

NUCLEAR SHORTS

U.S. Corporations Set to Weaponize Outer Space

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Another arms race is raging, this time over our heads. The Bush administration plans to spend between \$500 and \$750 billion dollars in the next 10 years to take control of space with weaponization and nuclearization. Giant corporations lobbying for and benefiting from enormous NASA contracts include Raytheon, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrop-Grumman. Projects now underway include the Near Field Infrared Experiment or N-Fire, a missile launching satellite, and Project Prometheus which aims at production of nuclear reactor-powered spacecraft. Research continues on wild-eyed schemes like bouncing laser beams off “mirrors” attached to orbiting spaceships, space-based surveillance systems, radio frequency weapons, and counter-surveillance systems capable of disrupting global communications.

The head of U.S. Space Command, Gen. Lance “Lordy” Lord, has said, “Future challenges require that we develop flexible, responsive force-projection capabilities to complement our nuclear deterrent force.”

U.S. militarization of space may already have produced casualties as two accidents have contaminated the global environment. In 1964, the U.S. Snap-9A plutonium-powered generating system — aboard the ill-fated Transit 5BN-3 satellite — spread 2.1 pounds of plutonium-238 across the atmosphere when it fell out of orbit and burned. In 1978, the Cosmos 954 satellite carrying 110 pounds of highly enriched uranium fuel fell from orbit scattering its radioactive debris.

In spite of China and Russia urging President Bush to abide by the agreement, the U.S. has been making a sham of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which set space aside for peaceful purposes. — Karl Grossman, “Bush Lightyear: To Infinity and Beyond,” *The Ecologist*, July/August 2004

China Plans Reactor on Earthquake Site

YANGJIANG, China — A 4.9 magnitude earthquake struck the site where state government officials recently approved plans to build the country’s largest power reactor, a 66-billion yuan [\$7.9 billion] behemoth. Nevertheless, the head of Guangdong’s Earthquake Prediction and Research Center said his group had studied the potential for quake-caused reactor accidents. “We have studied the possibility and strength of tremors Yangjiang will face. We have analyzed the risk of building a nuclear plant there and will be constructing a plant that can withstand earthquakes measuring seven in seismic intensity.”

— *South China Morning Post*, Sept. 18, 2004

IAEA: Iran Has No Nuclear Weapons Program

ISFAHAN, Iran — While the Bush administration trumpets war-like warnings about a future nuclear weapons program in Iran and talks of a need for “regime change,” a two-year investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency has concluded that Iran has no nuclear weapons materials. The *Washington Post* reported Nov. 8 that Iran is still “far away from being able to make bomb-grade uranium.” Iran agreed Nov. 15 to suspend its uranium-enrichment program, accepting demands from Britain, France, Germany and the European Union, in exchange for future talks on economic development. British Prime Minister Tony Blair recently persuaded the White House to endorse the agreement, but Bush’s people have been harshly critical. Hawks in the White House continue to call Iran a part of the so-called “axis of evil,” along with Iraq and North Korea. Outgoing Secretary of State General Colin Powell, ridiculed for his dubious UN speech about Iraqi weapons and programs, said similarly Nov. 17 that Iran was “actively working” on missiles that could carry nuclear warheads. Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, told the *New York Times*, “It makes no sense for the Europeans to offer incentives and for the U.S. to make threats.”

— *The Washington Post*, Nov. 8, & *The New York Times*, Nov. 21 & 23, 2004

Big Players Vying for New Reactor Contracts

TOKYO — The Japanese company Hitachi Ltd. plans to collaborate with General Electric to develop and build an advanced nuclear reactor in the U.S. by 2010. Hitachi is having a tough go at home financially and is looking for new markets. GE has completed a draft design of the ESBWR — European Simplified Boiling Water Reactor — two of which have been operating in Japan since 1997, and will submit it to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for approval next year. GE and Hitachi are making preparations so reactor construction can begin quickly once the license is approved.

Several companies are preparing for a wave of new reactor construction in the U.S. Westinghouse won approval Sept. 13 for a model called the AP-1000. Moreover, five new reactor designs from five different companies are in review with the NRC. Atomic Energy of Canada, General Atomics, AREVA and Siemens company Framatome, headquartered in Paris, Westinghouse and Exelon are all hoping for licenses to make a killing in the U.S. Targeted locations for new reactors include Entergy’s Grand Gulf in Mississippi, Exelon’s Clinton site in Illinois and Dominion Resources North Anna site in Virginia. — Reuters, Oct. 17, 2004; Nuclear Regulatory Commission, <nrc.gov/reactors/new-licensing/design-cert/pbmr.html>

Wisc. Reactor Worker Contaminated

TWO RIVERS, Wisc. — On Oct. 30, a worker was injured and contaminated at the Kewaunee reactor near Two Rivers, Wisconsin. The unidentified man was rushed to a nearby hospital after on-site attempts to decontaminate him failed.

The accident, registered as a “non-emergency,” was reported to the NRC Chicago office. NRC spokesman Jan Strasma told Nukewatch that the victim was working inside the containment structure when he collapsed. Although the details are not yet public, Strasma said the victim fell against a contaminated protective suit of another worker. Strasma said the man’s hair and neck were contaminated and that hospital staff successfully decontaminated him. Two utility company radiation technicians accompanied the ambulance and later reported that neither the vehicle nor the hospital were contaminated. No independent verification of these assurances is required. The NRC also said it did not know what isotopes had poisoned the worker’s neck and hair.

— Official NRC notification, Oct. 30; NRC Region 3 phone interview, Nov. 16, 2004

Russians Panic After Reactor Steam Leak

MOSCOW — Widespread panic broke out in the Russian town of Saratov, 560 miles northeast of Moscow, when residents spotted a white plume above the Blakovskaya reactor site. Hundreds of people left the area, businesses closed and pharmacies ran out of thyroid-shielding iodine. Rumors spread not to drink the water, but to drink vodka.

Panic especially struck people who recalled the cover-up of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, when authorities waited for two days to notify residents.

According to one news report, a leak developed in the reactor’s water system, while another account claims a turbine malfunctioned. No increase in “natural” radiation was reported. On Nov. 6, Russia’s Rosenergoatom company restarted the reactor. — Reuters & AP, Nov. 6, 2004

Mislabeled Nuclear Waste Shipped Illegally

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico — In the second such incident this year, the Energy Department has violated an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) directive and shipped at least 602 drums of untested plutonium waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) near Carlsbad, New Mexico, since August 2003. The EPA, which is responsible for safety at the WIPP site, requires mixed waste, toxic and radioactive, to undergo “characterization” inspections and testing. The illegal batch of waste was shipped from the Hanford nuclear reservation to WIPP and buried 2,150 feet underground. Federal regulators are considering a shutdown of all radioactive waste shipments to WIPP from Hanford as well as a fine.

Between last March and July, 107 drums of radioactive waste that required testing from Idaho’s National Engineering Laboratory were “overlooked” by the DOE and shipped to WIPP illegally. The New Mexico Environment Department issued a \$2.4 million fine in that incident.

— *Albuquerque Journal*, Nov. 2, 2004; *New Mexico Environment Department*, August 31, 2004

Launder This Money, Please

LITHUANIA — The country’s 3.5 million people were warned Nov. 5 to be on the lookout for a radioactive U.S. \$100 bill. The missing bill set off alarms at an airport checkpoint and was quarantined, although officials said they do not know how it became radioactive. *Reuters* reported that the bill could have been contaminated in “Eastern Europe that still has a high level of post-Chernobyl contamination.” The bill was reported missing and probably stolen Nov. 3, just before it was to be destroyed. In Lithuania, \$100 is about two-thirds of one month’s minimum wage. One official claimed the bill was not radioactive enough to cause burns but, “could pose risks for children or pregnant women.” However, testing for radiation without an expensive monitor is not possible. — *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 2004

FDA: Deadly Perchlorate Contaminating Food

WASHINGTON, DC — On Nov. 29, the Food and Drug Administration released alarming data that indicate a large portion of the United States’ milk and lettuce supply may be contaminated with unsafe levels of perchlorate, a toxic by-product of waste reactor fuel that is used in rocket fuel. The study analyzed milk and lettuce in 15 states, revealing perchlorate contamination in 94% of the samples. Perchlorate is linked to thyroid disorders, tumors, cancer and impairment of brain and nervous system development in fetuses.

In its survey, the FDA found an average concentration of 5.76 parts-per-billion in the milk, and 10.49 p.p.b. in the lettuce. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sets a limit at one p.p.b. Bill Walker, vice president of the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization that issued a warning about perchlorate contamination in California, recommends that people with thyroid problems and pregnant women monitor the total amount of perchlorate they ingest each day. Women are typically encouraged to drink extra milk and eat lettuce during pregnancy.

Previous studies have shown that perchlorate — leaking from hundreds of military bases and weapons contractors’

facilities — concentrates in lettuce grown with contaminated irrigation water. When contaminated water is used to grow alfalfa, cattle feeding on the hay take in the chemical and pass it on in their milk.

The FDA plans to wait until the National Academy of Sciences reviews the risks of perchlorate before deciding whether to enforce limits of the chemical in food.

— *WiredNews.com*, Nov. 30; & Environmental Working Group, Oakland, Calif., Nov. 30, 2004

Tax-free Profits for Navy Weapons Giants

WASHINGTON, DC — In October, a corporate tax cut was passed by Congress that slashed taxes by nearly \$500 million at two major military contractors, General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman. The provision allows shipbuilders to postpone their taxes for years on profits from building ships and submarines for the Navy. The tax break was supported by Democrats and Republicans despite a big jump in sales and profits enjoyed by both contractors. General Dynamics makes the *Arleigh Burke* class of Navy destroyers and *Seawolf* class nuclear submarines, while Northrop Grumman produces aircraft carriers and a new generation of destroyers.

In 1986, lawmakers in both parties decided that the same shipbuilders should pay income taxes on the billions of dollars in profits they make selling major weapons to the military. The reversal was a special provision in a bill which gave tax breaks to oil companies, corn farmers and dozens of other highly specific industries.

Since January 2003, General Dynamics’ employees and political action committees have made \$1.3 million in political contributions to lawmakers, 64% to Republicans. Northrop contributed \$1.24 million, 58% to Republicans.

— *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 2004

U.S. Plutonium Delivery Protested in France

CHERBOURG — A British Nuclear Fuels, Ltd. shipment of 300 lbs. of radioactive weapons-grade plutonium arrived in Cherbourg, France from the United States Oct. 7, 2004. The plutonium is set to be converted to experimental mixed-oxide, or MOX, fuel for nuclear reactors. Greenpeace and other local activists in France protested the shipment and clashed with police by blockading the road to the reprocessing facility at La Hague in Western France. A French court barred protesters from going within 100 yards of the shipment.

— *New York Times*, Oct. 7; & *Peace News*, Oct. 2004

Search for Lost H-bomb Renewed

LITTLE TYBEE ISLAND, Georgia. — The military is renewing a search for a nuclear weapon lost in the Atlantic Ocean since 1958. Derek Duke, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, has been looking for the bomb for five years and claims to have isolated an area the size of a football field with higher-than-normal radiation levels. Duke, working with Pentagon and National Lab scientists, will survey the area with sophisticated equipment to try and pinpoint the source of the radiation.

The bomb is one of 11 U.S. nuclear weapons lost during air or sea accidents. A crippled B-47 bomber dumped the H-bomb into the ocean after the plane collided with a fighter jet during a training flight. The 7,600-lb. bomb contains about 400 lbs. of conventional explosives and an undisclosed amount of uranium. The Air Force insists there is no risk of a nuclear blast because the plutonium trigger was removed before the ill-fated flight. Duke disagrees, citing a 1966 Air Force memo referring to the bomb as a “complete weapon.”

— *Mpls. Star Tribune*, Sept. 30; & *New York Times*, Oct. 1, 2004

Resources

- * *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist*, 6042 S. Kimbark Ave., Chicago, IL 60637, Web: thebulletin.org
- * **Committee to Bridge the Gap**, 1637 Butler Av., #203, Los Angeles, CA 90025, Tel.: (831) 462-6136, Web: envirolink.org
- * *The Ecologist*, No. 18 Chelsea Wharf, 15 Lots Rd, London, England, SW10 00J, Web: theecologist.org
- * **Environmental Working Group**, 1436 U St. N.W., Suite 100 | Washington, DC 20009, (202) 667-6982, Web: ewg.org
- * **Los Alamos Study Group**, Tel.: (505) 265-1200; Email: gmello@lasg.org; Web: lasg.com
- * **Military Toxics Project**, PO Box 558, Lewiston, ME 04243, Tel.: (207) 783-5091, Email: mtp@miltoxproj.org; Web: miltoxproj.org
- * **Nuclear Age Peace Foundation**, PMB 121, 1187 Coast Village Rd, #1, Santa Barbara, CA 93108, Tel.: (805) 965-3443
- * **Nuclear Information & Resource Service**, 1424 16th St. NW, #404, Washington, DC 20036, Tel.: (202) 328-0002; Web: nirs.org
- * *Peace News*, 5 Caledonian Rd, London, England N1 9NY, Tel.: (+44) 20 7278 3344, Email: editorial@peacenews.info; Web: peacenews.info
- * **Redwood Alliance**, PO Box 293, Arcata, CA 95518, Tel.: (707) 822-7884, Web: redwoodalliance.org
- * **Sierra Club**, 85 2nd St, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105, Tel.: (415) 977-5500 Email: information@sierraclub.org; Web: sierraclub.org
- * **Public Citizen**, 215 Penn. Av., SE Washington, DC 20003 (202) 546-4996 Web: citizen.org citizen.org/citizen.org

