. Nonetheless, BWC Meetings of Experts provided useful interactions and promotion of practical ideas, such as new arrangements for review of relevant scientific and technological developments.

A political-level BWC Meeting of States Parties produced some positive developments, such as a statement by the United States that they were open to difficult discussions on issues they had previously kept off the table. But it became mired in lowest common denominator discussions on the report of the meeting. There were also difficulties over the appointment of a President-designate for the Ninth Review Conference, now expected to take place in 2022.

Two key developments during the year in relation to chemical weapons were decisions taken by successive sessions of the CWC Conference of States Parties. The resumed 25th session decided to suspend certain rights and privileges of Syria under the CWC, as Syria had “not resolved all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of its chemical weapons stockpile and programme”.

The second decision addressed an ambiguity about which chemicals are suitable for use in law enforcement. This ambiguity was left in the CWC in the final stages of negotiations in 1992 to allow the convention to be agreed. The 26th session decided that aerosolised use of “Central Nervous System-acting chemicals” (which include substances such as anaesthetics) is understood to be inconsistent with law enforcement purposes under the Convention.

Both decisions were contested and so were taken by vote, rather than by consensus.

### Projects

#### Trident and the Integrated Review

In March, British Pugwash released a public statement noting our concern about the UK Government's decisions, announced in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, to increase the UK's stockpile of nuclear warheads and no longer to reveal the number of these weapons that will be kept operational.

British Pugwash also endorsed the analysis of the Arms Control Association, in its article titled 'The UK's Nuclear U-Turn', which can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/3rdfzvp5>

#### Trident and Climate Change

In July, British Pugwash published new research about the potential impacts of climate change on the UK's nuclear weapons infrastructure. The report was produced by Bournemouth University's Dr Sally Brown and overseen by a small team from the British Pugwash Executive Committee.

It considers how four coastal sites, essential to the replacement and delivery of the Trident nuclear-armed submarine system, might be challenged by sea-level rise and flooding. It also looks at opportunities to reduce flood risk through adaptation, such as the raising of docks.

#### Nuclear First Use and Public Opinion

In October, British Pugwash released new research on UK public attitudes to 'first use' nuclear weapons policies in the NATO-Russia context, with the hope of informing ongoing policy discussions within NATO and the US under Biden's leadership. The British Pugwash Chairman later reflected on the findings of this research in an article for the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists - online via <https://tinyurl.com/2vr6t84c>

Earlier in the year, British Pugwash also convened, in cooperation with German Pugwash, a meeting of defence experts to discuss issues around 'first use' and 'sole use' of nuclear weapons.

#### Current and Near-Future Missile Defence

In November, British Pugwash published a study from Harry Spencer, a postgraduate scholar at University of Birmingham, which addresses the capabilities and effectiveness of current and near-future missile defence against traditional and hypersonic missiles.

Harry also tested out his ideas earlier in the year, at the British Pugwash post-AGM Lecture (more below).

The report, and reflections on it from the Executive Committee, can be found online at <https://tinyurl.com/yc22hzbv>

#### Student/Young Pugwash UK

2021 was another productive year for Student/Young Pugwash (SYP) UK.

SYP UK's lead initiative - the Project on Ethical Science - hosted a series of events on topics as diverse as bioethics, ethical careers in STEM, developments in drone warfare, and co-organised an investigative journalism training session with the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. These events were complemented by a number of multimedia interviews with leading figures from the world of science, including Lord Martin Rees (the Astronomer Royal), Dame Ottoline Leyser (Head of UK Research & Innovation) and Behnam Taebi (Professor of Energy & Climate Ethics).

SYP continued to engage with the traditional Pugwash topics of peace and disarmament, hosting a series of 'Peace Workshops' in March. These online events brought together researchers and policy practitioners to discuss opportunities for international co-operation, on the topics of 'Russia and the West', 'Cyber & Digital Warfare', the 'Nuclear Ban Treaty', and '21st Century Arms Control'. The keynote talk was given by Dr Lassina Zerbo, then the Chief Executive of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation.

Alongside representatives at Oxford, Warwick, KCL, SOAS, Durham and Aberystwyth, SYP UK was pleased to appoint Emily Faux as its representative at the University of Leeds. SYP UK also strengthened its relationship with the University of Leicester's Third Nuclear Age project and is planning joint events for the future.

#### Report from PeaceJam UK

One of the key and very pleasing initiatives this year has been the development of strong EU and UK Youth Teams. They were created after many conversations where it was agreed that as the PeaceJam conferences' main benefactors are young people, it made sense that decisions on content, structure and programming should come from young people too. This would allow PeaceJam to proudly boast that these conferences were 'for young people, by young people.' Currently we have 8 UK members and 50 members of the wider EU Youth Team, with 25 core members.

Over the past two years, the Covid-19 global pandemic has affected the lives of families, and especially the well being of children. With the enforced move to online education, many young people already facing challenges in their lives, also lacked the digital technology devices and services that would enable them to connect, such as access to broadband internet and laptops, exacerbating the digital divide in education. Schools were also safe spaces that provided children with some sense of security through provision of food, a safe space to interact, speak out and reach out for help.

PeaceJam also believes that the government's narrative that students have 'fallen behind' and will never 'catch up' with some mythical benchmark is demoralising. Our young people need a morale boost and research consistently shows that people are happier when they have a sense of purpose in life and feel socially connected and useful by helping others and making a positive contribution to the world.

To this end we proposed to the Quaker Peace Studies Trust that PeaceJam UK would develop a 'Mentors into Schools' project, whereby university students would receive training to support the PeaceJam programme in educational settings. In particular the mentors would support educators and young people by delivering a short-format session called 'Generation Change' that would boost young people's sense of agency - that each one of them could make a difference in the world. This would be a precursor to encouraging young people to devise and carry out a community-enhancing social change project as part of PeaceJam's 'One Billion Acts of Peace' campaign. Pilots have now started in a number of schools in Yorkshire and the north-east.

Finally, our UK Youth Team put together a very successful online Slam with Stuart Lawrence, brother of the murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence, as keynote speaker. It ran to the usual format of Q&A sessions with the speaker and workshops and we had students from Greece and Romania as well as the UK. It was satisfying to be able to ship out PeaceJam t-shirts to them, using all the stock we had held after a previous Slam was cancelled due to Covid.

*Report prepared by Sally Milne, British Pugwash Executive Committee*

## Events

### British Pugwash Lecture (at Hay): Prof. Margaret MacMillan - 'Rolling the Iron Dice'

2021's British Pugwash Lecture at the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts was given by the historian Professor Margaret MacMillan. The talk, chaired by the broadcaster Nik Gowing, was about modern war, its causes, nature and impact, and the continuing search for peace.

Prof. MacMillan drew on her latest book 'War: How Conflict Shaped Us', which examines the historical, cultural and ideological aspects of military conflict, asking probing questions about how integral war is to the human condition.

Video of the lecture is available via a subscription to the Hay Festival's online streaming service: <https://tinyurl.com/4pps4ap6>

### OxPeace Conference 2021 - Peace in the Nuclear Era

In June, members of British Pugwash and SYP UK helped organise and spoke at a conference titled 'Peace in the Nuclear Era: threats, treaties and public understanding'. The hosts were the Oxford Network of Peace Studies at University of Oxford.

The conference looked at the present state of nuclear treaties and nuclear capabilities, considered future threats and opportunities for peace, and assessed public attitudes and the role of civil society in determining future directions. Video is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yckwva6d>

### Post-AGM Lecture: Missile Defence and Strategic Stability in the Hypersonic Age

In September, we held our Annual General Meeting (AGM) followed by a lecture and Q&A with Harry Spencer, a postgraduate scholar at University of Birmingham. Harry spoke about his ongoing research with British Pugwash on missile defence systems, hypersonic missiles and strategic stability. The session influenced Harry's report, published in November, on the same topic.

Video is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3ffjvp3m>

### **EuroPugwash workshop on 'Arms Control: Windows of Opportunity'**

In late October, members of British Pugwash's Executive Committee participated in a series of discussions on the future of arms control, Russia-West relations, and future Pugwash activities. It was hosted by the Institute for International Studies of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and the bulk of participants were made up of representatives of Pugwash Groups in Europe (who periodically meet under the 'EuroPugwash' banner).

It was a hybrid event and British Pugwash was represented in person by Dr Christopher Watson.

### **Robot wars? Current and future challenges posed by drones and lethal autonomous weapons**

In November, British Pugwash and SYP UK's Project on Ethical Science co-hosted a panel discussion on the technical, ethical and political challenges posed by drone warfare and lethal autonomous weapons ('Killer Robots').

The speakers were, Dr Peter Burt, Researcher at Drone Wars UK, Dr Ingvild Bode, Principle Investigator of the 'AutoNorms' project, and Professor Christian Ememark, University of Southampton. The moderator was SYP UK's Jeanne Frebault, a Physics student at King's College London.

Video can be found: <https://tinyurl.com/mptv54rs>

## **British Pugwash developments**

### **Membership growth**

In 2021 British Pugwash gained 16 new members, with 12 of these being in the student or Under 30s category.

### **New Executive Committee member**

In 2021, we were pleased to re-appoint to British Pugwash's Executive Committee: Professor David Caplin, Distinguished Research Fellow in the Department of Physics at Imperial College London.

**British Pugwash  
Executive Committee 2021**

**Chairman:** Peter Jenkins CMG

**Hon. Treasurer:** Dr Ian Crossland

Dr Christopher Watson

Dr David Ellwood

Dr Mamdouh El-Shanawany

Prof. David Caplin

**For the Joseph Rotblat Memorial Trust:** Dr  
Richard Guthrie

**For PeaceJamUK:** Sally Milne

**Staff / Ex Officio:** Andrew Gibson, Secretary

**Honorary members:** Prof. C. R. Hill FInstP, FIEE,  
Prof. John Simpson OBE

**Joseph Rotblat Memorial Trust  
Trustees 2021**

**Chair:** Dr Richard Guthrie

**Treasurer:** Mark Ingram

Professor John Finney FInstP, FRSC

Scarlett MccGwire

Lord Rees of Ludlow OM, FRS

Dr Tom Milne

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