

## British Pugwash

### Annual Report of the Executive Committee 2023

#### Developments in 2023

There was no improvement to the outlook for nuclear arms control and disarmament.

Early in a year during which Russia started to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia suspended its participation in New START. Later in the year it revoked its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Russia softened the first blow by remaining a party to New START and continuing to observe New START limits on deployed strategic warheads, and the second by declaring that it would continue to abide by a moratorium on nuclear testing.

Both moves seem to have been designed to signal to Washington that the United States could not have its cake and eat it, i.e., could not orchestrate what is seen in Moscow as NATO aggression and enjoy Russian cooperation on nuclear arms control. During 2023 explicit versions of that message accompanied Russian rejections of US requests for a resumption of their bilateral dialogue on strategic stability and a successor regime to New START (which is due to expire in 2026).

The failure of Ukraine's summer counter-offensive reduced the risk of Moscow being tempted to resort to nuclear weapons to stave off Ukrainian recovery of Crimea or the other provinces that have been annexed to Russia.

China continued to expand its nuclear forces. It is now thought to be aiming at a deployment of 1500 nuclear warheads a decade from now, a figure close to Russian and US strategic deployment ceilings under New START. China experts suggested that the expansion should be interpreted as a response to what Beijing perceives as threatening changes in US nuclear strategy. Beijing assesses, in the view of these experts, that the United States is bent on

acquiring capabilities that could be used to destroy or seriously degrade China's nuclear forces, and that the United States is lowering its threshold for nuclear use in the Chinese/Western Pacific theatre.

North Korea has not tested since 2017 but the upgrading of its nuclear weapon capability continues. At the start of 2023 Kim Jong Un declared an intention to "exponentially increase" nuclear weapon production and a willingness to use nuclear weapons for offensive as well as defensive purposes. In the course of 2023, a solid propellant ICBM was tested, a tactical nuclear warhead was unveiled, and the country's first ballistic missile submarine was floated out for sea trials. The Financial Times quoted a senior US official as saying that the Biden administration had made multiple efforts to engage Pyongyang but that the response had been "pretty much radio silence".

A month into Israel's Gaza campaign, during a radio interview, Israel's Heritage Minister suggested that Israel should drop "an atomic bomb" on Gaza. He later called the remarks "metaphorical", but he was widely criticised internationally and was suspended from the Israeli cabinet. Israel is thought to have possessed nuclear weapons since the late 1960s, but no Israeli government has ever confirmed this.

Iran continued to enrich uranium to 60% and reduced International Atomic Energy Agency access to its nuclear activities to the level required by its 1975 NPT safeguards agreement (a lot lower than that required by its 2015 agreement with the United States and others, which President Trump sabotaged in 2018). These moves were probably designed to produce negotiating leverage (at the cost of intensifying international concern about Iran's nuclear intentions) even though the United States seemed to have lost interest in nuclear-related negotiation. It was assessed that Iran was not undertaking the key nuclear weapon-development activities necessary to producing a testable nuclear device.

It was reported that German politicians were wrestling with whether to seek to acquire nuclear weapons, in light of a risk that Germany would no longer be able to rely on the US nuclear umbrella if Donald Trump returned to the White House.

2023 saw a significant milestone in the control of chemical weapons with the destruction of the last of the declared chemical stockpiles. The last weapons held by the USA were destroyed in July under international supervision by inspectors from the Organization for the Prohibition

of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). A number of governments and experts remain concerned that undeclared materials still exist within Syria, the underlying reason why consensus could not be reached at the Fifth Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) held during May. The new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (the ChemTech) which provides new laboratory and training facilities was officially opened just before the Review Conference.

The Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) held during 2022 established a new Working Group to strengthen the Convention. The mandate for this Group includes discussion of possible verification measures as well as topics such as review of scientific and technical developments relevant to the Convention as well as international cooperation and assistance issues. The Working Group held three meetings during 2023, one on administrative matters and two on substantive issues. While the contemporary global political context has been challenging there was a chance to make initial progress on some concepts.

### **Projects**

- **Student / Young Pugwash**

The focus of SYP over 2023 was on reviewing our strategy and operations, in addition to producing events (webinars, preparing the 2024 annual conference, a negotiation simulation) and publications (blogs and podcasts).

In April Shane Ward left his post as SYP coordinator. In August Andrea Gil left her post as SYP coordinator and was succeeded by Tim Street.

### **Podcasts:**

1. Nuclear diplomacy: <https://britishpugwash.org/new-syp-podcast/>
2. Iran and Ukraine: <https://britishpugwash.org/syp-podcast-second-episode-is-out-now/>
3. Russian nuclear weapons and the Ukraine conflict:  
<https://britishpugwash.org/new-podcast-episode/>

### **Webinar: What to know about Oppenheimer**

We hosted a webinar on July 26 on what to know before watching the second most anticipated movie of the summer (after Barbie). We were joined in this webinar by Lilly Adams, Emily Faux and Mackenzie Knight.

### **Online Negotiation Simulation**

We joined with SYP Germany to hold their first joint event on 23 November, a 'Negotiation Simulation'. The 12 participants had to consider how they would solve the prisoner's dilemma in a high-stakes international negotiation. Our event used a Harvard Law School scenario focused on oil pricing negotiations between two fictional states.

Report prepared by Tim Street, Coordinator, Student Young Pugwash

- **PeaceJam UK**

This year has seen an improvement in our financial situation which has allowed us to employ two part-time staff members towards the end of the year. One has been working on administration and social media tasks and the other concentrating on training for our university mentors and youth teams. This has relieved the pressure of work on our volunteer core team freeing them up to take PeaceJam to other schools and groups around the country. It has also fulfilled an aim, which we have always had, of being able to offer first jobs and work experience to some members of our hard-working university volunteers.

Our youth teams in both the UK and Europe have continued to flourish and a highly successful two-day conference was organised by students in Romania in April, which some of our PeaceJam students attended. We have continued to run our Generation Change project using university mentors to take it into school and youth groups in Bradford, Leeds and Winchester. In association with Rotary, we also held an interesting and lively one-day event in Leeds in November offering a number of workshops and activities throughout the day.

Report prepared by Sally Milne, British Pugwash Group Executive Committee.

- **Physicists for Nuclear Risk Reduction**

At the prompting of a Princeton-based US group of physicists, British Pugwash Executive Committee Members Dr Peter Collecott and Dr David Ellwood began presenting talks on

Nuclear Weapon Basics and Risk Reduction Strategies at UK Universities. The first talk took place on 23 May at Oxford University's Physics Department and was introduced by Prof Moritz Riede. The second was hosted by Cambridge University Physics Society on 1 November, introduced by Dame Athene Donald, an Honorary Patron. These talks aim to revitalise discussion about nuclear weapons risk among UK physicists. The UK physics community played a leading role in the development of the first nuclear weapon systems, but also went on to provide some of the most respected and effective voices in the ensuing arms control movements.

These talks also provide a rapid introduction to nuclear weapon systems, a survey of the status of current deployments/arsenals, and then describe a host of risk reduction strategies that nuclear weapon states can quickly adopt. Members of UK physics departments who would like to participate in this programme are encouraged to contact British Pugwash who can provide speakers or help facilitate discussion on an ongoing basis.

A video of the Oxford event is available [here](#)

- **UK Nuclear Weapons**

### **Briefing: Aspects of UK Nuclear Weapons Possession**

In December we published this briefing which covered four areas: i) UK nuclear weapons modernisation ii) the UK-US nuclear relationship iii) UK nuclear use policy in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war iv) UK action on nuclear arms control and disarmament. Read it [here](#)

### **2023 UK public opinion survey on nuclear weapons: article and data**

In January British Pugwash and polling company Savanta conducted a survey of UK public opinion concerning nuclear weapons issues. The poll aimed to understand the views of the British public in this area and assess potential support for policies that advance nuclear arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Read it [here](#)

## **Meetings and Events**

### **EuroPugwash meeting**

Members of Pugwash from across Europe met in person and online in Bristol on 30-31 January to discuss a range of topics including: nuclear threats and challenges; the destabilising effect of missile defence; how to bring the Ukraine war to an end; and options for reconciling the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

### **90 Seconds to Midnight: Russell, Pugwash and nuclear weapons**

With the Doomsday Clock inching closer to midnight, this event, held on 11 February, discussed Bertrand Russell's life and work, the history of Pugwash, and nuclear weapons. Jointly sponsored by the Bertrand Russell Society and British Pugwash, the speakers included Andrew Bone (BRS), Tony Simpson (BRS), and David Ellwood (BP).

A video of the event is available [here](#)

### **Power from Fusion: why the sudden excitement?**

The speaker for this webinar, held on 1 March, was Professor Sir Ian Chapman, CEO of the UK's Atomic Energy Authority, and head of one of the world's leading fusion research teams based at Culham near Oxford. He described ongoing research into this important topic and plans to turn power from fusion into a reality.

A video of the event is available [here](#)

### **Professor Sir Hew Strachan: 2023 Annual Lecture**

Mindful that the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto, which inspired the launch of Pugwash Conferences, highlights the threat to humankind's survival posed by war in a nuclear age, Honorary Patron of British Pugwash, Professor Sir Hew Strachan, explored what the invasion of Ukraine tells us about war, deterrence and escalation, during this webinar held on 9 May.

A video of the event is available [here](#)

### **Anatol Lieven: 'The Ukraine War- A European Tragedy,' British Pugwash Annual Lecture, Hay Festival**

A year on from the start of the Ukraine War, journalist and policy analyst Anatol Lieven explored the conflicting goals of Russia, the United States and Ukraine, during this event held on 4 June. He argued that Europe needs to take responsibility for its own security, and looked at ways in which the war might be brought to an end.

A video of the event is available [here](#)

### **Professor Steve Fetter on Rising Nuclear Risks**

In this talk, held at King's College London on 18 October, Prof Fetter reviewed US nuclear weapons policy across administrations, especially in relation to the current conflict in Ukraine, and considered how Washington can reduce nuclear risks. He also reflected on emerging technology and strategic challenges at a time of rising international tension, and how scientists and the public can get involved in these issues.

Watch the webinar video [here](#).

The British Pugwash YouTube channel has many other videos available [here](#).

### **Pugwash Meeting on Irreversibility in the Nuclear Domain**

Aware that at least one of the five NPT Nuclear Weapon States - the United Kingdom - is prepared to look into what 'getting to a world free of nuclear weapons' would entail (NPT/CONF 2020/WP35), and has been encouraging work on whether the elimination of nuclear weapons could be irreversible, British and International Pugwash convened a discussion in Rome on 20 and 21 November.

Recognising that many aspects of irreversibility in the nuclear domain had already been explored elsewhere, the 12 participants focussed mainly on whether the multi-decade negotiation and implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) offered lessons that could be relevant to any future negotiations on the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The 12 participants came from the USA, Russia, China, India, Canada, Italy, Belgium, Germany and the UK. The group comprised former diplomats, political scientists, physicists, and a nuclear weapon engineer. Out of the discussion has grown a proposal for a multi-phase approach to elimination, which will be submitted to the Nuclear Weapon States.

### **International Pugwash Council**

On 21-22 October the Pugwash Council met in hybrid format at the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste. British Pugwash Executive Committee Member Dr David Ellwood attended as an observer and was elected to the Council during the meeting in place of Dr Christopher Watson.

This was the first meeting of the Council since the 62nd Pugwash Conference that took place in 2017 in Kazakhstan. The Pugwash Council is the governing body of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and spearheads the organisation's efforts to reduce tensions and mitigate nuclear risks.

Noting the seriousness of conflicts that have erupted in different parts of the world, the Council assessed that global security is under increasing risk from unfulfilled nuclear disarmament commitments and severe proliferation challenges. Plans for the next Pugwash Conference and Pugwash leadership succession were also discussed at the meeting.



**British Pugwash developments**

The Executive Committee welcomed Dr Peter Collecott, James Brady and Andrew Gibson as new members.

**Membership growth**

In 2023 British Pugwash gained 21 new members. 13 of these were in the Student or Under 30s categories.

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