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Sent: 09 January 2008 01:36
To: LASG main listserve
Subject: [Los Alamos Study Group] Congressional actions, late 2007; meetings this week; disarmament walk report, more (Action Alert #82)

January 7, 2007

Action Alert #82: Congressional actions, late 2007; meetings this week; disarmament walk report, more

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1. **Thanks to all for a wonderful year!**
2. **End-of-year congressional update, 2007**
 - a. **Overall: nuclear weapons industry wins some, loses some**
 - b. **Domenici effective as ever, seems to be aiming for a permanent legacy of uncontrollable proliferation and teradollar waste**
 - c. **Udall talks “diversification” but works to maintain weapons funding; Bingaman does nothing we know of**
3. **Breakfast discussions recommence THIS WEEK (Tomorrow, January 9 & Thursday, January 10)**
4. **Solstice disarmament walk (Dec. 21-24): report and plans for June**
5. **NNSA releases latest new plan for the warhead complex**
6. **Rep. Tauscher (D-CA) introduces bill calling for test ban ratification**

Dear colleagues and friends –

1. Thanks to all for a wonderful year!

This past year was challenging and rewarding for us here at the Study Group. Especially, it has been a pleasure to talk, plan, and work (and walk!) with many of you. Thank you.

On the issues: we won some and lost some this year, and (which may be more important in the long run) I think we helped advance the debate. Policy “victories” and “defeats” are however never quite what they seem at first to be. Also, circumstances (and hence policies) always change. The best short interpretation may be: “stay tuned.”

Equally important, the Study Group put down new roots and made new friends. We are better connected internally. Our tiny staff was augmented by our active board of directors and the many volunteers who came forward mightily at key times. Thank you! It is certainly humbling, inspiring, and empowering to be supported in so many ways by the community.

This coming year promises to be one in which more Americans realize we must run, not walk, *toward sustainable security* (which, to be sustainable, must also be just) and *away* from mass terror, as in nuclear *deterrence*.

Looking back over the past year, all four of our highest legislative priorities (see below) more-or-less passed the House of Representatives by wide margins, amply proving their political practicality. However only one – halting the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) – made it through final budget negotiations last month.

It may be more accurate to say the RRW *acronym* was halted (for now). Large investments are now promised for a new pit production facility, however, the purpose of which is to make something like the RRW if not the RRW itself.

And only *most* of the RRW program was halted. From the ashes of RRW, an ominous \$15 M study of “advanced certification” (AC) was funded, including a study of new strategic systems—a project beyond the scope of the RRW effort. Rumors of RRW’s demise have been, as Mark Twain said, exaggerated.

It is especially an exaggeration to call such an outcome a “victory.” Or if one does, it seems important to say all that was given or allowed to slip away to get it. I just can’t see how cutting only 1% of the U.S. nuclear weapons program, when the House had already done that AND ANOTHER 5% in important, bellwether program cuts, is a “victory.” It looks like a defeat, snatched from victory’s jaws. With victories like that the world’s nonproliferation regime will die.

As noted, far more progressive positions were passed by the House by a wide margin, but the House committee leaders who did this – Visclosky and Hobson – were not, as far as we can tell, actively supported in these additional cuts by the arms control community.

In the end, the nuclear establishment lost only a 3-letter acronym (only 2 letters net, actually, since RRW, the successor to the Advanced Concepts Initiative, ACI, was replaced by the \$15 million “Advanced Certification,” AC). It’s not clear that a lot was gained in return for the deep compromises that were made.

Again, caution is required in interpretation. On the one hand the managers of the weapons complex gained incremental funding for a new plutonium warhead core (“pit”) production complex at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). On the other hand, they now see fit to call for downsizing the complex.

Unfortunately, the proposal offered is not *functional* downsizing – indeed it is *functional expansion*. At least the spin given the plan by the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) acknowledges the direction nuclear investments must go: *down*. NNSA and its Pentagon clients need further encouragement along these lines.

The incremental (one year) investments in pit production provided in December for the current fiscal year may prove difficult to convert into long-term nuclear advantages, especially if principled opposition continues and grows. Not to put too fine a point on it, neither money nor the furtive endorsement of paid-off politicians can buy legitimacy for weapons of mass incineration. They just amount to another maintenance payment on the deteriorating deterrence façade.

Month by month, nuclear policy issues are increasingly tied to the larger question of what actually constitutes national security, including its environmental, human, and of course economic components. All these are rising fast in perceived importance, as they must.

Soon it will be difficult to ignore the towering fact that “business as usual” is no longer a viable option for the American society, economy, and defense establishment. Humanity faces rapidly maturing, converging crises greater than any in its history. These crises existentially challenge all cultures as they do civilization as a whole. For many people – ultimately, billions – they will challenge basic survival. Nuclear weapons have contributed mightily to this deadly situation and continue to do so today.

These crises change political relationships and make new and very fruitful alliances possible, as we found this year both in Washington and New Mexico.

Let us raise our glasses, then, to the deepest things we know and share, to the human conscience in so many words, and toast to articulating those values, successfully, in the halls of power and in our communities in 2008.

2. End-of-year congressional update

a. Overall: nuclear weapons industry wins some, loses some

Nuclear weapons policy was largely determined through the appropriations process this year, as it has been for the last few years.

We went to Congress and the Executive branch with a number of concerns and proposals; of these we thought that *halting funding for the following projects and programs were the most important nuclear weapons policy goals nationwide* (in declining order of importance):

- The Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) construction project at LANL, with its essential security component the Nuclear Materials Safeguards and Security Upgrade Project (NMSSUP), and
- The RRW program.

Following these, the next two objectives were of more or less equal priority to us:

- Cutting pit production operating funds (deep cuts were needed; the House passed cuts of about half), and
- Cutting nuclear weapons activities funding overall (we proposed cuts in the 15% range; the House passed a 6% cut from FY07 funding).

We cared about and worked on a couple of dozen other issues, mostly related to these, but these four were the most important.

We think it was, and still is, more important to stop the CMRR/NMSSUP project than the RRW for a number of reasons. The CMRR project complex (the two projects mentioned are only part of what is involved) creates realities on the ground, while the RRW – a name for something which does not exist and could never exist without the CMRR/NMSSUP – does not. The RRW *per se* was also a relatively small program, though of high symbolic importance.

The CMRR/NMSSUP transcends the RRW. Its purpose was and is to build new weapons, whether the “RRW” or some other “acronym-of-the-year.”

Therefore if the CMRR/NMSSUP were funded (and it was; the combined projects were finally funded for FY08 at 86% of the President’s request, after being zeroed by the House), the RRW would not in any concrete sense be stopped.

From this perspective, the total “RRW” effort now continues under these other names. Since weapons program acronyms are lightning rods for opposition, the best course for NNSA would be just to build the factories and dispense with the named weapons programs.

It is the CMRR, not the RRW design effort *per se*, that establishes the timetable for new weapons. Trident replacement warheads were already largely designed by 2000 in a prior program, the Submarine Warhead Protection Program (pdf). (See also this 2/6/06 press release.)

Neither does the RRW program establish the maximum rate at which it could be produced, or the flexibility with which new designs *in general* could be built, quite likely with more than one such design in parallel. The CMRR/NMSSUP does that. It is the actual facilities and trained staff available which limit the process and which establish production capability and capacity. These in turn take many years and billions of dollars to procure.

The provision of new warhead factories (at LANL and at the Y-12 site in Tennessee) was to our knowledge not opposed by the arms control community this year. As one honest arms control lobbyist explained that allowing pit production at LANL is “the compromise we have made.”

It is worthwhile pointing out that the deep cuts proposed for LANL by the House were mostly the result of cutting pit production. LANL got most of its money, but pit production now threatens to become LANL’s primary identity and mission. (The difference between the House and Senate markup for LANL due entirely to policy differences concerning pit production was some \$251 M, composed of a \$106 M difference in pit manufacturing and certification, a \$96 M difference in CMRR, and a \$50 M difference in NMSSUP.

Thus more than half the difference between the House funding bill as passed and the proposed (but never passed) Senate bill can be attributed to the House's efforts to keep LANL from rushing to be this nation's new "right-sized" Rocky Flats and to keep the nation as a whole from rushing into building such a thing.

It was a given that there would be no funds provided for a larger pit factory facility. Both the House as a whole and the Senate Appropriations Committee opposed that portion of the President's request.

The quickest way to see the details in the nuclear weapons budget that finally resulted is to look at this report (budget tables included): <http://www.rules.house.gov/110/text/omni/jes/jesdivc.pdf>.

So as we enter 2008 all the major nuclear weapons policy issues are still "on the table." In addition, though the federal government drives the policy bus, it does not make the road. "Facts on the ground" will have their say, convenient or not. Facts not yet taken into account within the "nuclear weapons echo chamber" come in all shapes and sizes, from local issues to global ones, and they run the gamut from fiscal and infrastructure realities to sociological and moral ones. It is not clear, for example, that it is possible to make plutonium pits without resorting to a "heroic" production mode that denies particular dangers and risks. It is not clear that it is possible to build a "high-reliability" nuclear production culture in northern New Mexico in the absence of shared social purpose.

Perhaps you will join us in the coming year in articulating the increasing number of reasons it is a very bad idea to resume warhead production.

It is only fitting that Senator Domenici should have the last word. He seems to have had the last word in this year's budget negotiations, as usual. In an article by John Fleck of the *Albuquerque Journal* ("Bill Takes Smaller Bite of Labs," December 17, 2007, probably behind a paywall), we find

...Mello noted the budget includes a \$75 million down payment on a new plutonium lab at Los Alamos that could ultimately cost more than a billion dollars [actually, more than \$2 billion] and that could serve a central role in future nuclear weapons manufacturing at the New Mexico lab.

That sets the stage for the new warhead design effort to be revived in some new form, Mello said.

Domenici agreed, saying he expected the Reliable Replacement Warhead or something like it to re-emerge "sooner rather than later." (emphasis added)

b. Domenici as effective as ever, seems to be aiming for a permanent legacy of uncontrollable proliferation and teradollar waste

We usually find ourselves in agreement with Senator Domenici regarding what matters in the weapons policy business, as in the example above, though we nearly always disagree on what should be done.

There's no need to belabor the Senator's role in promoting nuclear weapons and nuclear power.

What is easily forgotten, however, is the extent to which this is not a feature of Mr. Domenici personally but rather a structural aspect of the situation in New Mexico. Senator Domenici's predecessor Clinton Anderson, a Democrat, played a major role in nuclear policy as Chair of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy in the 84th and 86th congresses; the Price-Anderson Act bears his name. Domenici's successor, Republican or Democrat, is likely to be a strong booster of the nuclear weapons laboratories. These labs are sure to try to use the new senator's office and its occupant to the maximum extent they can to further their corporate and ideological interests.

It's very far beyond the scope of this note (and our current efforts) to describe Senator Domenici's efforts on behalf of nuclear power (including the most speculative and destructive forms). Domenici's nuclear efforts have been nothing short of Herculean, although it is not yet clear if the federal government will throw enough money at the nuclear industry to overcome a variety of powerful physical, economic, and political realities.

Make no mistake: these are not energy programs in the usual sense of the term. The scale is too large, the many commitments too great. They would, if realized, reconstruct much of American society and its economy, as well as much of its foreign relations, in the nuclear image. *That*, not energy, sustainability, or quality of life, is the whole point of the exercise. Such a path has virtually unlimited advantages for the corporations involved.

If embraced on a sufficient scale to make a difference, Domenici's nuclear plans would spend, very inefficiently and with multi-decade time lags, essentially all the capital we would need to cope successfully

with global warming or the energy crisis now dawning upon us. Again, this is not a problem, because acquiring that capital is the goal of the institutions involved.

Returning to nuclear weapons issues, Senator Domenici seems at the end to have given up RRW, which he supported, in favor of retaining the CMRR/NMSSUP project. We agree with him: the CMRR and related projects are indeed more important – to halt, not to fund.

c. Udall talks “diversification” but works to maintain weapons funding; Bingaman does nothing we know of

Congressman Tom Udall and Senator Jeff Bingaman were two of the biggest disappointments this year. Peter Neils summarized Congressman Udall’s actions this summer, for which he was unfairly criticized from the political right, in [this op-ed](#).

The simple story is this: neither Udall nor Bingaman did anything this year, or last year, or any year in the past decade, to prevent a pit factory from being built at LANL.

Once the Senator did request a summary of findings on pit longevity, but that study had in effect been underway for years, with a well-known and widely-awaited data delivery schedule.

This year, as in that prior case, the Senator waited to see which way the wind was blowing before injecting himself into the process, if he ever did. His office consistently refused to help on any of our legislative issues.

In the final appropriations negotiations, certainly Udall and probably Bingaman must have been involved. The House Appropriations Committee, on which Udall sits, would not have finalized the fate of a \$2 billion facility in any congressperson’s district without careful consideration of that person’s wishes. Chairman Obey, or staff, would have spoken with Congressman Udall or his staff.

In short, Udall, under attack for being “soft” on lab funding from the right and running for the Senate, must have given a pass to pit production at LANL, just as Domenici wanted. It is difficult to believe that Bingaman, for whom LANL employees comprise his largest career source of donations, was not also involved.

At present, Udall is running ahead of Rep. Wilson, Domenici’s protégé, for senate. By not opposing pit production appropriations, Udall could avoid being tarred as weak on defense or insufficiently supportive of the labs. It is quite possible that he was not asked by too many to stop pit production because of the risk it could pose to gaining another seat for Democrats in the Senate.

3. Breakfast discussions recommence THIS WEEK (Jan. 9 & 10)

Regular weekly breakfast discussion meetings, open to the public, are recommencing this week. They run from 7:25 am to 8:45 am or a little longer; a light breakfast is provided (donation requested).

We’ll meet TOMORROW, Wednesday, January 9th at the Albuquerque Mennonite Church, 1300 Girard NE, and THURSDAY, January 10th in Santa Fe at the United Church of Santa Fe, 1804 Arroyo Chamiso.

At this week’s discussions we will provide detailed handouts about what is popularly called “peak oil” and related issues concerning natural gas, which centrally affects nuclear decisions of all kinds.

At the following week’s meetings (the week of January 14th) we will provide some background and useful references about the unfolding financial crisis, which is already affecting everything we do (though to us it is as clear as mud).

4. Solstice disarmament walk (Dec. 21-24): report and plans for June

We had a wonderful time, blisters and all. A report, with a few photos, is posted [here](#).

We hope to do this again in June, at the other (warmer) solstice. All parameters of that June walk (route, dates, logistics, activities) are TBD. If you think you might be interested let us know! You will be hearing more about this in the coming months.

5. NNSA releases latest new plan for the warhead complex

It can be found at <http://www.nnsa.doe.gov/complextransformation.htm>. We haven't absorbed all the details yet; there will be plenty of time for that in the coming weeks. As noted above, this plan entails a functional expansion within a slightly smaller physical footprint and, it is alleged, a slightly smaller budget. The expected rate of staff decline (about 2% per year) lies within normal attrition rates.

Despite its "small is beautiful" exterior, NNSA's plan embodies a policy vision that assumes significant production of new kinds of nuclear warheads in new, flexible production facilities. It assumes that the U.S. will retain a large arsenal of nuclear weapons for the foreseeable future.

For these reasons the plan is not yet compatible with U.S. nonproliferation goals and with U.S. treaty obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), as adjudicated by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and as almost universally interpreted in NPT forums. Neither is it yet easily reconciled with popular American opinion, common morality, or a clear-eyed vision of what national security actually requires at the present historical moment.

Decisions made in DC don't stay in DC; while it may be possible to convince a compliant and complicit Congress whose policy vision is impaired by a lust for pork-barrel spending that this plan is treaty- and non-proliferation friendly, it will not be possible to convince most of the countries in the world that this plan is a step toward ending nuclear apartheid.

This is less our opinion than an intractable reality from outside the nuclear weapons bubble that nuclear planners must take into account lest, in their zeal, they undermine U.S. national security.

NNSA's successive visions for a renewed warhead complex, starting with one issued in December of 1988 (even before Rocky Flats closed), have never been fully realized. Cost escalation, cancellations, and changes of direction have been the norm.

Any foreseeable U.S. stockpile, even a large one (if for some deluded reason that was desired), could be safely and reliably maintained in its entirety for several decades to come with a much smaller investment, supporting a workforce of about 50%, not 75%, of today's. New factories are not needed.

At the three laboratories and Nevada Test Site (NTS) especially, deeper cuts are called for. LANL and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) could easily perform all their necessary nuclear weapons missions if each had about one-third of their existing nuclear weapons workforces. There would be little pedagogical value (domestic or international) in achieving these lower employment levels by mere attrition.

On February 8, 1992, House Science Committee Chairman George Brown (D-Riverside, CA) wrote Secretary of Energy James Watkins regarding the future of the DOE nuclear weapons laboratories. The problem, as he saw it, was that

...the end of the Cold War has left the DOE weapons labs scrambling to define new missions for themselves, yet they are all reaching for the same new missions....With the end of the Cold War, do we still need three nuclear weapons labs, each funded at approximately one billion dollars per year and each with employment of about 8,000 people?

His answer was no. Among other measures, Brown advocated shrinking budgets.

Reduce the DOE nuclear weapons research, development, and testing budget by 20 percent per year over the next four years...the annual nuclear weapons RDT&E budget of nearly two billion per year could be cut in half.

Brown's "one billion" 1992 dollars, inflated to 2007 dollars, is about \$1.5 B. That is also the average DOE funding for these same labs today. (Overall budgets for the three labs are about one-third greater than this, falling in the \$2 B range, on the average). His employment estimate roughly holds if subcontractors are excluded.

Brown's bolder vision of deeper cuts at the labs should be incorporated in the plan unveiled today, which is better on the subject of the production plants than it is for the labs.

Beyond all this, this plan assumes that the United States wishes to be the world's sole hyperpower, capable of extending its will across land, sea, sky, space, and information indefinitely, and that the DOE's three nuclear laboratories can continue to participate to varying degrees in fostering the delusion of that "full-spectrum dominance" across all conflict scales and forms. Nuclear weapons are declining in importance somewhat in this vision of universal compellance, but this plan does assume that these three labs, historically self-identified as core founts of U.S. national power, will remain that, albeit through a changing mix of technologies. For this reason as well as for the contingent design and certification of novel nuclear explosives and their weaponization packages, hugely excessive nuclear design and simulation capabilities are to be maintained in all three locations.

What national security requires today is that we *run*, not walk, away from what theologian Walter Wink called the "myth of redemptive violence," as Santa Fe activist John Otter has pointed out, and toward what LASG board member Astrid Webster calls "full spectrum sustainability." To truly insure the safety of its population, the U.S. must now invest literally trillions of dollars and millions of full-time labor equivalents in sustainable infrastructure, and do so very soon, or all the nuclear weapons and global terror wars in the world will not prevent us from collapsing into a centrally-controlled, penurious, national security state with few genuine freedoms. I am afraid that is the real, hidden denouement of NNSA's plan if implemented in a context of "business as usual" elsewhere. Not that anyone intends such a thing, of course. But that is now the natural outcome of our long fascination with mass destruction. Eventually you get what you pay for, though perhaps not in the exact way expected. NNSA has a specific responsibility; they have tried to fulfill it, but there is a locomotive coming and they would have us build new playgrounds for the military savants right on its track.

Clearly, the pinnacle of American political and military power was in the past. This nuclear plan fails to acknowledge current as well as perennial realities and to downsize accordingly with all due speed. We need to quickly shift our emphasis to better security investments, those which emphasize shared human, economic, and environmental security worldwide, and do so in a way that clearly signals a different direction in U.S. foreign policy to all parties.

6. Rep. Tauscher (D-CA) introduces bill calling for test ban ratification

On December 17 Representative Ellen Tauscher introduced a resolution (H. Res. 882) calling on the Senate to "initiate a bipartisan process to give its advice and consent to ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty [CTBT]. Apparently the idea is to get this issue put high on a new president's "wish list" and early in the new Senate's calendar.

It is important to ratify the CTBT, but perhaps not at any cost. If we are not wary, the ratification process could be used by the nuclear weapons labs as a vehicle to gain the consent of a Democratic Administration to new militaristic funding streams, with results that would need to be weighed, to the extent possible, against the benefits of ratification at this time. Obviously one of these labs (Lawrence Livermore) is in Ms. Tauscher's district, so this may be one motivation for her action.

If additional surrogate design and testing capabilities were provided to mollify CTBT “doubters,” the nonproliferation value of the CTBT would decline, probably very far, because the CTBT would be seen by many key states as deeply hypocritical, a feature of a global system of “nuclear apartheid” rather than as part of the cure for it. In this regard recall it is not the nuclear explosive package which is the primary locus of innovation in nuclear weapons systems, but rather the non-nuclear components overall, including arming, firing, and fuzing, terminal guidance, guidance overall, targeting, command, control, and intelligence, integration with other STRATCOM capabilities in Prompt Global Strike, and so on. Mere nuclear maintenance allows militarily- and policy-significant innovation in all these areas for rich, technologically-advanced states. In many ways the CTBT is an anachronism – a highly-symbolic anachronism which also does have practical value – provided it does not degrade mutual nuclear security by being twisted into yet another tool of attempted U.S. and G8 domination, or by means of ill-considered concessions to the nuclear labs before and during the ratification process.

Best wishes to all in the new year!

Greg Mello, for the Los Alamos Study Group

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