How Donald Trump’s Border Wall Helped to Terminate the USAF Croughton ‘Joint Intelligence Analysis Centre’ (JIAC)

After five years of work and awareness-raising on Croughton’s role in the “War on Terror”, CroughtonWatch celebrates the demise of plans for an upgraded surveillance and intelligence centre, implicated in human rights abuses and war crimes.

Paul Mobbs, CroughtonWatch, Thursday 3rd October 2019

Sunday 30th June 2019 was a special day for CroughtonWatch. Exactly three years earlier, South Northamptonshire District Council had given planning permission[1] for a new military intelligence complex at USAF Croughton – the ‘Joint Intelligence Analysis Centre’ (JIAC). Development had to commence within three years of the permission being granted. Three years later, and no development had taken place!

A remark buried in Congressional appropriations...

2013 was an eventful year. The revelations over the scope of US military and intelligence surveillance from Edward Snowden (who had briefly worked at USAF Croughton as a contractor) shone a light on operations at the site. There was certainly a lot to report[2] to Oxfordshire Peace Campaign’s annual march and rally that October.

Then in November 2013, it was revealed that the site had been instrumental in monitoring Chancellor Merkel’s mobile phone[3] as part of US-German trade negotiations.

In May 2014, as part of the US Congress’ annual budgetary process, a request was made[4] for $300 million for a new intelligence centre at USAF Croughton:

The fiscal year 2015 budget request includes $92,223,000 for the first of a three-phase Joint Intelligence Analysis Center at [RAF] Croughton in the United Kingdom. The project would consolidate U.S. intelligence gathering operations for the European [EUCOM] and Africa [AFRICOM] Commands and establish a NATO Intelligence Fusion Center. The overall cost of this three-phase project is estimated to be in excess of $300,000,000.

NATO’s existing Joint Analysis Complex (JAC) is

What is CroughtonWatch?

CroughtonWatch is an independent citizen’s monitoring campaign run by an association of local people in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, networking at a national level with other interested groups via the Free Range Network.

The purpose of CroughtonWatch is to monitor the operations at USAF Croughton – an American military and intelligence communications base – and its wider connections to bases across Britain, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

As well as monitoring activities ‘on the ground’, the campaign reviews American, NATO and British military and intelligence reports, policy documents, and budgetary plans, in order to check for future developments at the site. The campaign produces briefings and information and shares them with other interested groups locally, nationally, and internationally.

Those who take part in the CroughtonWatch campaign represent different groups – from concerns over armed drones, to nuclear disarmament, to human rights. Some have been involved with USAF Croughton since the 1980s.

The work produced by CroughtonWatch is made available via the Free Range Network’s website: http://www.fraw.org.uk/frn/cw.html. CroughtonWatch can be contacted by email at croughtonwatch@fraw.org.uk
based at USAF Molesworth. Molesworth was to be closed and this new facility was intended to both replace it – merging intelligence gathering for Europe, the Near East and Africa – and significantly enlarge the operations currently carried out there.

Joint Intelligence Analysis Centre (JIAC)
The nature of conflict is changing, driven by new information and automation technologies. Just as these techniques are changing the High Street or commerce, from drones to artificial intelligence, these technologies are changing the way the military and intelligence agencies operate too.

The JIAC was intended to keep pace with these developments – extending the operations of the US military in Europe beyond their historic capability.

As later research on the proposed JIAC facility[5] found, the US government’s use of intelligence fusion[6] techniques would knit together multiple sites across Europe and Africa to form a continent-wide, computer-mediated, surveillance, cyberwar, drone and special forces-based killing machine.

The issue for CroughtonWatch was that the operations already practised at the site had been evaluated by legal experts[7], and in the wake of the Edward Snowden leaks had been judged by courts[8], to be illegal.

Britain was already deeply involved with[9] the US government’s “kill chain”. The development of the JIAC would amplify the scope of those breaches of UK and international humanitarian law.

More specifically, in 2014, research by Computer Weekly and the Bureau for Investigative Journalism had disclosed that USAF Croughton had a direct high-capacity data line[10] to AFRICOM’s headquarters in Djibouti – from where the US military ran drone strikes and intelligence operations in Yemen as part of the Saudi government’s acknowledged criminally-negligent[11] war.


US ‘pork barrel politics’ intervenes
The plans for the JIAC had emerged from the Obama administration. In the US Congress, Republicans tried to obstruct a whole range of government policies, including the changes to military policy which sought to push ahead with the JIAC.

A Republican congressman, Devin Nunes[13], sought to obstruct the JIAC development – in part, it is believed, due to his own interests in the development of an alternative site in the Azores.

This would ultimately result in the project being formally reviewed[14] by the US General Accountability Office (GAO) – and cleared[15].

The result of Nunes’ action would be the insertion of a clause into 2015/16’s budget appropriations bill prohibiting any further spending on the JIAC – except for planning and investigations, until the issue was resolved.

South Northants permits the JIAC
In March 2016 South Northamptonshire received a planning application[16] for the JIAC development. With its accompanying environmental impact statement, this gave a lot of information about the design and layout – but absolutely nothing regarding the operations that the site would enable.

Around the same time the US government’s military communications contracting arm, the Defense Information Technology Contracting Organization (DITCO), began to issue new tenders for communications links which connected Croughton to sites across Europe.

Then, nothing.

The expected start of development during the Summer of 2017 came and went, and meanwhile there were no signs of any initial groundworks having been carried out on the site.
Trump’s wall intervenes

In late 2017 news filtered out from EUCOM that USAF Mildenhall, which was part of the reorganisation including the closure of USAF Molesworth, was being delayed until 2024.

One of the reasons for this, it was said[17], was the continued delay in the building of the new JIAC development.

In February 2018 the US Senate blocked funding for Donald Trump’s proposed border wall.

In late 2018 the local parish council[19] at USAF Molesworth disclosed that NATO was considering keeping the existing JAC site at Molesworth, but there was no confirmation of this.

In early 2019, as blocking of the border wall continued, the President proposed to use emergency powers to take funding from other parts of the US defence budget. In May 2019, in order to divert at least $2.5 billion[18] to fund the border wall the Pentagon begins to review its future spending commitments – seeking to reallocate as much funding as possible to Trump’s “national emergency” priority.

In May 2019 the US budgetary round began. Over two pages (1669/1670) the Bill outlined revisions[20] to previous appropriations, re-designating the three funding phases of the JIAC from USAF Croughton to USAF Molesworth. As the Bill was in process that could, at that time, still have been amended.

Then in July 2019 the US forces newspaper, Stars & Stripes, announced that[21] the proposed JIAC develop would be located at USAF Molesworth.

Finally, in September 2019, the Pentagon published details of the other future development schemes around the globe which were being shelved in order to fund the border wall – totalling around $3.6 billion[22]. This included the remaining spending planned[23] at USAF Croughton: the new school complex; and, a new gatehouse on the A43 access.

Unanswered questions

Exactly what the redevelopment of the ‘JAC’ into the ‘JIAC’ at USAF Molesworth will comprise is not clear. As yet there are no proposals for what functions the site will perform in the future.

At some point a planning application will have to be made, and it will be possible to compare the two developments to see how they differ in scale. This does not, however, necessarily mean the end of the wider, pan-European JIAC scheme.

As part of continued pressure on European governments to spend more on defence, Donald Trump told them to fill the funding gap[24] left by his reallocation of funding. That statement is clearly misinformed since, according to last March’s EUCOM ‘Posture Statement’[25], EU states have already increased spending by $41 billion over 2016 levels, and that is projected to rise to $100 billion by 2020.

In any case, Britain is already undertaking a major review of defence spending and policy[26], and a lot of that includes funding for “cyber” activities – including many parts of the co-operative programmes run with the US government, relating to drones and mass surveillance, which have previously been identified as including unlawful activities.

Conclusion: What’s next?

The cancellation of the JIAC still leaves many unanswered questions for CroughtonWatch to pursue – and permits us more time to devote to realising those ends:

◆ Many organisations have identified that the operations ALREADY taking place at USAF Croughton are unlawful – which must be resolved;

◆ Given that the site breaches the law, why do local authorities continue to appoint ‘liaison officers’[27] to facilitate the US military’s operation there?; and

◆ Britain co-operates with the US military’s unlawful activities at many sites[28] across Britain – we need a more extensive ‘citizen monitoring’ network for all sites[29] to press the case for changing national defence priorities.
References


18. Another $1.5B in military funds to be diverted to border, top Democrat says, Connor O’Brien, Politico, 10th May 2019 – https://www.politico.com/story/2019/05/10/military-funds-durban-border-1217174


29. A new initiative on this, supported by the Free Range Network, commences in October 2019: ‘Weaponising Big Data’ – a research project on the military and intelligence sites in Britain that are preparing for offensive cyberwarfare and automated state surveillance – http://www.fraw.org.uk/frn/whd.html