

Editorial

Accounting for WMD

George W Bush and Tony Blair pursued weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that didn't exist. The Iraqis had declared to the United Nations what had happened to their chemical and biological weapons, as required by UN resolution. But the President and Prime Minister ignored them, and unleashed 'shock and awe' on the people of Iraq. One consequence of the leaders' folly was Iran's increased influence in Iraq and the wider region.

Meanwhile, Russia was drawing closer to China. The West's long standing policy of keeping apart two major Communist states seemed to be forgotten in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As the United States pursued 'full spectrum dominance' in its Vision 2020 military doctrine, Russia, China and other states sought their security in closer co-ordination. China and Russia bestride much of the Eurasian landmass, with China's Belt and Road Initiative extending influence, including amongst some Member States of the European Union. We are neighbours.

Into this changing world, in March 2021, the UK Government launched its Integrated Review of Defence, Development and Foreign Policy entitled *Global Britain in a competitive age*. One eye-catching detail reads:

'In 2010 the Government stated an intent to reduce our overall warhead stockpile ceiling from not more than 225 to not more than 180 by the mid-2020s. However, in recognition of the evolving security environment, including the developing range of technological and doctrinal threats, this is no longer possible, and the UK will move to an overall nuclear weapons stockpile of no more than 260 warheads.'

That's a lot of WMD, with 40 constantly at sea on Trident missiles leased from the United States. Nukewatch, seasoned observers of WMD logistics in Britain, unravel the story behind the British Government's apparently candid declaration. It seems likely HMG is, belatedly, confirming its increased stockpile of nuclear warheads. Meanwhile, preparations for the review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are rendered all the more difficult by this public declaration reversing course on the previous policy of reducing numbers of nuclear weapons of mass

destruction. In this context, Rob van Riet scrutinises the scarcely recognisable claims of Britain's WMD warriors. John Gittings explains why we missed the threat of a global pandemic, and addresses other existential risks.

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Ken Fleet trained long and hard to become a chartered accountant. His professional qualifications would have assured him a prosperous and busy career. But he didn't believe in profit. So he went in search of an alternative outlet for his skills and talents. Fortunately, he alighted on the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which he kept on a steady course for more than half a century. He was recruited to the Foundation by Ken Coates, whom he had met in an adult education class researching poverty in the St Ann's district of inner city Nottingham. Before he joined the Foundation, Ken Fleet became the founding secretary of the Institute for Workers' Control, which was established at a conference at Nottingham University in March 1968. In this issue of *The Spokesman*, we focus on Ken Fleet's work with the IWC. He put to good use his accountancy skills in the cause of workers at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and Triumph Meriden motorcycle co-operative. He explained for a wider audience the impulses to workers' control. To begin the story, he set out his own employment frustrations when he was in his thirties, and his quest for more fulfilling work. Kate Fleet, Ken's daughter, found this hand-written note-to-self amongst her father's papers. She typed this and his other contributions.

As well as not believing in the 'profit system', Ken Fleet was 'convinced of the absolute evil of atomic warfare'. From this conviction flowed his total commitment to the cause of European Nuclear Disarmament, which campaign he and Ken Coates helped steer through the 1980s. They were joint secretaries of the END Liaison Committee, which organised the annual END Conventions in different European cities, from 1982 onwards. In that END connection, Ken Fleet travelled to Israel in support of Mordechai Vanunu, the nuclear whistleblower. When he returned from his travels, Ken Fleet's reports were usually typed by Julia James, who worked cheerfully and enthusiastically at the Foundation for more than 30 years. Sadly, she died in 2021.

And, with an excerpt, we remember Lawrence Ferlinghetti, poet, publisher and bookseller, who never forgot the 'landscape in hell' he saw in Nagasaki as a US serviceman in 1945.

Tony Simpson