

New H-Bomb Production Defies Public Opinion, Non-Proliferation Treaty, Military Experts

In 2014, the Obama administration approved and Congress fully funded development and production of a new nuclear warhead, under a program dubbed “life extension,” known as the “B61-12.”

The new device is a so-called “variable yield” nuclear bomb designed to have four separate explosive yields—chosen à la carte as it were, from a menu of mass destruction—of 0.3 kilotons; 1.5 kilotons; 10 kilotons; and 50 kilotons.² This dial-a-WMD could detonate with between 50 and 83 times the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb which turned 140,000 people into powder and ash. Yet in the mechanized and cold-blooded jargon of nuclear war planning, the B61-12 is known as a “low-yield” bomb. Business writer Jeremy Bender even called it “tiny”!³

With a projected cost of \$12.2 billion, the B61-12 may be the most expensive nuclear bomb in history. Now in just an engineering phase, the first production of B61-12s could begin in 2022. Altogether about 480 may be built, so at between \$25 million and \$27 million apiece, and weighing 700 pounds, each bomb will cost more than if it were made of solid gold.

For 50 years, the B61 has been a federal jobs program at the Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico (and the Kansas City Plant in Missouri, etc.), which has engineered 15 different versions. Five B61s are still in use: the B61-3, -4, -10, -7; and -11. The Obama administration announced plans to retire three of them and “convert” the B61-4 into the B61-12.

According to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 300 of the current 820 B61s are kept at bases with B61-capable aircraft, “including 184 B61s deployed in Europe.” A total of about 250 B61-7 and 50 B61-11 bombs are stored at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri and at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico.

The new B61 is being touted as the first ever “guided” nuclear gravity bomb, making it more accurate and more likely to be used. A newly developed “tail-fin” attachment, and a reported ability to penetrate the earth and detonate underground are also new capabilities according to expert critics Hans Kristensen, Robert Norris, and Matthew McKinzie.

New nuclear weapons are unlawful under the Nonproliferation Treaty, and even President Barack Obama’s 2010 Nuclear Posture Review required that “upgrades” to the Pentagon’s current H-bombs not have “new capabilities.” So the Pentagon calls the B61-12 replacement program “modernization” in order to skirt NPT prohibitions.

“One NATO exercise in 1962 estimated that 10 to 15 million German civilians would be killed in a tactical nuclear exchange,” *Foreign Affairs* re-

ported.⁴ The self-destructiveness of such war plans helps explain why the US European Command gave up “advocating for maintaining nuclear weapons in Europe,” the authors said. EUCOM leaders told an oversight task force in 2008 there would be “no military downside to the unilateral withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe.” They noted that, “prominent critics ... have long argued that the military rationale for keeping nuclear weapons in Europe is an anachronism.”

“Militarily useless”

Opposition to the B61s and their replacement is gaining strength in the US and Europe where high-level politicians have called them “militarily useless.” Gen. James Cartwright, former Vice Chair of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the B61s “redundant,” and Gen. Colin Powell favored eliminating them in the 1990s when he was Chair of the Joint Chiefs.⁵ In 2013, Senator Dianne

Feinstein, and Representatives Mike Quigley and Jared Polis tried to curtail the B61-12 program. In 2010, five NATO partners—Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Holland and Norway—asked that the B61s be permanently removed from Europe.

In its 2012 Posture Review, NATO’s 28 ministers pledged to work for a world without nuclear weapons. In Germany, thanks to widespread protest and education) every major political party has formally called for withdrawal of the B61s. In one widely published article, former NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes and three senior Belgian politicians wrote, “US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe have lost all military importance.”

Germany’s *Der Spiegel* online reported Dec. 9, 2016: “By becoming a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1975, the Germans committed ‘not to receive the transfer of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly.’ During negotiations over German reunification in 1990, then-Chancellor Kohl also affirmed Germany’s ‘renunciation’ of the manufacture, possession and control of nuclear weapons.”

¹ Hans Kristensen & Robert Norris, “US Nuclear Weapons, 2015,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 2015; Vol. 71, No. 2, pp. 107-119.

² Hans Kristensen & Matthew McKinzie, Fed. of Am. Scientists, Jan. 14, 2016, https://fas.org/blogs/security/2016/01/b61-12_earth-penetration/

³ Business Insider, July 28, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/this-bomb-may-be-the-most-dangerous-in-us-arsenal-2015-7>.

⁴ Barry Blechman & Russell Rumbaugh, “Bombs Away: The Case for Phasing Out US Tactical Nukes in Europe,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2014.

⁵ Richard Sokolsky & Gordon Adams, *Foreign Affairs*, Feb. 9, 2016.



In the post-fact US Navy, the *USS America*, above, with up to 2,930 personnel and a compliment of 20 F-35B fighter jets, is not an aircraft carrier.

Counting Carriers, or, When is an F-35B not an aircraft?

The Pentagon likes to say it has 10 aircraft carriers, the 10 *Nimitz*-class “super carriers” that displace 100,000 tons, and carry up to 6,000 people. But it actually has *nineteen*.

The 19 carriers are not for deterrence or defense, considering Russia, China, Brazil, India, France and Thailand each have exactly one. Italy and Spain have two each, but they’re NATO allies.

Not counted by the Pentagon are its *Tarawa*-class carriers with 2,800 people onboard. Three football fields long, and 20 stories high, the *Tarawa* ships “have the general profile of an aircraft carrier,” as the website GlobalSecurity.org notes. They carry 35 fighter aircraft, including Harrier fighter jets, Harrier jump jets, helicopters, reconnaissance aircraft and thousands of tons of landing vehicles for invasions.

The eight other giant carriers are 45,000-ton *Wasp*-class behemoths, known instead as “amphibious assault ships” that the Navy calls “the largest amphibious ships in the world.” They launch helicopters, jump jets, hovercraft, landing craft and assault vehicles, and carry up to 2000 Marines. Used for waging war “forward... from the sea,” and “assault by air,” each of the eight *Wasps* have a 600-bed hospital.

Two of the newest carriers—the \$3.5 billion *USS America* and *USS Tripoli*—are “considerably larger than recent aircraft-carrying ships constructed for the Korean, Japanese, and Australian navies,” according to Robert Farley of the University of Kentucky’s Patterson School. The *America*-class will carry up to 20 Marine Corps F-35B fighter jets, plus Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, and helicopter gunships.

Not satisfied with a 19-to-one advantage, the Navy is sea testing the biggest carrier on Earth, the *Gerald R. Ford*, a 100,000-ton, \$10 billion giant that has a crew of 4,300 and carries a fleet of 90 aircraft.

—Lockheed Martin, www.f35.com; *The Diplomat*, April 17, 2014; <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/does-the-us-navy-have-10-or-19-aircraft-carriers/>; GlobalSecurity.org, “World Wide Aircraft Carriers - 2014”

Remember Yucca Mountain? Cancelled and Shutdown in 2010, Some Want a Revival

The common language in our struggles is understanding each link in the nuclear chain.

—Ian Zabarte, Western Shoshone

By Kelly Lundeen

If you thought the proposal to store highly radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada was dead, check out the new lineup in Washington, DC. With powerful opponents Senator Harry Reid and former President Obama out of the political picture, some Republicans are attempting to revive the licensing process for the waste repository. Trump’s budget proposal requested \$120 million for the Department of Energy (DOE), and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has requested \$30 million, so the agencies can reopen the licensing process. A Yucca dump would target Western Shoshone lands with the nation’s 70,000-plus tons of waste reactor fuel which would come in from over 70 locations. The nuclear industry responsible for creating the radioactive waste is promoting Yucca and other centralized dumpsites in order to transfer liability to the public from the facilities where it is currently being generated and stored.

Opposition to the Waste Repository Continues

Luckily, the movement of Native American and anti-nuclear organizations that stopped the licens-



Photo by Indigenous Action Media

ing process in 2010 remembers all of the reasons it has always been a bad idea: as a matter of Native sovereignty, science, environment, economy and politics. Considering the site under US federal

ownership is a violation of the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley, and Yucca Mountain is held sacred by the Western Shoshone. It is located on the third most seismic region on the continent, near seven cinder

cone volcanoes, 26 fault lines and contains a moving water table that would corrode canisters, making it geologically unstable and unsuitable. Transportation by road, rail and barge would expose 100 million people (about a third of the country’s population) living along these routes in the case of an accident. Any accident at the site, 90 miles from Las Vegas, or along the route as it passes through “the Strip,” would devastate the local tourism

industry which brought 43 million visitors in 2016. In sum, 299 legal contentions to the application as

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