

What we're up to, and reflections on some opportunities and dangers at hand

Greg Mello, Executive Director, Los Alamos Study Group, June 20, 2024

Key points

As a necessary step to all the goals we seek, the nuclear disarmament community should make our collective opposition to further U.S. and NATO participation in the Ukraine War front-and-center, seeking diplomacy and peace with Russia instead of war and sanctions.

We should organize our work around cutting the national security budget deeply, not just around cutting nuclear weapons, a small part of the whole.

We should embrace new political alliances – artificially prevented up to now – to win the peace, cut the military budget, negotiate new national priorities, and heal social and political divides.

Powerful external events and the consequences of past mistakes will impel and require dramatic changes for which we would do well to prepare – mentally, socially, and politically. We can, and need to, win.



To subscribe to the Study Group's main listserve send a blank email to lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net. See especially our pages for [plutonium pit production](#), the [Ukraine War](#), [nuclear weapons modernization](#), NNSA [plans](#), the [Call for Sanity](#). Detailed [home page](#).



Los Alamos Study Group
2901 Summit Place NE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
www.lasg.org, 505-265-1200;
Greg's cell is 505-577-8563;
his email is gmello@lasg.org.

The Los Alamos Study Group is an educational nonprofit working primarily in New Mexico and Washington, DC. We have worked on nuclear disarmament since 1989 (and prior to this, individually) and full-time as organizers, public policy analysts, and lobbyists since 1992.

Over this 35-year period we can list many successes and we look forward to more. You can see what we have been working on, recently and earlier, [here](#).

We are currently working primarily on aspects of [nuclear weapons modernization](#) policy, especially the modernization of plutonium warhead core ([“pit” production](#)), a theme that has repeatedly surfaced over the history of the Study Group. [So far we have won](#), but it's a new world now.

We contribute to opposition to the [Ukraine War](#) and to the slaughter in Gaza and Palestine. We have also worked on aspects of energy policy, laboratory reform, nuclear cleanup and waste disposal, and much else.

Let's get straight to the point:

We need to make our opposition to further U.S. and NATO participation in the Ukraine War front-and-center, seeking diplomacy and peace with Russia instead of war and sanctions. We need new political alliances to win this peace.

Halting the long-standing hybrid war against Russia is necessary (but not sufficient) for:

- **Preventing wider great power war, and nuclear war, now and in the future;**
- **Promoting (arms control and) nuclear disarmament;**
- **Dismantling the controlling national security state and thereby regaining a chance to have a constitutional republic; and**
- **Dismantling the U.S. empire and fostering a multipolar world of sovereign states under international law.**

If we want disarmament we are going to need peace. To win that peace we are going to have to make it an actual political priority – which I don't see happening in the anti-nuclear community or much of anywhere else.

What is the current situation in nuclear weapons policy?

- There has been no significant nuclear disarmament in the last decade.
- The nuclear weapons modernization program is growing and evolving. More new warheads and bombs are being proposed; more are being funded than the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) can even build, on schedule. Four new and reconditioned delivery platforms are proceeding despite politically-minor criticism; another (SLCM-N) has now been funded.
- Congress tends to add money to the already-extravagant requests, not trim them. There is almost no oversight. For pits, a \$22 billion temporary factory is being built in Los Alamos to deliver additional (MIRVed) warheads for Sentinel, ASAP.
- MANY provocative nuclear policy steps are proposed, some are likely to be adopted.

Highlights of the current situation, continued:

- The Russian Federation, for good reason, considers the U.S. “non-agreement capable” and is fielding advanced nuclear systems (e.g. Poseidon). Russia is no longer interested in most arms control and won’t be for many years to come. Real arms control is dead. *We are at war with Russia, for crying out loud!*
- In February of 2026 there will be no quantitative limits on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arms.
- China is expanding its nuclear arsenal fairly rapidly. (Don’t panic.)
- Russia has a new mutual defense treaty with the DPRK, which has a new ICBM (from Russia?) and is also expanding its nuclear arsenal.
- The U.S. has helped carry out attacks on strategic nuclear targets inside Russia.

What do these and many other related facts tell us? They tell us we have lost the battle for nuclear disarmament for a generation. Our immediate job now is to prevent wider war, which might well mean *nuclear war* – twin catastrophes that we are approaching.

Some further suggestions:

- Why not ask for more?
 - We need to talk about cutting a) at least most if not b) all U.S. nuclear weapons, unilaterally. These are two different options, of course. If we don't accept nuclear deterrence for moral or pragmatic reasons, what other choice is there for us than to abandon them?
 - Meanwhile, the U.S. will **never** sign the TPNW. That's a red herring. Some of us worked hard to get that Treaty, but we never had the notion that the U.S., or any other nuclear state, would sign it. That was never its purpose. It was never a nuclear disarmament treaty in that direct sense.
 - We definitely need to organize around cutting the military budget deeply, not just for nuclear weapons (which are relatively "cheap" – ~5% of the whole).
 - We should disconnect as best we can from political parties that don't support what we want. Their narratives and propaganda are everywhere and they are artificially dividing our society and polity. Ditto for big, controlling funders.

“Nuclear issues” are very different. Not everything with “nuclear” in its name is a mutually-supportive (or even related!) issue.

- **Nuclear power is not the same issue as nuclear weapons. There is a small overlap.**
- **Time matters. Historical issues are...historical, not current.**
- **Speaking of time, it is also very difficult to strategize about things that may or may not happen in 2035 or 2040, after the huge economic, environmental, and other changes we confidently – if vaguely – anticipate.**
- **Compensation for past nuclear injuries is not the same as nuclear weapons policy, or war and peace.**
- **Nonproliferation is not the same as disarmament.**
- **Cleanup of nuclear weapons sites has little or nothing to do with current missions.**
- **Being vaguely “antinuclear” is meaningless. Conflation of various “nuclear issues” is highly counterproductive, because politicians use easy issues for “peacewashing.”**

Further reflections:

- **Deep vocational commitments to nuclear disarmament are always respectable, as spiritual endeavors that light the way at the very least.**
- **That said, we need to win. Winning is very important, more so than performative actions that signal virtue but accomplish little else. We need to find ways to win on the big issues or the best parts of civilization won't survive. We have a duty to win.**
- **It is very hard to see how a campaign of financial divestment in nuclear weapons companies will ever be fruitful. It hasn't been and it won't be.**
- **Current impacts matter politically – to people, places, habitats, communities, and cultures. Nuclear weapons activities happen somewhere. They aren't just abstract entities in a theoretical policy space.**
- **There has been a successful effort to shut down and/or redirect the U.S. peace and disarmament movements into harmless channels, led by major funders and the U.S. government. It is an ongoing “color anti-revolution,” somewhat documented.**

Finally,

- **We are in a whole new world, which challenges us to change our mentality as well as our foreign and domestic policies. Yesterday's verities may not apply today.**
 - **The vast sums given to the national security state have created a powerful second government, which in effect controls our constitutional institutions.**
 - **Internationally, the U.S.-led international order is crumbling. This is a tremendous opportunity.**
 - **Various *forces majeure*, including the need to service debt or else default, are coming to the fore. This means many things for us, politically.**
 - **One is that there will never again be a successful mass movement for nuclear disarmament in the U.S. There are now, and will be, too many other things going on requiring attention, including being able to live indoors and eat food.**
 - **Another is that the military and nuclear weapons establishment will not get all they want. Their present domination is incompatible with national survival.**