

The Divine Strake Test

Nuclear Saber Rattling in the Nevada Desert

"I don't want to sound glib here, but it is the first time in Nevada that you'll see a mushroom cloud over Las Vegas since we stopped testing nuclear weapons." - James Tegnelia, DTRA, March 30, 2006.

The Divine Strake Test is a huge explosion at the Nevada Test Site (NTS) planned by the Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), who wants weapons to destroy hardened and deeply buried targets. Originally planned for June 2, the blast has been postponed due to numerous citizen, State, Tribal and Congressional protests. Nevada is now requiring that the test must comply with state air quality standards. The Western Shoshone Tribe and allied citizen groups have sued to permanently stop it. In 2005 Congress denied funding requests for what it called the Department of Energy's "extreme nuclear weapons goals." Nevertheless, Divine Strake will clearly be used to calibrate the effects of earth-penetrating nuclear weapons. President Bush has consistently declared that "all options are on the table" in escalating nuclear tensions with Iran. This test is a step in the dangerous direction of actually using nuclear weapons to destroy reputed Iranian underground nuclear facilities.

What is Divine Strake For?

DTRA's Fiscal Year 2006 budget request describes Divine Strake as a "Full scale tunnel defeat demonstration using high explosives to simulate a low yield nuclear weapon ground shock." Its purpose is to "improve the warfighter's confidence in selecting the smallest nuclear yield necessary to destroy underground



- photo courtesy of DTRA

facilities while minimizing collateral damage." After protests, DTRA claimed that the word "nuclear" in those sentences was a mistake. The blast will be produced by detonating 700 tons of ammonium nitrate-fuel oil (ANFO) in a hole 32 feet in diameter and 36 feet deep, approximately 100 feet above an existing tunnel. The ground shock effect on the tunnels and its equipment will be measured to calibrate computer codes so that war planners can specify how big a bomb is required to destroy any given buried target.

Is It a Test for Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons?

The overwhelming evidence suggests so. This size ANFO charge has the explosive power of 593 tons of TNT, or nearly 0.6 kiloton (one kiloton equals 1,000 tons of TNT). Divine Strake will be 280 times more powerful than the ANFO truck bomb that destroyed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and is 20 times heavier than the payload capabilities of the B-52, the U.S.'s heaviest bomber.

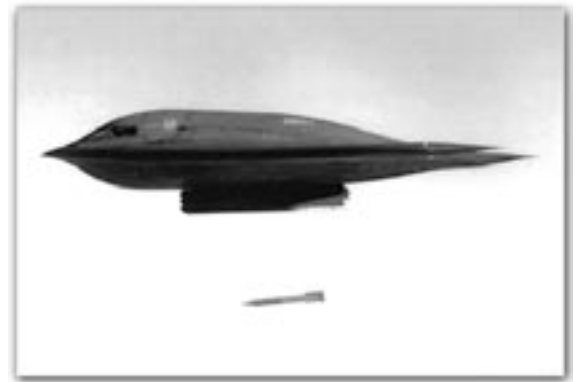
The only deliverable weapon in the U. S. arsenal with this destructive power is a nuclear weapon. However, the only currently deployed earth-penetrating nuclear bomb is the B61-11, with an estimated yield of 400 kilotons. That would cause too much collateral damage resulting in severe international repercussions. However, the B61-11 is currently going through a "Life Extension Program" to alter its secondary, the bomb component that provides the main blast. This could allow for lower yields, thus making the B61-11 more militarily attractive for any attack on Iran.

Are the Nuclear Weapons Labs Connected to Divine Strake?

Yes, very much so. In 2003 the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) was involved in the precursor test to Divine Strake, a 1.1kt explosion at NTS. In 2004, LANL used a geologic model of the Divine Strake tunnel while simulating the effects of a 10-kiloton blast. Moreover, the B61 is a Los Alamos design, and the Lab has lead responsibility for its Life Extension Program. Finally, the center of gravity for the 700 tons of ANFO in the Divine Strake test is approximately equal to the depth (18 feet) that unarmed B61-11s have been able to penetrate during drop tests from aircraft.

Sandia National Laboratories has been involved in earth penetrating weapon research for over 20 years, and designed and tested the nose cone and earth-penetrating bomb case for the B61-11 modification. It is currently performing cable-pulled drop tests “for worst-case testing of the B61-11”, probably to enhance its penetrating capabilities.

Additionally, there is a revolving door for senior managers between the Labs and DTRA. LANL’s controversial ex-director Pete Nanos is currently employed at DTRA, while still drawing \$235,000 a year from the Lab. Senior LANL nuclear weapons scientist Steve Younger was formerly the Director of DTRA. James Tegnolia, a former senior manager at Sandia, is now head of DTRA.



A B-2 Spirit Bomber test drops a B61-11 bomb casing. -courtesy Sandia Labs

Why Should Citizens Care About Divine Strake?

Divine Strake confirms that U.S. war planners continue to pursue the possible use of nuclear weapons in future wars, and the next one up could be with Iran. A global arms race could be renewed as more countries seek nuclear weapons, in part because of their possibly perceived need to deter the U.S. from using nuclear weapons. The Divine Strake Test could accelerate a return by the U.S. to the design, manufacture and testing of improved and/or new nuclear weapons. Environmentally, downwinders from as far away as Idaho and Utah have grave concerns that Divine Strake could re-suspend radioactivity from past nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site. Finally, the Physicians for Social Responsibility have modeled the effects and fallout dispersion of a nuclear attack with three B61-11’s each on two sites in Iran. According to the simulation, within 48 hours fallout would cover much of Iran and Afghanistan and spread to Pakistan and India. An estimated 2.6 million people could die and another 10.5 million be exposed to radioactive fallout with varying degrees of adverse health effects. Both geopolitically and environmentally, Divine Strake is a threat to humankind.

What Can You Do?

Citizens should be aware of the implications of this test and others, which are symptomatic of the Bush Administration’s aggressive nuclear weapons policies. Write letters-to-the-editor and to Congress expressing your views. For current developments and to participate in the “Stop Divine Strake Coalition” (43 member organizations and growing) visit www.citizenalert.org and www.nukewatch.org. Stay tuned to those websites for any rescheduling of the Divine Strake Test and related actions and protests.

We are indebted to our colleagues the Western States Legal Foundation (www.wslfweb.org) for first exposing the connections between the Divine Strake Test and U.S. nuclear weapons.

John Witham- May 25, 2006