



# How much do we know about NSA/NRO Menwith Hill?

*Work underway on a radome, maybe after weather damage. In April 2021, the chief planner at Harrogate Borough Council confirmed there were 30 extant radomes at the base, with three more (on the south side of the base) in the final stages of construction, and another (to the north) in the process of construction. This brings the total number of radomes to 34.*

# How much is known about NRS/NRO Menwith Hill?

## New report exposes the extent of the base's operations and a serious lack of accountability and democratic oversight.

On 2 October 2021, the Menwith Hill Accountability Campaign and Yorkshire Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament launched the latest report on Menwith Hill base, controlled by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and US National Reconnaissance Office (NRO).

The report was researched and written by Barnaby Pace. Barnaby is an experienced researcher with

the significance of drone warfare in an increasingly unstable area. Use of intelligence captured by the base to target drones means that the base itself and the surrounding area are a potential target for retaliatory strikes.

The launch included a presentation by Barnaby Pace and a short film. The report and film – and a film of the launch – are now available on the MHAC website (<https://themhac.uk>).



Photo by Leeds Media Services

an impressive track record of research on politics and security issues.

The report, “Menwith Hill in 3D: Domes, Data and Drone Strikes”, updates a 2012 research report produced by YCND: “Lifting the Lid on Menwith Hill ... The Strategic Roles and Economic Impact of the US Spy Base in Yorkshire”<sup>1</sup>. Recent developments and disclosures, for example from Edward Snowden, have captured public attention and aroused concern.

The new report reveals ways in which electronic surveillance has developed at Menwith Hill. Intelligence gained from the captured data has facilitated the increased use of drone warfare in recent years. Latest news from Afghanistan highlights

### Endorsements of the report

#### **Paul Rogers, Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University:**

*“This is an impressive and authoritative report, backed up by detailed references. It covers a wide field of activity at Menwith Hill and is particularly useful in highlighting its role in the move towards remote warfare, especially the proliferation and use of armed drones. These raise many issues of transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight, and challenging the implications of this trend will be made more effective by this valuable study.”*

#### **Richard Norton-Taylor, board member of Declassified UK (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/declassified-uk/>) and former Guardian defence and security editor:**

*“The Menwith Hill Accountability Campaign’s report is a most timely, informative, and well-produced document that goes to the heart of a crucial but now shamefully neglected issue facing all of us namely, the absence of any effective British control and oversight of US military and spy bases on our island. The bases are described as “RAF” establishments.*

1. “Lifting the Lid on Menwith Hill”, a 2012 Yorkshire CND report, available from: <https://cnduk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/liftingthelid.pdf>

*That is a myth: they are American. They include “RAF” Croughton in Northamptonshire where 19-year-old Harry Dunn died when he was hit by a car driven by Anne Sacoolas outside the spy base. Sacoolas, reportedly a CIA officer, was charged with causing death by dangerous driving. She left Britain days after the crash and claims she is protected by diplomatic immunity.*

*US spy bases which are also command bases for drone strikes are expanding. But unlike US fighter and nuclear bomber bases, which have traditionally attracted attention, their role and their activities are concealed.*

*This document is a valuable contribution to a debate about British sovereignty and democracy issues overshadowed by the arguments over Brexit. It deserves a wide readership.”*

**Chris Cole, founder of Drone Wars UK**  
(<https://dronewars.net/>):

*“Drones are the visible face of what has come to be known as remote warfare. But below the surface, there’s a vast intelligence gathering and data analysis operation to enable drone warfare to take place and Menwith Hill plays a key part in that operation. This new report lays out clearly the role of Menwith Hill and is a hugely important resource.”*

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## What’s **NEW** since the last newsletter?

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We have been informed that Chris Agar is the new US Chief of Station at Menwith Hill.

As Chief of the NSA Cybersecurity Threat Operations Center, Chris Agar wrote a presentation in 2018 about the NSA and US Cyber Command sharing a 24/7 operations floor for the first time and inviting US government and Five Eyes partners (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) to join them. The presentation emphasises that “Partnership will be critical, as will sharing information”<sup>2</sup>.

The stand-up of UK Space Command took place in July 2021. Space Command represents the UK’s part in the Combined Space Operations initiative which includes the same five partners plus France and Germany. However, “cooperation” – as with the Five Eyes – is in the context of confrontation, of criticism of Russia’s and China’s threatening behaviour in space.

No mention is made of the opposition of the US and the UK to a UN process which would prevent space threats. The US and UK opposed proposals for a Treaty to Prevent the Deployment of Weapons in Outer Space and the Threat of Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects jointly submitted by Russia and China in 2002, 2008 and 2014, and opposed a 2017 UN proposal to ban an arms race in space<sup>3</sup>.

Dave Webb, Chair of CND and convenor of the Global Network Against Nuclear Power and Weapons in Space, has written of the UK Integrated Strategic Review that the UK government’s “intention is to . . . maintain and further develop collaborative projects with existing allies – especially the US. They also see it as necessary to continue citing Russia and China as major threats and using them as a major reason why many of these actions are necessary.”

He continues:

**Increases in military spending and more nuclear warheads only make situations less secure. There is no recognition of human security issues such as poverty relief, healthcare provision, tackling climate change and ending homelessness. Instead of offering ways in which we might all work together to tackle these problems, it is adopting an even more confrontational attitude to international affairs.**<sup>4</sup>

Like Fylingdales, Menwith Hill is involved in the highly controversial US Missile ‘Defense’, through the two radomes that are part of the Space-Based Infrared System (SBIRS). The US Space Force’s sixth and final SBIRS Geosynchronous Earth Orbit satellite is now ready for launch.

In addition to the serious environmental dangers of launches and of the proliferation of satellites<sup>5</sup>, critics argue that the

deployment of missile defence systems undermines arms-control agreements, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and can spur new nuclear-arms races. Russia has claimed that its newest nuclear weapons under development, including undersea torpedoes, hypersonic glide vehicles and nuclear-powered cruise missiles, are designed to overcome US missile defenses<sup>6</sup>.

The threat of hypersonic weapons has now led to the development of US hypersonic missiles, US hypersonic missile defense systems, and US hypersonic defense weapons.

US defense revenues have risen in 2021<sup>7</sup>. The US military has sidestepped major budget cuts and there have been calls for massive investment in artificial intelligence which also has an insatiable appetite for data<sup>8</sup> and risks<sup>9</sup>. No rest for NSA/NRO Menwith Hill.

There have, this year, been encouraging signs for Menwith Hill's involvement in illegal and lethal US drone operations – such as lower levels of US drone strikes<sup>10</sup> and a review of US drone strike policy. Nevertheless President Biden is now promising 'over-the-horizon' surveillance and attacks to keep terrorism at bay in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal.

2. Chris Agar, "Security Operation Center Consolidation", <https://www.fbcinc.com/e/DoCITCyber/presentations/B1ChrisAgar.pdf>
3. Watch the video by Paul Mobbs, "'Weaponising Space Debris': Britain, 'DARC', and the US military's control of the 'space domain'", 2021/10/02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KhkdjqSNic>
4. Drone Wars, 2021/05/10, Dave Webb, "No Space for Peace in the Integrated Security Review", <https://dronewars.net/2021/05/10/no-space-for-peace-in-the-integrated-security-review/>
5. See the video by Dave Webb, 2021/09/14, "Keep Space for Peace Week", <https://youtu.be/KxPbWchOxTg>.
6. Arms Control Association, 12/2020, "Missile Defense and the Arms Race", <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-12/focus/missile-defense-arms-race>
7. Defense News, 2021/08/25, Joe Gould, "Arms trade momentum: Globalization and US defense spending drive defense industry growth", <https://www.defensenews.com/top-100/2020/08/17/arms-trade-momentum-globalization-and-us-defense-spending-drive-defense-industry-growth/tradeGlobalization and US>
8. C4ISNet, 2021/03/1, Andrew Eversden, "'Wakeup call': Report calls for Massive AI investments to counter China",

<https://www.c4isrnet.com/artificial-intelligence/2021/03/01/wakeup-call-report-calls-for-massive-ai-investments-to-counter-china/>

9. The Conversation, 2021/09/29, James Dawes, "An autonomous weapon may have already killed people – here's how the weapons could be more destabilizing than nukes", <https://theconversation.com/an-autonomous-robot-may-have-already-killed-people-heres-how-the-weapons-could-be-more-destabilizing-than-nukes-168049>
10. New York Times, 2021/03/03, Charlie Savage and Eric Schmitt, "Biden Secretly Limits Counterterrorism Drone Strikes Away From War Zones", <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/us/politics/biden-drones.html>

## What progress towards accountability and control of operations such as those conducted at Menwith Hill?

We thank all those who have campaigned for the accountability of Menwith Hill in the past, and to those who continue to campaign – individuals, whistle-blowers, and organisations.

*The Menwith Hill Women's Peace Camp, one of a number of peace camps set up near the base at various times*



*Supporters of Otley Peace Action Group in about 1983*

*Protest organised by the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases calling for Independence from America on 4th July 2011*

In January 2021 Privacy International won their judicial review challenge to a 2016 ruling by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal. The UK High Court held that the security and intelligence services can no longer rely on general warrants for certain forms of property interference, including hacking: "In the digital age, when a general warrant could easily enable spying on hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people, this is a major victory"<sup>11</sup>.



by Highland councillors regardless of the 400 objections to the proposal submitted by local residents questioning the environmental impact on the peatlands the site will be based on, and the ethical concerns over the military potential. Scottish Ministers signed a 75-year option to lease the land and we may now see the first launch in 2022.

HIE has acknowledged that data gathered by satellites launched could be used for defence purposes. Military and spy satellites would have an incredible impact on the operations of the MoD and its allies as well as the arms companies set to make astronomical profits from these operations. In recent months, Lockheed Martin [US] has moved its support towards a site in Shetland, the Shetland Space Centre, taking the bulk of its funding from UKSA with them. This new site would allow for three launch pads, with one solely for their use, something that was made possible with the June 2020 signing of the UK-US Technology Safeguards Agreement.

The Scottish Government's industry-led Scottish Space Leadership Council includes a number of arms companies, such as Leonardo, Raytheon [US], BAE Systems and Chemring that are likely to push a militaristic agenda. Despite this, HIE denies that the Sutherland Space Hub will be used for military purposes, while both Scottish and UK governments have said little about the matter.

The UK military has not been clear on what exactly the aforementioned "national security payload" could be, but it is evident that the UK's intelligence and surveillance will increase with these spaceports. That is why we (Campaign Against the Arms Trade in Scotland) are calling on leaders in Holyrood and Westminster to properly scrutinise this project and refuse to allow military exploitation of a project that could boost our local and national economy and aid understanding of the ongoing climate emergency.

<https://caat.org.uk/keep-in-touch/caat-news-magazine/>

For more detail about the UK's involvement with the US military through these spaceports, visit:

<https://dronewars.net/2021/05/10/no-space-for-peace-in-the-integrated-security-review/>

For inspiration, watch this video from the other side of the world, of the "STOP Militarisation of Space" Rocket Lab HQ Protest Event in Auckland NZ on 21 June 2021:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HScLY93Aas>



*International Day of Action Against Foreign Military Bases  
Photo by Neil Terry Photography*

On 30 April, supporters of MHAC and YCND and others met at the main gates of Menwith Hill and walked to and from the base's Nessfield Gate through the nature reserve, also known as the orchid field, along the diverted footpath that used to go through the base.



Dave Webb of YCND spoke about the origins of the Day of Action – in action by campaigners against the massive US base at Ramstein, Germany, which also has a role in US targeted killings.

*The alder tree outside the main gate of Menwith Hill, planted by his wife in memory of Bob Cryer MP - who worked tirelessly to bring the activities of Menwith Hill under public scrutiny. It is to be moved near the entrance to the nature reserve because of major developments at the main gate.*

## 4 July Independence From America Day 2021



4 July Independence from the USA

The annual 4th July protest (started in the 1980s) included a presence outside Menwith Hill main gate. Thought-provoking, interesting speakers in the Zoom webinar included Alex Sobel MP, who continues to ask written parliamentary questions about the base's activities.

## International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons 26 September

The Nuke Free Europe network coordinated a month of action this September to



26 September



highlight the presence of nuclear weapons stationed across the continent. CND encouraged action at nuclear sites across the UK on 26 September, the International

Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

In Yorkshire, CND and MHAC protested outside both Fylingdales and Menwith Hill (both involved in US missile defense). A few people travelled up to Fylingdales in the morning. More protested outside Menwith Hill from 4pm. Tea (and cake) were provided to commemorate the tee-total elimination of nuclear weapons on a Sunday afternoon.

## Keep Space for Peace at Harrogate Meeting House on 2 October 2021

The launch of the new report – “Menwith Hill in 3D: Domes, Data and Drone Strikes” – was also part of Keep Space for Peace week, a week of action called for by Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space. Email [mail@themhac.uk](mailto:mail@themhac.uk) for a copy of the report.

## The weekly Tuesday protest outside the main gates of Menwith Hill

The regular protest, started by the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases in 2000, now continues after a pause for the pandemic. On 10 August 2021 MHAC supported Drone Wars UK's call for protest against General Atomics' plan to bring their new SkyGuardian drone to the UK for experimental flights this summer.

<https://dronewars.net/nousdronetests/>



Protest 10 August 2021

The video below, featuring Martin Schweiger talking about the weekly protest, is as relevant now as when it was made by CAAB in 2010 (although we now demonstrate from 6:00 pm until 7:30). We hope it inspires you to come and join us.

## YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED

<https://youtu.be/2al-aqJ01Nk>

## MONEY MATTERS

There are several ways of supporting MHAC financially (see the MHAC website). Accounts can be seen by application to the Treasurer.

**MHAC Account No:** 50095311

**Sort Code:** 089229

The Cooperative Bank,  
1 Balloon Street, Manchester, M60 4EP

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Please also enclose your address so that we can write to thank you!

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## WHO'S WHO AT MHAC?

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31 Blossomgate, Ripon, HG4 2AJ  
(Bank signatories Judith Rushby and Sarah Swift)

**Webmaster:** Ray Middleton

**Coordinator of meetings:** Hazel Costello

**Facebook administrator:**

Brigid-Mary Oates

**Twitter administrator:** Claire Nash

**Newsletter distributor:** Christine Dean

**Graphic designer:** Paul Wood

**Designer of merchandise:** Sarah McEvoy

**Monitoring planning applications:**

Laila and Rob Packer

**Contact email:** mail@themhac.uk

**Coordinator of weekly demo and of newsletter:** Sarah Swift Tel: 01765 600928

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## THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO CONTINUES TO SUPPORT US.

Please contact us if you would like more information about items in this newsletter or if you would like to help in any way.

**Very many thanks to Steve Hill for monitoring planning applications for many years for CAAB and then for MHAC, and to Laila and Rob Packer for taking this over.**

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