

## "Tactical Nuclear Weapons" against Afghanistan?

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The US Air Force is using GBU-28 "bunker buster bombs" capable of creating large scale underground explosions. The official story is that these bombs are intended to target "cave and tunnel complexes" in mountainous areas in southern Afghanistan, used as a hideaway by Osama.

Dubbed by the Pentagon as "the Big Ones", the GBUs ("guided bomb unit") are 5000lb laser guided bombs with improved BLU-113 warheads, capable of penetrating several meters of reinforced concrete. The BLU-113 is the most powerful conventional "earth penetrating warhead."

While the Pentagon's "Big Ones" are classified as "conventional weapons", the official statements fail to mention that the same "bunker buster bombs" launched from a B-52, a B-2 stealth bomber or an F-16 aircraft *can also be equipped with a nuclear device*. The B61-11 is the "nuclear version" of its "conventional" BLU-113 counterpart. The B61-11 was developed from the old "conventional" B61-7 "gravity bomb."

While in the case of these "bunker buster bombs", the distinction between "nuclear" and "conventional" warheads is not always brought out in official statements, the impacts of the "nuclear version" on civilians are far more devastating, in view of the toxic radioactive fallout over a large area.

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### America's B61-11 "low yield" Nuclear Bomb

The B61-11 is the "nuclear version" of the "conventional" BLU-113. The B61-11 is categorised as a "deep earth penetrating bomb" capable of "destroying the deepest and most hardened of underground bunkers, which the conventional warheads are not capable of doing". The B61-11s can be delivered in much same way as the conventional GBU, from a B-2. a B-2 stealth bomber or from an F-16 aircraft.

The Bush Administration has not excluded the use of the B61-11 in Afghanistan, which is categorised as "a tactical nuclear weapon". Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, has stated that while the "conventional" bunker buster bombs *"are going to be able to do the job', ... he did not rule out the eventual use of nuclear weapons."*<sup>1</sup>

The B61-11 is said to operate much in the same way as the conventional BLU-113 bunker buster bomb, triggering an underground explosion. According to official statements, the B61-11 does not threaten "the surrounding civilian population". These statements convey the impression that the B61-11 while triggering a much larger explosion, is broadly similar to the conventional bunker buster bomb.

Already during the Clinton Administration, the Pentagon was calling for the use of the "nuclear" B61-11 bunker buster bomb, suggesting that *because it was "underground", there was no toxic radioactive fallout which could affect civilians:*

*"military officials and leaders of America's nuclear weapon laboratories are urging the US to develop a new generation of precision low-yield nuclear weapons... which could be used in conventional conflicts with third-world nations. Critics argue that adding low-yield warheads to the world's nuclear inventory simply makes their eventual use more likely. In fact, a 1994 law currently prohibits the nuclear laboratories from undertaking research and development that could lead to a precision nuclear weapon of less than 5 kilotons (KT), because "low-yield nuclear weapons blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional war." Last year, Senate Republicans John Warner (R-VA) and Wayne Allard (R-CO) buried a small provision in the 2001 Defense Authorization Bill that would have overturned these earlier restrictions... Senators Warner and Allard imagine these nuclear weapons could be used in small-scale conventional conflicts against rogue dictators, while leaving most of the civilian population untouched. As one anonymous former Pentagon official put it to the Washington Post last spring, "What's needed now is something that can threaten a bunker tunneled under 300 meters of granite without killing the surrounding civilian population." Statements like these promote the illusion that nuclear weapons could be used in ways which minimize their "collateral damage," making them acceptable tools to be used like conventional weapons. 2*

### **Al Qaeda's "Dirty Nuclear Device"**

The Administration needs a justification as well as public support for the use of tactical nuclear weapons as part of its campaign against international terrorism. It is also anxious to test its "low yield" B61-11 bombs. .

First it is saying that these "low yield" nuclear weapons do not affect civilians, therefore justifying their use in the same way as conventional weapons.

Second, the Administration is hinting that the use of nuclear bunker busters may be justified as part of "the campaign against international terrorism", because Osama possesses nuclear capabilities and could use them against us.

According to the State Department:

*the possibility of terrorist attacks using chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or large explosive weapons 'remained real'.: 'Most terrorists continued to rely on conventional tactics, such as bombing, shooting, and kidnapping, but some terrorists - such as Osama bin Laden and his associates - continued to seek chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear capabilities,' 3*

In early December, Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge issued "a new terrorism warning, prompted in part by concerns that Osama bin Laden's nuclear capabilities are more advanced than previously

thought." Without further investigation, the US media had concluded almost in chorus that Osama constitutes a nuclear threat:

*"disturbing information gathered by US intelligence sources inside Afghanistan in recent weeks indicates that bin Laden and al-Qaeda operatives are working to build a so-called "dirty bomb," a crude weapon capable of spreading radiation over a populated area. 4*

A new and somewhat unusual "arms race" is unfolding. It is now claimed, according to one report, that nuclear weapons could be used by Osama and the Taliban against American troops in Afghanistan:

*"Who is to say that he won't use a bomb since the United States has put troops in the country? The Taliban can wipe out a lot of troops with one bomb." 5*

**Osama's nuclear device is labelled a "dirty bomb" conveying the impression that America's B61-11 is "clean"** The "dirty bomb" is developed from nuclear waste.

America's tactical nuclear weapons are said to be "safe" in comparison to those of Osama. Administration statements suggest, in this regard, that a so-called "low-yield" earth penetrating tactical nuclear weapon such as the B61-11 would *"limit collateral damage"* and therefore be relatively safe to use.<sup>6</sup>

These new buzz words are being spread by the US media to develop public support for the use of "tactical nuclear weapons" against an opponent which now possesses nuclear capabilities. Yet the scientific evidence on this issue is unequivocal: the impacts on civilians of the "low yield" B61-11 would be devastating ***"because of the large amount of radioactive dirt thrown out in the explosion, the hypothetical 5-kiloton weapon ... would produce a large area of lethal fallout."***<sup>7</sup>

### **Justifying Military Action against Iraq**

In parallel with the rumours concerning Osama's nuclear bomb, the Administration --with the full support of the US media-- is highlighting (as part of its PR campaign) the so-called "Osama-Saddam links".

*"It raises new questions in the fiery debate over whether Saddam's regime -- and its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs -- should be the next target in the war on terrorism." 8*

Visibly Washington is attempting to build *"a casus belli, a legal predicate for going to war."*<sup>9</sup> Iraq and other "rogue states" are said to be developing "weapons of mass destruction". These "rogue states" could provide the terrorists with chemical, biological as well as nuclear weapons. It follows *pari passu* that the US has the right and obligation to defend the Western World through "pre-emptive actions", which could in this case include the use of tactical nuclear weapons:

*"[T]errorists like Osama bin Laden, and whoever takes his place, want to get hold of such weapons to use against the United States and the West. Saddam and his regime have a history of cooperating with these types. Saddam may have provided al-Qaida with anthrax; someday he could provide other terrorists a nuclear bomb. For this reason, Saddam and his regime pose a direct and unacceptable threat to the United States.*

*Therefore the United States has the right to take pre-emptive action. America need not wait "for terrorists to try to strike us again," the president said recently. We can take "the fight to the enemy" to "save ourselves and our children from living in a world of fear."*

*A sane Saddam can covertly and deniably provide weapons, know-how or weapons material to terrorists like bin Laden or Son of bin Laden. Since deterrence doesn't work against terrorists, mere containment of Saddam is no longer sufficient to guarantee U.S. security. You need to shut him down. 10*