



For immediate release 11/14/14

DoD Reviews of Nuclear Weapons Operations Largely “Management Clichés,” Fail to Address Core Problems, Group Charges

Contact: Greg Mello, 505-265-1200 or 505-577-8563

Albuquerque – Today’s long-expected [internal](#) and [external](#) reviews of the Department of Defense (DoD) nuclear operations do not address the root causes of the operational lapses that plague DoD nuclear forces, the Los Alamos Study Group charges. (Accompanying DoD [fact sheet](#).) An [article this morning](#) by Robert Burns and Lolita Baldor of the Associated Press explains the basic outlines of today’s announcement by Secretary Hagel.

According to AP, Hagel told his listeners that the good news “is there has been no nuclear exchange in the world.” Likewise Adm. Cecil Haney, Commander in Chief of STRATCOM said, “You don’t see the mushroom cloud or that sort of thing. We must continue that.”

Hagel said, “The root cause [of the persistent problems discovered] has been a lack of sustained focus, attention, and resources, resulting in a pervasive sense that a career in the nuclear enterprise offers too few opportunities for growth and advancement.”

Hagel told reporters the cost of implementing the improvements planned would increase DoD nuclear costs by about 10% per year.

A [December 2013 study](#) by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) tallied the 10-year cost of DoD’s portion of nuclear weapons expenses at \$19.2 billion (B) (p. 2; for more detail see p. 5). A 10% increase in these costs thus comes to about \$2 B per year or \$10 B over the annual 5-year budget Future Years National Security Plan (FYNSP).

Based on past experience, CBO foresaw \$30 B in cost escalation over DoD’s budgeted expenditures of \$191 B over the coming decade, due to underestimation of acquisition costs. Today’s announcement concerns operational costs and deferred maintenance rather than acquisition, so the 10% increase announced would add about \$19 B to CBO’s estimate of overall DoD nuclear weapons costs over the coming decade.

Study Group Director Greg Mello: “In today’s announcement the frightening disconnect between the world of nuclear command and the world of human beings is fully apparent. That, not management, is the “root cause” of the problems.

“If the ‘good news’ is that there has been ‘no nuclear exchange’ and no ‘mushroom cloud,’ to quote Secretary Hagel and the STRATCOM chief today, we know the bar is set too low. There could hardly be more revealing comments. It is the mission, not the management, which is the core of the problem. Dysfunctional management has evolved to fit the dysfunctional mission.

“The way to get rid of problems in the ICBM force is to get rid of ICBMs. They comprise the most absurd leg of the triad. That will save a lot of money as well, though money is secondary to the increased security such retirements would bring.

“These studies had to be done, and I am sure they were done as conscientiously as possible by smart, experienced people. Even so, the final result is riddled with what amount to management clichés and rah-rah boosterism.

“No amount of money or silly made-up medals will ever lead to ‘good morale’ in ICBM officers in particular, who must sit in a deep hole in the ground awaiting orders to end the world. The mental gymnastics of nuclear deterrence theory do not make human sense to those who must live, day and night, in an inhuman environment with world-ending orders locked in a box in front of them. They know they and their children will be first to die. They know that in that final moment, their sacrifice of years, their struggle against doubts, will have been meaningless – and they know that they themselves will have been the agents of unspeakable war crimes.

“These reports miss the forest for the trees. They are crafted within an ideological system that is itself irrational and bizarre, and examine management details AS IF they could possibly make sense. The only thing missing is sanity -- a sane appreciation for the world-as-it-is outside the walls of the national security echo chamber, itself a capsule buried far from

sunlight and air.

"Will the additional billions proposed create more national security? No. They will disappear into the same futile and misdirected black hole as the previous billions. Will morale improve? No. Contractors will be enriched, and the generals will have the satisfaction of knowing that 'something has been done.' But the problems will persist.

"There is no reason to think today's ICBM force is any more dangerous than it has been at all times in the past. There is no accumulation of danger. Danger is the object of the exercise, and there have always been severe morale problems, accidents, and so on.

"It is quite possible that upgrades of old command and control systems will introduce new dangers, so DoD must be very careful. The introduction of new dangers during upgrades is commonplace. The biggest cause of problems is often solutions.

"I think any honest person with an ounce of common sense realizes that the only real path to higher morale in the nuclear weapons business lies in gradually shutting it down, starting with the most stupid parts first. The hope that the nuclear sword of Damocles can finally be lifted, reinforced by gradual progress, is what can bring higher morale -- and only that.

"Norris Bradbury told every arriving new employee at LANL that 'we are doing our job in order to give the politicians time to solve the problem of nuclear weapons.' It worked for a couple of decades and maybe in 1946 it was almost true. Today's missile officers are told, instead -- what? That the doomsday machine of which you are an inanimate cog is an essential aspect of U.S. national security essentially forever, or some such malarkey. This, no one in their heart of hearts believes. The system they directly observe contradicts all ideas of security. It does not and will not feel secure to them any more than a suicide vest feels secure. It doesn't jibe and never will. The symptoms of these contradictions are what we see behaviorally.

"No amount of investment in a fundamentally bad idea can make it good. Caliban doesn't become Prospero with new suit of clothes. The man on a pale horse doesn't become our friend just because we buy him a shiny new scythe."

ENDS



Reminder! Discussion tonight in Taos, 6 pm, "Ban the Bomb: Why, How, and Your Role!" Pass it on!

November 14, 2014

Dear Taos friends --

Please forgive the very late notice if you can, and please pass this notice on to your friends! We have been swamped here and forgot to send this reminder until this morning!

TONIGHT, Friday, Nov. 14th, at 6 pm at the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative in Taos, [118 Cruz Alta Road](#), the Los Alamos Study Group will host a talk and practical discussion about the growing international movement to ban the bomb and our roles in it:

"Ban the Bomb: Why, How, and Your Role"

The importance of this growing movement and its critical relevance to New Mexico activism of all kinds has only increased over the past year.

Trish and I were recently in New York at the UN First Committee, meeting with some of the international leaders of the movement. I gave a talk on a panel sponsored by Ireland and Mexico, which was attended (for the first time, apparently) senior diplomats from the U.S. and U.K. Both countries' foreign ministries are showing signs of concern that this movement, *the initial steps of which are now supported by 155 countries*, could get out of hand.

As a result of meetings there, we have a much clearer picture of the challenges, urgency, and importance of this effort.

We particularly hope anyone interested in 2015 events surrounding the 70th anniversary of the Trinity test and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings will attend tonight.

Please spread the word however you can today.

Best wishes,

Greg



Los Alamos Study Group

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October 27, 2014

Reminder: Discussion Tuesday evening (tomorrow, 10/28), 6-8 pm, UNM Law School Room 2403, 1117 Stanford Dr. NE

Dear Albuquerque friends --

Tomorrow evening we are scheduled to discuss "Violence and Nonviolence in New Mexico Economic Development" (or in three words, "Disarm, and Develop"). For more about this meeting keep reading.

This will be our last public meeting in Albuquerque this year, so we really hope you come. We will be providing some important new information and analysis you can't easily get elsewhere and we expect a lively discussion!

Also, on Thursday evening of this week (10/30) we will meet in Los Alamos, at 6 pm again, at Fuller Lodge, [2132 Central Ave](#), to debate issues related to plutonium pit production at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). If you can come to Los Alamos on Thursday, please do.

Our three November meetings are on this [calendar](#).

Tomorrow's talk will not focus on economic development policy – expanding, for example, on the themes sketched in this [guest editorial](#) from August. It will not explain ([again](#)) why our big nuclear laboratories haven't been, aren't, and will never be engines of economic development. It won't explain ([again](#)) that our congressional delegation – especially [Senator Udall](#) – [promotes these labs and bases at New Mexico's expense](#).

It will not focus on the tens of thousands of new, good careers we could create in renewable energy (RE), sustainable transportation, and energy efficiency (EE), the other businesses that would flow from them, the greenhouse gases (GHGs), air pollution deaths, and water usage and contamination we could avoid.

These are really good topics but we don't yet have the political power to make that vision a reality.

Tomorrow's talk will instead focus on what [has](#) happened over the past decade, what will happen, and what is [likely](#) to happen in the remaining years of the present decade as a result of oil resource limitations alone. I want to show you why, in the words of Governor Inslee of Washington, we need to work for "[disruptive change](#)" NOW – *and why disruptive change will come to us whether we are ready for it or not*.

We want to show why more radical efforts to save the climate and build a sustainable, just society are not just [needed](#) now but are also [more politically possible](#). We want to show why nuclear disarmament is not just a good idea, and not just the law, but to a considerable extent also inevitable.

We are hoping the themes of this discussion will ramify in other organizations in the area. We'll be publicizing the themes more but in the meantime we hope you will come so we can try to understand together and start strategizing together.

Please feel free to invite your friends to these meetings.

Sincerely,

Greg, Trish and the gang

PS: We are looking for volunteers, and interns. We have a good program here, but we could use help. Let's talk about it.

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For Immediate Release October 1, 2014

DOE Inspector General releases scathing report about LANL's incompetent handling of waste, leading to WIPP shutdown

Contact: Greg Mello, 505-265-1200 office, 505-577-8563 cell

Albuquerque, NM – Today the Department of Energy (DOE) Inspector General (IG) released [a scathing "Management Alert"](#) from their investigation into the role of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in causing the contamination and shutdown of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

The Los Alamos Study Group filed a detailed formal request with the DOE IG to investigate these issues on July 15, 2014. Today's IG report is partly responsive to that request.

After noting that a LANL-created drum burst at WIPP, causing significant impacts not just at WIPP but at transuranic (TRU) waste generating sites around the country, the DOE IG found that:

- Despite specific direction to the contrary, LANL made procedural changes that did not conform to DOE technical guidance.
- LANL and its subcontractors mixed "potentially incompatible materials" to chemically-hazardous TRU waste that contained oxidizers (nitrate salts), namely organic absorbents (organic kitty litter and before that, organic polymer) as well as certain acid neutralizers.
- LANL's waste processing and safety control procedures were inadequate, leading to the creation of mixtures which were "inherently hazardous."
- LANL "did not consider readily available information on chemical reactions," including an EPA case study on mixing oxidizers with organic or combustible materials which noted that "common references" warn against such mixtures.
- LANL somehow added the "organic" to the description of acceptable absorbent, violating recent (2012) detailed DOE/LANL/WIPP guidance for this particular waste stream. LANL didn't run its procedures past subject matter experts or the WIPP team that was set up to resolve issues with difficult waste streams such as this one. Neither did LANL consult with its own safety organizations. Instead, LANL's review was focused on compliance with environmental permits alone.
- Yet, [oddly,] LANL had halted processing of this waste stream in 2012 "because of the possible dangers of mixing organic materials with nitrates," [suggesting that at least some LANL managers as well as other people in the waste program understood these dangers].
- LANL also approved the use of an acid neutralizer that included an ingredient that was "highly reactive" with oxidizers and therefore "potentially incompatible with nitrate salts stored in the drums." This neutralizer was added to "the majority of drums" in this waste stream.
- According to LANL's permit under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), waste processing should have stopped if the waste involved was a hazardous waste for multiple reasons (was "assigned multiple EPA hazardous waste codes").
- LANL has subsequently "tentatively" reclassified hundreds of drums as potentially ignitable and/or corrosive, "which may pose previously unrecognized safety issues."^[1]

The IG also made recommendations for immediate steps DOE and LANL could take to improve TRU waste at LANL. These recommendations were accepted in detail by Frank Klotz, Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration

(NNSA) on behalf of DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz, to whom the Alert was sent.

The DOE's Accident Investigation Board is expected to complete its own review of the WIPP incident before the end of the year.

Study Group director Greg Mello was the first state hazardous waste official to inspect LANL, in 1984. Mello: "We are pleased that this report correctly identifies the central role of LANL in causing the contamination and shutdown of WIPP, which [DOE now estimates](#) to last about two years and cost up to one-half billion dollars or more. That will be the minimum. Expensive operational limitations are likely at WIPP henceforth.

"The violations of established well-procedures and lack of common chemical knowledge are shocking. The report, as well as other information available to the Study Group, describe an insular, stove-piped, highly-bureaucratized corporate culture that did not access or use its own technical expertise or that of others.

"The IG report hints at, but does not discuss, the knowledge LANL had about the dangers of mixing organic materials with nitrate salt waste drums. LANL halted processing these drums over just this issue, but inexplicably resumed in August 2012, mixing finely-divided organic material with a witch's brew of unknown nitrate salts and acids, by the pallet-load.

"The IG report is silent about what LANL knew when. Did LANL know about the dangers of mixing and shipping what the DOE IG correctly calls "inherently hazardous" combinations of chemicals, which "common references" warn against? Was LANL rushing to meet its June 30 deadline for the sake of profits and incentive pay?

"The IG report is also silent about accountability for this huge fiasco. Will the for-profit private company that manages LANL, LANS, be forced to pay for any of the hundreds of millions of dollars that these failures have cost the taxpayers? Will LANS be awarded another year of managing LANL as if nothing happened, with no actual penalty except a few million dollars less profit? Indeed will LANS be able to keep its contract at all, in the face of this incompetence and the resulting tremendous costs, the full scope of which is as yet unknown?

"LANL has admitted violating its operating permit. Under RCRA, the person who must be held responsible for this is the managing director of the site, Charlie McMillan. Is LANS so powerful that Dr. McMillan is now above responsibility for "petty" matters like waste management?

"NNSA's response to this report is very far from adequate. It basically consists of adding more bureaucratic complexity and rules, instead of actually using the management tools available to NNSA. The LANS contract needs to be renegotiated, at a minimum. If NNSA's response to this incident continues the "forward-looking" approach of the DOE IG, and ignores accountability, it will only be a short time before LANS produces another fiasco, something this contractor is now doing on a regular basis."

Suggestions for NNSA laboratory management reform can be found here: [LASG comments to the Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories \(CRENEL\)](#), Sep 26, 2014.

See also "[New Mexico TRU: Study Group Calls for Pause in New Plutonium Waste at Los Alamos](#)", press release, Jun 2, 2014.

ENDS

[1] On August 29, New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ryan Flynn directed LANL to resume daily monitoring of the potentially explosive gases which have been building up in two containers at LANL stored at Area G near White Rock, NM. LANL had inexplicably halted daily monitoring despite knowing that hydrogen levels in one of the containers had reached 70% of the lower explosive limit (LEL). See "[Gas buildup in waste drum prompts state order to Los Alamos](#)," George Lobsenz, *Energy Daily*, 9/26/14.



September 27, 2014

Re: LANL is splitting; NNSA lab futures; meeting schedule; more

Dear Study Group core supporters and friends –

Thanks to those who were able to come and contribute to recent discussions in Albuquerque (“Through and Beyond the Issues; Work, Study Opportunities with the Los Alamos Study Group”), Los Alamos (“The Future of NNSA’s Nuclear Labs”), and Santa Fe (“Plutonium is Not Your Friend”).

Helen Caldicott joined us via Skype and a projector at this last meeting. We will bring in other authorities and guest speakers at future meetings. Stay tuned.

Our next meeting is in Taos at the Kit Carson Electric Coop, [118 Cruz Alta Road](#) on Friday, October 10 (“Plutonium is Not Your Friend”). All our meetings are from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.

For later Study Group meetings in New Mexico see the table in [Bulletin 194](#).

There has been considerable ferment on laboratory issues despite (apparent) congressional inaction. We put a few key news articles, often involving us, on our [home page](#), along with our own new work if it can be shared. New information about LANL plutonium plans usually goes on [our main active plutonium infrastructure page](#).

We want to draw your attention to yesterday’s announcement by the Department of Energy (DOE) that the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), with which Los Alamos National Security (LANS), LLC contracts to manage and operate (M&O) Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for the government, will not remain as the manager of environmental cleanup and legacy waste operations at LANL. DOE Environmental Management (EM) will take over that federal role, with a new contract and quite likely a new contractor, as the [Albuquerque Journal](#) explains.

The *New Mexican* also had an [important in-depth article](#) about the LANL bust-up, which also revealed hitherto unpublished information (provided by Trish) about the (high) temperatures reached in the LANL-created drum that burst. (Trish also took the aerial shot of the active dumping pit at Area G that the paper used.)

It took us some time yesterday to understand and digest the news that 10% of LANL’s work is being split off. We had been asked by congressional staff and others what we thought about doing just that when we were in Washington earlier this month but the actual event caught us by surprise.

We are very pleased with this announcement, for which we can take little credit. We are still working in various other ways to make LANS accountable for the mountainous mistakes that led to the WIPP contamination and shutdown. We have requested a DOE Inspector General investigation of illegal activity and associated cover-up, and now there is an investigation underway. Based on information we have seen and the justifiable anger we have witnessed in Washington, more shoes could drop. Clearly the reassignment or dismissal of four managers is being done to avoid even worse outcomes, if that is possible. For example, LANS could have its contract cut short. Some want it ended.

We believe it is time to end the LANS contract and replace it not just with another contractor from the same short list, but with federal management.

Yesterday we completed [our initial comments](#) to the [Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories](#) (CRENEL). They are a little rough but we are often asked what we think the future of LANL should be. Read [our comments](#) to find out.

Please understand these are a *provisional* normative future. They do not include a nuclear abolition scenario. Of course in the long run LANL will come to an end one way or another. Hopefully humanity will outlast it.

Most of you saw the recent *New York Times* article (“U.S. Ramping Up Major Renewal in Nuclear Arms,” William Broad and David Sanger, 9/21/14) and associated editorial about nuclear weapons modernization and costs (“[Backsliding on Nuclear Promises](#),” 9/22/14). It’s a very helpful piece, though it must be said that the prominent critics of the huge costs quoted are some of the same people that agreed to the modernization program, explicitly including its huge costs, at the time.^[1] And of

course the *New York Times*, including David Sanger, is a prominent platform for fallacious U.S. anti-Russian propaganda and is thereby working to undermine prospects for nuclear disarmament and arms control.[2]

More will follow, to many more people, in a Bulletin in the next few days. [Please help us with outreach, especially to potential Study Group funders, if you can.](#)

In solidarity,

Greg and Trish, for the Study Group

[1] Another strange aspect of the article is that it focuses on failed activist efforts to halt plans to rebuild the Kansas City Plant (KCP) in a new location a few miles south of the previous one. Those efforts were misguided and doomed to fail from the get-go, because if successful they would have left NNSA with only one recourse: move the plant to Albuquerque. This was the activist plan, kept secret in New Mexico by the groups involved. It was shameful and dumb, so it failed. (For background see for example “[NRDC and others seek to move nuclear weapons factories to NM: more details](#),” Action Alert #90, Aug 25, 2008; “[Overall Remarks on “Transforming the U.S. Strategic Posture and Weapons Complex for Transition to a Nuclear Weapons Free World,”](#) a report by the “[Nuclear Weapons Complex Consolidation Network](#),” Jun 1, 2009; and “[Would moving the Kansas City Plant \(KCP\) to Albuquerque Lead toward Nuclear Disarmament?](#),” Jun 3, 2009.) We lobbied Congress and administration as heavily as we could against this plan.

[2] More accurate and balanced views can be found in many places, such as from Robert Parry at [Consortium News](#) (many good articles of his could be cited).

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Los Alamos Study Group

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February 9, 2014

Please join us at the Prandoni family home in Santa Fe on Sunday, Feb. 23, at 4:00 pm, and more news and views

Dear Study Group core supporters and friends –

If you don't want to be on the Study Group's inner email list, [write us](#) and we will remove you! For reference, five previous letters have been sent to this list, on 10/23/13, 11/15/13, 11/25/13, and 12/27/13, none of which have been sent to the general membership or posted.

In this letter, which is not going to the main Study Group list:

1. **Please join us at the Prandoni family home in Santa Fe on Sunday, Feb. 23, at 4:00 pm**
2. **Greg to speak at Gray Panthers meeting, Albuquerque, Sat, Feb. 22nd, 1pm.**
3. **Please join us the Study Group "World Headquarters" on Tuesday, Feb. 25, at 6:30 pm**
4. **Simplify into Spring! Donations are being accepted for the Study Group Spring Garage Sale, Friday February 28 through Sunday March 2. Volunteers wanted!**
5. **Excellent 25th Anniversary Study Group mugs available!**
6. **The ignored gravity of our civilizational crisis – and the majesty of a wholehearted response. It's a brave new world, or no world at all.**

Dear Study Group core supporters and friends –

First of all, board member Marita and Peter Prandoni have invited members of the Study Group who live in the area to their lovely home near Seton Village south of Santa Fe on Sunday, February 23, at 4 pm, for food, drink, and discussion.

I will provide a (short!) update on the status of nuclear weapons and schemes for their "modernization" (mostly *good* news) and of our nuclear laboratories. I will have just returned from a sort of "[nuclear Davos](#)" here in DC (offered free to us by the organizers – shhh please) and various lobbying visits on and around the Hill.

Perhaps more interestingly, Trish will provide a report on the [second international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons](#) in Nayarit, Mexico, from which she will just have returned. If I know Trish, she will have pictures of our colleagues and the diplomatic community who will be gathered there. We very much want to support this international movement – and some of them want to work with us here – but we need more member participation to help make that happen smoothly.

Overall, we want to have a discussion with you, our members, about the opportunities before us in the crisis our state, and our world, are now entering. Basically, the sun is shining, and we need manpower and womanpower to make hay while we can. But in the meantime we also want to enjoy one another's company, and that's what this gathering is about also.

Regardless of whether you think you can contribute in any way or not, please feel comfortable in coming to this discussion, if you can make it. And if you know a friend who might be able to help our work, bring them too. If we run out of space at the Prandoni's (and we may) we will schedule another meeting pronto in Santa Fe, as the subject matter can't wait. (See 2. and 3. below for Albuquerque meetings.)

Please call Marita at 505-989-1014 to RSVP so she will know how much food to prepare. She will also explain how to get to her place.

2. **Greg to speak at Gray Panthers meeting, Albuquerque, Sat, Feb. 22nd, 1pm.**

I will be speaking at the Gray Panthers meeting on Saturday, February 22nd, 1 pm, at the Highland Senior Center, 131

Monroe Street NE, Albuquerque, on "Partnership of the Generations -- or Collapse." Many of the people who will be present have been serious activists for decades and the discussion is bound to be good. There is no charge to attend and you do not have to be a member.

3. Please join us the Study Group "World Headquarters" on Tuesday, Feb. 25, at 6:30 pm

We hope those of you in Albuquerque will be able to come to 2901 Summit Place NE for an update from Trish and Greg, with snacks and drinks and relaxed discussion after short updates from each of us, as above. We really want to work with folks in Albuquerque more and there are very great opportunities for solidarity and community with those who live nearby. The Study Group could do much more in Albuquerque. Come on over!

4. Simplify into Spring! Donations are being accepted for the Study Group Spring Garage Sale, Friday February 28 through Sunday March 2. Volunteers wanted!

We're going to have a garage sale to raise money for the Study Group on the above dates. We crave salable items, and volunteers. You can bring your goodies at any time from tomorrow on; just call the office at 505-265-1200 and speak to our Volunteer Coordinator Astrid Webster, who is handling donations and volunteer scheduling. A good time should be had by all, so please chip in however you can!

And it is a very good time to simplify, not just our material lives but our attention as well. Distraction, in its various forms, is probably the primary reason citizens lose political struggles. It's not our primarily our adversaries' money that is the problem but rather the focused and continued attention and skill money buys. If one has focused, long-term attention, and the skills that result from that, one has most of what the Koch brothers or the military-industrial complex has to pay for with millions of dollars. I am proposing that there exists, or should exist, a relationship and continuum between spring cleaning and preparation for real citizenship in a time of crisis, about which more below. William Morris's advice in 1880 is still good, however far we may be from following it at the moment: "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful."

5. Excellent 25th Anniversary Study Group mugs available!

Our [25th anniversary mugs](#) are here! Get one for just \$10! There are three ways to do this: a) call the office (505-265-1200) and if convenient drop by and pick one up; b) come to an events; or c) ask us to send one to you, which will cost more and take more time.

6. The ignored gravity of our civilizational crisis – and the majesty of a wholehearted response

Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be only?

Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol"

...in *The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis* (1924) [Freud] wrote the following: "Neurosis does not disavow the reality, it ignores it; psychosis disavows it and tries to replace it." (p. 185) What psychosis replaces reality with is delusion....Psychotic delusion on the personal level becomes ideology at the group level; both possess the power to annihilate the Other – be it the foreigner or the domestic subversive.

Dmitri Orlov, "[Peak Oil Oppositional Disorder: Neurosis or Psychosis?](#)"

The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It may be that in this respect precisely the present time deserves a special interest. Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two "Heavenly Powers", eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what results?

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

I love Jesus, who said to us:
Heaven and earth will pass away.
When heaven and earth have passed away,
my word will remain.
What was your word, Jesus?
Love? Forgiveness? Affection?
All your words were one word:
Wakeup.

Antonio Machado, "Moral Proverbs and Folk Songs," Robert Bly translation

And the crisis of society is, of course, the crisis of organized religion too: religion is no longer valid as a hero system, and so the youth scorn it. If traditional culture is discredited as heroics, then the church that supports that culture automatically discredits itself. If the church, on the other hand, chooses to insist on its own special heroics, it might find that in crucial ways it must work against the culture, recruit youth to be antiheroes to the ways of life of the society they live in. This is the dilemma of religion in our time.

Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*

I want to say just a few words about the gravity of our collective situation, just in case there is any mistake about it.

I think we all understand that human civilization, and this planet's diversity of life, have entered a severe, multifaceted crisis. For human civilization, the crisis is unprecedented in scale (it is global), in dimension (it affects all human institutions) and in severity (there are no apparent limits).

As regards nature, the mass extinction now underway and the present very rapid accumulation of greenhouse gases and initial stages of climate change in the new [Anthropocene](#) epoch is not entirely unprecedented. An apparent analog to where present trends (in emissions, deforestation, and above all arctic warming and melting) will lead unless they are rapidly reversed can be found in the [Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum \(PETM\)](#), or even the [Permian–Triassic mass extinction event](#), which killed more than 95% of all life on earth. As mentioned in my October 23 letter to you, Thom Hartmann and his colleagues have produced an excellent video [wake-up call](#) regarding these matters. The threat is very grave and very urgent, as perusal of the web site of the [Arctic Methane Emergency Group](#) will tell you. The response of climate and our weather (hence, storms, droughts and food production) to changes in fundamental variables like atmospheric moisture (now up 4%) and the extent of summer arctic sea ice (which may effectively vanish [as early as 2015](#)) is *not linear*. *Earth's climate is inherently unstable, outside narrow boundaries which we have already transgressed.* We must therefore promptly return to a stable climate before runaway geophysical events make it impossible to return. *Surely no monetary cost in such an effort is too great, since there are no technological means capable of supporting civilization and human populations under the climatic regime toward which we are certainly headed if we cannot rapidly reverse course. Specifically, we must reverse arctic warming. It is quite possible that, to be successful in avoiding runaway climate change, we must prevent further arctic warming during the present decade.* This would require active cooling, a subject well beyond the scope of this letter.

Without particularly focusing on arctic issues, James Hansen and several others in an overview paper published last month attempt to quantify the overall greenhouse gas problem from a policy perspective, advising that global warming needs to be held to about 1°C and suggesting how to do, with a sobering reminder of the cost of delays, past and prospective.

We conclude that human-made warming could be held to about 1°C (1.8°F) if cumulative industrial-era fossil fuel emissions are limited to 500 GtC (gigatons of carbon, where a gigaton is one billion metric tons) and if policies are pursued to restore 100 GtC into the biosphere, including the soil. This scenario leads to reduction of atmospheric CO₂ to 350 ppm by 2100, as needed to restore Earth's energy balance and approximately stabilize climate....Cumulative fossil fuel emissions through 2012 are 370 GtC and increasing almost 10 GtC per year. *The current emission rate would need to decrease 6% per year to limit emissions to 500 GtC.* If reductions had begun in 1995, the required reduction rate would have been 2.1% per year, or 3.5% per year if reductions had begun in 2005. *If emissions continue to grow until 2020, reductions must be 15% per year to stay within the 500 GtC limit,* which emphasizes the urgency of initiating emission reductions. (emphasis added)

(James Hansen et. al., "Assessing 'Dangerous Climate Change': Required Reduction of Carbon Emissions to Protect Young People, Future Generations and Nature"; [6 pp. summary and commentary](#); [whole paper](#))

Let us set aside the climate crisis just for a moment and consider the energetic basis of our civilization, specifically the transportation fuels necessary to run it. The best official data available now show that conventional oil production peaked around 2008 and is now in terminal decline.

A former British Petroleum (BP) geologist has warned that the age of cheap oil is long gone, bringing with it the danger of "continuous recession" and increased risk of conflict and hunger.

The first hammer-blow – the peaking of conventional oil production – has already fallen, quadrupling the price of oil and shocking our frothy finance system and the real economy so badly it has taken trillions of dollars in near-zero-interest loans to the biggest financial organizations just to maintain the ragged illusion of "normality."

What makes our society and our nested economic arrangements very fragile is also what makes them very unjust, very environmentally destructive, and anti-democratic. Our common problems have common solutions, but do not be deceived: there is no utopia, no better world, ahead. There is a *less-bad* world, if we choose it.

In this country alone, millions of livelihoods, as well as prospects for tens of millions of young people to someday join the “middle class,” have come to what is very likely a permanent end. There is no serious plan to get those livelihoods back. There can't be without a radical commitment to substitution for the economic resources which have become limiting. That change will involve financial losses – losses of power and status – for many of the people now running the show, so some (not all) of them resist mightily. By and large the superwealthy would still be wealthy after the necessary transition, but that minor diminishment and flexibility for the common good is not part of everyone's moral code.

The nature of the resources we need now is radically changing, away from oil and gas, which will never again be available at prices low enough to re-start real (not fictitious, bytes-in-a-hard-drive) economic growth, and toward dispersed renewable energy and the human skill, wisdom and care it will take to manage a society which is no longer rich. Surely everyone knows, at some level, that more and more of us must now “make our living by loving,” as Thoreau put it. The social contract, the environmental contract, must make up a larger and larger part of our economy, replacing mindless consumerism and the mindless mass entertainment that enables it, or else there will be no economy. We must now turn to one another and “speak new words for the first time,” as Gary Snyder put it so many years ago.

Surely everyone knows that all the new debt – aka claims on our children's productivity – will never be repaid. When the U.S. shale oil boom begins to plateau and decline, a process that could well begin next year or the year after, or the year after that, as many industry analysts now understand, today's anemic “recovery,” itself the product of jiggered government statistics, will collapse. How far and fast that process goes, and with what pauses and what turbulence, is anybody's guess, but one thing is certain: the rising tide of trouble will engulf the lowest stratum of society first (it already has), and then the next. Already, the life expectancy in Albuquerque's richest census tracts is 28 years more than in its poorest. (Thanks to the *Albuquerque Journal's* Mike Bush for [reporting this](#) research, apparently done by the [Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies](#), to be used by Peter Winograd of the UNM [Center for Education Policy](#) in a lunch talk to be hosted by the [Albuquerque Press Women](#) tomorrow, February 10.)

To see the future that is gradually spreading, just look at our poorest neighborhoods and rural regions today, not to mention at the refugees and riots in many countries today. People aren't risking their lives in those demonstrations just *to vote*. People riot when they perceive that they have little to lose. They want *material* benefits and opportunities which they are denied. They want respect, and dignity, and these come with a material as well as a social and political price tag.

This economic decline – so fast in historical terms it will be called a “collapse” in retrospect – will probably be a good thing, because the way we live has unleashed a climate catastrophe which if not quickly reversed will – not *may* – destroy civilization and most life on earth. This will happen very fast, indeed it is happening now. What we do in the next decade is likely to be determinative of the outcome on a scale of centuries.

Unfortunately, merely decreasing emissions, no matter how steeply, is almost certainly no longer enough. We waited too long.

What each of now does, or fails to do, has consequences that far exceed the apparent ambit of our lives. Each of our voices is now more important than ever.

“Does the individual know,” said Jung, “that he is the makeweight that tips the scales?”

Well, no, in our experience “the individual” generally does *not* know and many people do not *want* to know. We are seeing a great deal of understandable fear in our communities – fear of information, fear of discussion, fear of commitment. People are shit-scared, for darn good reasons, and many of you are hiding, whether you know it or not. Scared you may be, just as we are, but please do not hide.

We often hear, “I can't do any more than I am!” Jung does not imply doing *more* and neither do we. We don't need *more*, we need *less*. And there is a problem with *doing*, period. “Doing” generally means some variant of busyness. Why can't we dispense with “our” precious notions of choice, 99% of which amount to mere consumer choice, and *be willing* to set aside some of that slavery and *accept* a degree of freedom? There's no deferred gratification involved here. The freedom is instant.

Neither does “the individual,” in our experience, know *why* she or he is that makeweight. “The individual,” in our experience, in the United States, is generally very far from free. “The individual” wants a certain political outcome but does not know that it is the wholly-accepted *process*, not the outcome, which is the liberating and majestic experience.

Although the Study Group works closely with two branches of government and we litigate in the courts, we know these activities are not remotely sufficient *in themselves* to save our country from its intensifying decline, compounded of factors very familiar to all of us.

Neither will mere *reform* rescue this poor state from its downward spiral (“Whither New Mexico, world capital of weapons of mass destruction?” [Bulletin #167](#), 03/27/13)

Reform in all its modes will not preserve the diversity of life on earth, now in its [sixth great extinction crisis](#). In fact we do not

know what will be sufficient, or if *anything* will be sufficient. At the Study Group we've been discussing our converging crises for many years – many of us, for decades.

Two things are clear. First, nothing we see on the contemporary political scene in the U.S. today is sufficiently efficacious to prevent major disruptions to our lives and families. Second, our present level of comfort – the “American Way of Life” as we have known it since World War II, including the ecosystems that support us in the living landscape and waters – is being stripped away.

How dire things become, and how quickly, and for whom and for how many, and how we each experience these conditions socially, psychologically, economically, and spiritually, are in crucial ways up to us. Our society will have the crises, but will we seize the opportunities? The old world, the assumptions and conditions that have formed our politics and intellectual assumptions up to now, is dying. *Our new world must be brave or we will have no world at all.*

For others (including our children) to survive, we now need to travel the path of nonviolently withdrawing legitimacy and energy (attention, time, and money) from those institutions and activities which act far outside human ethical norms. The goal is not disengagement and certainly not any sort of purity, as self-satisfying as that can temporarily be. Our goal is rather engagement – *political* engagement. Nothing we do or try to do, in the household and corporate realms *merely*, will be enough, without political engagement. Goodness knows I don't mean *voting*, that charade of legitimacy. Vote, certainly, but *voting merely* no longer counts as democratic participation.

Running for office is altogether another and more effective thing to do, especially in a primary. In our long experience, our congressional delegation cares about little else than winning. They have no platform or plan for government, let alone knowledge or any significant interest in the crises our society faces, except as these are reflected in potential votes in the coming election. Their attention cannot be gained in any other way than by threatening successful reelection, either through running for office or through discouraging donations to the electoral process, by which votes are bought through propaganda campaigns. In any election for national office these days, votes serve to legitimize oppression and global environmental destruction. One chooses the least bad candidate, as best as one can, but this process will never right itself under the current corrupting influence of capital.

Nonviolent noncooperation is powerful and effective, more powerful and wise than anything else. There will be casualties.

We must find effective ways to rebel, if our family responsibilities allow. If we do not, we must help others do so. Hedges quite rightly distinguishes between those who are *hors de combat* and those who are not (“[Shielding a Flickering Flame](#),” Nov. 24, 2013). Some are calling for a constitutional “insurgency” (Brecher, “[Climate Protection: The New Insurgency](#),” Dec. 28, 2014), others for an “uprising” (Hedges). It comes to the same thing. Here is Hedges:

[T]hose who defend corporate totalitarianism, including the leaders of the two major political parties, fatuous academics, pundits and a bankrupt press, must be driven from the temples of power. Mass street protests and prolonged civil disobedience are our only hope. A failure to rise up—which is what the corporate state is counting upon—will see us enslaved. (“[The Last Gasp of American Democracy](#),” Jan. 5, 2014)

David Holmgren, called “one of the founders of permaculture” in this [review by Albert Bates](#), calls for “[Crash on Demand](#),” that is, “a strategic decoupling by masses of youth (and elders) from the economic system that is the crashing the planet's ecological stasis,” in Bates' summary.

This is an ugly picture, or so it may seem. Yet the spectacle of millions of lives crushed by the quest for corporate profits (and our comfort), and the silent winking-out of the beautiful creatures who have been our companions for thousands and millions of years – now *that* is ugly. *Let us hope it quickly becomes too ugly for us to bear – and I mean us, not unnamed others – and let us work together to quicken that day.* That's our foremost wish for 2014 and we hope you will consider it closely and conscientiously with us. Yes, we will continue and deepen our “normal” work, but these are not “normal” times any more, as we will explain face-to-face if given the chance, as well as in these bulletins.

In gratitude and solidarity,

Greg, for the Study Group