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Transforming the U.S. Strategic Posture and Weapons Complex For Transition to a Nuclear Weapons-Free World

"...as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act... So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." President Barack Obama, April 5, 2009, Prague, Czech Republic.

Washington, DC - - Today, April 8th, in the nation's capital, Nuclear Watch New Mexico and the Nuclear Weapons Complex Consolidation Policy Network released a major report outlining how the President's vision of a nuclear weapons-free world can begin to be concretely realized in the near-term. First, the United States must declare that its strategic stockpile exists for only one purpose — to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others until the world is free of nuclear weapons. For that interim deterrence, a total stockpile of 500 warheads is more than sufficient, and the nuclear weapons complex can be downsized from eight sites to three.

Maintaining a Potent Deterrence

The U.S. stockpile has been extensively tested. Further, recent lifetime studies have shown it to be even more reliable than previously thought. The stockpile can be maintained through a nuts-and-bolts "curatorship" program, instead of the expensive and speculative "Stockpile Stewardship" Program that erodes confidence by intentionally introducing changes to existing nuclear weapons. Under a minimalist (but still extremely potent) nuclear deterrent, U.S. strategic forces can be progressively reduced step-by-step and the weapons complex downsized accordingly, in alignment with the President's stated national goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Re-focusing Research Critical for the 21st Century

Our plan is the plan that the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) under the Bush Administration should have proposed for its misnamed "Complex Transformation" — but did not. NNSA's archaic plan is dead on arrival in the Obama Administration, while our plan sets a reasonable path for 21st Century security on which the U.S. can and should embark. Our plan takes the Lawrence Livermore Lab out of nuclear weapons programs and directs it toward the energy, environmental and global climate change research that our country so desperately needs. It also ends NNSA control of the Sandia Lab in California and the Nevada Test Site by 2012, and ends weapons work at the Kansas City Plant by 2015. As the arsenal is reduced toward 500 warheads, the Savannah River Site near Aiken, SC, and then the Y-12 Site near Oak Ridge, TN, would also cease to be part of the nuclear weapons complex.

Reducing the Nuclear Weapons Workload

Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch NM declared, "Instead of transferring nuclear weapons work from other sites, we believe that already existing capabilities at three remaining sites can more than adequately perform our plan's sharply reduced nuclear weapons workload. These remaining sites would be: The Los Alamos Lab for nuclear components curatorship, Sandia-New Mexico for non-nuclear components curatorship, and the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, TX, for accelerated dismantlements and storage of plutonium pit "triggers" while they await final disposal. Given a 500-warhead stockpile maintained through curatorship, interim activities while working toward a nuclear weapons-free world should result in no net increase in nuclear weapons work or funding at any of the three remaining sites, other than urgently needed dismantlements and the safeguarding of nuclear weapons materials."

Transparency and Mission Diversification

While we are confident in the merits of our plan, we strongly emphasize that due process needs to be followed before implementation. For example, there has to be analysis and public review of any "major federal action" under the National Environmental Policy Act to ensure that potential environmental impacts are properly considered, mitigated, or best of all avoided. Environmental justice issues and Tribal concerns

must also be met, the latter on a government-to-government basis as needed.

The issue of mission diversification at the nuclear weapons laboratories is outside the scope of this report. Nevertheless, our plan provides the basis for deep change at the Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories from which mission diversification can spring. First, Sandia has already been by far the most successful of the three nuclear weapons design laboratories in securing new missions, with nuclear weapons already accounting for less than half of its annual institutional budget. That trend is expected to continue, and would only accelerate under our plan.

In contrast, under the Bush Administration the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) remained two-thirds funded by nuclear weapons programs. Citizen victories against proposed new-design nuclear weapons—the so-called Reliable Replacement Warheads and related expanded plutonium pit “trigger” production—have made the high water mark of nuclear weapons work begin to recede at the Lab. With its curatorship approach toward maintenance of a radically reduced stockpile, our plan would finally end the dominance of the nuclear weapons research and production mission at LANL.

Expanding Possibilities for LANL

In its place, we emphasize the need for expanded nonproliferation programs, for which the Lab can provide important technical underpinnings for arms control treaty verification and homeland security against smuggled WMDs or materials. Already existing energy efficiency programs at LANL, such as fuel cell and improved electrical transmission research, could also greatly aid the country toward achieving energy independence. Supercomputers used primarily for nuclear weapons simulations should be redirected toward urgently needed purposes, such as modeling global climate change. Finally, LANL should be comprehensively cleaned up, so that the environmental threat to the Rio Grande and groundwater is permanently eliminated in our semi-arid state.

Budgeting

It is essential that taxpayers’ money be conserved whenever possible, now more so than ever. Our recommendations would cut nation-wide NNSA spending on nuclear weapons by \$2.3 billion in fiscal year 2010, compared to the recently released budget request of \$6.3 billion. By 2020, our recommendations would further reduce NNSA nuclear weapons spending to around \$2 billion in FY09 dollars, one-third of what it is today. Specific to LANL, we would immediately eliminate funding for the Lab’s proposed \$2 billion-and-climbing plutonium facility.

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The members of the Nuclear Weapons Complex Consolidation Policy Network include Nuclear Watch New Mexico along with national organizations: the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Project On Government Oversight; Tri-Valley CAREs, near the Lawrence Livermore National Lab; the Greater Kansas City Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, near the Kansas City Plant; and JustPeace of Texas, near the Pantex Plant.

The Network’s report’s executive summary, full report and map of the current and our proposed nuclear weapons complex is available at <<http://www.nukewatch.org/>>

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