



April 17, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hagel:

Two years ago the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) raised concerns about 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 of questionable military efficacy and security is not justifiable.

You recently stated that “Our military must continue to adapt in order to remain effective and relevant in the face of threats markedly different than those that shaped our defense institutions during the Cold War,”³ and we are hopeful that you will turn your attention to the taxpayer dollars being wasted on the B61 in Europe.

In 2012 we wrote a letter to your predecessor, Secretary Leon Panetta, again raising our concerns about these costs.⁴ The only response we received was a vague reference to the B61s being an important part of the deterrence strategy,⁵ which did not sufficiently address our cost, efficacy, and security concerns. The Department of Defense (DoD) has yet to respond directly to that letter.

Mounting Costs

Since POGO first raised the issue, the total cost estimate for extending the life (called a life extension program, or LEP) of B61s has grown from approximately \$4 billion to \$10 billion total, according to

¹ Project On Government Oversight and Taxpayers for Common Sense, *Spending Less, Spending Smarter: Recommendations for National Security Savings FY 2012 to FY 2021*, July 21, 2011. <http://www.pogo.org/our-work/reports/2011/spending-less-spending-smarter-ns-wds-20110721.html> (hereinafter *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 Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, National Defense University, April 3, 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1764> (Downloaded April 10, 2013)

⁴ Letter from Danielle Brian, Executive Director of the Project On Government Oversight, to Secretary Leon Panetta, then-Secretary of Defense, regarding the B61 bomb program in Europe, February 2, 2012. http://www.pogo.org/our-work/letters/2012/nss-dod-20120201-pogo-panetta-taxpayers-shouldnt-bear-cost-of-b61-bombs-europe.html#_ftn2

⁵ Letter from Dr. Brad Roberts, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, to Danielle Brian, Executive Director of the Project On Government Oversight, regarding the February 2, 2012 letter to Secretary Panetta, April 11, 2012. <http://www.pogoarchives.org/m/nss/B-61-letter-response-4-11-2012.pdf>

the Pentagon.⁶ Approximately half of the U.S.'s B61s are deployed in Europe, thus the cost to complete the LEP for our NATO allies is approximately \$5 billion. Furthermore, the annual budget for the B61 LEP is set to increase by over 300 percent from \$126 million in FY2012 to \$537 million in FY2014, according to the latest numbers from the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). The funding increase “reflects the continued ramp-up” of engineering and testing, according to the budget.⁷

However, the B61 LEP is not simply a modernization project. 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.”⁸ The B61 LEP for 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.⁹ Because of the cost and complexity, Congress directed that \$134 million for the B61 LEP effort be withheld in FY2012, pending the outcome of a detailed design definition and cost study by the NNSA.¹⁰

Congress also directed the JASON group of scientific advisors to complete an assessment if the B61 LEP included adding any additional nuclear capabilities. 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.”¹¹

We realize that this is a complicated issue involving the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and the NNSA. Although the NNSA manages the B61 program in Europe, most of the funding comes from the Defense Department.¹² Therefore it is time for the DoD to cut the purse strings on this out-of-control Cold War program.

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

⁶ Kate Brannen, “Pentagon More Than Doubles Cost Estimate for B61 Nuclear Bomb,” *Defense News*, July 25, 2012. <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120725/DEFREG02/307250004/Pentagon-More-Than-Doubles-Cost-Estimate-B61-Nuclear-Bomb> (Downloaded April 5, 2013)

⁷ Department of Energy, *Department of Energy FY 2014 Congressional Budget Request: National Nuclear Security Administration*, p. WA-25, April 2013. <http://www.cfo.doe.gov/budget/14budget/Content/volume1.pdf> (Downloaded April 16, 2013)

⁸ 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)

⁹ GAO-11-381, p. 13.

¹⁰ House of Representatives, Rules Committee, Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act, Division B, 2012 Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, pp. 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)

¹¹ Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, p. 32-33.

¹² Memorandum of agreement between the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy concerning the modernization of the U.S. nuclear infrastructure, May 3, 2013. <http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/nwgs/DoD-DOE-MOA-final.pdf> (Downloaded April 17, 2013)

problematic:

Most of the [60 – 70 B61 bombs]...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.¹³

However, Turkey's F-16s, its dual-capable aircraft,¹⁴ are not currently certified to carry out the mission of delivering nuclear weapons, nor are they loaded with nuclear weapons.¹⁵

There are problems in Germany, too: it does not plan for its replacement fighter aircraft to be nuclear capable.¹⁶ 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. Furthermore, popular support in Germany for removing the bomb from an air base in Buchel has been growing.¹⁷

Even without the above challenges, according to sources the effective combat radius of current and proposed dual-capable aircrafts 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 while engaged in the mission over adversary territory.

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 currently deployed 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

¹³ Norris and Kristensen-2011, pp. 69-70.

¹⁴ 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)

¹⁵ Norris and Kristensen-2011, p. 70.

¹⁶ 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)

¹⁷ Dana Priest, “The B61 bomb: A case study in costs and needs,” *The Washington Post*, September 16, 2012.

http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-09-16/world/35496610_1_b61s-nuclear-weapons-nuclear-strategists/2 (Downloaded April 10, 2013)

¹⁸ 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)

¹⁹ 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)

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 2008 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.²⁰ 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. It's time to move away from this Cold War strategy.

We appreciate your attention to this issue and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this in more detail with you or your staff.

Sincerely,



Danielle Brian
Executive Director

cc: Secretary of Energy Steven Chu
National Nuclear Security Administration Acting Administrator Neile L. Miller
Senate Armed Services Committee
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Senate Committee on Appropriations, Defense Subcommittee
Senate Committee on Appropriations Energy and Water Subcommittee
House Armed Services Committee
House Energy and Commerce Committee
House Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee
House Committee on Appropriations Energy and Water

²⁰ 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