



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

Board of Directors (check lasg.org for pictures and bios, coming circa May 5):

These are: Lydia Clark, Treasurer, Santa Fe; Beverly Gattis, Amarillo; Sam Hitt, Santa Fe; Willem Malten, Santa Fe; Zia Mian, Princeton; Greg Mello, Secretary, Albuquerque; Peter Neils, President, Albuquerque; Shigeko Sasamori, Los Angeles; Astrid Webster, Albuquerque.

Advisory Council (check lasg.org for these people, circa May 15):

The Study Group has a great many well-known friends and allies around the world. We have decided to organize an Advisory Council that will bring some of these inadvertently-hidden relationships to light. Each month we will offer, via conference call, a chance for interested members to confer with us and each other, receive updates that can help them be more effective allies, and advise us.

Study Group Associates (check lasg.org, circa May 15):

Study Group Associates are activist and community leaders with whom we regularly meet and work, and who advise us.

Praise for the Study Group

Dr. Frank von Hippel, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University: “The Los Alamos Study Group (LASG) plays a unique role in the nuclear-weapons policy debate. Its Director, Greg Mello, understands more deeply than any other independent expert the plans and policy initiatives of the nation’s nuclear-weapon laboratories as they try to construct a future of planned obsolescence and continual renewal for the U.S. nuclear-weapon arsenal. He is a precious early warning system and strategic advisor for those of us who propose, in contrast, a future in which the U.S. nuclear stockpile is steadily reduced and increasingly marginalized in U.S. security policy considerations.”

Danielle Brian, Executive Director, Project On Government Oversight: “The Los Alamos Study Group consistently produces serious, solid analysis that we can count on. Their work has been instrumental in our understanding the on-the-ground impact of Los Alamos operations.”

Andrew Lichterman, Director, Western States Legal Foundation, LASG senior analyst 1998-1999: “For almost two decades, the Los Alamos Study Group has provided clear, accurate information about U.S. nuclear weapons programs and their broader context. LASG is the first place I call when I have a hard-to-answer question about the nuclear weapons laboratories. I know I will get an answer grounded in a firm commitment to peace and to truth.”

David Krieger, President, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation: “The Los Alamos Study Group is one of the most effective organizations in the country in providing clear and understandable information about what is going on behind the closed doors of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. The Laboratory is one of the major proponents and drivers of continued US reliance on nuclear weapons. Without the Los Alamos Study Group much of what happens at the Laboratory would be hidden from public view or distorted beyond recognition by clever public relations.”

Roger Snodgrass, Assistant Editor, Los Alamos Monitor: “I am very appreciative of my relationship with the Los Alamos Study Group. Greg’s articulate insight and historical perspective is invaluable for any attempt at balanced coverage of powerful and inherently secret organizations like the nuclear weapons laboratories. The Study Group does a public service, tirelessly analyzing obfuscatory documents and opaque policies, digging for truth and providing an independent view representing the public in so many arenas where the public might not otherwise be represented at all.”

“The Los Alamos Study Group consistently produces serious, solid analysis that we can count on.”
– Danielle Brian, POGO

It is critical to stop pit production, and we can (continued)

- New Mexico’s political system would continue its subaltern relationship with New Mexico’s nuclear laboratories, uranium enrichment plant, waste disposal sites, and with various nuclear contractors, some of whom are now campaigning to bring additional nuclear facilities (mostly waste-oriented) to New Mexico.
- If the state’s politicians continue to depend on nuclear and defense thinking and contractors, they will continue to ignore realistic solutions to the state’s economic, social, and environmental problems. These leaders, some powerful, will also (continue to) forestall development of sound *national* energy and climate policies.
- “Plutonium-induced” changes in the state’s identity, culture, reputation, and politics would lower the barriers to more nuclear investments in a downward spiral, further investing the state in injustice, unsustainability, and continuing to stunt its democratic institutions.
- Finally, pit production has been very difficult for DOE and NNSA to achieve, in part because it is utterly unnecessary and in part because it is so hard, dangerous, dirty, and expensive. Six plans have failed since 1988. Either Senator Bingaman or Congressman Udall could stop this relatively easily if they wanted to do so, given other realities. Senator Domenici is the main congressional force behind expanded pit production at LANL.

May 1, 2007

Dear friends and colleagues –

I am writing to request your support for the work of the Los Alamos Study Group. We have never been more effective, and our work has never been more important. Yet we have never been quite so poor!

It’s a very eerie moment in U.S. nuclear history. Policy teeters on a knife-edge between disarmament and rearmament, but silence largely reigns. The attention of policy-makers, the public and news media, the nonprofit community, and the major foundations has not quite caught up with events – and no wonder, given the smokescreen in which they are occurring – leaving too many decisions chiefly in the hands of autonomous, largely unconscious, nuclear bureaucracies.

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) hopes to begin producing plutonium warhead cores (“pits”) a little before Christmas of this year at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). If that happens, it will be the first time the U.S. has produced pits in 18 years. With new pits, the production of whole new warheads can also restart, lighting up all ten warhead factories, labs, and NNSA administrative centers with new work and a fresh sense of importance and legitimacy. It remains to be seen if this will happen – and if it does, whether it will – or can – be sustained.

Of course these events would echo around the world, reinforcing those who say their nation too should have nuclear weapons. Security would decline for everyone.

Without new pits, new warheads, and new production, the warhead enterprise faces very serious internal crises related to an aging workforce, declining practical skills, poor morale, aging facilities, and a fading ideological commitment to nuclear weapons, among other problems. The apparent social consensus that once supported U.S. WMD in the face of bedrock moral values and sound safety, fiscal, and environmental practices has long since evaporated.

Make no mistake: pit production, and the new factories needed to provide it, isn’t needed to maintain the very large, diverse, nuclear arsenal of today. It is needed for the novel arsenal of tomorrow.

(For more on this point, see the text box to the right and the talking points at http://www.lasg.org/PU_talking_points1.htm.)

All is far from lost. The nuclear weapons proposals of the Bush Administration are being subjected to withering criticism. They don’t make sense from many perspectives, even internal ones. (Typical example mentioned to us by a cognizant White House official: how in the world can the U.S. make thousands of new warheads while simultaneously rebuilding the factories needed to make them – let alone do all this “on-budget”?) These grandiose nuclear plans, for which New Mexico is supposed to do “the dirty work,” can be defeated. We’ve done it before.

They can be defeated regionally, nationally, or internationally – or as it usually happens, through a combination of all three. At the Study Group we work in all three ways, working with colleagues across the country and around the world. We know how to win. **Huge opportunities are opening up in all three arenas, but we very much need help – your help, we hope – to take advantage of them.** It won’t be easy, but if we work together creatively, firmly, and with constant purpose, we can’t fail.

It is critical to stop warhead core (“pit”) production, and we can.

CONDENSED TALKING POINTS

- Pit production is not needed to maintain each and every warhead and bomb in the U.S. arsenal until at least 2060 if not longer. There is a pit in each of the almost 10,000 warheads and bombs in the current arsenal and there are at least 13,000 extra pits. Bush has promised to dismantle ~ 4,000 warheads and bombs. There are many forms of redundancy built into the U.S. nuclear posture.
- There are legally-binding, widely-recognized obligations to achieve nuclear abolition intertwined with the world’s nonproliferation treaties and regimes.
- Several big polls show that at least 80% of the American public supports full nuclear disarmament pursuant to treaty.
- LANL is the *only* place in the U.S. where plutonium warhead cores (“pits”) can be made for at least the next 15 years or more. Most (not all) new warheads require new pits. Hence LANL is pivotal in whether or not the U.S. resumes nuclear weapon production after the current 18-year pause.
- Ominously, the first two kinds of pits to be made are for the Trident missile system. The bulk of these pits, and the new warheads to be made from them, are for a warhead shell for which an ultra-high-accuracy variant already has been designed, built, and tested, ostensibly for “conventional” warheads for “prompt global strike.” (continued on p. 2)

It is critical to stop pit production, and we can (continued)

- If pit production can be postponed just a few years, global security imperatives, increasingly obvious even in the U.S., may allow a sober reassessment of pit production benefits and costs. Ideological commitment may wane as “Cold Warriors” retire. Superfluous skills will disappear, facilities will age, and fiscal realities will press, all making gratuitous, aggressive pit and warhead production less likely.
- Failure to resume production would realistically lower the status of the nuclear weapons enterprise in the U.S., reducing the legitimacy and appeal of an aggressive nuclear posture and allowing decisionmakers time and reason to disinvest in nuclear weapons.
- In theory, LANL can make pits now and is planning to do so this year. LANL may or may not be able to do so in actual practice. And it can only do so at a low rate, by breaking internal safety rules, driving a reluctant workforce, and building “work-arounds” to temporarily fix various infrastructure deficiencies.
- Key members of Congress already oppose adding new production capacity at LANL. Last month, construction of the larger of two new pit production buildings appears to have been deferred for a year pending other decisions.
- If new production capacity is acquired by LANL – through new construction, gradual expansion of existing capacity, or both – there would be serious consequences. Preventing proliferation and arms races would be much harder. Look –
 - More production capacity if acquired would be used – indeed *must* be used to be proven. Pit production would begin in earnest and overall U.S. warhead manufacture would then resume with very serious ramifications worldwide.
 - The pits made would very likely be for a new generation of warheads, possibly including disclosed or undisclosed “small builds” of “special weapons.” There is little or no interest in building extra copies of warheads slated for dismantlement!
 - Since these new weapons would be untested, the U.S. would be unlikely to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In that case, few if any other key states would ratify, and the CTBT would not enter into force. (*continued on p. 3*)

Our community and ways to get involved

For the past few years the Study Group has consisted of concentric circles of people self-selected by the degree of involvement they would like to have. Some of the outer rings are rather specialized, so perhaps a sunflower, symbolizing nuclear disarmament, is a good analogy. In the center is the paid staff, currently just two: Greg Mello and Trish Williams-Mello, with more than 30 years of nonprofit, organizing and issue experience between them. Greg is an internationally-known expert in nuclear weapons issues; Trish has been managing nonprofit operations for a decade and a half here and for STAND of Amarillo, watchdog of the Pantex nuclear weapons plant.

Supporting the Study Group sunflower like a stem are the directors, currently nine people (see back page). Our Advisory Council and our Associates work with us, amplifying and advising our work in particular areas where they have expertise or interest. We maintain a core email list of 650 people, a larger e-alert list of 2,200, and a mailing list of 6,500. Unnamed allies in government and its contractors help on frequent occasions, and we maintain excellent working contacts with our international NGO and UN colleagues.

This is not a hobby for any of us here. We are serious people (though we have fun too), and we mean business. All parties involved, inside government and outside it, understand this.

Our democracy is very broken in most respects, and we face energy and environmental challenges, among others, that are nothing short of apocalyptic. So we try hard to work smart, given our limited resources and time. We have been remarkably successful at doing so over the years. We also know that what worked yesterday does not necessarily work today.

If you want to be more involved, call us.

We are a truth-seeking organization that amplifies and grounds individual efforts in a worldwide network of activists, scholars, government officials, independent experts, and journalists. We’ve found that most professionals are quite eager to get our reliable information, especially in forms they can use. Our disarmament message closes no doors.



Greg Mello, invited to speak to the Española City Council, speaks about pit production, its likely future impacts, and about LANL’s poor regional economic performance

Opportunities and challenges

Given what this Administration has in mind (and has done!), you’d think quite a few citizens and non-governmental organizations would be visiting Congress, reasoning with staff, meeting with congresspersons, and generally arguing for nuclear restraint, a reality-based security paradigm, and so on.

You’d be wrong about that. There is very little nuclear weapons lobbying or education going on. The few people involved are stretched to the limit, and many are new to the issues. New leadership in Congress means just that – new leaders and new staff. They must make a raft of decisions quickly and with little reliable information. Even in the executive branch, experience is scarce, and insular.

In most of the places nuclear weapons decisions are being made only a few of the dots are being connected. It isn’t rocket science, but it’s very important to connect those dots, to help the system learn and think, and it isn’t happening fast enough. H.G. Wells said “Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.” This is as true today for nuclear weapons as it is for climate issues. In the past few months, it has been somewhat surprising and gratifying to see how welcome our contributions have become in the halls of power.

We are now badly resource-limited. In the 1990s we were supported by a healthy mix of generous individual donors and foundation grants. The latter generally increased over time until the traumatic events of 9/11/01 and the advent of George Bush. The foundations which supplied much of our funding no longer exist today. In the past few years, generous major donors have stepped forward to fill part of the gap. We have tightened our belts and kept going. Our voice is as uniquely important in this field as ever and in some ways more influential, but our funding is now just a fraction of what it was in even the recent past.

Some of you may be able to help our work financially or in other ways (some of which are shown on the enclosed card). As this historical moment, *everything* depends upon you and me acting decisively and effectively. I hope you will consider joining our efforts.

Greg Mello,
Executive Director



Director Willem Malten, then-intern Darwin BondGraham, director Zia Mian, and former staff member Andrew Lichterman at a Non-Proliferation Treaty meeting in NYC at the UN, 2004.

It is critical to stop pit production, and we can (continued)

- Adding renewed U.S. warhead design and production to many other powerful negative factors already present would make it likely that *all* efforts by *all* parties to strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) would fail, further weakening restraint over nuclear anarchy.
- Making a new generation of U.S. warheads and bombs would help legitimate nuclear weapons worldwide and stimulate a variety of responsive investments in other countries, all driven or protected by U.S. hypocrisy. Fresh U.S. commitments to nuclear weapons would poison restraint and empower hard-liners worldwide in a complex manner very hard to control.
- Russia in particular would continue to modernize and invest in its nuclear forces for this and other potent reasons.
- Pit production would have big implications for New Mexico – some new, some continuing.
 - LANL would become primarily a production site as the exigencies of pit production take over lab funding and culture. Its reputation would reflect that. Even without accidents, a “plutonium” identity and reputation would come to be shared to some extent throughout the Santa Fe metropolitan area and Northern New Mexico. Already the Santa Fe metro area is home to a growing, unregulated nuclear waste dump, by far the largest in New Mexico and the largest in a four-state area. Most of the new waste is generated by pit production and related programs.
 - This would affect the area’s culture and quality of life directly and it would harm the area’s economic development potential, currently based in substantial part on perceptions of environmental amenity.
 - These impacts would combine with the regional impacts of global warming (including long-term drought, dramatic ecological changes triggered by drought spikes, significant loss of stream flow and water supplies, and the loss of most skiing), as well as with a variety of social problems, almost certain to increase for other reasons. All these problems would be negatively synergistic. (*continued, p. 4*)