

## Editorial

January 2001 sees the inauguration of President Bush in Washington. A little earlier, it will bring the report of the commission to assess the National Security Space Management and Organisation of the United States. This commission has been labouring for more than a year, having been set up by members of Congress under the leadership of Donald Rumsfeld, who promises that his top priority is 'the defence of space assets'. But Donald Rumsfeld will not simply act as a rapporteur in the cause of the militarisation of space. He has also been nominated as President Bush's Secretary of Defence, so that he will be in a position to implement his own report, to allow the American military to colonise the last frontier.

There has been a growing reliance on satellites in space for a host of purposes. Navigation has been transformed by the space dimension, as have communications in general. Weather forecasting has become a finer art than ever before. All these innocent civilian advances shade over into potentially military assets, so that reconnaissance, for instance, now justifies the funding of a whole new programme in Japan. But up to now there has been a firm and necessary taboo against war fighting in space.

On various drawing boards exist plans for anti-satellite laser weapons, and computerised disruption of data from other people's satellites. The Rumsfeld commission is thought likely to advocate the improvement of satellite defences, and may well recommend further testing of the Mid Range Advanced Chemical Laser, which has been tested since 1997, when it aroused powerful criticism from President Yeltsin, who warned against breaching space taboos. The Mid Range Laser is ground-based. But the Pentagon has recently allocated \$100 million to test a space vehicle which could carry a high powered laser capable of attacking missiles and other targets from space.

Standing in the way of this device is the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty which prohibits the deployment of laser weapons in space. But President Bush promises either to change or scrap this Treaty, in order to facilitate National Missile Defence on the expanded scale which he has promised.

We have pointed out before that United States policy envisages what it calls 'full-spectrum dominance' in the space arena.

If the epoch of space wars is to be delayed, there is only one key question: who will exercise 'dominance' over global public opinion? It should not be necessary to point out that space wars threaten the destruction of far more than present power balances. The unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty will provoke a mutation in nuclear military policies, which will be all the more devastating for being uncontrolled by powerful ideological centres. Announcements of the 'end of history' with the downfall of Communism, were evidently somewhat premature. But the rise to power of Donald Rumsfeld and his colleagues might bring about that end, unless the peoples of the world resolve to keep their history going for a while.

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The scandal of the use of depleted uranium, first in the Gulf and then in various Yugoslav wars, has at last become public knowledge in the West. We have already commissioned a full-scale treatment of this problem, but in the meantime we are pleased to publish a short introduction by Rosalie Bertell, which indicates how long informed people have been warning on this question, and therefore how specious the official defence of ignorance can be seen to have been. Various European members of Nato have called for a moratorium on the use of depleted uranium, at least until appropriate studies have been completed and published. That is the very least that we should expect.

**THE NEXT LIFE THEY SAVE  
COULD BE YOURS!**



**The Fire Brigades Union**

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Fire Control Rooms and Fire Control Staff are an integral and essential core element of all Local Authority Fire Brigades. They are not only the first point of contact for the public and outside agencies in terms of general enquiries and advice, they are the only fully trained staff with the necessary expertise to handle 999 calls for the Fire Service and Fire Service related incidents and procedures. Whilst technological advance has been welcomed, it is no substitute for human resources - trained staff. Recently there have been talks and now some proposals on amalgamating fire, police and ambulance Controls. The motivation for these proposals appears to be political posturing rather than true efficiency and service enhancement.

**MERGERS**

**Effective liaison is the most important factor in providing a speedy and efficient service at multi-agency incidents. Effective liaison should not, however, be confused with amalgamation or merger.**

- The call handling techniques of the Ambulance, Police and Fire Service are different.

Each group of workers has a specialist knowledge necessary for their Service - none of which should be underestimated.

**Merging the Services would, in the view of the FBU, diminish the skills bases of all groups of workers and, most importantly, diminish the standard of service to the public.**

**AMALGAMATION**

**A Home Office Report recently put to the Central**

**Fire Brigades Advisory Council has put forward recommendations which would have a devastating effect on the UK Fire Service.**

**The proposal is that the number of emergency fire control rooms in England and Wales will be reduced, through amalgamation from 49 to 21 - effectively halving the number of trained staff who can deal with emergency fire calls.**

**It is not possible to eliminate 50% of Fire Control rooms and provide the same high standard of service.**

- Larger Control centres inevitably means less local knowledge.

A good knowledge of topography and demography assists greatly in identifying the location of the fire, the required fire cover and dispatching the correct fire appliances. Technology only recommends our members make the decision.

**Local knowledge is an invaluable asset**

**Fire Control Staff are a lifeline to the public and to firefighters. Don't allow your lifeline to be stretched to breaking point!**

**PLEASE WRITE TO YOUR MP AND  
LOCAL COUNCILLOR.**

**For more information contact:**  
The Fire Brigades Union  
Bradley House  
68 Coombe Road  
Kingston upon Thames  
Surrey  
KT2 7AE