

WHY ON EARTH IS THE UK SUPPORTING STAR WARS? NEWS FROM FYLINGDALES



The Fylingdales Radar "Pyramid"

While Americans were queuing outside polling stations and while Bush and his mates were rubbing their hands with glee over their electronic vote-fixing system, I was up on the North York Moors in the wind and rain outside RAF Fylingdales, taking part in a protest very much linked with the United States and President Bush.

Fylingdales Ballistic Early Warning Radar station is one of five around the world whose role is to spot and track missiles which might be heading for the US. The radars used to be contained in giant 'golf ball' radomes like the ones at Menwith Hill, but these have been removed and replaced with a structure vaguely reminiscent of (but much uglier than) an Aztec Pyramid. Although the site at Fylingdales is owned by the Ministry of Defence, all the radar equipment on site belongs to the US, the system is operated by US personnel, and any information obtained is passed straight to the US.

The Ballistic Missile Defence system (BMD, or "Star Wars" as it has been dubbed) has been described by Labour MP Malcolm Savidge as an '*extremely expensive and technically dubious defence against a very improbable form of attack.*' (Jan 03) When complete and if it works, which is doubtful, the US will have a shield to protect it from inter-continental missiles. Unfortunately, the only countries which have long-range missiles capable of reaching America are countries which are highly unlikely to launch such an attack (such as Britain, France, Russia, China).

It seems more probable that the whole costly system is about the US' desire to dominate not only the planet but Space too. The new system will, in theory at least, enable the US to accurately pinpoint and attack any target on Earth from Space without the inconvenience of sending in troops. BMD is also about generating vast profits for the companies involved while pretending to the American people who are paying for it (over \$100 billion to date) that it will protect them from the dangers they are always being warned about. If it does provide any defence at all, that defence certainly won't extend to Britain, which begs the question - why on earth are we getting involved in this? Hasn't Iraq taught our government anything? We should dissociate ourselves from all aspects of U.S. plans for global domination, which means we must

GET THE U.S. OUT OF FYLINGDALES!

Demonstrations at RAF Fylingdales aim to raise public awareness about the extent to which Britain, thanks to Tony Blair, is supporting Bush's crazy 'Star Wars' programme. Not only did the British Government avoid a full parliamentary debate last year when it approved the upgrading of Fylingdales to enable it to be part of 'Star Wars', but it now appears that Blair may have agreed that the US can keep its 'interceptor' missiles at the base. We know that the British Government has been talking to the US about siting missiles on British soil, but it is staying very tight-lipped about what was agreed. From past experience, we know that it is likely that a decision will be made without discussion, without even any pretence of democratic process and that it will probably not be announced until after our own elections.

It is by no means certain that US missiles will be sited at Fylingdales. There is no obvious reason to put both tracking system and missiles on the same site, and it could be argued that doing so would make the installation particularly vulnerable to attack. Other bases such as Lakenheath and Fairford could be used to house US weapons silos. However, the North York Moors are not the most hospitable part of the country, and cynical government ministers might have selected Fylingdales simply because the site is high up, cold and wet, and therefore not an easy place to mobilise large numbers of people for demonstrations... which makes it all the more important that we protest and continue to protest there.

www.freefylingdales.org

www.cndyorks.gn.apc.org



WPJF PROTESTS AGAINST ATTACKS ON FALLUJAH



At the beginning of November the US military, aided and abetted by British troops, was poised to launch another murderous assault on Fallujah which would kill hundreds more innocent civilians and do nothing to bring peace closer for the people of Iraq. Military spokespersons and reporters were not even pretending that civilians wouldn't be hurt this time, so we knew that it was going to be bad. The stated first priority of the US military was to defeat the rebels in Fallujah meaning, presumably, that the safety of civilians was of only secondary importance to them. This proved to be the case – in flagrant disregard of international humanitarian law the Red Crescent was refused approval by the US military to enter Fallujah with medical teams and essential aid following the attacks.

The problem, as always, is how to respond to such atrocities. Nothing we could do here in Wrexham seemed adequate by way of protest, but doing something is better than doing nothing, and we felt it was important for local people to see that there was opposition to the attacks, especially since neither that opposition nor the reality of civilian casualties was being covered in the mainstream news. After some discussion we decided to hold candlelit vigils at the busy Plas Coch roundabout every evening from the 8th–12th November in support of the people of Fallujah and in protest at the attacks.

EXTRACT FROM WPJF PRESS RELEASE 8th NOVEMBER

This assault is claimed to be to defeat terrorists and insurgents, but the people of Fallujah have written an open letter to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, stating: "As you know, there is no military presence in the city. There have been no actions by the resistance in Fallujah in the last few weeks because negotiations are in progress between representatives of the city and the Allawi government." In response, Kofi Annan has called for restraint from the coalition forces. He writes that "ultimately, the problem of insecurity can only be addressed through dialogue and an inclusive political process. The threat or actual use of force not only risks deepening the sense of alienation of certain communities, but would also reinforce perceptions among the Iraqi population of a continued military occupation."

We know that most of the casualties in the attack will be civilians. When US forces attacked Fallujah in April, about 75% of the 1000 dead were women and children. There were well-documented cases of US snipers firing on clearly-marked ambulances and preventing casualties from receiving medical aid, in clear breach of the Geneva Conventions. US bombers have already destroyed a hospital in the latest attacks.

Thankfully, the week was mainly dry, if cold and sometimes blowy with the wind presenting particular challenges for those of us with high-sided banners! Rather distressingly, every banner we have ever made for the group seemed appropriate, and with all these festooning the railings, along with dozens of candles, lanterns and nightlights, it would have been impossible for any passing motorist to have missed us. The banners included old ones, such as: IRAQ FOR THE IRAQIS; THE US OCCUPATION ISN'T OVER; THE FIRST CASUALTY OF WAR IS TRUTH; ENOUGH DEATH. STOP THIS BLOODY WAR! and some new ones like: LISTEN TO THE UN. STOP THE ATTACKS ON FALLUJAH; BUSH – BLAIR: MURDERERS and FALLUJAH APRIL – 1000 DEAD. HOW MANY MORE? STOP THE WAR.

The vigil was attended by approximately 15-20 people each evening. Wrexham Quakers had representatives and a banner at the vigil every night; we had our own WPJF banner, and Forward Wales supported us on Thursday evening. There was also an encouraging amount of media interest. MFM Radio advertised the event on Monday and ran reports from the vigil on Tuesday; Radio Wales interviewed CND Cymru about our vigil and other protests in Wales; local papers covered the story, and there was interest from national Welsh language media such as Radio Cymru and the Welsh newspaper Y Cymro. Media coverage is at least as important as the event itself because, for every one person who sees us, hundreds more will hear or read about what we do, hopefully prompting discussion and debate and helping to redress the dreadful media imbalance in reporting on the situation in Iraq. Support from passing motorists increased noticeably as the week progressed, and by Friday it seemed as if every other driver was beeping and waving. Maybe next time, some motorists will be brave enough to park up and join us.

In the following weeks we switched our protests to the early morning, with lively demonstrations at the junction of Grosvenor Rd and Rhosddu Rd during the rush hour. We were joined by a group of students from Yale College who protested noisily and enthusiastically (thank you Kelly, Naomi, Amy, Jim and Anna – you were great!), and on one morning we were filmed by a French TV cameraman who happened to be staying at the Lemon Tree Hotel next to the roundabout.

It's important that we keep protesting about the situation in Iraq for as long as the bloodshed continues. I've just invested in several more rolls of fabric, so look out for our new banners at the next demonstration. If you want to be kept informed of our activities, join our egroup by sending a blank message to: wrexhamagainstwar-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.