

US Wasting Billions on Nuclear Bombs That Pose Threat to NATO – Experts

New Report Says Cold War-Era Weapons are a Potentially Catastrophic Liability

The US is to spend billions of dollars upgrading 150 nuclear bombs positioned in Europe, although the weapons may be useless as a deterrent and a potentially catastrophic security liability, according to a new report by arms experts.

A third of the B61 bombs in Europe under joint US and NATO control are thought to be kept at the Incirlik base in Turkey, 70 miles from the Syrian border, which has been the subject of serious concern. The threat to the base posed by Islamic State militants was considered serious enough in March 2016 to evacuate the families of military officers.

During a coup attempt that July, Turkish authorities locked down the base and cut its electricity. The Turkish commanding officer at Incirlik was arrested for his alleged role in the plot.

A 72-page report on the future of the B61 bombs by the arms control advocacy group Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI),* made available to the *Guardian*, said the 2016 events show “just how quickly assumptions about the safety and security of US nuclear weapons stored abroad can change.”

Since then, US-Turkish relations have soured further, largely over Washington’s support for Kurd forces in Syria. US national security adviser, General HR McMaster, and secretary of state Rex Tillerson, made trips to Turkey in February to try to heal the rift.

There have been reports that the nuclear bombs have been quietly moved out because of safety concerns, but that has not been confirmed.

The remaining B61 bombs are stored at five other locations in four countries: Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, according to the Federation of American Scientists, which tracks the weapons. The NTI report said it, “should be assumed that [the bombs] are targets for terrorism and theft.”

German Foreign Minister Calls for Ouster of US Nukes from Germany

In a diplomatic break with its US and NATO colleagues, Germany’s Foreign Office on Feb. 4th issued a scathing critique of the Trump Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review one day after it was released. Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said in a prepared statement: “The US Administration’s decision to develop new tactical nuclear weapons shows that the spiral of a new nuclear arms race has already been set in motion. As at the time of the Cold War, we in Europe are particularly at risk. For this reason, we in Europe in particular must launch new arms control and disarmament initiatives. ... “The mutually accelerating development of new nuclear weapons must be viewed with concern, as it

The bombs are the remnants of a much larger Cold War nuclear arsenal in Europe, and critics have said they serve no military purpose, as the nuclear deterrent against Russia relies largely on the overwhelming US strategic missile arsenal.

Using the B61s in any conflict would involve an agreement between the US and the host country in consultation with other NATO members.

“It is hard to envision the circumstances under which a US president would initiate nuclear use for the first time in more than 70 years with a NATO [dual-capable aircraft] flown by non-US pilots delivering a US B61 bomb,” said the NTI report, titled Building a Safe, Secure and Credible NATO Nuclear Posture.

Since the Cold War, the B61 has played a symbolic role, as reassurance for some NATO members of US commitment to defending Europe. They are also considered potential bargaining chips against Russia’s much greater arsenal of nearly 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons.

However, the NTI report argues they are also serious liabilities, because of the threat of terrorism or accident, and because they could become targets in the early stages of any conflict with Russia.

“Forward-deployed US nuclear weapons in Europe increase the risk of accidents, blunders, or catastrophic terrorism and invite pre-emption. Given these added risks, it is past time to revisit whether

sends the wrong message.... However, the solution must not be to simply join the nuclear arms race.

“The current arms control treaties must therefore be upheld as a matter of urgency. We need new disarmament initiatives rather than new arms systems.”

Last Aug. 22, Martin Schulz, during his unsuccessful campaign as the Social Democrat candidate for Chancellor, called for the ouster of US weapons. Worldwide media reported that, “German rival of Chancellor [Angela] Merkel vows to remove US nuclear weapons from the country.” The *Los Angeles Times* noted that Schulz said at a campaign rally,



Four sod-covered bunkers (center of photo) at Büchel Air Base in Germany may hold up to 20 US B61 nuclear bombs for use on German Tornado jet fighters. The base will again be the object of 20 weeks of protest, Mar. 26 to Aug. 9, 2018.

these forward-based weapons are essential for military deterrence and political reassurance,” the Obama administration energy secretary Ernest Moniz and the former Democratic senator Sam Nunn, both NTI co-chairs, argue in the preface to the report.

The Obama administration considered withdrawing the B61s from Europe as part of the president’s nuclear disarmament initiative, but the idea lost support as relations with Russia deteriorated. Instead, the administration approved a Pentagon programme to upgrade the bombs over the next decade with a tailfin assembly to make them more accurate.

The plan has been embraced by the Trump administration’s nuclear posture review, despite the fact that the estimated cost of the 460 new model B61-12 bombs – including 310 in the US – has doubled in recent years to \$10 billion, a part of a huge increase of overall defence spending.

—Julian Borger, *The Guardian*, Feb. 15, 2018

* http://www.nti.org/media/documents/NTI_NATO_RPT_Web.pdf

“As chancellor, I’d push for the ejection of nuclear weapons stored in Germany.”

Then Aug. 29, Foreign Minister Gabriel, shocked a Washington, DC press conference with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson by endorsing Schulz’s call for ridding Germany of US bombs. Gabriel bluntly said, “I agree with Mr. Schulz’s point that we need to get rid of the nuclear weapons that are in our country.” —*JL*



Dismantling the EPA: 700 Flee Agency As Trump Nixes Regulations, Enforcement

The first year of the Trump Administration has been devastating for environmental protection. As if pollution and graft made the country great, the Trump administration, Republican majorities and some key Democrats have been on a regulation-cancelling rampage, repealing rules on environmental protection, health care, financial services, and even internet accessibility. According the Dec. 15 *New York Times*, Trump’s military-industrial complex had revoked 67 rules, withdrawn 635 planned regulations, declared 244 rules “inactive,” and “delayed” 700 others. News reports in January indicated that Trump had bragged about repealing 22 regulations for every adopted new one adopted: 67 rules nullified against three new ones. Significantly, around Feb. 3rd, the Senate reversed the Stream Protection Rule that sought to protect surface water and drinking water sources from mining debris. A separate rule that required mining, gas and oil companies to report payments to foreign governments and aimed at punishing bribery, was also repealed.

On Jan. 15, nine of the 12 members of the National Park System Advisory Board resigned, the *Washington Post* reported, in protest over Interior Secretary

Ryan Zinke’s refusal to meet with them. On Dec. 18, 2017, Trump announced that the government will no longer regard climate change by name as a national security threat.

The move is an abrupt reversal of the Obama administration’s position, which in 2015 described climate change as “an urgent and growing threat to our national security,” given its effects on natural disasters, conflicts over food and water, and refugee crises.

Also in December, EPA officials removed dozens of online resources available to aid local and state governments confronting climate change. The deletions were called “very alarming” by Adam Parris of the Science and Resilience Institute in New York who said, “These are the kind of resources it has taken years to develop.”

By Dec. 23, 2017, more than 700 employees of the Environmental Protection Agency had left the agency, and of them, over 200 were scientists, and 96 are environmental protection specialists, the *New York Times* reported. Thomas Burke, a former EPA science advisor told the *Times*, “The mission of the

agency is the protection of public health. Clearly there’s been a departure in the mission.” —*JL*

2nd US Delegation to Join Peace Actions at German Air Base that Hosts US H-Bombs

Nuclear abolitionists in Germany will again sponsor 20 weeks of nonviolent resistance at Büchel Air Base, from March 26 to August 9, 2018. The campaign demands that the 20 US B61 H-bombs at Büchel be sent home permanently—not replaced with new bombs as the US intends—and that Germany ratify the new nuclear weapons ban treaty. A delegation from the US coordinated by Nukewatch will join the Büchel peace camp July 10-18. For more info., visit the websites buechel-atombombenfrei.de and atomwaffenfrei.de (click on *International & English*), where you can consider joining the delegation, and endorse the campaign by signing the Declaration of Solidarity.

To support a scholarship fund for the delegation, please send a donation to Nukewatch today—online or through the mail, see p. 7.