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Obama Announces Up to One-Third Cut in Nuclear Arms; In Contrast U.S. Nuclear Agency Plans ~\$60 Billion In Weapons Upgrades and Improvements

Santa Fe, NM - Today, standing in front of the historic Brandenburg gate in Berlin, President Barack Obama declared that he will seek to cut the arsenal of deployed strategic nuclear arms by up to one-third in concert with Russia. He also said he will pursue significant bilateral cuts in tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons in Europe. In contrast, just two days ago, Obama's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) released its plans for over 60 billion dollars in upgrades and improvements to existing nuclear weapons, beginning with a \$10 billion upgrade to the B61 tactical bomb based in Europe.

In its just released "FY 2014 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan," the NNSA proposes perpetual Life Extension Programs that will result in three types of ballistic missile warheads, two types of nuclear bombs (including the refurbished B61), and one redeployed cruise missile warhead (which is not currently active). Much of the drive for this comes from the Directors of the nuclear weapons labs, who simultaneously act as the presidents of the for-profit limited liability corporations that run the labs. According to the Directors and the NNSA, the three modified ballistic missile warheads would be "interoperable" between delivery platforms. However, these warheads can never be truly interoperable between land and sub-based missiles, but at most will have some interchangeable components.

Further, although it's still vague, the three so-called interoperable warheads would replace only four types of existing warheads, which other than profits for the labs makes little sense given their staggering estimated costs. Moreover, these proposals will also require untold sums of taxpayers money for facility upgrades and new construction and then production by 2030 of 80 new plutonium pits at Los Alamos, NM and uranium secondaries at Oak Ridge, TN. Finally, these radical modifications, if implemented, cannot be full-scale tested, therefore perhaps undermining confidence in reliability. In contrast, our existing nuclear weapons designs have been extensively tested, and subsequent studies have found them to be even more reliable and long-lived than originally thought.

NNSA's Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan also claims that new military capabilities for existing nuclear weapons will never be pursued through

improvements, echoing previous claims made internationally at the highest levels of government (for example by the Secretary of State at the United Nations' 2010 NonProliferation Treaty Review conference). But past and planned modifications and Life Extension Programs contradict that claim. In 1997 the U.S. rushed a B61 bomb modified as an earth-penetrator to the stockpile. This significantly changed weapon, with an estimated yield of 350 kilotons, assumed the mission of the 9 megaton surface-burst B53 bomb to destroy hardened, deeply buried targets.

The U.S. is currently conducting a Life Extension Program for the sub-launched W76 warhead. This is extending its service life by three decades or more, and giving it a new fuze that is likely capable of more precise heights of burst. As far back as 1997 the head of the Navy's Strategic Systems pointed out that the combination of increased accuracy and a changed fuze could transform the 100 kiloton W76 from a weapon of deterrence targeting soft targets such as cities into a hard target killer of missile silos and command centers.

NNSA now proposes an overly ambitious Life Extension Program for the existing battlefield variants of the B61 gravity bomb, an estimated 180 of which are forward deployed in NATO countries as a relic of the Cold War. This, of course, seems to contradict Obama's newly declared goal of reducing the presence of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. While future numbers may be lowered, the government's plans will radically improve the B61, which the Russians will be keenly aware of.

NNSA's proposed B61 Life Extension Program has exploded in costs from an estimated \$4 billion to more than \$10 billion. Among other things it will mate the bomb to the future F35 Joint Strike Fighter (which itself is estimated to have life cycle costs of more than \$1 trillion). Separately, a ~\$1.2 billion Pentagon program will upgrade the B61 with a new tailfin guidance kit. This combination of an improved nuclear "smart" bomb delivered by highly stealthy supersonic aircraft will create a lower yield nuclear weapon that can assume the mission of existing higher yield B61's.

Together, these three examples firmly establish that the U.S. creates new military capabilities through modifications and improvements of existing nuclear weapons. In Nuclear Watch New Mexico's opinion, an arguably more usable lower-yield nuclear weapon substituting for a higher-yield weapon is clearly and inherently a new military capability.

In contrast to his rhetoric today, in April President Obama requested an unprecedented \$537 million for the B61 Life Extension Program in FY 2014. Senator Dianne Feinstein, chairwoman of the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee that funds NNSA programs, has expressed increasing concern over exploding costs. She has indicated in media reports that a reasonable alternative would be to fund a significantly reduced program that replaces limited life components. In our view, this would also have the benefit of not creating new military capabilities.

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, "We naturally welcome President Obama's declared goal to reduce deployed strategic nuclear weapons and battlefield weapons in Europe. However, as a real disarmament step, he should take a time out on the full B61 Life Extension Program. He should instead adopt the more fiscally prudent and technically sound alternative of replacing limited life components while the ultimate future of B61 forward deployment in Europe is being determined. This unending cycle of proposed Life Extension Program will waste huge sums of taxpayers money and is in direct conflict with the President's own long-term goal of a future world free of nuclear weapons."

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The full text of President's Obama's speech is available at
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obam>

NNSA's FY 2014 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan is available at
<http://nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/SSMP-FY2014.pdf>

For more on the W76 and B61 Life Extension Programs, in particular their new military capabilities, see the Federation of American Scientists blogs at
http://blogs.fas.org/security/2007/08/us_tripplles_submarine_warhead/ and
<http://blogs.fas.org/security/2011/06/b61-12/>

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