

## Fact Sheet:

# B61 Life Extension Program (LEP)

The B61 is the oldest nuclear weapon in the U.S. arsenal, first deployed in the 1960s — a gravity bomb that is transported and dropped from a nuclear-capable aircraft. All the deployed B61 bombs are in Europe as part of NATO's nuclear sharing agreement; there are approximately 180 of these bombs at bases in 5 European countries (Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Germany). There are approximately 300 more B61 nuclear weapons in storage in the United States.

A Life Extension Program (LEP) is conducted by the nuclear labs (NNSA) to replace aging non-nuclear parts of nuclear weapons, such as batteries and fuses. Some of the B61's replacement parts impart new military capabilities, such as changeable burst height. In this sense, the B61 LEP is also a modernization program, which is something the U.S. has pledged not to pursue in international agreements and domestic nuclear policy. The LEP is meant to extend the life of the B61 nuclear weapon for decades, further contradicting U.S. nuclear policy and treaty commitments.

### **Expensive & Wasteful!**

The B61 LEP is already the most expensive warhead modernization program ever, at an estimated cost of \$10 billion, up from \$4 billion in 2010. In fact, the B61 bomb will end up costing more than its weight in gold, at \$28 million/weapon.

Cutting the B61 LEP not only saves money on the bombs themselves, but also on the research and development of nuclear capable F-35 aircraft with the capability to transport and deploy those nuclear weapons. The F-35 is already the most expensive weapons system in the U.S. military (estimated at over \$1 trillion), despite continued delays in production and the grounding of those already in service due to multiple problems. Removing the nuclear missions could save billions more from this already troubled program.

Money is tight — the expected \$600 million reduction of the NNSA's weapons activities budget could slow the B61-12 LEP, which could delay production potentially into the 2020s, years after the NNSA said they must already be deployed.

### **Modernization = New Capabilities = Wrong Message**

The B61-12 LEP will deliver the new capability of being able to lower the explosive yield and will include a new tail kit that will give the nuclear weapon a new \$800 million precision guidance capability — these same capabilities were rejected by Congress in 1994 over concerns they would lead to more useable nuclear weapons.

Increasing capabilities of nuclear weapons goes against the spirit and the letter of international agreements, NATO's Deterrence and Defense Review adopted in May 2012, and U.S. nuclear policy.

Increasing the capabilities of tactical nuclear weapons such as the B61 undercuts U.S. efforts to engage Russia in talks to limit and eliminate non-strategic nuclear weapons, of which Russia has many more than the United States.

### **The Cold War is Over**

B61 bombs are outdated and unnecessary — these are the oldest nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal, originally intended to support troops on the battlefield and prevent a Soviet invasion of Europe.

Some NATO members have called for the B61 bombs in Europe to be repatriated to the U.S., and future arms control agreements with Russia could call for a reduction in all tactical nuclear weapons — B61 bombs may become even more obsolete by the time the LEP is completed, wasting time, money and resources.

Former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. James Cartwright, stated the B61 in Europe have no military role in U.S. or allied security, but are only there as political reassurance for some NATO countries (not the ones that host the warheads, however, who want those weapons to go home).

### **Some Alternatives to the B61 LEP**

A cheaper alternative (savings billions of dollars) would be to retain a different version of the B61 (approximately 120 B61-7 bombs) for use with the B-2A bomber and retire other B61 versions.

Bring all the B61 back from Europe to the U.S. and either store them securely with the others at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico or better yet, take them to the Pantex plant in Texas for decommissioning.

A letter to Congressional Armed Services and Energy and Water Committee leaders signed by dozens of arms control organizations suggests Congress withhold funding from the B61 LEP in FY2014 until a “public, unclassified review of a range of reasonable alternatives is completed.”

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For sources and citations, visit <http://www.peace-action.org/node/168>*