

Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

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NUKES “FOREVER”-- US PLANS REVEALED

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK -- According to United States Department of Energy (DOE) documents just made public for the first time at the United Nations, the US has plans to keep nuclear weapons “forever.” This is in spite of the thirty-year agreement signed by the US as part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) under which the US has pledged to end the nuclear arms race and eliminate its nuclear arsenal.

As recently as last week the US renewed what it called an “unequivocal” agreement to the “ultimate” goal of complete nuclear disarmament in a joint statement with the other four major nuclear powers – Russia, Britain, France and China – released at the month-long NPT Review Conference now underway at the United Nations.

The documents revealing plans that would enable the US to keep nuclear weapons “forever” were acquired by the Los Alamos Study Group, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that monitors the US nuclear weapons laboratory at Los Alamos New Mexico. The documents were unveiled at a UN meeting between NPT delegates and NGOs on Wednesday evening by Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Director of the California-based Western States Legal Foundation, an NGO that researches and analyzes US nuclear weapons policy and activities.

The documents reveal US plans, presented at a DOE briefing in March this year by A.E. Whiteman of the DOE’s Albuquerque New Mexico Office of Technology, as part of a report on restructuring of US nuclear weapons production facilities and technologies. Whiteman outlined what will be required to ensure that US nuclear weapons “remain viable forever” under the so-called “Stockpile Stewardship” program. Requirements, he said, include “replacement and certification of every part of every weapon.” A program called “SLEP” (Stockpile Life Extension Program), Whiteman said, “will be the driver for the replacement and certification.” According to the documents, Stockpile Stewardship is intended to maintain US nuclear weapons “indefinitely,” without underground nuclear testing.

Commenting on the revelations, Cabasso told NGOs and UN delegates that in combing through government statements, her organization has found numerous references to US reliance on nuclear weapons “for the foreseeable future” and even “indefinitely.” However, she said,

“this is the first official reference we have found confirming US plans for keeping nuclear weapons forever.” She added: “Viewed in combination with the shocking US ‘talking points’ recently obtained by The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists declaring that both the United States and Russia ‘will possess under the terms of any possible future arms reduction agreements, large, diversified, viable arsenals of strategic offensive weapons,’ it is has become undeniable that the real US intention is ‘nukes forever.’”

According to Greg Mello, Executive Director of the Los Alamos Study Group: “These documents reveal a resurgent nuclear weapons complex that is completely out of step with the requirements of the NPT. These legal requirements are seldom mentioned in DOE documents and have had no effect whatsoever on US weapons production plans. The DOE’s proposal to spend more than \$4 billion on new nuclear weapons production facilities and to produce at least 450 plutonium bomb “triggers” per year is outrageous and irrational. We call on the international community to help up put the brakes on all plans for new nuclear weapons design and production facilities. If built the facilities will be used.”

John Burroughs, Executive Director of the Lawyers’ Committee on Nuclear Policy in New York stated: “US plans to modernize its nuclear arsenal and to maintain nuclear arms indefinitely flagrantly violate both provisions of the NPT disarmament obligation – the requirement to end the nuclear arms race and the requirement for good faith negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament.”

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8/25/00 For Immediate Release

DOE Proposes to Bring 1,000 Drums of Transuranic Waste to Los Alamos No Other Options To Be Studied, DOE Silent on Final Disposition

Contact: Greg Mello, 982-7747

LOS ALAMOS--The Department of Energy (DOE) is proposing this week to bring some 21,000 "sealed sources" of radiation, comprising approximately 30,000 curies of transuranic (TRU) waste, to Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for indefinite storage--and, quite possibly, on-site disposal. In a letter and "Supplement Analysis" dated August 22, David Gurule of DOE's Los Alamos office states that no further environmental or safety analysis is necessary before bringing the waste to LANL.

According to DOE, these wastes consist "primarily" of plutonium-238, plutonium-239, and americium-241, associated with other materials like beryllium, a chemical toxin and listed hazardous waste. No further information about the quantities of radioisotopes and hazardous constituents has been provided.

Some of the wastes are defense-related--the smaller part, it is believed--and this portion will be earmarked for possible disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad.

For the rest of the waste, there is no storage, processing, or disposal plan, other than storage at LANL for an indefinite period. In lieu of a plan today, DOE proposes to analyze disposition options for this waste in about six years.

In fact, no specific environmental study of the hazard of storing this waste at LANL has ever been done, let alone any analysis of alternatives. DOE's only analysis to date of long-term waste storage, the 1999 LANL Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS), was a generic analysis which did not address the storage of these wastes.

Much of this waste is to be stored at LANL in an old building, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) building, located directly over an active earthquake fault. LANL's calculations suggest that this building would collapse in the event of a modest-sized earthquake. Seismic-induced ground rupture at this location is also a hazard.

What is not stored at the CMR Building would be stored at LANL's main waste storage and disposal site, TA-54, which is vulnerable to fire (as noted in the SWEIS--and recent experience), to terrorist attack, and to theft.

TA-54 already contains more than 10 million cubic feet of radioactive and chemical waste in disposal cells below the surface, and roughly 60,000 drums' worth of waste is stored above the ground.

This week's proposal is the first time that commercial nuclear waste, some of it originating in the civilian nuclear power industry, has been proposed for long-term storage and (although this possibility is not explicitly stated) possible disposal at this site. Because of their long-lived and highly-dangerous nature, there is no disposal site in the United States licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to receive these "greater than Class C" nuclear wastes, and none are proposed to be so licensed.

This week's proposal is also the first time that large quantities of prospective WIPP waste are to be shipped first to Los Alamos for consolidation and long-term storage.

Gurule's letter says that DOE will not officially declare this material "waste" until some time in the future. In this way, DOE and LANL apparently hope to at least temporarily evade NRC licensing requirements, as well as the hazardous waste permitting requirements of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA).

It is doubtful whether the CMR Building could meet RCRA storage requirements, given its seismic hazard.

The CMR Building could not, in fact, even be built in its present location and handle nuclear materials under current DOE orders.

These wastes would be transported to Los Alamos in approximately 1,000 shielded metal drums. TRUPACT containers would not be used.

Background

The waste in question is comprised of nuclear sources which are typically sealed in multiple stainless steel jackets, and which have been in use in a variety of industries, universities, and government laboratories. Tens of thousands of radiation sources, of many types, were placed into private hands beginning in the 1950s; the sealed sources mentioned in this week's announcement are a subset of this larger universe.

Some of these sources definitely comprise a hazard to public and worker safety in their present location. Further, plutonium from these and other sources could be combined to manufacture nuclear weapons or, along with other isotopes like americium, nuclear terrorist devices.

DOE and LANL have had a rather slow-paced, low-priority program in place to collect and chemically separate these waste sources since 1979. Only 1,100 sources have been collected at LANL so far. LANL received a transfusion of money in 1995 to continue and expand this work, but this expansion apparently has not happened. It seems that the separation work, as low-key as it has been, competes for space with other programs deemed more important, such as the manufacture of plutonium "pits" for nuclear weapons.

Further, DOE and LANL fear commingling defense and non-defense waste subsequent to processing, which raises legal questions regarding prospective waste disposal at the WIPP site, which is authorized to receive only military-related transuranic waste. This is important because the manufacture of plutonium pits and other related work at Los Alamos continue to create large volumes of transuranic waste, volumes that could increase if manufacturing activities ramp up in coming years, despite local opposition.

This week's announcement discontinues the chemical separation policy, in which the separated plutonium was added to the nations's surplus.

DOE has several alternatives to the proposed action. These include: 1) collecting and processing these wastes at Los Alamos as originally planned, funded, and begun, which would probably simplify final disposition; 2) consolidating and storing these materials at its current staging locations--which are licensed by the NRC and run by private contractor(s)--until something better than another "interim" plan is available; or 3) collecting and storing the civilian portion of the sealed sources at a much more secure storage site, such as the large Manzano Nuclear Weapons Storage Area, which is now unused and which could store, and more safely protect, not just these sources, but tens of tons of plutonium.

There is in any case no compelling reason to bring commercial nuclear waste to LANL other than processing--unless, of course, on-site disposal were envisioned.

There has been no environmental, cost, and proliferation analysis of alternatives such as these, and none is planned. DOE's proposed action regarding these sealed sources, like so many actions proposed by the agency, seems to be an "interim" step in what often seems like an endless shell game, moving waste from site to site, serving what are often unstated, and at best highly-uncertain, goals.

ENDS

Los Alamos Study Group

For Immediate Release 10/17/00

Richardson Begins Negotiations to Extend UC Nuke Lab Contracts—Without Competition

Despite Massive Performance Failures at Los Alamos, Livermore,
Richardson to Extend 58-Year Sweetheart Deal to 2005
Contact: Greg Mello, 505- 982-7747

SANTA FE – Today Secretary Richardson agreed to begin exclusive negotiations with the University of California (UC) to extend UC’s management of the Department of Energy’s (DOE’s) two nuclear weapons laboratories until 2005.

This recommendation was part of a package of so-called “reforms” suggested by John Gordon, the new Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Agency Administration (NNSA). These “reforms” were ostensibly drawn up to address the on-going security scandals and project cost overruns at the two laboratories.

According to a DOE press release today, the initial phase of these “reforms”—all of which are apparently subject to UC negotiation and approval—consist of: 1) creating a new UC Vice President, bringing in new subcontractors to “support the lab directors” and “help the new UC [VP] obtain...expertise,” and 3) establish an additional advisory group in the UC President’s office—composed of the senior lab managers. These are the very people whom that office is supposed to be managing.

“These so-called ‘reforms’ are nothing more than window dressing. They have no substance at all. The problems they are designed to solve are in public relations and morale, not security or project management,” said Study Group director Greg Mello. “Actually, there is no outside oversight of the labs--not by DOE, and certainly not by the UC office in Oakland. If Los Alamos has a problem, the labs merely run to Senator Domenici, in whose Senate office Los Alamos maintains a full-time lobbyist at UC—that is, DOE--expense. Because of Domenici’s power, the regional press won’t touch this story. Numerous DOE contract reform advocates, contract negotiators, inspectors, and auditors have all told us that because of these political connections, their hands are tied. The labs run themselves.”

During the past year, the long-standing security problems at Los Alamos have been revealed to the nation in the details of the Wen Ho Lee story, as well as in the circumstances surrounding a temporarily-missing set of hard drives which contained the designs of most of the world’s nuclear weapons. A small group of top weapons designers is still refusing to cooperate with FBI investigators regarding this latter incident.

At Livermore, the General Accounting Office (GAO) found that numerous senior lab managers have intentionally misled Congress regarding billions of dollars of eventual cost overruns in the nation’s largest new physics facility, the National Ignition Facility (NIF).

The lab contracts make UC, in dollar terms, the largest contractor for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the world, responsible not only for design and testing but increasingly for production as well, and one of the five or six largest defense contractors in the United States.

ENDS

Los Alamos Study Group

For Immediate Release 11/9/00

Los Alamos Weapons Budget Reaches All-time High, Exceeds 3-Year Manhattan Project Total for Site

Contact: Greg Mello, 505-982-7747

Quick Summary

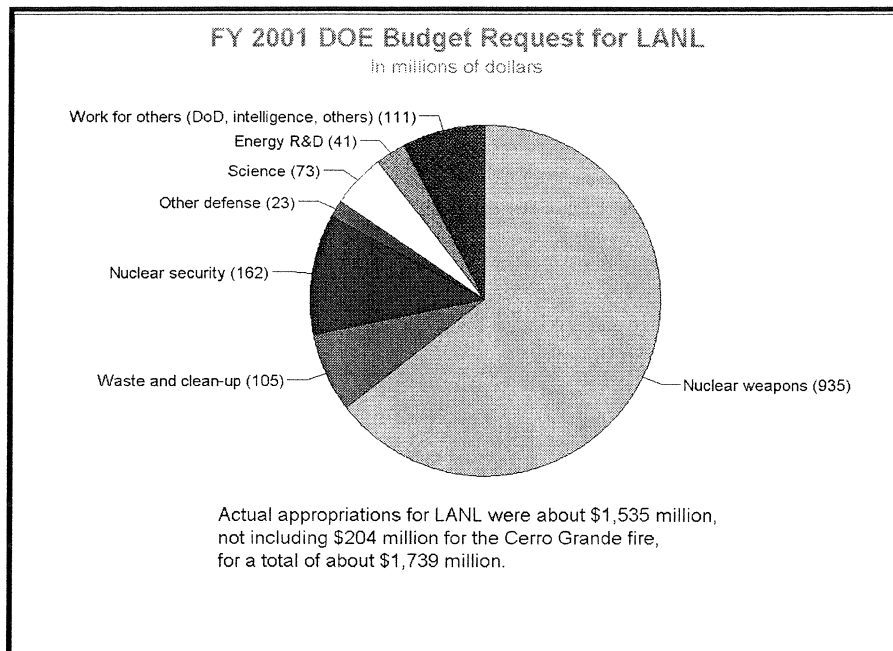
- Recent analysis shows that annual nuclear weapons spending at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) has *doubled* in the last six years, in constant year 2000 dollars.
- Nuclear weapons spending at the lab is now, for first time, more than *twice* average Cold-War levels, and is more than *triple* the spending level in the 1970s, again in constant dollars.
- If waste disposal costs are included, weapons spending growth is even greater.
- This record spending occurs even as the Department of Energy (DOE) and LANL seek billions in extra funds for the design and production of both old and new varieties of nuclear weapons. DOE's Inspector General recently called for national nuclear infrastructure investments of "\$5 to \$8 billion more than current budgeted amounts [\$50 billion] over the next ten years." The current LANL site plan calls for investment of over \$5 billion in new construction to support expansion of local nuclear weapons programs.
- Increased LANL nuclear design and production activities pivot on the continued availability and economy of on-site radioactive waste disposal; current site commitments do not include cleanup or stabilization of hundreds of contaminated sites and two dozen nuclear and chemical dump sites.

SANTA FE—Are you—or is your child's school--a little short on money lately? Well, Los Alamos lab isn't. For the first time, lawmakers--led by Senator Pete Domenici--have given Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) an annual appropriation for nuclear weapons design, testing, and production that exceeds, in constant dollars, the *total* amount of money spent to acquire, build, and operate Los Alamos lab and its "Trinity" testing site for the duration of the Manhattan Project.

The total Manhattan Project spending at Los Alamos from 1943 through 1945, including everything, was \$74 million in then-year dollars, worth \$919 million today.¹

This year, Los Alamos will spend about \$875 million on its nuclear weapons design and production business, but next year, in FY2001, funds are appropriated to break the "Manhattan barrier," with its nuclear weapons allowance rising to above \$1 billion dollars for the year. And if the special "contingency" appropriation granted the lab for cleaning up after the Cerro Grande fire is counted, the total LANL appropriation for next year will leap to about \$1,740 million.

The relative proportions between LANL's programs can be seen in the pie chart on the next page, which is based on DOE's budget request to Congress. The dollar figures for some of the tasks shown were increased substantially by congressional action, which gave DOE's "Weapons Activities" account for FY2001 some \$394 million more than requested and \$606 million more than in FY2000.

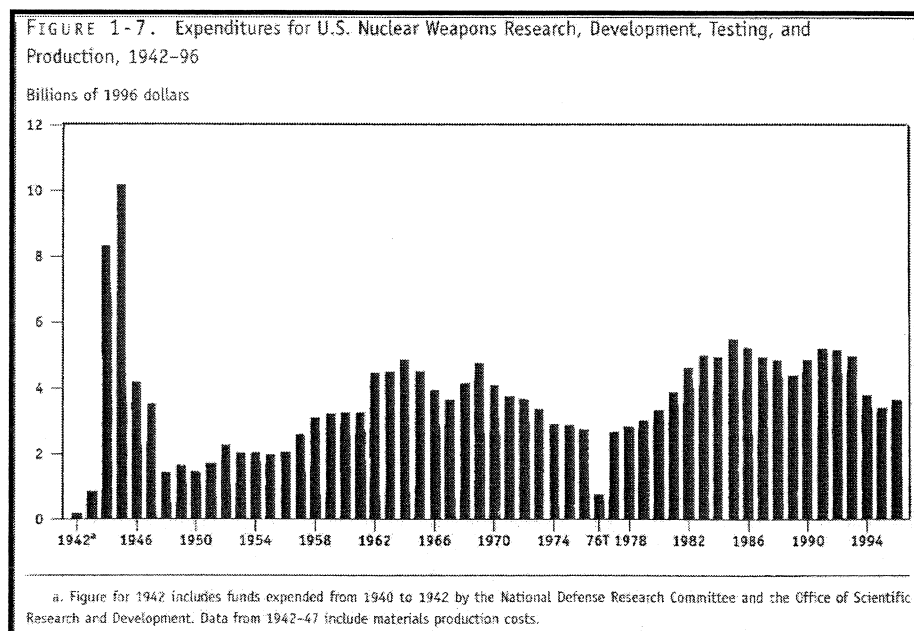


Sources: DOE FY 2001 Congressional Budget Request, Senator Domenici's press release of 9/27/00, and the LANL draft FY 2001-2006 *Institutional Plan*.

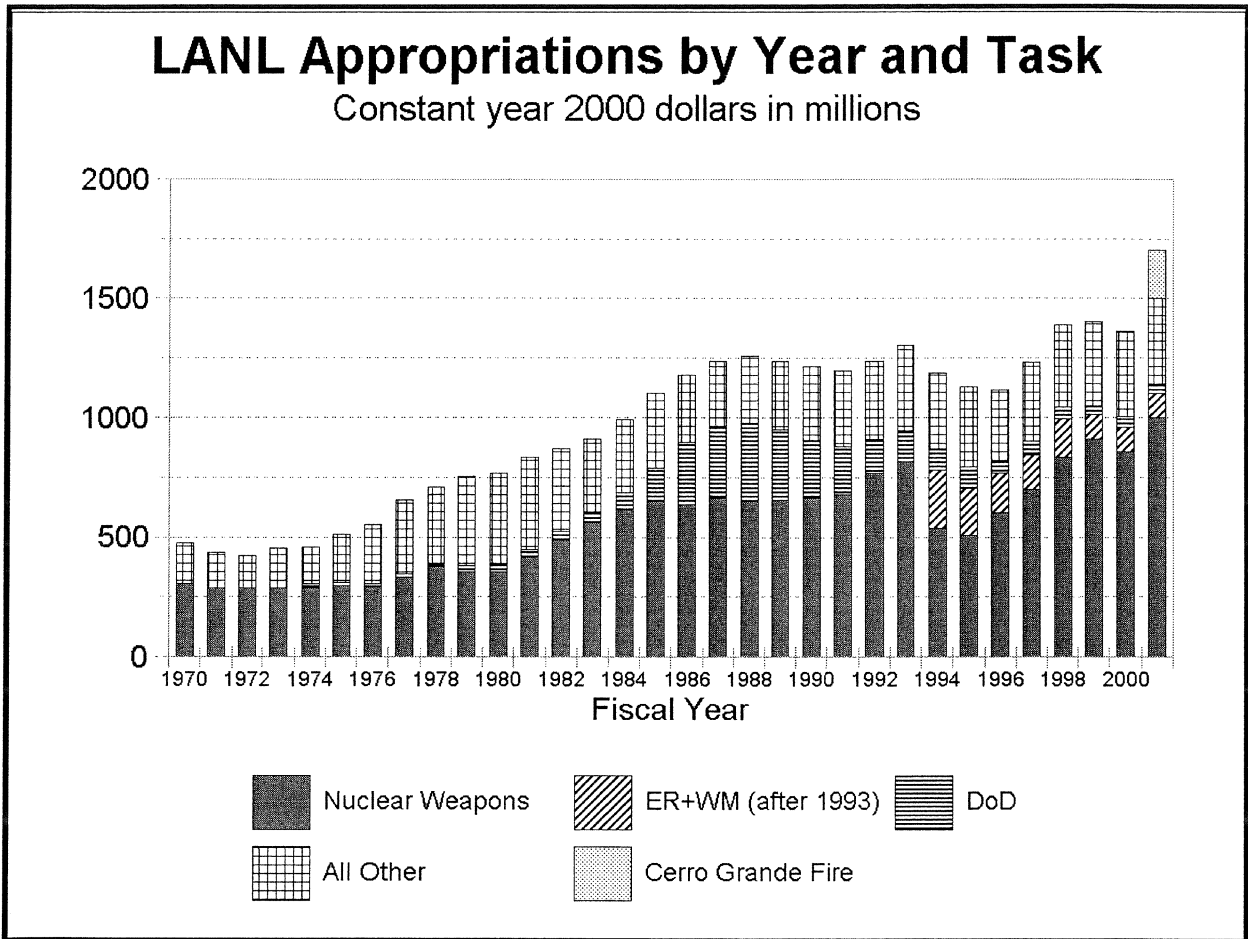
This level of nuclear weapons funding at the lab is unprecedented, and far exceeds LANL's typical Cold War appropriation. For example, it is more than *double* the constant-dollar, average nuclear weapons spending at the lab for the 27-year period from 1970 (the earliest date for which we have data) through 1996, which was \$495 million, in year 2000 dollars. This average--what might be called the "late Cold War average" funding level at the lab--includes the effects of the Reagan

defense build-up in the 1980s, which brought significant new monies to Los Alamos for nuclear weapons and the Star Wars missile defense program. Not only this, but next year's appropriation is more than *triple* the average annual appropriation for the "detente" decade of the 1970s, a mere \$310 million in today's dollars. These late-cold-war-era nuclear weapons appropriations are shown in the chart on the next page.

While data is not as easily obtained for nuclear weapons spending in the early years of Los Alamos, an close indication of the relative scale of that spending can be obtained from the relative levels of *national* spending for nuclear weapon research, development, testing, production ("RDT&P"), which is shown (in constant 1996 dollars) on the right. It can be seen that the spending for RDT&P,



From Stephen Schwartz, ed., *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940*, Brookings, 1998.



Sources: Office of Technology Assessment, *Defense conversion: Redirecting R&D*, OTA-ITE-552, May 1993, for 1970 through 1993; DOE congressional budget requests and LANL institutional plans, 1994 through 2001; Senator Domenici press release, September 27, 2000. Operating funds only were tabulated by OTA through 1993; OTA also appears to have included waste management and environmental restoration in its nuclear weapons account. After 1993, nuclear weapons capital and construction accounts are included in this task, but not waste and cleanup, as shown. "All other" includes "work for others," including DoD and the intelligence community.

which includes LANL appropriations, was, in constant dollars, at least as great in the period after 1969 (for which we have LANL data) as before this date (for which we do not have LANL data). Therefore if current LANL weapons spending is more than twice that of the late Cold War, it is also more than twice that for the Cold War as a whole.

During the Cold War, environmental costs at LANL, including waste disposal and environmental surveillance, were billed to an overhead account created by "taxing" all lab programs. That is, before the creation of the "environmental management" (EM) account at the DOE, these costs were primarily carried within the nuclear weapons program itself. Properly speaking, the great bulk of these expenses were and are created by the nuclear weapons program. Today, the EM account represents that portion of the environmental cost of the weapons program which the DOE has seen fit to partially internalize. (It is not fully internalized, of course, since DOE has "de-coupled" the environmental costs of its weapons program by creating first a separate account and then, last year,

a separate subagency for nuclear weapons, one without the environmental externalities included.)

In the chart above, EM appropriations at LANL are shown for the period since 1993. To properly compare nuclear weapons expenditures before 1990 with those after this date, these EM expenditures must be added to the nuclear weapons expenditures shown.

While good economics, this is not current DOE accounting practice. The comparisons made here between current and Cold-War levels of nuclear weapons spending do not include modern EM spending.

When the Lion's Share is Not Enough

Space does not permit a discussion of DOE and LANL nuclear weapons budgets in any depth, or of what these funds are meant to accomplish, let alone the degree of confidence with which these hopes are likely to be realized. Neither can we discuss in any depth the plans that LANL and DOE have for the future. These budgets and plans have been the subject of prior analyses by the Study Group as well as by many others, although our information and analyses remain incomplete in many areas. Please contact us if you have specific questions.

Of special note is the LANL site plan, which can be viewed at <<http://www.lanl.gov/csp2000>>. This document describes a proposed sweeping reinvestment in new and replacement facilities at LANL, including some \$5.07 billion in proposed new construction under the DOE's nuclear weapons account. Some of this construction is already underway, but the bulk of it has yet to begin. Much of it has not been approved by Congress. Some of the largest proposed facilities, however, like the \$1.6 billion Advanced Hydrotest Facility, a suite of experimental facilities for conducting high-speed dynamic tomography of plutonium and other explosions, have a great deal of momentum and are crucial to the continued evolution of the U.S. arsenal.

Likewise worthy of brief attention is the recent DOE Inspector General (IG) report, IG-0484, "Management of the Nuclear Weapons Infrastructure." This report quotes unnamed senior officials in the National Nuclear Stewardship Agency (NNSA) and Department of Defense (DoD) as saying that to meet future stockpile requirements, DOE must spend \$5 to 8 billion more than the \$50 billion now planned for nuclear weapons RDT&P in the next decade.

It is apparent from the use of hearsay for its key conclusion that the IG's office made no independent review of this "need." Yet this report joins others to help build a congressional- and media-oriented "case" for large new projects like the Large Scale Pit Facility (LSPF), now estimated to cost \$3 billion, and the Special Materials Facility, a new \$325 million factory for the production of nuclear weapons components made with beryllium and other special materials.

For the first time, the DOE's fiscal year 2001 budget request admitted that some of the pits to be manufactured at Los Alamos and later at the LSPF could be "new-design pits"--meaning pits for new varieties of nuclear weapons. Likewise, the Special Materials Facility is needed urgently, according to the IG, to manufacture parts for the W76 warhead, which is slated to undergo a major functional upgrade to allow these weapons (the most numerous in the stockpile) -to destroy hardened and buried targets, an "improvement" with significant targeting and arms control implications.

Color versions of the LANL-specific charts above are available upon request.

1. Stephen Schwartz, ed., *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940*, Brookings, 1998.