Obama Has Fanned the Flames of Nuclear Development

Contributed by Roger Herried
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It would seem that nothing is new under the sun these days when it comes to the good old USA. The state of Arizona -- anybody remember McCain -- recently gave the Canadian Denison Mining Company the go-ahead to reopen the Arizona 1 uranium mine near the Grand Canyon, with two more mining permits pending.
Yes, Obama has tentatively stopped nearly 1000 new mining permits around the Canyon from going ahead, old mines are another matter. (see "Uranium mining could resume north of Canyon," Sept. 2)

The downturn in the economy has slowed the nuclear renaissance down but not stopped it. The nuclear industrial complex was given a huge influx of cash by Obama to supposedly clean up Department of Energy contamination from the Cold War. DOE's own estimate for the clean up is between $270-330 billion. Under Bush, a dramatic acceleration of the privatization of DOE activities has occurred with nearly 200,000 contract workers versus 15,000 government employees. With the giant handouts of money going to the very U.S. military industrial companies that are seeking to expand nuclear development in the U.S. Obama has fanned the flames of nuclear development.

Rather than going into the heart of the beast and rolling back the lobbying apparatus he promised to do, the nuclear industry is now on the verge of obtaining $100 billion in loans to pay for its corrupt "Renaissance."

Another major hidden strategy of the nuclear weapons industry is to start constructing (nuclear) Energy Parks at DOE facilities across the country. These Energy Parks were slated to be feel-good green programs with the core issue being a reconfiguration (new generation) of nuclear weapons and power as part of the industry's push to reopen their Breeder/reprocessing agenda. One of the first major pushes in this area came with a call by USEC to get billions in loans for a new enrichment facility along with the announcement to build reactors at Piketon, Ohio, once the home of one of the country's major enrichment facilities that still is in the process of being cleaned up. At the end of the Bush administration military bases across the country were being slated for the construction of mini-nukes for power. Fortunately, the economic downturn has put a crimp in this new push.

Anti-nuclear groups have spent much of the last four years gearing up to stop new reactors being pushed mostly in the Southeast, however, this issue is global in scope as the nuclear push is being coordinated at the international level by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with a handful of global interests moving ahead with Bush's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership. Even though Democrats and the DOE have defunded the project, the international coalition that was set up by former DOE Secretary Bodman is going ahead at the global level with plans to develop an international uranium bank.

It was Obama and the Democrats that showed their true colors during the crazed pre-election run up when Asian Indians send Democrats millions of dollars in political bribes to pass the illegal and immoral bilateral 123 Agreement that has opened the global door for India to continue ignoring international law (Non-Proliferation Treaty - NPT) while now being allowed as a global nuclear force. The 123 agreement, that Democrats fell down on their swords for, will allow U.S. companies to obtain long sought breeder technologies developed in India as well as advanced Thorium reactor designs. New reactor contracts are being pushed and India's thirst for uranium has now been quenched as Namibia has offered to sell uranium to them. Yes, just as the world is finally turning its eyes to the illegal status the U.S. has set up, allowing Israel to become a global nuclear power, the U.S. has reversed its long policy of locking India out of the global nuclear industry. It is highly unlikely that the recent disclosures that the Indian claims to technical advances which were used to draw the U.S. in, are bogus will get any play inside the US political establishment as it might expose the Democratic leadership's ugly dealings. A recent Bulletin of Atomic Scientist's report on India's Breeder program should be a warning that 123 represents a horrible global example of the proliferation issues to come if it isn't reversed.

It was Hilary Clinton's saber rattling against North Korea that set the tone of the Obama administration. Since then Obama's only nuclear initiative that appears to be a change from Bush is his backpedaling on Bush's European defense shield. His response to Iran represents probably his saddest moment on the international field. Few Americans ever saw or heard the Frontline program that exposed the disastrous post 9-11 Bush failure to engage with Iranian president

Mohammad Khatami’s proposal for a new era of cooperation. It is the U.S.'s duplicitous nuclear agenda against Iran versus the public bigotry with nuclear Israel and India that beckons to anyone with eyes. The real truth shines through when it comes to the link between nuclear energy and weapons. We dare not let anyone we distrust obtain the ability to construct, fuel and operate a nuclear reactor because it's only a minor step up to construct a weapon.

The acknowledgment that a global nuclear energy renaissance represents the largest proliferation crisis the world has ever faced was seen recently with Egypt’s push to get into nuclear and the impacts it is having with its neighbor Ethiopia. The world is neither blind nor dumb, compared to the American public when it comes to what the future holds in store, as it is just a matter of time before another saber-rattling right wing administration remounts the U.S. throne of power. Countries around the world are preparing for the coming energy wars that are now just starting to gear up. Obama is rapidly running out of time as major policy changes have all fallen to the K Street crowd.

The impacts are clear. Probably the clearest sign of where the world is headed today will come with Germany’s national elections that will be held Sept. 27th. The main issue is over whether Germany should scrap its plan to dismantle its nuclear energy industry. And the outcome is going to be very close.

The largest nuclear promoter in the world is reawakening. The nuclear industry hasn’t the slightest interest in the Climate change issue other than a vehicle to promote nuclear expansion. How is it that energy experts in this country can’t seem to wake up to the internal bigotry of the country’s major corporate players? On the one hand the coal and oil industries are still in full denial about the issue, yet it would appear their nuclear brethren have gotten the gospel. Funny nobody has called for a debate between these two industrial communities on their differences.

Tribal people around the world will once again will be taking the first blows of the nuclear insanity that grows daily around the world. As seen in a recent Counterpunch article about how the country set up tribal lands to become a National Sacrifice Area (scroll down on Counterpunch's website), the national media once again turns a blind eye to the impacts of the new improved uranium mining industry that pushing to start mining across the West -- where nearly 1/3 of our waters have been contaminated due to corporate mining practices. The cleanup of past contamination is estimated to cost at least $30 billion grows as a national disgrace.

We have starved tribal communities into the dark ages and then once again offer them new jobs to once again start mining uranium using in-situ leach (ISL) techniques that will contaminate their wells with heavy metals and radiation. Attempts to paint the full picture of the new push for uranium at the global and national level would take the front page of the New York Times up for weeks just to lay out and do justice to this travesty. There are few people in the world that could knowledgeably discuss the ongoing battles around the world, let alone here in the U.S. on the massive uranium mining industry.

Giant global corporations like BHP Billiton, Rio-Tinto and the French Government’s Cameco are at the forefront of exploiting tribal people around around the world. For anyone who has explored this issue more than casually, it would be quite clear that the U.S. uranium industry collapsed about the same time as the Soviet Union failed. It did so primarily due to the fact that there are cheaper, more abundant sources of uranium outside of the U.S. Today, over 90% of U.S. reactor fuel is coming from the former Soviet Union’s nuclear arsenal and will continue to do so for many more years to come. As a result of a major collapse of Cameco's Cigar Lake uranium mine in 2005, a huge spike in uranium prices -- timed with Bush’s $13 billion handout to promote nuclear power -- has rekindled a flawed interest in uranium mining in the U.S. which is now mostly being driven by Canadian uranium companies, using the tragic loopholes in the U.S. 1872 mining act.

Across the West as well as in Virgina there are new pushes to mine uranium with the age old tactic of “We’ve learned our lesson and won’t mess up this time" promise being spread fast and furious, all in the name of energy independence. What BS! It will be just a matter of time before the global push to expand uranium will once again flood the market with cheap uranium, very likely resulting in abandoned mining operations here, leaving nearby residents with a new generation of contamination to deal with.

Why is it that that this country which has failed to clean up the nuclear disaster from last time around isn't being given the facts about the impacts to come? Anyone alive who watch the PR wars gear up last time can remember some nerdy scientist holding up a uranium fuel pellet and pontificating on how much energy it would produce compared to oil or coal. Yet, never once did we ever hear about the vast strip mining operations that now dot the world that use vast amounts of water and energy. Nor do we speak of the thousands of yet to be cleaned up mines, and the health effects of those around those still abandoned mines. Today, in one of the only substantial pushes, the Obama administration has increased funding for the incredibly dangerous Moab tailing cleanup that threatens to contaminate the Colorado River.

Since when is the corporate media going to do its job and document the immense catastrophe of the nuclear fuel cycle from one end to the other? How about the danger of nearly $30 billion of damages to Lake Erie if the government fails to spend $13 billion to clean up the failed West Valley reprocessing facility in New York? Or the growing fear that Obama's nuclear Plan B for the blocked Yucca Mountain repository could end up being Hanford or some other unlucky small Western state, as seen in the past at Skull Valley or Energy Solution's push to incinerate and then bury foreign wastes and dump them in Utah?

We are waiting for the kind of big picture presentation to the U.S. public that might finally awaken the public to the true nature of the nuclear monster and why going fission is dead wrong. Native communities have long been the battlegrounds over uranium and other resources on their lands. The four-day Southwest Indigenous Uranium Forum (see image and link below to conference) represents one of the major battle fronts needing attention. It took hearings by Henry Waxman in late 2007 to finally shake the government out of the Bush stupor over its failed promises to cleanup tribal lands.

When will the national environmental groups that have the money and resources do a serious exposé of the fuel cycle and the devastating impacts not just to tribal communities but to hundreds of thousands of former and current DOE workers who are dying? When will the true scope of the continuing nuclear nightmare finally be shared so that this monster be put to rest?

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Roger Herried manages the Abalone Alliance Archive office in San Francisco, and runs the energy-net.org site. This article originally appeared on that website on Sept. 19, 2009, with associated videos, as Southwest Indigenous Uranium Forum Conference

7th Southwest Indigenous Uranium Forum Conference
october 22, 23, 24 2009, Acoma Pueblo, NM

Further Reading in Culture Change on nuke energy:

Ben Williams Why nuclear energy is not the answer to Climate Change

Roger Herried Radiation Dangers Allowed to Proliferate for the Consumer

Roger Herried Why a Nuclear Free World is Important

Jim Bell Nuclear Power - One of Humankind's Biggest Mistakes

Jeff Gerritsen Uranium Mining Poisons Native Americans

Note: photo at top is the Capulin Waste Dump, NM, courtesy Western Mining Action Network.