

Posturing ourselves to death so contractors can thrive

The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States

Greg Mello, Los Alamos Study Group, November 16, 2023

Hell is empty and all the devils are here.

Shakespeare, "The Tempest"

Only he who knows the empire of might and knows how not to respect it is capable of love and justice...Thus it is that those to whom destiny lends might, perish for having relied too much upon it.

Simone Weil, "The Iliad, Poem of Might"



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NOTICE

OFFICE OF CIVILIAN DEFENSE
WASHINGTON D. C.



* **INSTRUCTION TO PATRONS ON PREMISES** *
* **IN CASE OF NUCLEAR BOMB ATTACK:** *

UPON THE FIRST WARNING:

- 1. STAY CLEAR OF ALL WINDOWS.**
- 2. KEEP HANDS FREE OF GLASSES, BOTTLES, CIGARETTES, ETC.**
- 3. STAND AWAY FROM BAR, TABLES, ORCHESTRA, EQUIPMENT AND FURNITURE.**
- 4. LOOSEN NECKTIE, UNBUTTON COAT AND ANY OTHER RESTRICTIVE CLOTHING.**
- 5. REMOVE GLASSES, EMPTY POCKETS OF ALL SHARP OBJECTS SUCH AS PENS, PENCILS, ETC.**
- 6. IMMEDIATELY UPON SEEING THE BRILLIANT FLASH OF NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, BEND OVER AND PLACE YOUR HEAD FIRMLY BETWEEN YOUR LEGS.**
- 7. THEN KISS YOUR ASS GOODBYE.**

This report – which is not an official government proposal; please be clear about that – may be the most hawkish nuclear policy prescription bearing any resemblance of official imprimatur presented since the early 1980s, when this cartoon was drawn.



"THE TROUBLE WITH GENERALS IS, THEY'RE ALWAYS FIGHTING THE LAST WAR!"

A few things to note right off the top. This report is about money.

- At least three-fourths of the authors of this report are lobbyists ([“US nuke panel packed with weapons industry interests,”](#) Eli Clifton and Ben Freeman, *Responsible Statecraft*, 11/10/23).
- The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), which designs, tests, and builds U.S. nuclear warheads, is more than 97% privatized. Nuclear weapons are a for-profit enterprise, driven by high salaries, corporate profits, and personal bonuses. Salaries are generally much greater than federal salaries for equivalent work and can now be negotiated individually at the staff level.
- NNSA’s prime contractors have little or no capital at risk and are indemnified against claims from major accidents. Contracts often involve tens of billions of dollars of work, done on a reimbursement and fee basis.
- Senior employees are incentivized via bonuses. In “non-profits” like Triad, LLC, which operates Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), it is these individuals which profit financially over and above their large salaries; the corporations involved also obtain influence affecting other government work. NNSA contractors form a cabal.

Some key elements and recommendations in this report (1 of 5)

- The U.S. needs a new strategic posture because Russia and China are being “aggressive.” This is “troubling” because these countries are in “growing competition” with the U.S. These two countries “are dedicated to and focused on undermining the post-Cold War international order.” One is a nuclear peer and the other soon will be if trends continue.
- U.S. strategic force upgrades face “problems”: “workforce shortages, supply chain limitations, and inadequate scientific, technical, and experimental infrastructures.”
- Must commit to” a whole of government approach to be more efficient and effective.” This was their #1 recommendation. Executive and congressional branches must be “synchronized.” This will be “akin to the ‘moonshot’ of the 1960s.” State governments must also be harnessed.
- The U.S. is not only not leading, but is also not “keeping up with technology” needed for strategic domination.
- All the existing program of record (POR) must be executed as quickly as possible, but that is not enough. Much more will be needed in every strategic domain to deter and if necessary defeat Russia and China simultaneously.

Key elements and recommendations in this report (2 of 5)

- The critical timeframe for action is 2027-2035, because China's strategic assets are rapidly growing.
- No cost analysis was done.
- "A number" of the commissioners believe the size of the U.S. nuclear stockpile and number of delivery systems should increase (belying claims of "consensus").
- If the U.S. cannot deter and defeat Russia and China simultaneously with conventional forces, U.S. strategies must increase reliance on nuclear weapons.
- Nuclear weapons can be legally used within certain parameters.
- A (much) larger number of targets in China need to be addressed.
- The U.S. does not and should not rely on launching ICBMs under attack.
- A range of tactical nuclear options are needed (about which more below).
- Tactical weapons should be forward-based in the Asia-Pacific theater.
- DoD and NNSA strategic infrastructure should be expanded in time to meet the expanding threat, i.e. immediately.

Some key elements and recommendations in this report (3 of 5)

- “Hedges” against failures, delays, and strategic inadequacies should be provided up and down the line. The POR is likely to stumble or be delayed, or worse.
- Bipartisan consensus supporting all this must be urgently forged.
- Technical and vocational training programs should be started and/or greatly amped up to supply the necessary skilled trades workforce to build all these weapons.
- Larger precision conventional global strike forces are needed on an accelerated basis.
- More resilience space warfare assets are urgently needed.
- Effective missile defenses must be quickly developed and deployed.
- Aggression must be deterred “regionally, before it can reach the U.S. homeland, while also enabling U.S. economic prosperity through access to international markets.”
- The U.S. should only engage in arms control only after the U.S. decides what it wants, and only if and to the extent it benefits U.S. strategic domination.
- The U.S. should prepare to upload some or all hedge warheads.

Some key elements and recommendations in this report (4 of 5)

- Plan to deploy Sentinel in a MIRVed configuration.
- Increase the number of LRSO missiles and warheads.
- Increase the number of B-21 bombers and air tankers.
- Increase the number of Columbia-class SSBNs and Trident missiles; upgrade the latter faster.
- “Pursue” putting some ICBMs in a road-mobile configuration.
- Initiate preparations to put a portion of the bomber fleet on continuous alert status.
- Urgently,
 - Exercise uploading ICBM and SLBM warheads to prepare for breaking out of New START limits in February 2026.
 - Develop procedures to “reconvert” SLBM launchers and B-52 bombers, again to break out from New START limits.
 - Make sure existing deployed systems can operate past their planned retirement dates, which would hedge against delays and/or provide extra weapons.

Some key elements and recommendations in this report (5 of 5)

- Develop and deploy theater nuclear weapons that can be forward-deployed or deployable, survivable, have a range of yields including low yields, can penetrate enemy air defenses, and arrive at their targets promptly.
- The planned DoD/NNSA infrastructure is too small and old to supply the weapons needed during the critical 2027-2035 timeframe, including pit production facilities. Infrastructure modernization is proceeding too slowly; NNSA must pull out all the stops to execute its existing POR. Meanwhile the U.S. has zero pit production capacity.
- The U.S. must plan to increase production capacity beyond the POR. Pull out every stop to speed up NNSA's work. Many recommendations as to how to do that.
- Make nuclear weapons the highest official priority of the DOE. Structurally, make NNSA more powerful and the Secretary of Energy less powerful. Give more power to the Nuclear Weapons Council.
- They assess that the Biological Weapons Convention does not prevent development of bioweapons. (In fact, dozens of facilities in the U.S. and abroad are researching and developing bioengineered pathogens and vaccines “just in case” right now.)

The existing nuclear modernization program of record, which the Commission believes is too little:

- Replaces or upgrades every nuclear delivery system (heavy bombers, ballistic missile submarines, land-based missiles, and dual-capable aircraft)
- Upgrades and/or replaces all nuclear command and control
- Replaces or upgrades every nuclear warhead and bomb as needed or desired, with 6 underway right now, if we include equipping the W87-0 with a new “smart” arming, firing, and fuzing (AFF) system.
- Upgrades, replaces, or augments every key NNSA facility and capability and expanding and perfecting NNSA’s experimental and computational nuclear design and testing capabilities
- Invests substantially in all the other strategic assets mentioned in the Commission’s report.

For details see: This report; LASG [“US nuclear weapons since 2020: continuity & change,”](#) 2021; [“Update on US Nuclear Weapons Modernization for the International Disarmament Community,”](#) 2020; NNSA/DOE Stockpile Stewardship & Management Plans (SSMPs), e.g. [FY 2023 SSMP](#); DoD [Nuclear Matters 2020](#).

The existing program of record has evolved. Here are some of the main ways.

- [Pit production](#) capacity has proven difficult. [CMRR-NF](#) (the previous Commission's highest infrastructure priority) was canceled after 14 year's work; pit production "modules" at LANL were proposed and withdrawn; "split production" at 1) a small old facility at LANL and 2) [a larger new facility at SRS](#) was selected in 2018 and joined the POR in 2020. The LANL part of the plan was formally rejected by NNSA in 2017, as was split production.
- The W76-2 low-yield Trident warhead was created from the population of W76-1s.
- The W93 replacement for the W88 was made a POR.
- The new-pit "Reliable Replacement Warhead" (RRW) was replaced by the new-pit W87-1.
- A smart fuze for the W87-0 will begin full production this year.
- A W61-13 is proposed, to be made from existing B61-7s (next slide, not yet in the POR).
- A new DCA is being built (the F-35 aircraft).
- A number of expensive diagnostic and computational tools have been built or are in the POR, e.g. the Enhanced Capability for Subcritical Testing (ECSE).
- Numerous "smaller" infrastructure projects have been added by NNSA.
- A Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N) is being debated, as is retention of the B83.
- Costs have gone through the roof and many projects and programs are delayed.

Recent addition: (excerpts from NNSA Fact Sheet on B61-13, October 27, 2023)

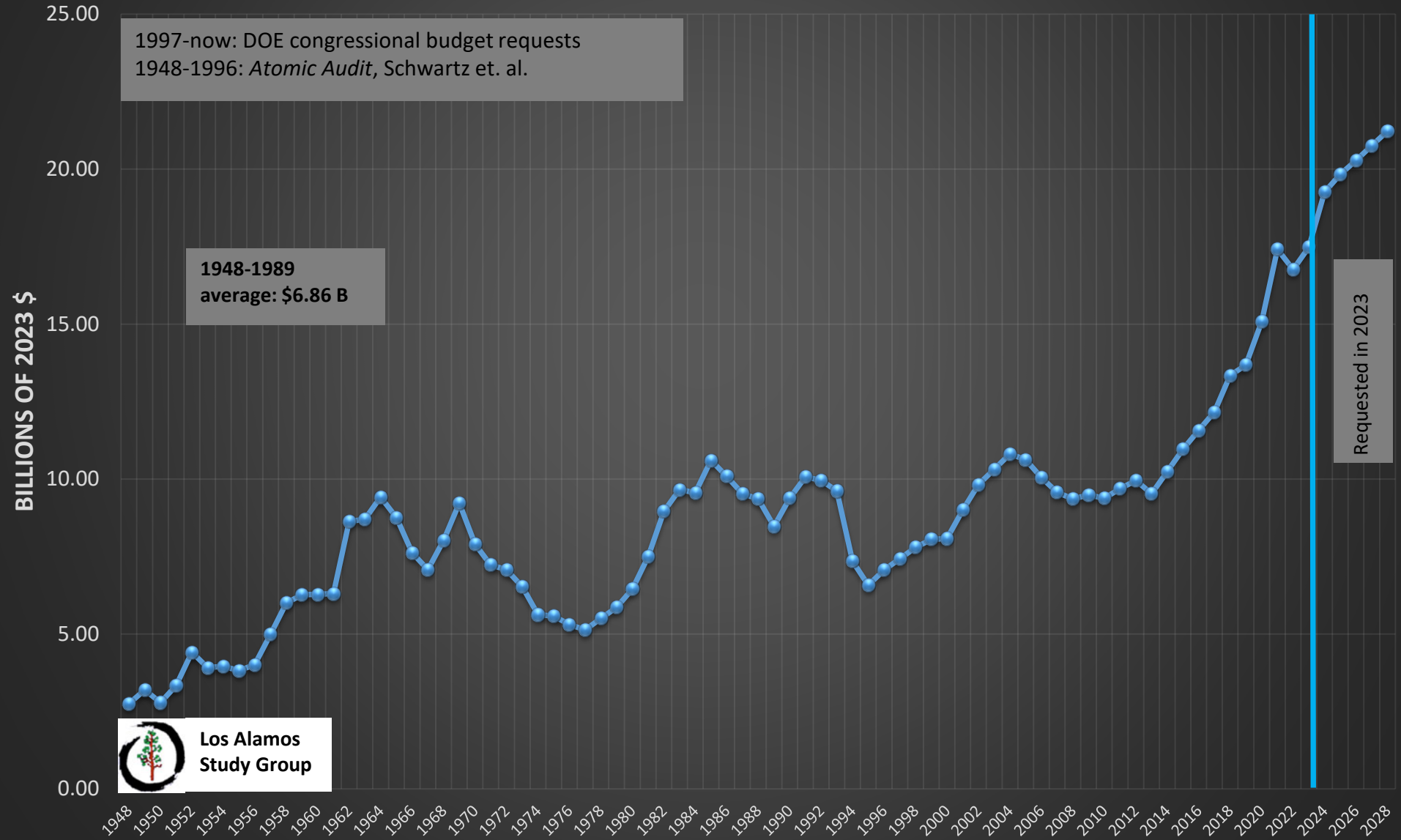
On October 27, the Department of Defense announced that the United States will pursue a modern variant of the B61 nuclear gravity bomb, designated the B61-13, pending Congressional authorization and appropriation.

- The B61-13 will replace some of the B61-7s in the current stockpile, pending Congressional authorization and appropriation. The number of B61-12s to be produced will be lowered by the same amount as the number of B61-13s produced.
- The B61-13 will have a yield similar to the B61-7 (up to ~340 kt), which is higher than that of the B61-12 (up to ~50 kt). The B61-13 will include the modern safety, security, and accuracy features of the B61-12.
- While the B61-13 will provide the President with additional options against certain harder and large-area military targets, DoD will separately continue its work to complete and implement a comprehensive strategy for defeat of hard and deeply buried targets, as directed in the Nuclear Posture Review.
- The B61-13 will provide the President with additional options against certain harder and large-area military targets, even while the Department works to retire legacy systems such as the B83-1 and the B61-7.

One way NNSA's nuclear weapons "program of record" has evolved is in its cost, which has risen relentlessly in constant dollars since its inception.

Spending to the right of the 2023 line is that requested. No inflation estimates have been applied to these requests.

AEC/ERDA/DOE/NNSA Annual Spending for Nuclear Weapons Research, Development, Testing, and Production: NNSA Weapons Activities with administrative costs included; constant 2023\$; ≥FY24 requested, in then-year \$. Updated 11/16/23.



Is gradual democratic reform, as we usually think of it, possible? Probably not.

- Michael Glennon: The “Trumanite” institutions (DoD, NSC, and CIA, to which we can add NNSA) have all but conquered the “Madisonian” institutions.
- In Ray McGovern’s formulation, the “MICIMATT” (military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-MEDIA*-academic-think-tank) complex reigns supreme. (*most critical, per Ray)
- NNSA and its contractors have acquired unique political powers and immunities deriving from the existential nature of nuclear weapons. (For a glimpse of some see ["Structural Features Making NNSA an Unusual Federal Agency,"](#) memo for VP Biden, 2016; there are many others).

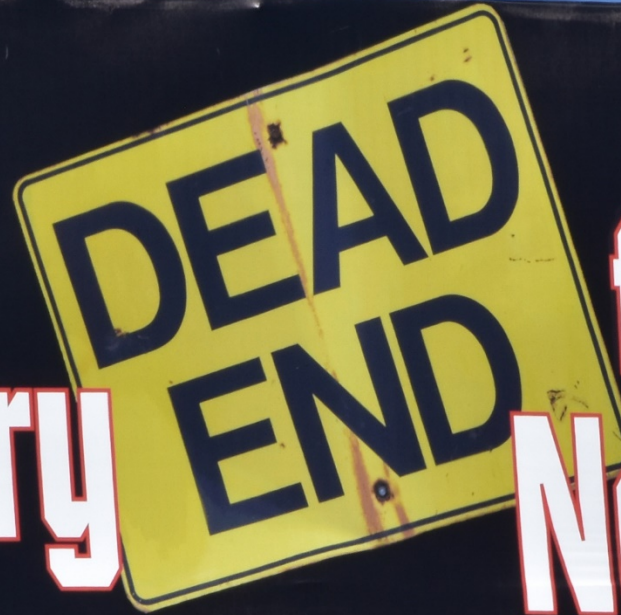
It is possible to map out saner alternative policies, which we must in general do. Some of these may be adopted if we survive the POR and “business as usual” otherwise, let alone these doomsday recommendations.

We must in the meantime be realistic: the U.S. is currently on the road to nuclear war with Russia. Arms control may be impossible for a generation. Even absent war, the federal priorities implied in this proposal are deadly.

Next time: “Force Majeure”

- Why the present situation is pregnant with opportunity, despite being “piled high with difficulty”
- Why federal authority and funding will not suffice to build the proposed nuclear forces
- The peculiar “power of proximity” (Arundhati Roy) and its modalities, here in New Mexico
- Elements of what we, in our respective locales, can do to open the door to peace and hasten the end of the arms race

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