

# Nuclear Free Local Authorities briefing



Date: 14 May 2001

Subject: **Missile Defence & Space Weapons**

## Introduction

The next few years are likely to see changes in American foreign policy with implications at regional, national and local levels. The focus of US attention is turning to Asia and China (now viewed as the prime Global competitor). American forces are likely to be restructured with more resources directed to the development of missile defences and Space based weapons. This will be to protect Space assets (both commercial and military), protect Global commercial interests and for military power projection. These tasks are plainly spelt out in the US Space Command's *Vision for 2020* mission statement:

"US Space Command—dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment. Integrating Space Forces into warfighting capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict."

Of course, the realization of these goals will be easy neither technically nor politically. The timescale for spaced based laser weapon deployment (together with their orbiting nuclear power packs) is estimated at around 2020. The complexity of computer software to integrate command, control and intelligence for a globally deployed ground and space based weapons system is unfathomable. Programme costs are unspecified but significant short-term increases in defence expenditure are expected funded through cuts in other US domestic and international programmes. This is the direction President Bush, and his Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, have said they want to go.

## This is a matter for Local Authorities

In order to develop the capacity to control or deny access to Space, the new US administration has already signaled that it will not be constrained by existing arms control agreements. The Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty already characterised as 'ancient history' may be the first victim. The Comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Test Ban Treaty (currently observed by the US though not ratified) and Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty could be fatally undermined as well. The Outer Space Treaty (preventing the deployment in Space of weapons of mass destruction) could go too.

Collapse of arms control would likely trigger a new nuclear arms build up ('vertical' proliferation) in Russia and China, but also in India (in response to China) and Pakistan (in response to India).

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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Weaponisation of Space is not the only driver. The US continues to develop new 'low yield' 'usable' nuclear weapons (so called 'mini nukes') for deployment - eroding the 'fire break' between 'conventional' and 'nuclear' force.

Britain could find itself plunged into a new age of Cold War and nuclear war planning from which it emerged barely more than ten years ago. Local authority emergency planning could once again be focused primarily on civil defence.

Nuclear weapon bases (RAF Lakenheath and the Clyde Submarine Base at Faslane), support facilities (Devonport), radar, intelligence gathering and tracking facilities (at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill, North Yorkshire and Feltwell, Norfolk) in the UK could become prime nuclear targets. These concerns have already been voiced in areas affected.

A new nuclear arms race and deteriorating international relations could also spur the already increasing illicit trade in nuclear materials. Only last week (*New Scientist* 9 May 2001) reported:

"The International Atomic Energy Agency's database on trafficking in nuclear materials has logged more than 550 incidents since 1993, it revealed at a conference in Stockholm. The rate of incidents in 1999 and 2000 was twice that in 1996. In the first three months of 2001, there were 20 confirmed cases, including thefts in Germany, Romania, South Africa and Mexico. ...15 instances since 1993 involved plutonium or enriched uranium, which could be used in bombs ...(though no single consignment has so far contained enough for a bomb)... Alex Schmid of the UN's Terrorism Prevention Branch suggests that there could be as many as 130 terrorist groups that pose a nuclear threat."

Preventing access to materials for clandestine nuclear weapons proliferation or nuclear terrorism is becoming more difficult yet recent press reports say the new US administration is cutting funding to help maintain the safety and security of nuclear facilities in Russia. It has already reversed the anti proliferation policy of engagement with North Korea pursued by the previous Clinton administration (see *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* p32-39 May/June 2001).

Destabilisation of international relations through Space militarisation clearly risks undermining positive local community action to promote sustainable towns and cities. In an interdependent world, we must act co-operatively to secure peace, which is vital for the meaningful pursuit of sustainability at all, levels. A spokesman for Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, articulated this necessity in a statement on 1 May:

"The Secretary-General believes that, in promoting respect for the rule of law in international affairs, there is a need to consolidate and build upon existing disarmament and non-proliferation agreements, specifically to prevent a new arms race and to maintain the non-weaponised status of outer space.

In this context, the Secretary General appeals to all States to engage in negotiations towards legally binding disarmament agreements that is both verifiable and irreversible.

The House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Select Committee also concluded last August (*Weapons of Mass Destruction* HC407):

"We are not convinced that the US plans to deploy NMD (National Missile Defence) represent an appropriate response to the proliferation problems

facing the international community. We recommend that the government encourage the USA to seek other ways of reducing the threats it perceives."

### Action by NFLAs

The 2000 Nuclear Free Local Authorities AGM recognised the potential dangers of developing weapons to militarise Space and unanimously resolved:

"This AGM is deeply appalled by the implications for international security, and consequently for local communities, resulting from any development of the US national missile defence programme.

This AGM therefore insists that the UK Government states clearly that it will not assist this programme by permitting the use of either Menwith Hill or the Fylingdales Stations for US NMD purposes."

Since the AGM councils in Leeds and Rotherham have carried their own resolutions expressing concern about ballistic missile defence deployment - the first step towards Space militarisation. Notably, these resolutions attracted cross party support reflecting a degree of 'grass roots' concern in these communities about the implications of ballistic missile defences. The resolution carried by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council states:

"This Council is deeply concerned by the implications for international security and the consequences for the safety of local communities arising from any development of a US national missile defence programme. This Council believes development of ballistic missile defence risks increasing international tensions and diverting huge resources, which could be better directed to tackle poverty, environmental degradation and human rights abuse which sow the seeds of War. This Council, therefore, urges the Government to continue to use its good offices to promote international stability and sustainable development as the foundation for national and local peace, security and prosperity."

The Mayor of London has also placed his concerns on record in a recently published article about national missile defence (see *The Last Frontier: Preparing for War in Space* Spokesman Press p20-22 No.70, 2001).

### Public Opinion

A Greenpeace poll carried out by YouGov.com and published on 26 April 2001 found a significant split in public opinion based on political party support. 72% of respondents identifying themselves as Liberal Democrats either strongly opposed or opposed current US missile defence plans. Labour supporters opposed by 69%. However, 80% of respondents identifying themselves as Conservatives supported US plans with 79% agreeing that the UK should assist the US with deployment.

Liberal Democrat and Conservative opinion reflects positions on ballistic missile defence taken by their Parties. Official Government policy on missile defence remains non-committal.

### **ACTION**

The NFLA Steering Committee meeting on 29 March 2001 decided to brief member authorities in the terms above. The NFLA Steering Committee also wished to determine member authority opinion about US missile defence and Space weapons plans in view of the potential implications for local security and sustainability. **Therefore member authorities**

**are asked to bringing forward resolutions** (possibly in the terms carried by Rotherham MBC) **for consideration by their Council.** Where resolutions are carried member authorities are requested to convey their position to:

- Local Members of Parliament at Westminster and, as appropriate, in Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast
- The Secretaries of State for Defence and for Foreign Affairs  
(Secretary of State for Defence, MoD Main Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB)  
(Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, Whitehall, London SW1A 2AH)
- Relevant local government associations
- The Chair of the Government's Commission on Sustainable Development  
(Jonathon Porritt CBE, Chair, Sustainable Development Commission, 5<sup>th</sup> floor Romney House, Tufton St, London SW1P 3RA)
- Local press and media
- the NFLA Secretariat (for information).

For more information on the above matters contact: **Stewart Kemp** 0161 234 3244