

Will 2010 Bring REAL Reductions in Nuclear Weapons?

“Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

— ARTICLE VI, NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY, RATIFIED BY THE U.S. SENATE ON MARCH 13, 1969 BY A VOTE OF 83-15

“The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War.... 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, SPEAKING IN PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, APRIL 5, 2009

“We believe that funding for such a [nuclear weapons] modernization program... is needed as the U.S. considers the further nuclear weapons reductions...”

— LETTER FROM 41 U.S. SENATORS TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, DECEMBER 15, 2009

Since 1970, when the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) went into force, part of what the Constitution calls the “supreme law of the land” is to comply with Article VI. Successive presidents and congresses have not pursued negotiations for nuclear disarmament, nor has that been the stated policy goal. President Obama’s 2009 Prague speech marked a significant rhetorical change in U.S. policy, and his administration negotiated with Russia a nuclear weapons reduction treaty to supersede the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) that expired on December 5, 2009. The new START treaty was signed on April 8, 2010. The president also has committed to re-submitting to the Senate the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was not ratified, by a vote of 48 in favor, 51 against, on October 13, 1999.

While the Senate did not ratify the CTBT, Congress has provided billions of dollars in funding for nuclear weapons programs over the past decade. In 2008, funding was \$52.4 billion for nuclear weapons, far more than that spent by any other nation. Nevertheless, 41 Senators wrote that they view additional funding for nuclear weapons to be essential before they will consider ratifying the new START treaty or CTBT. The senators called for untold billions more for the Lifetime Extension Programs for the B61 and W76 warheads, uncalculated billions in funding for a new “modern warhead,” and “full funding” for a new plutonium bomb plant at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), uranium production facility at the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee, and a modern pit facility — none of which are designed, but their construction costs would certainly total at least \$15 billion.

Since treaty ratification requires 67 favorable votes from the 100 senators, several of those 41 senators must vote in favor for any nuclear weapons reduction treaty to be ratified. Would other nations, and people in the U.S., see ratification as complying with Article VI if there is also funding for a new weapon and new facilities that could build bombs for decades into the future?

LANL PLUTONIUM BOMB PLANT

While nuclear weapons are a vital national and international issue, they are also an important local matter in New Mexico. Approximately \$5 billion a year of nuclear weapons spending is in the state, primarily at LANL, Sandia National Lab, the air force bases, and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The new LANL plutonium bomb plant (the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility or CMRR-NF) would ensure the lab’s primary purpose remains nuclear weapons design and production, with the resulting contamination, for at least 50 years.



ABOVE: Four B61 nuclear bombs.

RIGHT: Operation Hardtack was a series of underwater nuclear bomb tests conducted by the U.S. in 1958. Photo of the Umbrella test detonation near Enewetak Atoll.



LEFT: Trident II submarine-launched ballistic missile test. These missiles can be armed with nuclear warheads.

As its formal name implies, the new facility would replace the CMR Building, which has operated since 1952. But in recent years, some of the building has been shut down because of safety concerns, including an earthquake fault beneath part of the building.

In April 2003, the Department of Energy (DOE) issued a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the CMRR. Public comments, including by Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, and Sisters of Loretto emphasized opposition to nuclear weapons, stated that there is no need for new nuclear weapons, raised numerous environmental and safety issues, and pointed out that the cost is unknown. In November 2003, the final EIS was issued. It stated that the nuclear weapons debate “is beyond the scope”

of the EIS. “Ball park” construction estimates were \$420 million to \$955 million. Further, “radiological risks to the public and adjacent Pueblo of San Ildefonso would be small.” On February 12, 2004, the Record of Decision stated that the new CMRR would be constructed in two buildings and the existing CMR would be decontaminated and demolished.

The first of the new buildings — Radiological Laboratory/Utility/Office Building (RLUOB) — has been constructed at a cost of \$164 million. The next phase is equipment installation in that building, which has an estimated cost of \$199.4 million and is to be completed in 2013.

The design of the NF is to be done by 2013, at an estimated cost of at least \$517 million. Construction is planned to begin in 2012 before final design is completed, and continue through at least 2020, so that it could begin operations in 2022. The “preliminary cost estimate” for construction now is more than \$2 billion.

Citizen opposition stopped an air quality permit for the NF in 2005. As part of a settlement agreement, LANL holds public meetings twice a year to discuss the CMRR. Among the information at the most recent meeting on March 3, 2010, was the disclosure that plans are to remove 225,000 cubic yards of volcanic ash from the proposed building site and fill the hole with concrete to try to stabilize the new facility against earthquakes.

TENNESSEE URANIUM BOMB PLANT

At the Y-12 plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a uranium bomb plant, called the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) is proposed. About \$200 million has been spent on its design. Construction is to begin in 2012 and be completed by 2018, “with a cost range of \$1.4 billion to \$3.5 billion.”

The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance has led the opposition to the new plant. It advocates that Y-12 commit itself to the dismantlement of nuclear weapons since there is currently a 15-year backlog of retired weapons in Oak Ridge awaiting dismantlement, with more to come as weapons reduction occurs.

WHAT’S HAPPENING IN 2010?

The administration budget request for Fiscal Year 2011 includes \$166 million for design work for the NF, and \$270 million for design and equipment for the new Y-12 plant. Those amounts are part of the \$7 billion for the DOE Nuclear Weapons budget, which is more than a \$600 million increase from this year, and the highest amount in history. That funding will be considered over the next several months in the House and Senate as part of the Energy and Water Appropriations bill.

The new START treaty is to be submitted for Senate for debate and ratification this year.

Citizen participation will play an important role in what funding Congress approves and whether a treaty is ratified without requiring new nuclear warheads, the LANL bomb plant, the Y-12 bomb plant, and other facilities. What’s at stake is not just money, but also whether nuclear weapons reduction really occurs in order to diminish nuclear threats worldwide. ✈

FOR MORE INFORMATION

LANL — www.lanl.gov

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety — www.nuclearactive.org

Nuclear Watch New Mexico — www.nukewatch.org

Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance — www.stopthebombs.org