



To sign onto this list (or to get off) click on the appropriate link [below](#).

If you have trouble forwarding this email, please choose "forward as attachment" from your email program menu.



Printer-friendly



Adobe pdf

April 17, 2009

Peter Neils, President

Los Alamos Study Group

Friends,

I am taking the unusual step of writing to you personally because there is a new, or at least a newly visible, effort to consolidate nuclear weapons facilities in New Mexico. What's most disconcerting about this is that it is not a government or industry scheme. Rather, it's an effort by non-profit organizations.

As you may be aware, a network of six non-governmental organizations led by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has just released a [study](#) (pdf) that advocates consolidating the entire nuclear weapons enterprise into facilities at Pantex, near Amarillo TX, Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), and Sandia National Laboratories (SNL). We have examined this plan in some detail and find it neither realistic nor desirable from any perspective. A straightforward plan for downsizing in place would be far simpler, much cheaper and is politically practical.

It is not clear whether this self-described "Nuclear Weapons Complex Consolidation Network" or any of its organizations will press on with this plan. The answer probably lies in whether any major foundations have any stomach for it.

It is noteworthy that the director of Santa Fe-based Nuclear Watch of New Mexico is one of the authors of this scheme to turn the State of New Mexico into a nuclear dumping ground – nothing short of a national sacrifice zone.

Superficially, there are points to praise in this study. Most of what is good in it summarizes what we have been writing for years. The plan rejects pit manufacturing, a step forward for these organizations, and rejects (most of) planned further construction of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) project at LANL. Paradoxically, however, the overall actions proposed would make the construction of the CMRR, or even *two* CMRR-like projects, not just more likely but even necessary.

The study claims all this consolidation could be done without much new construction. Nonsense. As correctly noted by a National Nuclear Security Administration spokesperson, this plan would be "extremely costly to the taxpayer." It would require billions of dollars in new construction, even if the most favorable and drastic cuts are made to the US nuclear weapons arsenal by the Obama administration.

The only real upside of this study's rollout is that a dark objective about which we have been somewhat constrained to comment is now in the light of day at last. Major national NGOs, with the support of some New Mexico based NGOs, have decided that the best way to downsize the arms complex is to concentrate it in as few states and congressional districts as possible, the theory being that this would reduce political support for the mission. Hence we are now presented with, in whole cloth, NRDC's proposal for a "Southwest Nuclear Triangle."

Instead of straightforwardly reducing the nuclear weapons complex in place, these folks want to consolidate it by building it anew.

Quite apart from the political theory on which it is based, which we judge naïve at best, the people of West Texas and New Mexico were not consulted about the impact this plan might have on their lives.

A major foundation that funded this study is called "Connect U.S." Perhaps, in this case, it should have been called "Disconnect U.S.", or "Divide U.S." Seldom in recent years have liberal foundations sponsored a plan that would, if successful, create such environmental injustice. Is that how NGO's work these days? Decide what's best for their agenda and let the people in the target areas bear the consequences? The authors surely knew at some level they were doing something shameful and that's probably why they kept the whole process secret.

In their plan, as we told you last summer, is the integration of the manufacturing facility in Kansas City into Sandia and Los Alamos. Last fall, the director of Nuclear Watch came to a public meeting the Study Group called to discuss the Kansas City part of this plan. He first denied they planned to move it to Sandia, then subsequently flip-flopped, confirming it at the same meeting.

Incredibly, though there is no existing space at Sandia for these operations, this network claims that Sandia's facilities budget will decline slightly by 2015, by which time they assume KC operations will have moved here, and that the merger of manufacturing and research cultures could be managed without difficulty, disregarding substantial evidence to the contrary.

In the plan, weapons disassembly at Pantex near Amarillo increases by 125% at the same time facility expenses decrease by 1% over the next 6 years. It is not explained how this will be possible.

In fact, this report assumes a massive consolidation of the nation's nuclear enterprise can be achieved at less than no cost. In the view of the study's authors, all the operations currently taking place at entire sites are to be absorbed into the existing infrastructure at the labs – very limited, often old, and not designed for these purposes.

While some of the stated goals of the Nuclear Weapons Complex Consolidation Network are laudable, their assumptions are simply aspirations and their conclusions not supported by concrete data. This plan would cost more money than reducing operations in place at their current locations, and we believe it could increase, not decrease, the political clout of the weapons complex. Downsizing in place would utilize the experience of existing local labor while taking advantage of attrition through retirements. Major construction would be avoided and extensive layoffs would not be required. Large-scale recruitment and training would not be required.

There is a brief mention of social and environmental justice issues, suggesting that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which experienced observers will note has been used by the NNSA in the past to divert citizen concern from more effective organizing, will insure the integrity of communities is not undermined by this plan. NEPA merely assures that projects are done according to existing law. Citizen participation may result in changes in order to assure environmental quality, but NEPA seldom determines policy.

What can be said about these groups so-called "grassroots?" With whom have they consulted in New Mexico and Texas and by what process? This network, and the plan produced by its leading members, speaks far more of Washington-based Astro-turf than grassroots. Its facade of legitimacy has been bought.

Interestingly, the plan never contemplates the issue of water, which is shaping up to be the issue of this century here in New Mexico.

We hope this proposal is dead on arrival due to its gross impracticality and great cost. Nothing is sure, however. The federal government is obviously capable of great blunders. Within NNSA major blunders are normal.

Impractical or not, this proposal is certain to be cherry-picked by hawkish advocates for new construction. CMRR advocates will say, "We need to build the CMRR because we might consolidate nuclear work at LANL someday. The NGO community says we should consolidate, so we need this building!" An influential trade newsletter written just after the plan's release came to that exact conclusion, saying the embattled CMRR was necessary to "help spur consolidation."

The most prudent, cost effective, secure and honest way to get to our goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is to reduce operations in their current facilities while pursuing multilateral disarmament. In these economic times we can't afford anything else. The Study Group has articulated such a position for years. And, it's been in the open, on our website.

Now that this plan is out where we all can see it, it's time to get the word out. You will certainly see more about this from us in the coming days.

In the meantime you may wish to let some of these groups know how you feel about being a pawn in their grand plan.

Best, Peter

*To subscribe to this listserve, send a blank email to [lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net).*

*To unsubscribe send a blank email to [lasg-unsubscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:lasg-unsubscribe@lists.riseup.net).*

[\[back to top\]](#)