

UPF DESIGN INCORPORATES AVOIDABLE SECURITY VULNERABILITIES

In the frenzied days last July and August following the Transform Now Plowshares breach of security, a lot of attention was paid to what the three nonviolent disarmament activists did. In the months since, they have been charged in federal court with four charges (one has since been dropped) covering everything they did and more. Hearings were held, investigations were launched, reports were written, workers were sacked, companies were canned, meals were culped, fingers were pointed, more companies were let go...through it all there was little public discussion of the bigger security breach that took place—one that is made clear if we ask what the TNP resisters DIDN'T do in the early morning hours of July 28.

What they didn't do—probably by chance more than by plan—was carry out their action on the active nuclear weapons production facility—Building 9212, where thermonuclear secondaries and cases are being produced for the W76 warhead—even though, by the time they had penetrated the deadly-force PIDAS zone, they had ample time to do so. In fact, had they turned right and moved through the warren of buildings to 9212 instead of conducting their action out in the open on the inviting white walls of the HEUMF, they very well might have gone undetected for a much longer period of time. And there is no telling how the corner of Building 9212 would have held up to their symbolic hammering...

From the Plowshares standpoint, it doesn't matter. They have said repeatedly, and their actions bear it out, that their action was symbolic. They hammered on the HEUMF, but they stopped hammering before they were discovered and taken into custody—it was a ritual hammering of swords into plowshares. Its point was to call attention, and attention was called.

From the standpoint of those who are concerned about security at Y12—as every person living in Oak Ridge and the surrounding areas should be—it does matter. It matters that Bldg 9212 was so nakedly vulnerable; it matters that security could have been so easily compromised.

It also matters what has been done to correct things. Thanks to the new, even tighter lips policy at NNSA, we have almost no idea what steps have been taken—we know workers were given a two week security refresher course that was so effective the head of security apparently felt it was necessary to give the answers out before the final exam. We know the hole in the perimeter fence the activists entered was not repaired—it was still there 4 1/2 months later, wide open, until activists and the Knoxville News-Sentinel pointed it out.

Attention to Y12 security was not the point of the Plowshares action—they were asking the macro-security question, questioning the larger false sense of security represented by the bombs being built at Y12. And that is, by any reckoning, a bigger and more important question. But it doesn't mean the micro-security question isn't still critically important.

Of course there are some things that can't be discussed. But there are some things that can, and the public deserves an accounting. Questions should be answered, starting with why we—and anybody else with a computer or smart phone—can see the kinds of pictures attached below.

The dirty little secret from last July and August is that our security was compromised far more than anyone has let on. The Plowshares action laid bare this truth: Y12 can not be made secure against a hostile attack until they come up with an impenetrable dome.

Back when HEUMF was being designed, several groups and individuals argued it should be built below grade in order to offer a significant level of security enhancement. It wasn't, and last July proved how wrong that decision was. The cost of the July 28 response so far (\$15.5 million, not counting investigations) has already exceeded the savings they touted when they decided not to go below-grade with the HEUMF (just over \$12 million, if memory serves).

What about the next bomb plant? More than half a billion dollars has been spent on designing the Uranium Processing Facility, and all the sketches so far show it sitting above ground, big as life, easy pickin's, virtually surrounded by high ridges. It appears to be a hybrid design, half HEUMF and half New Hope Visitors Center. Should the people living here just accept the risks that come with a new bomb plant—risks that increase with every enemy the US makes with drone strikes? Should the US expose its flagship nuclear production plant to avoidable risks?

Why isn't the UPF being built below grade? It can't be cost (like they said about the HEUMF)—there is no upper limit on the cost of the UPF; it is already estimated to cost many billions. It can't be the facility is impregnable—no one's been able to say that with a straight face since July 28, 2012.

Among the other possible reasons, one I would like to discard is "they just don't care." I think they do care—the people responsible for this project live around here, too, and raise their families here.

The likeliest reason is that self-deception runs very deep. It is really, really important that we believe we are secure, that we believe it can't happen, that we believe it's okay. That is the illusion of security that is behind the whole nuclear weapons enterprise at this point.

But it can happen and we aren't secure, and the price of deceiving ourselves is too great to continue.

Some have called the Plowshares action a "wake up call." But the local community hasn't awakened yet to the simple, obvious security risk posed by the UPF design; Congress hasn't wakened up; the media hasn't wakened up—so I am sending out this gently buzzing alarm, hoping someone will do more than hit the snooze button.

===

here are a couple photos from google maps that illustrate.

aerial view—why is this available on google maps?—HEUMF is the white "square" just left of center. the bare area to the left of HEUMF is a parking lot—it is also the site for the proposed new bomb plant, the UPF.



below: zooming in to see UPF and, to its right, the sprawling complex of buildings now known as Bldg 9212. you can see here the HEUMF appears to be surrounded on four sides by a PIDAS zone. in reality, the zone to the right and bottom is the old PIDAS; the top and left sides are the extension of the PIDAS to include the HEUMF. the old PIDAS fence is still there, but as you see in the second photo below, there is a drive paved over the PIDAS and a gate between them.



below: zooming closer to see the gate between the two facilities. the gate is clearly open here. whether or not it is ever closed/closable, i do not know. the old PIDAS space between the fences has been paved for traffic.



below: one more picture, closer in on the gate. one could guess, from the fence shadows, that this gate may actually be closable if those second shadows are a rolling gate, the kind that parallels the fence itself. in this photo, though, they are open, with no apparent traffic approaching, suggesting this was the default status.



