

(TWILIGHT, MOON RISING, COYOTES SINGING, STARS WHEELING, PATH, COMPANIONS.)

War-life and peace in the U.S. post-democratic decline

Remarks at the Albuquerque Mennonite Church, September 24, 2023, Greg Mello, Los Alamos Study Group

“Save as many as you can.” (from the 2004 movie, “The Day After Tomorrow”)

“The Horsemen of the Apocalypse are already on their way and all hope now is with Lord God the Almighty.” (Dmitri Medvedev)

“The French people, in June and July 1940, were not a people waylaid by a band of ruffians, whose country was suddenly snatched from them. They are a people who opened their hands and allowed their country to fall to the ground. Later on...they spent themselves in ever more and more desperate efforts to pick it up again; but someone had placed his foot on it.” (Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*)



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“The fixation with Ukraine essentially is but a gloss pasted over the realities of a global order in decomposition.” (Alastair Crooke)

“When the methods of Information War in Fourth Generation Warfare are used in Total War, it results in a war upon the psyche, a war upon cognition, a war upon our very conception and understanding of reality. This will be an increasing feature of our relationship with reality.” (Joaquin Flores, “Russia vs. US: Total War is the Obliteration of Reality,” July 2015)

“We have had the bomb on our minds since 1945. It was first our weaponry and then our diplomacy, and now it’s our economy. How can we suppose that something so monstrously powerful would not, after years, compose our identity?” (E.L. Doctorow)

“Only he who knows the empire of might and knows how not to respect it is capable of love and justice.” (Simone Weil)

What is the Los Alamos Study Group?

- A nonpartisan, non-ideological, nonprofit working for peace, disarmament, and human development via public education and government interactions of various kinds.
- Our current projects aim to:
 - Extend by at least 10 years the current 34-year hiatus in U.S. production of plutonium nuclear warhead cores (“pits”);
 - Help reinvigorate stalled arms control and nominal disarmament efforts in the U.S. and internationally;
 - Educate to end the war against Russia and the looming war against China;
 - Improve transparency across the U.S. warhead complex; and
 - Train a new generation of activists in and through these projects.

Key takeaways as to the context of our work (I):

- Ending U.S. wars is necessary for we in the U.S. to lead in avoiding nuclear war, revitalizing arms control, and preventing collapse of our own society. Nuclear disarmament is off the table for a while.
- The U.S. polity is now post-democratic overall; it has long been so where national security issues are concerned. We have a “double government.” (More on this in a moment.)
- U.S. society, along with others, are so propagandized and manipulated by a corrupted government and news media that a large minority of people have now slipped into “mass formation psychosis,” the social psychology of totalitarianism. Educating oneself and speaking rationally and nonviolently in the public domain is essential to prevent the worst outcomes and expand the viable options for our society. Being “woke” is far from being awake.

Key takeaways (II):

- Dramatic, long-term economic decline is now inevitable for the U.S. and E.U., among other states due, with national variations, to the increasing scarcity of cheap energy, enormous debt, corruption, educational failure and related incompetence and skill shortages, war and militarism, and many other factors. Prosperity as we now define it will never return.
- Looming defeat in Ukraine (already happened, not yet admitted), the associated rapid rise of multipolarity and loss of U.S. power and prestige, the misuse of federal powers (most obviously federal law enforcement), and not least the exposure of Biden family corruption, have the potential to create near-term havoc.
- Crises in food, water, weather, governance, and security threaten large parts of the world's population. Such crises will mount overall.

Key Takeaways (III)

- To repeat, the U.S. is not a democracy any more. We cannot win if we naively imagine we can reform the present structures solely through electoral and lobbying techniques. The “MICIMATT” complex rules over the “Madisonian” institutions (Congress, the Executive, Courts). Naivety is dangerous. We face the same governance failure as regards to finance and large corporate cartels. We won’t halt climate collapse solely through electoral & lobbying techniques either. Neither will efforts personal purity be adequate.

The bottom line is that we are in an emergency situation, in which we are called to revisit our personal priorities. We need to have family meetings, consider quitting our jobs if they are not deeply beneficial, and more. We need to get rid of the idea that we can “solve” our society’s problems, or do so in comfort or without full-time commitments by a lot more people.

Key Takeaways (IV)

- LANL's new production mission is a key enabling program for a hybrid war against now-combined Russia and China. The U.S. has already lost.
- LANL's new mission is absurd, based on poor engineering and management, and is vulnerable to "off-ramps." With help, LANL has failed at this mission four times before and is in the process of failing again, with increasing visibility.
- It will be impossible to meet climate, environmental, or social goals under conditions of empire and a nuclear arms race, for political, fiscal, and social reasons.
- Santa Fe and Northern New Mexico are uniquely placed to make an enormous, material contribution to peace and social development.

Key Takeaways (V)

- LANL pit production in the 2020s and early 2030s artificially increases nuclear weapons (NW) spending & hiring across the NNSA complex.
- Postponing pit production until circa 2036, when it might begin at the Savannah River Site makes sense from every perspective except a) empire, b) runaway nuclearism, and c) contractor budgets.
- There are, or recently were, senior staff in Congress and the military who want to stop LANL pit production in lieu of just R&D and training.
- If the war-state is not stopped now, and a broad political awakening not achieved in the 2020s, prospects for a habitable earth are dim.
- Pit production proponents, in arms control groups and elsewhere, implicitly deny the U.S. faces immediate, converging existential crises. We are certain otherwise. Pit production in the mid- to late-2030s is a mirage, given these. Assertion of humane values (always) matters most here and now.

Madam Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee: Key Takeaways (I)

- This is the fifth time, over a five year period, that I have come before this Committee to share some of what I and my colleagues at the Study Group and in government have learned about NNSA's proposal to create industrial plutonium capabilities at LANL, primarily to manufacture pits. This will not be another data-rich presentation, but rather present conclusions and one proposed action.
- The Study Group is a non-partisan, non-ideological, policy research, consulting, and educational organization. We also educate, lobby, and learn from, Congress and executive branch officials.
- **The Committee had the opportunity to demand a full environmental analysis prior to the NNSA decisions in September 2020 that have since created an increasing, multi-dimensional hazardous and radioactive materials crisis for the state. The environmental and social impacts, some of which are being discussed today, will continue to build and accrue until this mission is terminated.**
- **Pit production is an inherently “dirty” mission that has been assigned to LANL despite the site's many drawbacks due to political “pork-barrel” pressure and, as a senior LANL official once explained to us, in anticipation of political compliance and lack of regulatory rigor. This is called “pollution shopping.” Politically, it is a form of “Stockholm Syndrome.”**
- **This committee has not placed a high value on NNSA and LANL transparency or oversight, as today's executive session with NNSA and LANL officials demonstrates.**

Key Takeaways (continued)

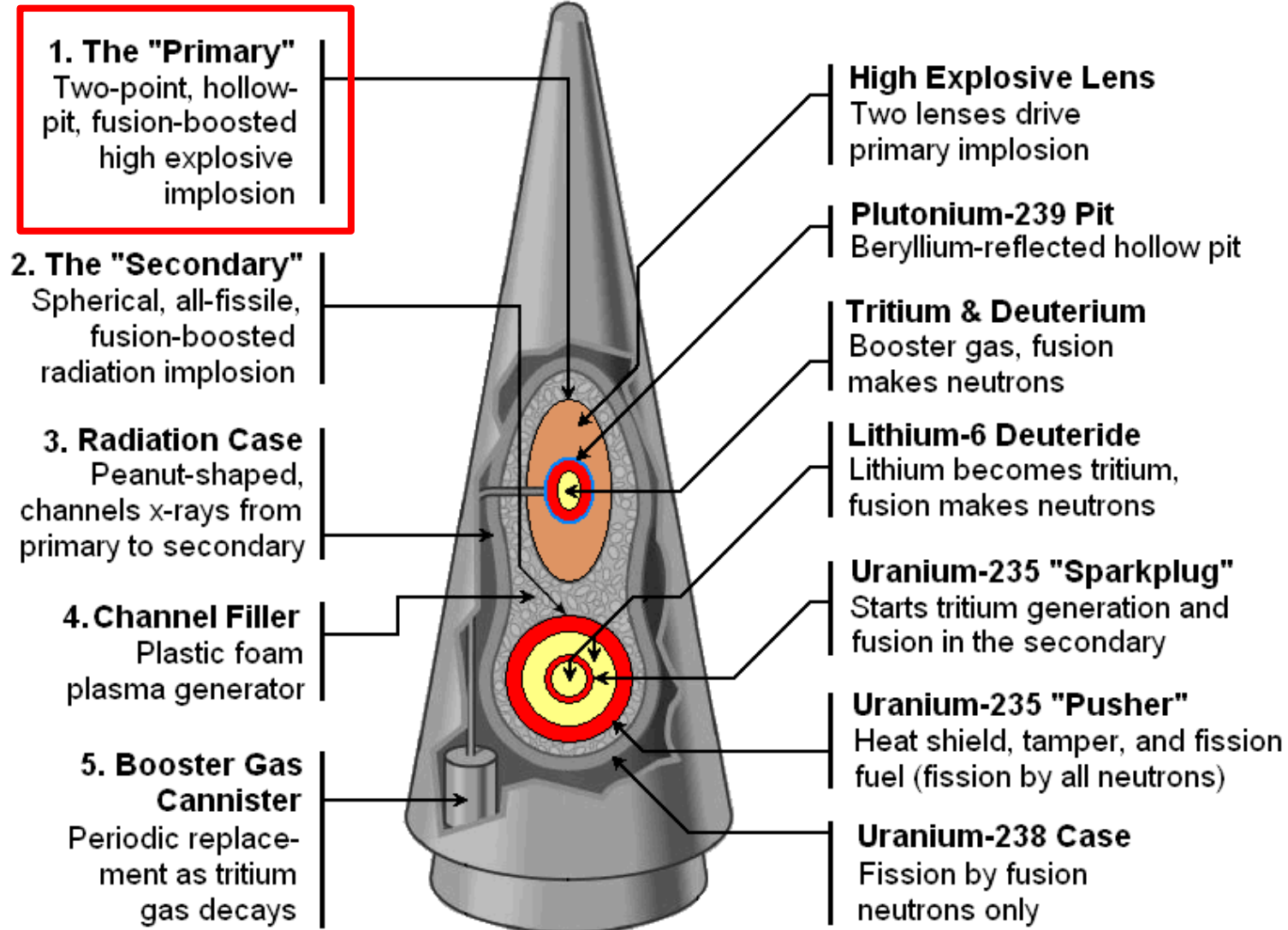
- Meanwhile the Committee can observe that there has been no true economic development in the region as a result of enormous LANL spending, historically totaling in excess of \$140 billion in today's dollars and rising rapidly over the past 5 years. "Those who think LANL create economic development are people for whom 78 years of data are not enough."
- Spending money does not in itself create economic or social development. It can create growth, but growth has costs, which can be damaging on a net basis. LANL spending can and has distorted labor and housing markets and has incurred transportation, resource use, and waste handling externalities, exacerbated regional inequality, and stifled the imaginations of New Mexico political leaders. As rural development and public health advocate Carol Miller has rightly said, "LANL is our political heroin."
- The result has been a flagrant "failure to thrive," with New Mexico falling to last place among all U.S. states in terms of overall child well-being, a good measure of social development overall. Areas in LANL's "labor-shed" which ought to be benefitting, are among the worst in the state in terms of poverty, drug abuse, and social ills.
- Overcoming this social failure will require more creative, committed, bipartisan, urban-rural state government responses than we have yet seen. "Help" from LANL comes with implicit costs the region cannot afford to pay and is no substitute for the cooperative social contract we need.

Key Takeaways (more)

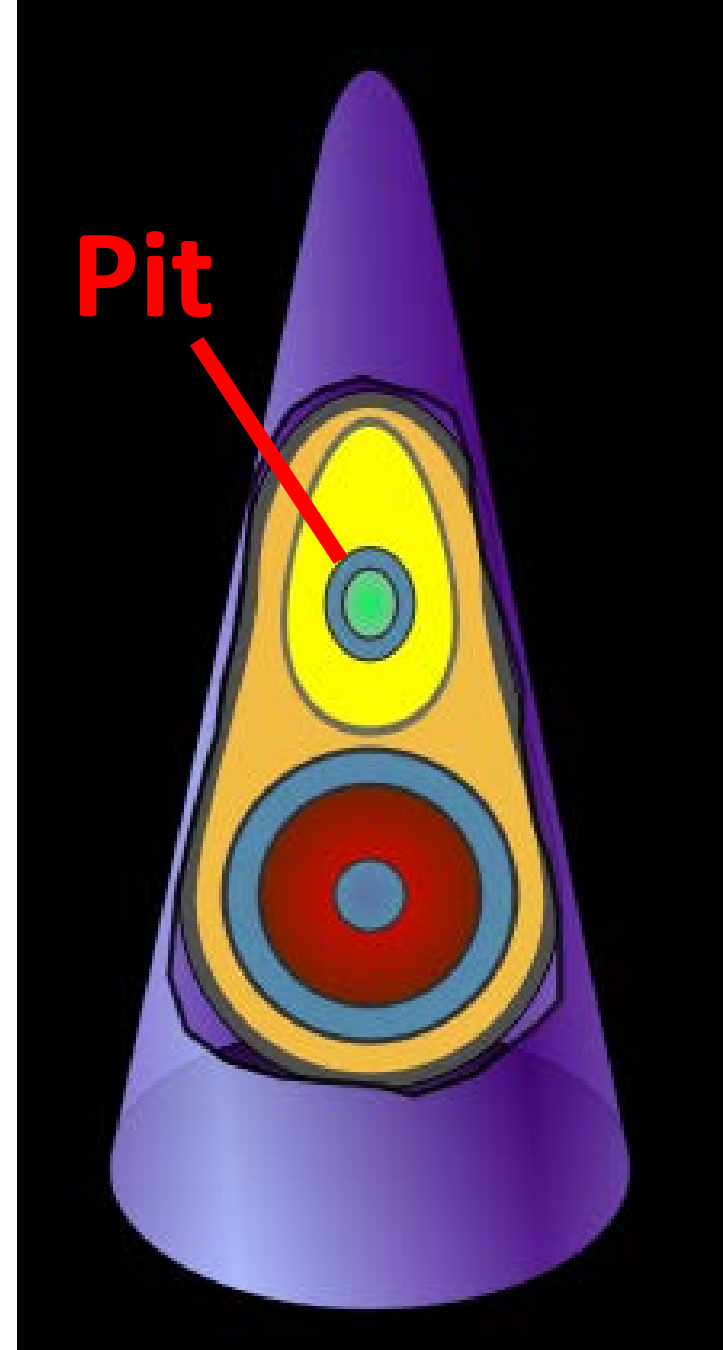
- The reasons for LANL's failure to create economic development are many and include:
 - LANL's salaries are far too high relative to other local businesses and government institutions. LANL is a "black hole" for talent.
 - LANL does not produce useful goods or services. "Tech transfer" has been and will remain largely a mirage, an economic and social development strategy that "underachieves."
 - LANL-induced growth comes with high fiscal and "congestion" costs as well as market distortions, leaving non-LANL workers with less-affordable housing, longer commutes, and lower quality of life.
 - The nature of LANL's mission – improving nuclear "deterrence," i.e. threatened genocide or omnicide, using dangerous materials that also require an extensive militarized and intrusive security apparatus – violates treaties the U.S. has signed and is a form of "reputational pollution" for the state and region. It also damages the moral tenor of the region, essential for a social contract, which in turn is required to overcome the erosive effects of predatory capitalism in a peripheral region.
 - LANL's national security missions require extensive secrecy, and lying, in its public statements. This lying usually takes the form of omitting the most important information or quietly re-defining the terms of discussion to mean something quite different from ordinary language. This secrecy creates, in Herman Agoyo's words, *a lack of public story and meaning*, around which meaning, traditions, productive vocations, and identity could otherwise constellate. LANL makes enormous efforts to fill the resulting "black hole" with empty corporate slogans.

Modern U.S. ballistic missile warhead, late 1980s

W88 Warhead for Trident D-5 Ballistic Missile



Sources for illustrations: Wikipedia



New silo-based missiles are to be the destination for new plutonium pits.



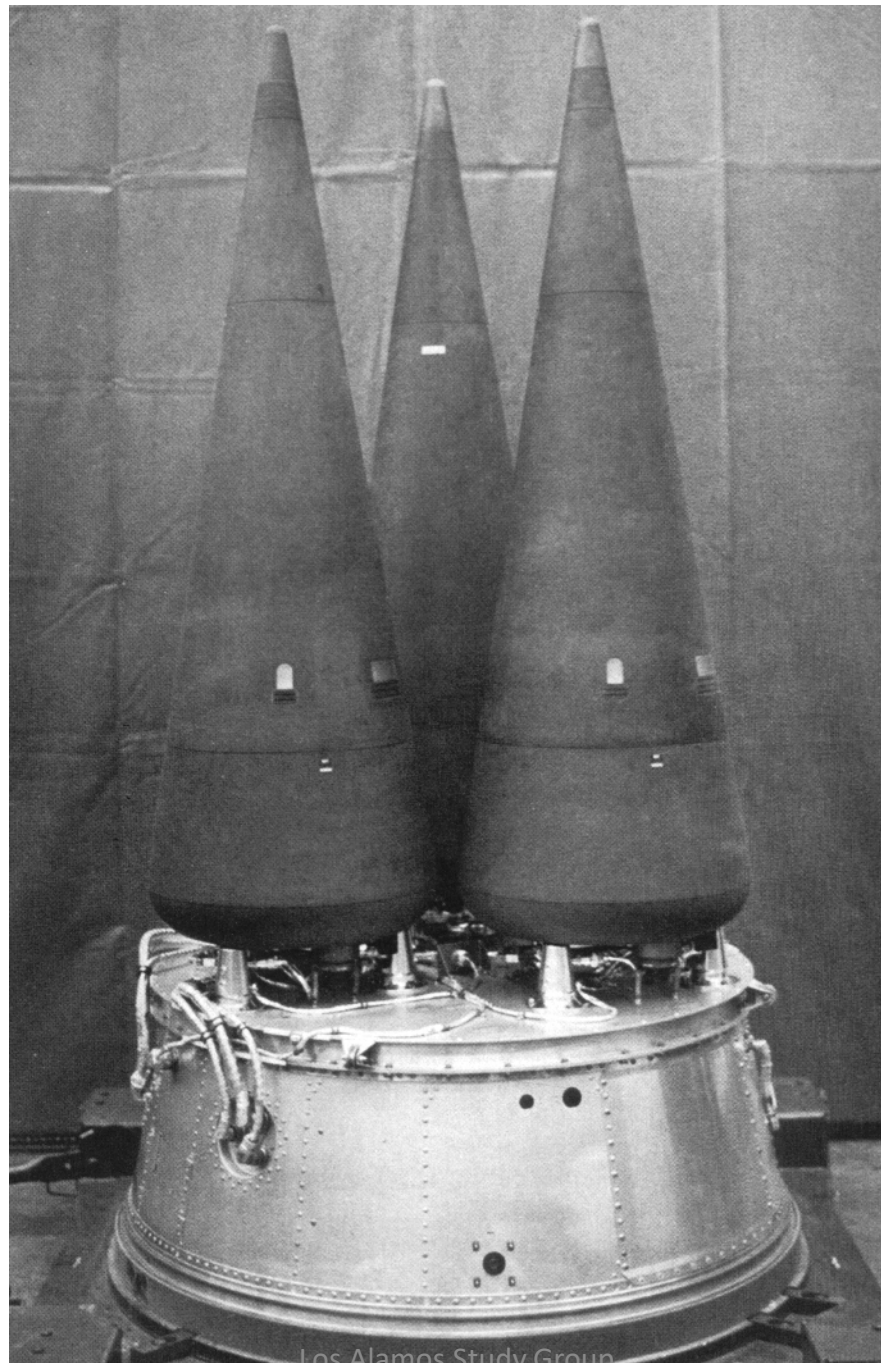
W87-0 in Mark 21 reentry vehicles (RVs), shown here in (retired) MX missile configuration. Circular error probable (CEP) is classified but say ~100 m, with “smart” fuzing. Yield is 300 kilotons (kt), with a 475 kt variant optional. It is pits of this type which LANL is tasked to make.

The US possesses ~ 540 (490?) W87s, in addition to ~780 W78s in Mark 12A RVs (CEP ~720 ft) for the same 450 Minuteman III missiles (400 deployed). At present, ~200 MM IIIs could be returned to multiple independent RV (MIRV) status with 3 W78 warheads each.

**Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) “Sentinel” system.
Deployment 2030-2037. A \$85-140+ billion program plus warheads,
according to DoD’s Cost Analysis and Program Evaluation (CAPE). 400
deployed, MIRV-capable (3 per missile for some fraction of 400,
perhaps 200 as at present). To be armed with new W87-1 warheads
(W87-0s initially). Some 250-1,500 new-pit W87-1s are desired,
starting in 2030.**



**This is the origin of the
80+ pit per year by 2030
requirement.**



**Minuteman III
Mk-12 MIRV
Warheads (W78s),
tested in this
configuration in
the last
administration.**

