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## Obama and the works of death

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

New Mexico is abuzz with the news. Soon from our austere landscape will rise a spanking new, state-of-the-art, plutonium bomb factory. Setting pen to paper and thereby blessing the project was President Obama, who had announced a year ago in Prague the goal of a nuclear-free world, but with his recent budget, will actually increase nuclear weapons production more than any other president since Ronald Reagan.

Here's a piece of hypocrisy that surpasses even that of George W. Bush. Cheer on disarmament while drawing up plans for new facilities. Raise up a hopeful vision and, behind the scenes, ensure its dying. An Orwellian nightmare.

Need it be added, the weapons manufacturers are delighted.

"Obama's Nuke Vision Sees Cash Flow to Labs," was the headline last week in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. The article reported that Obama will increase funding for nuclear weapons research and security programs \$7 billion more next year, an increase of \$624 million from the 2010 fiscal year.

Obama approved three new nuclear weapons facilities, according to the National Catholic Reporter, the second in Oak Ridge, Tenn., and the third in Kansas City, Mo. As Obama feeds the nuclear weapons industry with a \$7 billion increase, he'll go through the motions of hammering out a disarmament deal with Russia and of reviewing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In that convoluted logic, so common to the holders of nuclear weapons, he thinks he can promote peace while adding billions for nuclear advances.

"This budget is implementing the president's nuclear vision," Thomas D'Agostino, administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, told the *Santa Fe New Mexican*.

The total Department of Energy request for Los Alamos National Nuclear Laboratory totals \$2.21 billion, up from \$1.82 billion in 2010.

In the actions-speak-louder-than-words department, all this is telling. Said Greg Mello, director of the nuclear watch-dog Los Alamos Study Group "The nation hasn't seen any increase in weapons activities like this since the early years of Ronald Reagan ... It's a complete surrender to Senate Republicans."

Some of this largess, pending final review, will go toward building the new plutonium plant -- a chemical and metallurgy research facility known as the "CMRR," to replace a 58-year-old lab. The CMRR will enable Los Alamos to make far more new plutonium pits (a nuclear weapon's triggering device). In previous years they could make 20 a year; they'll soon be able to make 125 a year.

Obama -- the nuclear free world visionary -- has given the green light to the nuclear madmen of Los Alamos to lay their largest nest of doomsday bombs in years.

Under Obama, the Pentagon budget for mass murder and the impasse we call deterrence would grow by more than three percent, not counting separate funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan . It adds up to \$741 billion. The budget cuts no weapons programs, only social programs.

All this insanity is hard to bear. Obama's recent unmanned drone blitz killed 123 civilians and three al-Qaeda leaders in January; Guantanamo, the off-shore prison and torture center, is still in business; our troops still occupy Iraq and invade Afghanistan. All this insanity while Haiti lies in ruins at our doorstep, like Luke's starving Lazarus lying at the rich man's door. American culture is rotting from the inside out.

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I follow developments this week from my home atop a remote mesa in northern New Mexico where lately big snows have hemmed me in. There in the silence, surrounded for miles by white-topped juniper trees and distant mountains, I've immersed myself in the Gospel of John, in preparation for a retreat (April 30-May2, see [www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org)). And in preparation, too, for a new book I'm writing on the raising of Lazarus.

The Gospel attends very much to our nation's wayward rush to empire. We see the life and death struggle, the nonviolent Jesus confronting in his own time the culture of death. And he calls us to the new life of resurrection, "life to the full," where we live in love, peace, and joy -- as friends. There is nothing on the Galilean political landscape like this daring Jesus, he who confronts death persistently and holds aloft the vision of peace.

The middle chapters of John (5-11), especially. Read them again; read them through the lens of our own culture. He exposes the works of death, and the powers hound him -- trying to discredit, trying to trap, and eventually sending death squads to dispatch him in the usual, efficient, manner. Off they went. Later, the job undone, they sheepishly returned, saying: "No one has ever spoken like him."

Here, in Jesus, is our inspiration. President Obama, as did all his predecessors, stokes the furnaces of the machinery of death. But Jesus invites us to join his nonviolent campaign to resist the works of death. Not a matter of picking this issue or that, but of confronting death in all its forms, including -- in my backyard -- the newest iteration of the Bomb.

Taking the nonviolent Jesus at his word, some of us are mobilizing to do just this. At the end of this

month, the Pacific Life Community, a network of Christian activists from the West coast, will gather for days of prayer and reflection in New Mexico then take our message to Los Alamos . (See: [www.pacificlifecommunity.wordpress.com](http://www.pacificlifecommunity.wordpress.com))

On April 30-May 1, while I'm at the Kirkridge retreat, a large conference will be held at Riverside Church in New York City to study the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty review, which starts on May 3 at the United Nations. Every five years since 1970, the world gathers to review the NPT's progress toward preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and eventually abolishing them. Each review has failed us. I'll join tens of thousands of people in New York City that Sunday afternoon, May 2, in a march for nuclear disarmament, and that Monday, May 3, for a nonviolent protest at the U.S. Mission. (See: [www.peaceandjusticenow.org/wordpress](http://www.peaceandjusticenow.org/wordpress))

On the weekend of July 4th, people will gather from around the nation at the Oak Ridge, Tenn., nuclear factory to pray, reflect, vigil and speak out against nuclear weapons (see: [www.stopthebombs.org](http://www.stopthebombs.org)). On July 30 and 31, we'll gather again at Los Alamos to mark the 65th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and say the time has come to retire nuclear weapons. Our guest speaker will be Bishop Gabino Zvala, president of Pax Christi USA. Other plans are afoot as well.

So the works of death continue, but so do the works of life. And with the God of life, "death has no dominion." The last word belongs to God. So we do what we can, as Jesus did, taking him at his word, and trusting in the God of life.

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To contribute to Catholic Relief Services' "Fr. John Dear Haiti Fund," go to: <http://donate.crs.org/goto/fatherjohn>. John's upcoming retreats include: "The Road to Peace," March 2-3, Atlanta, Ga., see: <http://www.paxchrististjude.webs.com/Home.html>; "The Gospel According to John," April 30-May 2, near Stroudsburg, PA, see [www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org); and "Gandhi, King, Day and Merton," at Ghost Ranch Center, Abiquiu, N.M., see [www.ghost ranch.org](http://www.ghost ranch.org). John's latest book, *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (Orbis), along with other recent books, *A Persistent Peace* and *Put Down Your Sword*, as well as Patricia Normile's *John Dear On Peace*, are available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). For further information, or to schedule a lecture, go to [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org).

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