

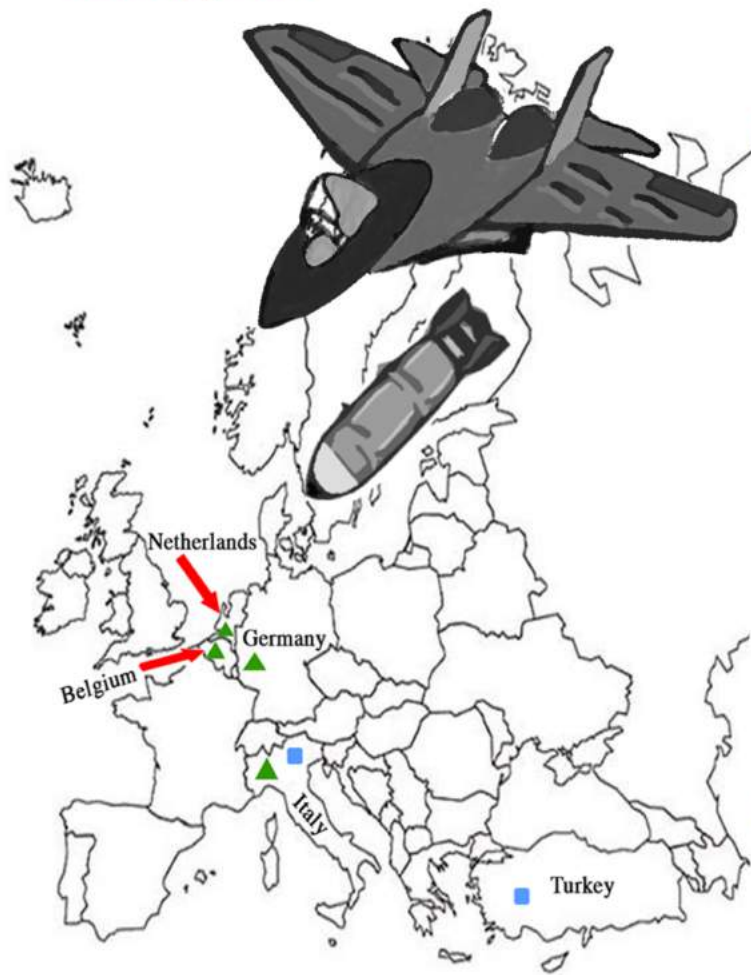
B61 Bombs in Europe and the U.S. Life Extension Program

A briefing by BASIC

February 2014

British American Security
Information Council

www.basicint.org




What are B61 Bombs?

- B61 are free-fall nuclear bombs carried by aircraft.
- First built in the 1960s, they are considered to be the oldest weapons in the U.S. arsenal.
- The U.S. possesses approximately 520;¹ about 200 are assigned to NATO's burden-sharing mission in Europe, hosted by NATO-member countries in Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, and Turkey. The bombs are funded by U.S. taxpayers.
- These bombs are contained in six bases, two of which would utilize U.S. aircraft (one air base in Incirlik Turkey and one in Aviano Italy). Non-U.S. aircraft is assigned to other bases (Kleine Brogel, Belgium; Büchel, Germany; Ghedi Torre, Italy; and Volkel, The Netherlands).²

B61s and the NATO Alliance:

- NATO's Strategic Concept stipulates nuclear deterrence as a core component of the security alliance.
- B61s are assigned to NATO as part of the Alliance's "nuclear deterrent", and are seen as part of allied burden-sharing. Some also see the basing of these bombs and related nuclear-sharing arrangements as a symbol of reassurance of allies' commitments to one another.
- NATO's last Strategic Concept was agreed in 2010, and affirmed the role of nuclear weapons in alliance security - specifically the strategic arsenals, however it de-emphasized the role played by the tactical nuclear bombs in Europe compared to the previous version. The 2010 Concept is to serve as the Alliance's "road map" until 2020.
- They are also seen as a leverage tool for negotiations with Russia and other states outside of the Alliance.

 Air Base (AB) with US aircraft

 Air Base (AB) with non-US aircraft

¹ "The B61 Life Extension Program," *Union of Concerned Scientists*, N.d., <http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/nwgs/B61-life-extension-program-FS.pdf>

² Norris S. Robert and Kristensen M. Hans, "The U.S. Tactical Weapons In Europe," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2011, <http://www.nonukes.nl/media/files/2010-12-bas-us-tactical-nukes-in-europe-2011.pdf>

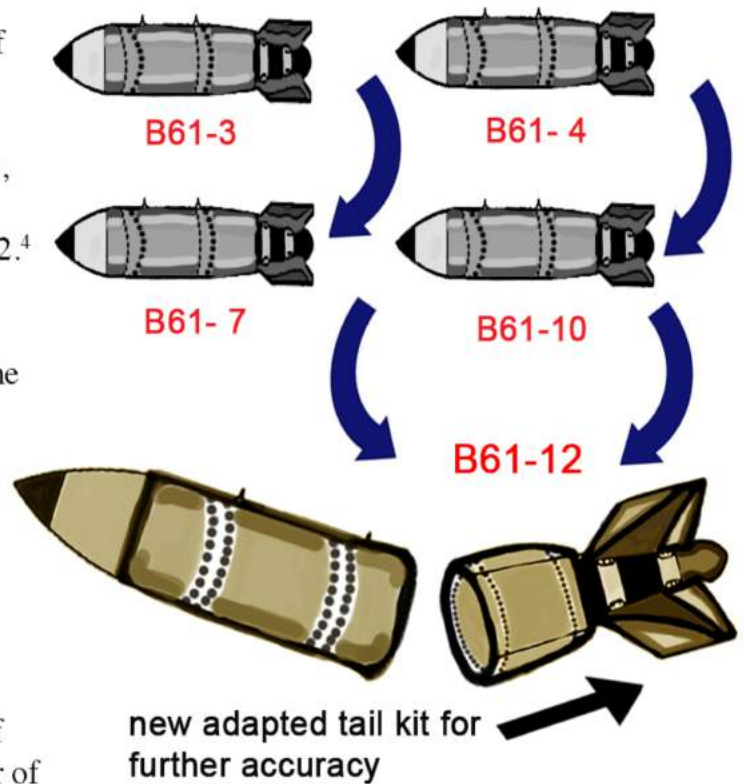
Plans to Modernize These Weapons:

- U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) wishes to upgrade and expand the lives of these weapons for about 20 years, through a Life Extension Program (LEP).³
- NNSA desires to transform the four variant types, or “MOD’s,” of the B61 bombs (B61-3, 4, 7, and 10), and roll them into one MOD called the B61-12.⁴
- To make the bombs more accurate, the United States will remodel approximately 400 of these weapons with an additional tail kit adapted from the conventional JDAM bomb.⁵
- The first version of the B61-12 bomb is to be completed by 2020; all remaining bombs to be adapted by 2024.⁶

Reactions to the Life Extension Program:

- The LEP is justified as a contribution towards President Obama’s goals of reducing the amount of weapon variants and decreasing the overall number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. stockpile.⁷ The B61 weapons require an upgrade in order to attain secure and accurate qualities.
- A report from the U.S. House Armed Services Committee highlighted how some elements of these bombs must undergo refurbishment in order to maintain their full capacities for operating in the future.⁸
- Critics of the LEP have pointed to the escalating costs of the program, calling them unnecessary and politically driven.⁹

Creating the B61-12



Estimated Costs:

- The U.S. Defense Department has estimated that the B61-12 LEP will cost at least \$10 billion. NNSA originally estimated the program to cost \$4 billion.¹⁰ The production of a single bomb would cost about \$25 million, becoming the most expensive in the U.S. arsenal.¹¹

3 Cook L. Donald, “Congressional Testimony,” NNSA, October 2013, <http://nnsa.energy.gov/mediaroom/congressionaltestimony/lep>

4 Nassauer, Otfried and Becker, Markus, “US to Turn Old Bombs Into All-Purpose Weapons,” *ABC News*, Nov 10, 2013, <http://abc-news.go.com/US/us-turn-bombs-purpose-weapons/story?id=20825797>

5 “Throwing Money at Nukes,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/27/opinion/throwing-money-at-nukes.html?_r=1&

6 IBID

7 “Nuclear Weapons Modernization Programs: Military, Technical, and Political Requirements, for the B61 Life Extension Program and Future Stockpile Strategy,” *U.S. House Committee on Armed Services*, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, One Hundred Thirteenth Congress, First Session, October 29, 2013, <http://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=747337>

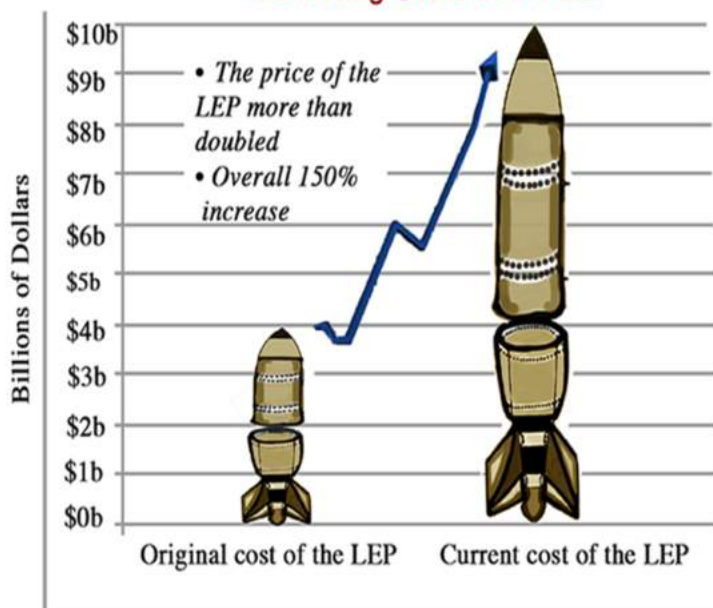
8 IBID

9 Guarino P. Douglas, “House Democrat Eyes More Powerful Alternative to B61 Nuclear Bomb,” *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*, October 30, 2013, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/house-democrat-eyes-more-powerful-alternative-b-61-nuclear-bomb/>

10 Kristensen M. Hans, “B61-12 NNSA’s Gold Plated Nuclear Bomb Project,” *FAS*, July, 2012, <http://blogs.fas.org/security/2012/07/b61-12-gold/>

11 MacDonald, Eryn, “Take Another Look at B61,” *Union of Concerned Scientists*, June 25, 2013, <http://allthingsnuclear.org/take-another-look-at-b61/>

Increasing Costs of the LEP



- Germany had been a strong advocate of the removal of nuclear weapons ever since 2009 when then foreign minister Guido Westerwelle (FDP) announced the government’s position in support of the removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in late November, the new German coalition government released a white paper which stated that withdrawal was preconditioned on successful disarmament negotiations with Russia. Further to this, Germany wants to be involved in NATO’s nuclear planning for as long as nuclear weapons play a role in NATO’s Strategic Concept.¹⁵

Opinion From Host European members:

- In order to meet U.S. standards, European NATO members would need to spend \$100 million dollars to bring facilities up to U.S. requirements, for “guns, guards, [and] gates.”¹²
- There are domestic debates in some of the European host countries as to the future of the hosting arrangements. In November 2013, the Dutch Parliament adopted a motion that agreed that the F16 successor fighter jets may not have a nuclear task. This is following a Dutch Parliament motion in December 2012 which rejected the B61 modernization plans.¹³ However, the Dutch position is not quite clear as subsequently the government has said that it is not prepared to abandon the mission without a decision made by NATO itself.

Current Status of B61 bombs and Congress:

- In the week of January 15, 2014, U.S. Congress approved the funding for \$537 million for the extension program of the B61 bombs, in the Omnibus appropriations bill of the Fiscal Year 2014. This occurred despite several attempts made by some members in the Senate to decrease this amount or move towards less costly projects.¹⁶
- Congress could reconsider the funding of the LEP for the Fiscal Year 2015.¹⁷

Research and design by: Maria G. Rivas, a research intern in BASIC’s London Office

12 Lewis, Jeffrey, “A Steal at \$10 Billion,” *Foreign Policy*, September 5, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/05/a_steal_at_10_billion
 13 “Netherlands Now on an Unstoppable Path Towards Denuclearization,” *No nukes*, N.d, <http://www.nonukes.nl/en/news/netherlands-now-on-an-unstoppable-path-towards--denuclearization>
 14 Phalnikar, Sonia, “New German Government to Seek Removal of US Nuclear Weapons,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 25, 2009, <http://www.dw.de/new-german-government-to-seek-removal-of-us-nuclear-weapons/a-4824174-1>
 15 “Deutschlands zukunft gestalten,” *Koalitionsvertrag Zwischen CDU CSU UND SPD*, N.d, <https://www.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/dokumente/koalitionsvertrag.pdf>
 16 “Cash-Strapped Congress Fully Funds B-61 Solid Gold Nukes,” *Nukewatch*, Jan 15, 2014, <http://nukewatch.org/B61.html>
 17 IBID