



February 1, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

Several months ago the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) raised the issue of U.S. taxpayers bearing the increasing life extension costs of the approximately 200 B61 nuclear bombs deployed and stored in Europe.¹ These B61s are at six bases in five European countries as part of NATO's defense.² Given the magnitude of U.S. fiscal concerns, continuing to spend billions of dollars on weapons whose military efficacy is questionable at best and whose security is not assured is not justifiable.

Mounting costs

POGO has learned from government sources that, since POGO first raised the issue,³ the total cost estimate for extending the life (called a life extension program, or LEP) of B61s has grown from approximately \$4 billion to \$5.2 billion. The cost for the B61s deployed in Europe alone has grown from approximately \$1.6 billion to approximately \$2.1 billion.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the B61 LEP is “unlike prior life extension programs” because it is meant “to accomplish a variety of goals—such as considering previously untried design options and concepts—in addition to replacing the bomb’s aging components.”⁴ The B61 LEP in Europe is highly complex, more so than that for B61s deployed as strategic weapons in the U.S because of the weapon’s multiple requirements, according to the GAO.⁵ Because of the cost and complexity, Congress directed that \$134 million for the B61 LEP

¹ Project On Government Oversight, *Spending Less, Spending Smarter: Recommendations for National Security Savings FY 2012 to FY 2021*, July 21, 2011. <http://www.pogo.org/resources/national-security/spending-less-spending-smarter-recommendations-for-national-security-savings.html> (hereinafter POGO, *Spending Less, Spending Smarter*)

² The five countries are Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, “U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, 2011,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 67, No.1, January/February 2011, pp. 64-73. <http://www.nonukes.nl/media/files/2010-12-bas-us-tactical-nukes-in-europe-2011.pdf> (Downloaded January 30, 2012) (hereinafter “Norris and Kristensen-2011.”)

³ POGO, *Spending Less, Spending Smarter*

⁴ Government Accountability Office, *Nuclear Weapons: DOD and NNSA Need to Better Manage Scope of Future Refurbishments and Risks to Maintaining U.S. Commitments to NATO* (GAO-11-381), May 2011. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/317883.pdf> (Downloaded January 30, 2012) (hereinafter GAO-11-381)

⁵ GAO-11-381, p. 13.

effort be withheld in FY 2012, pending the outcome of a detailed design definition and cost study by the NNSA.⁶ Congress also directed the JASON group of scientific advisors to complete an assessment if the B61 LEP included any nuclear scope. Its review would involve “the extent to which the nuclear scope is needed to enhance the safety, security, and maintainability of a refurbished B61 and whether changes to the weapon will affect its long-term safety, security, reliability, and military characteristics.”⁷

Questionable Military Efficacy

As you know, serious questions have been raised about the military effectiveness of the deployment of these nuclear arms in Europe. The situation at the U.S. base in Incirlik, Turkey, is particularly problematic:

Most of the [60 – 70 B61] bombs (approximately 50) are for delivery by US aircraft, but the US Air Force does not have a fighter wing based at Incirlik. Requests to deploy a wing there have been turned down by Turkey, so the NATO nuclear posture at Incirlik is more of a half-posture. In a crisis, US aircraft from other bases would have to first deploy to Incirlik to pick up the weapons before they could be used. The remaining 10 – 20 bombs at Incirlik AB are earmarked for delivery by Turkish F-16A/Bs.⁸

However, Turkey’s F-16s, its dual-capable aircraft,⁹ are not currently certified to carry out the mission of delivering nuclear weapons, nor are they loaded with nuclear weapons.¹⁰

In another example, Germany plans for its replacement fighter aircraft not to be nuclear capable.¹¹ This could influence other countries to do the same—leaving the United States in a position where U.S. dual-capable aircraft would be required to deploy to other bases in order to fly the nuclear mission.

Even without the above challenges, according to sources the effective combat radius of current and proposed dual-capable aircraft makes any successful, independent bombing mission more difficult. Currently, ranges to potential adversary targets outside NATO-friendly territories are such that multiple, in-flight refueling would be required. The concern is that these aircraft would run out of gas before reaching their targets (to say nothing of returning to base).

⁶ House of Representatives, Rules Committee, Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act, Division B, 2012 Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, p. 69.
http://rules.house.gov/Media/file/PDF_112_1/legislativetext/HR2055crSOM/psConference%20Div%20B%20-%20SOMI%20OCR.pdf (Downloaded January 30, 2012) (hereinafter Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference)

⁷ Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, p. 32-33.

⁸ Norris and Kristensen-2011, pp. 69-70.

⁹ Dual-capable aircraft are “allied and US fighter aircraft tasked and configured to perform either conventional or theater nuclear missions.” Defense Technical Information Center, “dual-capable aircraft.”
http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/data/d/11195.html (Downloaded January 30, 2012)

¹⁰ Norris and Kristensen-2011, p. 70.

¹¹ Steven Pifer, The Brookings Institution, *NATO, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control*, Arms Control Series, Paper 7, July 2011, p. 21.

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2011/0719_arms_control_pifer/0719_arms_control_pifer.pdf (Downloaded January 30, 2012)

Security vulnerabilities

Keeping nuclear weapons in Europe creates additional concerns about the level of risk the U.S. is assuming to secure these weapons. Weapons are deployed currently at U.S. installations where they are protected by U.S. military personnel and at airbases where security is the responsibility of the host nation.¹² A 2008 report by a U.S. Air Force Blue Ribbon Review states that security at the host-nation locations is varied and often does not meet U.S. nuclear weapons protection standards. Physical facilities such as structures, fences, lights, and alarm systems are not well maintained. In addition, host-nation military personnel charged with the security mission are sometimes conscripts.¹³ According to government sources, these conscripts have almost no specialized training and their reliability is questionable due to deficiencies in host-nation screening processes. Additionally, at U.S. bases in these countries, security forces are limited in their response by U.S./host nation agreements that proscribe their operating areas and the use of certain weapons.

It appears that some of the problems pointed out by the Air Force's Blue Ribbon Review have not been fixed. For instance, according to security experts, the storage of weapons within Weapons Storage and Security System vaults among dispersed, individual Protected Aircraft Shelters designed to improve protection may actually provide an attacking force a fortified "castle." In 2010, a protest group penetrated the perimeter at Kleine Brogel Air Base in Belgium and found this fairly easy to do.¹⁴ An attacker could then use the reinforced shelter to buy time—something that must not be ceded to a terrorist. Resolving these and other security issues only adds to the overall costs.

The NATO Alliance was built on the concept of burden-sharing among the members. Since its inception, the U.S. has borne the lion's share of the military costs. If U.S. and European leaders really believe these nuclear weapons can be useful as a deterrent or that they remain essential to maintaining the political ties that bind the Alliance, the European members must agree to bear an increased share of the costs for these weapons. The U.S. should not be responsible for continuing to pay the majority of the cost to maintain a nuclear weapons capability in European countries, particularly given our nation's financial constraints.

Sincerely,



Danielle Brian
Executive Director

¹² Tom Sauer and Bob Van Der Zwann, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *U.S. Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe After NATO's Lisbon Summit: Why Their Withdrawal Is Desirable and Feasible* (Discussion Paper #2011-05), May 2011, p. 16. <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/us-tactical-nuclearweapons-in-europe.pdf> (Downloaded January 30, 2012) (hereinafter Discussion Paper #2011-05)

¹³ Major General Polly A. Peyer, Air Force, *Air Force Blue Ribbon Review of Nuclear Weapons Policies and Procedures*, February 8, 2008, pp. 51-52. <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/usa/doctrine/usaf/BRR-2008.pdf> (Downloaded January 30, 2012)

¹⁴ Elaine M. Grossman, "More Activist Intrusions at Belgian Nuclear Base Stoke Worries," *Global Security Newswire*, October 22, 2010. <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/more-activist-intrusions-at-belgian-nuclear-base-stoke-worries/> (Downloaded January 30, 2012); Discussion Paper #2011-05