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ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

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## *Succeeding Where Bush Failed*

# The Obama Administration's Nuclear Weapons Surge

By Darwin Bond-Graham

As with many aspects of the Obama presidency, expectations for drastic changes in nuclear weapons policy were high among liberals and the Left. Many wanted to believe that a program, however modest, of scaling back the military-industrial complex was commencing. Obama stoked these impressions on the campaign trail and in the earliest days of his presidency, with rhetoric such as “a world without nuclear weapons is profoundly in America’s interest and the world’s interest. It is our responsibility to make the commitment, and to do the hard work to make this vision a reality.”

Obama’s first term will go down in

history, however, as containing one of the single largest spending increases on nuclear weapons ever. His administration has worked vigorously to commit the nation to a multi-hundred-billion-dollar re-investment in nuclear weapons, mapped out over the next three-plus decades.

At the center of Obama’s ambitious nuclear agenda is the expansion of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex via a multi-billion-dollar construction program. Also, at the center of Obama’s nuclear agenda is a commitment of tens of billions of dollars to designing and building the next generation of nuclear submarines, ballistic missiles, and heavy bombers. Stockpiled nuclear warheads will re-

ceive billions more in refurbishment and new components. All of this is now underway. Completion dates for various pieces of this puzzle span the next half-century. Finally, Obama’s nuclear policies have been designed to leave the door open to new weapons at some future date.

Only one aspect of Obama’s presidency deviates significantly from his predecessor’s. Rather than projecting an unambiguously belligerent U.S. foreign policy resting openly upon the nuclear arsenal, Obama has promoted an agenda that my colleagues and I have defined elsewhere as anti-nuclear imperialism.

And again, as with many aspects of the Obama presidency, liberals and even many anti-nuclear activists have failed to see the president’s policy agenda for what it is. Instead of focusing on the reality of the Obama nuclear weapons surge, and

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Obama's Record

Over six months have passed since the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan. What progress if any has been made to deal with what is surely one of the worst industrial accidents in history?

The situation at the Fukushima No.1 power station site is far from being resolved, although Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) has said a “cold shutdown” of some of the reactors may be “within reach.” Despite a drastic reduction from the trillions of becquerels of radiation that were released during the darkest days of March, retired nuclear engineer Arnie Gunderson, who has supplied us with a steady source of reliable analyses, roughly estimates that the damaged reactors are still emitting a billion becquerels per day.

Recently, professor Hiroaki Koide, a radiation metrology and nuclear safety expert at Kyoto University’s Research

## *Japan’s Nuclear Disaster Radiation Still Leaking*

# Recovery Still Years Away

By Richard Wilcox

Reactor Institute, relayed this frightening assessment:

“The nuclear disaster is ongoing... Without accurate information about what’s happening inside the reactors, there’s a need to consider various scenarios. At present, I believe that there is a possibility that massive amounts of radioactive materials will be released into the environment again. At the No. 1 reactor, there’s a chance that melted fuel has burned through the ... floor of the reactor building, and has sunk into the ground. From there, radioactive materials may be seeping into the ocean and groundwater... Recovering the melted nuclear fuel is another huge challenge. I can’t even

imagine how that could be done ... there is a possibility that nuclear fuel has fallen into the ground, in which case it will take 10 or 20 years to recover it. We are now head to head with a situation that mankind has never faced before.”

Could professor Koide be worried that the corium (melted fuel) may reach the groundwater, resulting in the classic China syndrome?

Some nuclear experts are more optimistic, stating that “[e]fforts seem to be making smooth progress.” But there is still a catch-22 at work here: “Before the Fukushima crisis can be said contained, the holes and cracks from which the water and fuel are escaping must be lo-

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instead of acknowledging the true pro-nuclear weapons goals of the administration, as they have been outlined in budget and planning documents (which exist in stark contrast against Obama's vacuous public pronouncements), many continue to dwell on his idealistic rhetoric.

Ironically, the only thing that seems capable of slowing the Obama administration's enormous investments in nuclear weapons is the budget crisis, and the desire of some Republicans in the House of Representatives to cut nuke spending. But even here, the administration and Republicans in the Senate have managed, through several rounds of negotiations, to politically insulate nuclear weapons spending from much of the austerity now stripping social spending and even some military programs.

### **Bringing Hope to the Nuclear Weapons Complex – A Brief Historical Reprieve**

To understand just how profoundly important the Obama administration has been in advancing the legitimacy of and funding commitments for nuclear weapons, a short and recent history of U.S. nuclear policy is in order.

With the end of the Cold War in 1991, the institutions responsible for designing

and building nuclear arms – a complex of labs, factories, test sites, and dumping grounds, known as the “nuclear weapons complex,” located in New Mexico, Tennessee, California, Nevada, Missouri, and South Carolina – underwent a succession of compounding crises. It began with the sudden loss of the “Evil Empire” that till then gave nuclear weapons, and those who built them, a sense of necessity, legitimacy, even valor.

The first President Bush actually oversaw a large disarmament program and defunding of nuclear weapons. Nukes truly receded in importance in U.S. foreign policy. An important measure of this was the declining budget for nuclear

## **The first President Bush actually oversaw a large disarmament program and defunding of nuclear weapons. Nukes truly receded in importance in U.S. foreign policy. An important measure of this was the declining budget for nuclear weapons in the early 1990s.**

weapons in the early 1990s.

The nuclear weapons complex, however, organized and lobbied for its interests to promote new missions for nuclear weapons. A slew of books and white papers poured out about the importance of nukes in a post-Cold War world, to guard against tyrants like Saddam Hussein, or to hedge against the emergence of new superpowers, or even to protect civilization against shadowy “terrorists.” None of this ideological work stuck. The trend was toward disarmament by default, for no new all-encompassing justification for a multibillion-dollar nuclear weapons program was being articulated. Butter was beating guns in the budget debates. The two nuclear weapons labs, Los Alamos and Livermore, eyed each other with more than just the traditional competitive contempt; now they feared one of them would be closed, and they jockeyed for the position of the “best” nuke lab. It was a moment of weakness for the

nuclear complex that could have been turned into an opportunity for anti-war and pro-democracy forces.

It was during the Clinton administration that the nuclear weapons complex staged a comeback by creating the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Program (SSM). The latter, which was dreamed up as a means of pumping billions of dollars into the weapons complex over more than a decade, constituted an actual increase in spending on nuclear weapons, even though they seemed more useless than ever. SSM came about largely because of the Clinton administration's counterproductive obsession with ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The CTBT would have barred the U.S.A. and nearly all other nations from detonating nuclear weapons, thus halting the primary means by which new weapons can be designed, or the necessary step by which non-nuclear states can obtain nukes.

The nuclear weapons complex and its allies in the Pentagon, Congress, and industry seized on the CTBT negotiations, using this treaty's ratification process to make obscure, pseudoscientific claims about how difficult it would be for the nation to “safely maintain” the “nuclear deterrent” without the ritual of full-blown nuke shots. An end to testing, they claimed, would require huge funding increases to build complex virtual testing facilities to use in lieu of nuclear shots under the desert. Even though Clinton approved SSM, setting in motion a decade of trough-feeding for the nuclear complex, the CTBT was never ratified by the Senate. Republicans balked. In a sort of de facto adherence to the treaty, the U.S.A. hasn't vaporized the soil under the Nevada Test Site since, but as Obama, and the liberal imperialists he has installed in the State Department, will claim, the unratified CTBT reduces America's moral and legal authority to challenge other nations with active nuclear-development programs.

Regardless, the clear winner of the CTBT debate was the nuclear weapons complex. It lost nothing it had not already given up under the first Bush (who, as I noted above, instituted the test moratorium). Some of the decline was temporarily staved off, the crisis of legitimacy paused, money flowed. The bomb at the heart of American empire was ticking again.

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Fast-forward ten years. In the early 2000s, the nuclear weapons complex was coasting under the SSM program, burning billions each year on experiments meant to further refine nuclear weapons. The labs had even managed to sneakily design new weapons like the B61-11 bomb. However, even with large guaranteed funding streams (perhaps because of these), the weapons complex sank into scandal after scandal – rampant mismanagement and incompetence at the most senior levels; missing computers and memory chips with top secret data; a Chinese spy who turned out not to be one; a massive fire that almost burned through toxic and radioactive waste dumps; embezzled money; projects with skyrocketing prices, unknown completion dates, and dubious missions; innumerable accidents and safety lapses.

The root problem remained. The entire nuclear enterprise still lacked legitimacy and a sense of mission. Morale plummeted further. The brain centers of the weapons complex at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories knew that the solution would require something that was supposedly not possible without the ability to conduct full-scale nuclear tests: a completely new weapon design starting with new manufactured plutonium pits.

The George W. Bush White House attempted to address this root problem by initiating a complete rebuild and repurposing of the nuclear weapons complex. At the center of this surge was a new nuclear weapon, at first called the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, and later the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW). The RRW was intended to replace a large portion of the existing stockpile. To design it, and build thousands, would require flexing every muscle in the nuclear weapons complex. Therefore, Bush proposed building new labs and factories in Los Alamos, N.M., Livermore, CA., Oak Ridge, TN., the Nevada Test Site, and Kansas City, MO. The centerpiece of it all would have been a “Modern Pit Facility,” where the core plutonium component of the RRW would be milled.

As with many lofty but difficult to achieve ideas proposed by Bush (like the mission to Mars), the planned new surge came to naught. Just enough Democrats and some Republican members of the House obstructed the RRW, defunded the “Modern Pit Facility,” and voted

against huge increases in nuclear weapons spending. Anti-nuclear groups mobilized the larger anti-war movement vigorously against these proposals, creating political rewards for the Congress’s nuclear skeptics. And, perhaps most importantly, the Bush White House’s own incompetence prevented these atomic dreams from advancing. The entire second term of Bush II was a period of modestly declining budgets for the nuclear weapons complex, and little to no advancement on any construction projects or weapons system development.

Obama has achieved what Bush could not. His reinvestments in nuclear weapons are not just a matter of dollar amounts. When put in the context of the

### **The entire second term of Bush II was a period of modestly declining budgets for the nuclear weapons complex, and little to no advancement on any construction projects or weapons system development.**

mismanagement and declining morale of the past two decades, Obama is literally saving the nuclear weapons complex, reinvigorating it with legitimacy, and outflanking any who would dare to elevate a debate over military vs. social investments.

His pro-nuclear policies begin with his anti-nuclear rhetoric. Obama’s famous Prague speech of April 2009 primed the international community to accept the image of a restrained U.S. state, one promoting an ambitious vision of global nuclear disarmament, in splendid contrast to rogue states and shadowy atomic terrorists. Perhaps just as important, Obama’s paeans to nuclear abolition were contrasted against the grandiose, more honest ambitions of his predecessor in the Oval Office. Obama’s anti-nuclear rhetoric has subsequently been used to justify a harder line against Iran, North Korea, and other states that are said to have active nuclear weapons programs. Obama’s anti-nuclear rhetoric has also disarmed most potential critics within

the United States, especially the liberal arms control and anti-nuclear organizations that have opposed – under past presidential administrations, especially the most recent – increased nuclear spending.

Obama’s transition into the White House helped set the stage. His proclivity to keep Bush administration appointees in many posts overseeing the U.S. nuclear weapons complex ensured that pro-nuclear voices would be firmly entrenched. While he appointed a new secretary of energy, he retained Bush’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Administrator Tom D’Agostino, a hawkish bureaucrat dedicated to increasing U.S. nuclear weapons funding. Additionally, Obama retained Defense Secretary Robert Gates and many senior civilian Pentagon officials tasked with nuclear policy. Both Gates and D’Agostino were determined to restart the stalled nuclear modernization program that, to their frustration, withered through Bush’s second term. Given a relatively free hand, they were able to bring in fresh blood where needed and prepare a more realistic, long-term investment in the nuclear weapons complex.

Showing much deference to this NNSA-Pentagon center of gravity, the Obama administration (mostly through Defense Secretary Gates’ office) worked on an important policy statement, the Nuclear Posture Review. It was repeatedly delayed, in part because White House and State Department officials were trying to magically graft together otherwise mutually exclusive policies. They sought language to balance the anti-nuclear rhetoric, necessary for an aggressive foreign policy under the pretext of non-proliferation, and language that would simultaneously symbolize a continued, even boosted commitment to nuclear weapons. This was achieved in the document released in April of 2010, which succeeded in being many different things to many different readers.

In reading the NPR, those who would normally mount strong opposition to such an enormous program of nuclear armament (a rough sketch of which was in the NPR, with more detailed blueprints forthcoming) somehow only retained passages that warbled about Obama’s desire to “seek a world free of nuclear weapons.” The NPR did not offer any substantive policies that would advance this goal,

nor even any that would truly de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. foreign policy. The only offering along these lines included in the NPR involved the conditions under which the U.S.A. would use nuclear weapons. To quote the administration, “the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the [Non-Proliferation Treaty] and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”

This convoluted assurance not to nuke some nations was widely reported to be a significant shift in U.S. nuclear policy,<sup>7</sup> even though it was not, and even though the NPR itself contradicted this exact statement only paragraphs later, e.g., “the United States reserves the right to make any adjustment in the assurance that may be warranted...,” and, “the United States is therefore not prepared at the present time to adopt a universal policy that deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons...”

If liberals largely didn't see through these smokescreens and palliatives, the nuclear weapons complex, its powerful corporate contractors, and the military

certainly could. When all the fluff about a nuke-free world was removed, the loud, clear, and road-mapped message contained in the NPR was that the administration was ready to ramp up spending on nuclear weapons programs and build the infrastructure and future weapons systems that would be comparable in scale and purpose to the nuclear wish list proposed eight years earlier by Bush.

## **The significance of what Obama is achieving, when put in the context of the mismanagement and declining morale of the past two decades, is that he is literally saving the nuclear weapons complex, reinvigorating it with legitimacy, and outflanking any who would dare to elevate a debate over military vs. social investments.**

To demonstrate the administration's sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of the weapons complex and its corporate contractors, the NPR also acknowledged the crisis that has been brewing for over two decades: “Today's nuclear complex, however, has fallen into neglect [...] Over the last decade, our human capital base has been underfunded and underdeveloped. Our national security laboratories have found it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the best and brightest scientists and engineers of today. Morale has declined with the lack of broad, national consensus...”

Although the claim of being “underfunded” was absurd fantasy – due to the fact that the nuclear weapons complex was funded at levels matching Cold War highs throughout most of the Clinton and Bush II administrations – the recognition that the complex is in dire trouble due to lack of morale and defined mission was correct.

To solve these problems, and secure nukes forever, the NPR promised “re-

capitalization of the nuclear infrastructure through fully funding the NNSA.” Finally, in coded language meant to leave the door open to new weapons designs (another RRRW) in the future, something earlier in the NPR the administration claimed it would not seek, the NPR concludes, “some modest capacity will be put in place to surge production in the event of significant geopolitical ‘surprise.’”

Coinciding with the release of the NPR was the signing of the New START treaty between the U.S.A. and Russia, also in April of 2010. Like the NPR, New START was hailed by liberals and many anti-nuclear groups as a path-breaking disarmament treaty, an important “first step” toward Obama's vision of a nuclear weapons-free world. For Obama and his liberal imperialist cohort (which includes some senior Republicans and elder statesmen like George Shultz and Henry Kissinger), the treaty is the cornerstone of their anti-nuclear imperialist foreign policy.

It would, however, become a millstone when Obama's political advisers, and then the mainstreams of the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements, came to believe that ratification of New START would provide an important political “win” for the president, significantly boosting the Democrats in the midterm elections and helping Obama remain strong into 2012, all guided by the assumption that a Republican in the White House, or significant Republican control of the Congress, would advance a nuclear weapons surge. On a strategic basis then, the opponents of the nuclear surge proposed by Bush eight years earlier had checked out of reality. Worse than becoming insignificant, they became a pro-nuclear weapons lobbying force by pushing so hard for New START ratification.

Like the NPR, the actual legal and policy direction of New START has virtually nothing to do with restraint, or concrete disarmament steps. Instead, New START would serve as an “arms affirmation treaty.”

On balance, the nominal reductions in nuclear weapons required by New START are insignificant when compared to the multibillion-dollar nuclear (and strategic non-nuclear) weapons programs committed to in the treaty's text (non-nuclear programs include “Prompt Global Strike” and “Missile Defense”). On paper, New START limits the U.S.A. and

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Russia to a total deployed strategic arsenal of 1,550 warheads on 700 platforms each – platforms being the bombers and missiles that can launch these weapons. In a talking point that would gain universal circulation in the media, Obama lied and said this would amount to a 30 per cent cut in nuclear weapons.

However, when the treaty's text was finally released and closely analyzed by independent experts, the consensus was that New START does not actually require much, if any, disarmament. Two highly respected arms-control analysts summed this up by noting that New START "doesn't actually reduce the number of warheads," and that, in fact, "the treaty does not require destruction of a single nuclear warhead and actually permits the United States and Russia to deploy almost the same number of strategic warheads that were permitted by the 2002 Moscow Treaty."

Even though New START was old wine, it set in motion the negotiations by which Obama and a cabal of Senate Republicans would haggle over the question of how much they would increase spending to achieve the goal of a revitalized nuclear weapons complex. Throughout these negotiations, one camp, led by Republican Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, advocated a realistic set of budget projections and demanded immediate and binding commitments for funding at a level of at least \$80 billion over ten years. Obama's team, led by Vice President Biden and Senator Kerry, advocated a more flexible and slightly smaller increase in nuke funding to achieve virtually the same goals.

The details of the Obama administration's nuclear investments, as they were forged through the New START debate in late 2010, are contained in two key documents released during the treaty's limbo.

First is the very detailed Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan of 2011, the summary of which was made public in May. Obama's SSM Plan calls for spending several billion each year over the next decade and a half to provide what are called "life extensions" (LEP) for different model nuclear warheads and bombs in the arsenal. For example, the Obama administration is committed to ramping up the LEP for the B61 gravity bomb, and has spent more than \$200 million in 2011 on this single

program alone. By 2016, upward of \$450 million will be spent, extending the "life" of this bomb design. The program is not expected to taper off and end until 2022, the result being hundreds of B61 nuclear bombs ready, after billions lavished upon them, to sit in bunkers and hangers for another few decades.

More importantly (because it's more expensive and will drive programs like the LEPs), the SSM Plan addresses the nuclear weapons complex's ambitious construction wish list that includes no less than 17 "major infrastructure milestones." At the top of the pile are the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research

## **Absent through Obama's first term are the rank and file of the Democratic Party, and the same anti-nuclear and anti-war groups that so effectively exposed Bush's plans and derailed the nuclear surge then.**

Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR) and the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF), at Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico and Y-12 in Tennessee respectively. These two nuclear weapons component factories are projected to cost \$5.8 billion and \$6.5 billion. The CMRR, it should be pointed out, will fulfill virtually the same function as the Modern Pit Facility proposed by Bush.

In all, the SSM Plan is punctuated throughout with descriptions of "ramping up" (used 6 times), "increasing" (used 14 times), and "committing" (used 17 times) money for nuclear weapons programs. The administration's commitment to new nuclear weapons production facilities is described as a "capabilities-based" program, meaning essentially that the point is to build bomb factories capable of rolling out small and large orders, of old and possibly new designs – everything but the kitchen sink.

The second key Obama administration nuclear plan, of more importance to the deal forged during New START

ratification, is the Section 1251 Report, named after the section of law in the 2010 Defense Authorization Act that required it be written. Like the SSM Plan, the Section 1251 Report is packed with commitments to increase spending on nuclear weapons through "life extension programs," new and refurbished bomb factories, and also new weapons systems like subs, ICBMs, and bombers. At twelve pages in length, the Section 1251 Report's update, completed in November of 2010, is the most succinct and honest summary of the Obama administration's nuclear policy goals. To quote straight from the horse's mouth:

"From FY 2005 to FY 2010 [Bush's second term], a downward trend in the budget for Weapons Activities at the National Nuclear Security Administration resulted in a loss of purchasing power of approximately 20 per cent. As part of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, the administration made a commitment to modernize America's nuclear arsenal and the complex that sustains it [...]. To begin this effort, the president requested a nearly 10 per cent increase for Weapons Activities in the FY 2011 budget [...]. Altogether, the president plans to request \$41.6 billion for FY 2012-2016..."

Add to this another \$30 billion promised for development of a new nuclear-armed sub, \$26 million per year for Air Force studies to decide when, and at what price, to refurbish or build new ICBMs, and another \$1.7 billion, between 2011 and 2015, to contemplate a new long-range nuclear-armed bomber (which will be comparable in cost to the subs), and you will begin to get sense of how committed the Obama administration is to nuclear armament.

### **Locked In?**

The most remarkable thing about the Obama administration's nuclear surge is how it is uniquely insulated from the austerity program now gutting most other discretionary federal accounts.

Obama's team has made numerous pledges to fund the increasingly expensive capital program for the nuclear weapons complex, a program that, as of this writing, still has no final cost estimate. As the largest projects like the CMRR and UPF grow, the entire program will swell by many billions of dollars. Once the Pentagon begins in earnest its replacement of the existing fleet of

nuclear-armed subs and other weapons systems, costs will multiply and inflate.

The commitment to fund all of this was made repeatedly during the New START ratification debate in such a publicly conspicuous way that any reduction in funds or program limitations would create an uproar that could significantly harm the Obama administration. Republicans sought more than just Obama's word. They sought a binding commitment. For example, the Senate briefly considered measures such as forward funding.

In its ratification resolution for New START, the Senate noted that its approval of the treaty was dependent on the progress of the Obama nuclear surge: "If appropriations are enacted that fail to meet the resource requirements set forth in the president's 10-year plan," the Senate warned, "or, if at any time more resources are required than estimated in the president's 10-year plan, the president shall submit to Congress, within 60 days of such enactment or the identification of the requirement for such additional resources, as appropriate, a report detailing... how the president proposes to remedy the resource shortfall," and furthermore requiring proposals for increased funds. The resolution stated unequivocally that "the United States is committed to accomplishing the modernization and replacement of its strategic nuclear delivery vehicles."

Ultimately, the nuclear surge that is well underway has no legally binding, ironclad commitment. It has the commitment of the Obama administration and the U.S. Senate, a pact composed during the entire process surrounding New START. Key Democratic senators and representatives, in whose districts the nuclear weapons complex facilities are located, are strongly backing the plan and pulling a majority of Democrats along with them. The Tea Party Republicans in the House are a wild card, however. The fiscal situation of the United States could derail the nuclear surge if revenues fall beneath some unknown threshold, making further cuts to social programs a cause of political instability, therefore requiring a slowdown or jettisoning of the surge, in parts or entirely.

Missing from this calculus today, and absent through Obama's first term, largely because of the Democratic president's own efforts to neutralize them, are the

rank and file of the Democratic Party, and the same anti-nuclear and anti-war groups that so effectively exposed Bush's plans and derailed the nuclear surge back then. The result is a Left seemingly incapable of turning the dire fiscal situation and austerity assault into an opportunity to force a debate over nukes and war vs. jobs and social programs. **CP**

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#### WILCOX CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cated and sealed. But this extremely difficult task could take years because the radiation near the reactors is simply too high to let workers get near them." (*Japan Times*, September 11, 2011)

The Japanese government has finally decided to take nuclear safety seriously, as evidenced when the Ground Self-Defense Force held a drill within the evacuation site, "in preparation for any further large-scale emission of radioactive materials from the plant." Could this be in preparation for professor Koide's scenario of possible "massive amounts of radioactive materials"?

Although some people have elected to risk their health and stay inside the evacuation zone, a 30 km up to 100 km radius around the stricken site looks to be dangerous if not uninhabitable for years to come. Decontaminating the site would cost billions of dollars and disposing of contaminated soil – estimated now to be at least 100 million cubic meters – poses a formidable challenge. Recently it was learned that the Tokyo Metropolitan government has been dumping radioactive sludge from its water purification plants and ashes from the sludge plants in its landfill in Tokyo Bay at least since late May. The huge landfill is right near the Haneda Airport.

Over 100,000 people have been displaced by the accident and have little hope of returning to their homes, and more than a third of residents of Fukushima Prefecture would move to avoid radiation if they could. But those 600,000 people who would choose to move do not have the economic means to do so, and the government is not offering help. An example of the government's schizophrenia is how health and eco-

nomics conflict. While ecologists are studying the extent to which heavily forested Fukushima Prefecture is contaminated with radioactive fallout, at the same time "Seiji Maehara, who lost his bid to become the party leader and the prime minister of Japan, has nonetheless landed on a very powerful party position as the chairman of the DPJ's [Democratic Party of Japan] policy bureau." Maehara is trying to promote an "eco forestry" scheme so that the stricken region can regain its economy. How the very area, Iitate, that received the lion's share of radiation is going to sell "green" timber is puzzling, especially given that up to this point the government's regime for testing food and other materials has proven to be superficial and unreliable.

There are a number of maps over recent months that have tracked the deposition of radiation, namely cesium. My personal assessment from studying various charts, maps and readings from a variety of Internet sources is that by far the worst such depository is Fukushima, especially the "red band" northwest of the nuclear site. However, the eastern half of Fukushima, along with large swathes in Miyagi to the north, the eastern corner of Yamagata, and most of Tochigi and Ibaraki prefectures have been hard hit, with radiation even spread into the beautiful mountains of Nagano. Yet many of these maps are still incomplete, as the most likely contaminated areas are being measured first. There have been any number of hot spots located all over the Kanto region, including Saitama, Chiba and Tokyo, and even farther to the south. These assessments do not take into account the considerable amount of radiation that went into the ocean (or to North America), both from the airborne explosions and contaminated water.

Recently, I spoke with a Japanese housewife who has a 5-year-old child and closely follows the radiation issue on Japanese Internet sites. She believes the entire east coast of Japan in the Pacific Ocean, from Hokkaido well down to Shikoku or Kyushu, is now contaminated with radiation. This rings true with what Arnie Gunderson said months ago: don't eat the fish if it comes from Japan's Pacific coastal waters. A recent Greenpeace study found a variety of radioactive elements in seaweed 30 km south of Fukushima.

The spread of radiation has been docu-

mented by the Japanese-American blog hero, Ex-SKF (ex-skf.blogspot.com), who, by translating Japanese news stories into English, has devoted himself to exposing government corruption. The heading at the website in Japanese translates to: “Good luck Japan, don’t give up! Don’t rely on the government!” A perusal of the archives shows a trend of denial and cover-up on the part of TEPCO, the government and many businesses. For months, we have been jarred by one scandal after another, from radioactive green tea to beef being sold all over the country without proper testing.

Just the other day Ex-SKF wrote about a typical story:

“The willful ignorance, or the determination to carry on with their lives they knew before March 11, of many Japanese is driving me crazy. A nursery school in Akita Prefecture bought turf from Ibaraki Prefecture, which is located south of Fukushima Prefecture and which was doused with radioactive materials carried downwind from Fukushima I Nuke Plant creating areas with high radiation, in the middle of July. Small children were playing on the freshly installed turf. Then the city came and measured the air radiation level. Guess what? It was high. Duh.”

The extent of radioactive contamination depends on how you define “contaminated,” but from one-seventh up to about half of the entire eastern part of Fukushima Prefecture has been doused with radiation. For example, a “survey of 2,200 locations within a 100-kilometer (62-mile) radius of the crippled plant found that those 33 locations had cesium-137 in excess of 1.48 million becquerels per square meter, the level set by the Soviet Union for forced resettlement after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Another 132 locations had a combined amount of cesium-137/134 over 555,000 becquerels per square meter, the level at which the Soviet authorities called for voluntary evacuation and imposed a ban on farming.”

Another source found that “[a]n extensive area of more than 8,000 square kilometers has accumulated cesium-137 levels of 30,000 becquerels per square meter or more. ...The affected area is one-18th of about 145,000 square kilometers contaminated with cesium-137 levels of 37,000 becquerels per square meter or more following the 1986 Chernobyl accident in the former Soviet Union.

The contaminated area includes about 6,000 square kilometers in Fukushima Prefecture, or nearly half of the prefecture. Fukushima Prefecture, the third largest in Japan, covers 13,782 square kilometers.”

Although with less extensive damage than from Chernobyl, the future of safe farming in Japan’s narrow breadbasket is now in question. Recent claims that rice grown this season is “below 10 becquerels/kg” and, therefore, safe to eat, are now being challenged by new data. Anyway, how proper were the tests, and does anyone in their right mind think rice from northwest Fukushima is advisable to eat? How about a mad cow burger and secret cesium sauce with your coke, sir?

## **Although some people have elected to risk their health and stay inside the evacuation zone, a 30 km up to 100 km radius around the stricken site looks to be dangerous if not uninhabitable for years to come.**

North Americans are also worried about radiation traveling by wind and ocean currents. In a recent video, Arnold Gunderson points out that a “tent” is being built over reactor no. 1 “to reduce the amount of radiation on site.” However, “[t]he radiation inside that tent is still going to have to go somewhere, or else it is going to build up and become lethal. So what is going to happen to that radiation, is it is going to be exhausted up the stack.” This means radiation will be guided upward into the wind, where it may travel near or great distances: out of sight is out of mind. Since the winds generally blow to the west, a steady stream (for how many months or years?) is going to land in the ocean or in North America. The philosophy is: The Solution To Pollution Is Dilution, but no one can agree on what a safe dose of radiation really is. It is most likely that even small doses are harmful.

This raises the question: just how much radiation has been and still is being released? As Tokyo University profes-

sor Tatsuhiko Kodama famously testified to the Japanese Diet in late July, the radiation released from the Fukushima reactor explosions was equivalent to 20 Hiroshima atom bombs. Estimates as to the amount of radiation that have been released vary widely. One mainstream science source has claimed “5-6 per cent of the total from Chernobyl,” yet notes that “there are still more questions than definite answers... High radiation levels make it impossible to directly measure damage to the melted reactor cores. Perhaps the greatest uncertainty is exactly how much radiation was released in the first ten days after the accident, when power outages hampered measurements.” TEPCO recently admitted that the amount of highly radioactive water released into the sea shortly after the accident was three times higher than previously thought.

A more realistic estimate would put the total releases at 10-20 per cent of Chernobyl. Yet, for many reasons, researchers such as Gunderson, a former nuclear engineer, and Chris Busby, radiation expert for the European Union, have both said that, based on various criteria, “Fukushima is worse than Chernobyl.” If total releases are not as high as Chernobyl (Busby has suggested they may be much higher), other factors testify the crisis is ongoing: The huge amount of nuclear fuel stored at the site; the power station’s siting not far above the groundwater and in close vicinity to the ocean; proneness to further earthquakes/tsunamis; and nearby population density are all reasons for grave concern.

Scientific uncertainty, technological ineptness and political cover-up in the case of most nuclear accidents are par for the course, as anyone who has critically examined the history of the nuclear power industries, in both the U.S.A. and Japan, can attest. But as more people find out the truth, government and industry take actions to prevent people from becoming involved in substantive policy decisions. Recently pro-nuke politician, (LDP) Secretary-General Nobuteru Ishihara, stated, “Geiger counters, costing between 40,000 and 50,000 yen (\$500-600), provide patchy measurements. We have to try and stop citizens from taking their own radiation measurements.” The Global Nuclear Crime Syndicate is on the attack, warning that “media coverage” about radiation from Fukushima could

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be upsetting to the public. One egghead hooted, "We've got to stop these sorts of reports coming out." In other words, don't worry the people over the fact that they or their children may die an early death from cancer.

On the other hand, I have seen some wildly inaccurate interpretations on the Internet, including that "hundreds of millions of people will die" from Fukushima; that "much of northern Japan" is now uninhabitable (please consult a map); or, the most crackpot idea to date – that the situation at the Fukushima power station is so serious that we must "nuke it" to terminate the problem. Yet, most coverage of the issue, even from many mainstream sources, has been well intentioned if not always perfectly accurate, or is overly self-censored.

TEPCO would be happy for everyone to forget all about Fukushima, so they can get back to the business of making lots of money. Their cover-up of important information was made obvious when a Diet science committee received a "heavily censored copy of a nuclear accident operating manual for the Fukushima No. 1 power station." Their message is

clear: "We own you, people, and we can get away with bloody murder."

That TEPCO has huge influence and control over the media and politicians is well documented. Their bribes and pay-offs are legion, spending hundreds of

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millions of dollars "on payments known internally [to the company] as 'funds to deal with local communities.'" TEPCO's arrogance and greed knows no bounds, as this *Asahi News* editorialist writes: they intend "to raise electricity rates by a uniform 15 per cent for three years starting next fiscal year, [while] its employees

are taking a pay cut of 5 per cent. ... I am appalled that the company is also paying bonuses, although the amount is down by half. Once the period of the rate hike is over, it intends to resume paying bonuses in full."

In the meantime, although many folks have volunteered to help in the stricken northeast region, the majority of Japanese people have pushed the issue to the back of their minds. The fate of Fukushima residents is just their tough luck – lifestyle consumerism and self-preservation take precedence. If given a choice, I don't think the Japanese would have chosen nuclear power as an energy source, but that decision was foisted on them in the post-WWII period. There is still a hard core group of a few thousand anti-nuke protesters, who consistently make their voices heard, and we keep hearing squeaking noises from top politicians that nuclear power must be phased out, hopefully the sooner the better. **CP**

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