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Bush nuke plan may not affect Europe stores

By **Ron Jensen, Stars and Stripes**

European edition, Monday, August 30, 2004

The Bush administration plans to cut by nearly half America's nuclear warhead stockpile, a result of the Moscow Treaty of 2002 reducing deployed nuclear forces, according to a report to be published in the September/October edition of *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.

But one of the authors of the article said the nuclear arsenal kept on European soil is not going anywhere.

"Right now, I assume those weapons are staying, at least in the short term," said Robert S. Norris of the Natural Resources Defense Council, or NRDC, an environmental watchdog group from Washington, D.C.

Norris and Hans M. Kristensen — who are on the NRDC nuclear issues staff — wrote the article, in which they say the National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA, submitted a classified report to Congress on June 1 outlining the administration's plans to reduce the number of nuclear warheads, Norris said in a telephone interview last week.

An unclassified letter to Congress from the NNSA that accompanied the report says the stockpile reduction is possible because the Moscow Treaty will reduce the nation's deployed force of nuclear weapons to the lowest level in decades by 2012. The treaty requires a reduction of those weapons to no more than 2,200 by that date. A reduction in deployed weapons makes possible a reduction in the stockpile, which supports the deployed force, the letter says.

Details of the NNSA report were not provided to the authors, but Norris and Kristensen used declassified material to estimate that the United States has about 10,350 warheads in the stockpile and plans to cut about 4,300 of them, or 42 percent.

The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* has been tracking nuclear weapon development by the United States and other countries for 60 years.

Norris and Kristensen claim that America has 480 warheads stored in six countries in Europe, including Turkey. Most of them — 130 — are at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, they say. RAF Lakenheath, England, is home to 110, they said.

They said others are stored at Klein Brogel Air Base, Belgium; Buchel Air Base, Germany; Aviano Air Base and Ghedi Air Base, Italy; Volkel Air Base, the Netherlands; and Incirlik Air Base, Turkey.

The U.S. European Command said Thursday the locations and numbers of nuclear weapons are classified. But those sites also appear in publications from other organizations that follow nuclear weapon development, including the Italian Union of Scientists for Disarmament and various anti-nuclear groups in Europe and America.

A EUCOM spokesman in Stuttgart, Germany, told Stars and Stripes that NATO considers nuclear weapons "an essential political and military link between the European and North American members of the alliance."

U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Rick Haupt said, "The alliance will, therefore, maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe."

He said their numbers would be at "the minimum level to maintain peace and stability."

"The U.S. remains committed to NATO's strategic concept and will continue to support it, along with its allies," he said.

Hopes were raised in the European anti-nuclear crowd a few months ago when Gen. James L. Jones, EUCOM commander and supreme allied commander in Europe for NATO, told a Belgian senate committee that U.S. nuclear weapons would be reduced in Europe.

"The reduction will be significant. Good news is on the way," Jones told the committee in March, according to *La Libre Belgique*, a newspaper.

Pol D'Huyvetter, a spokesman for a Belgian anti-nuclear group known as For Mother Earth, said, "That [newspaper article] appeared even on the Web site of SHAPE for a few days and then — whoosh! — it was gone."

However, it had already been picked up by anti-nuclear Web sites and raised expectations for a further announcement.

"I was expecting a follow-up then, but it didn't happen," said Norris.

America has maintained nuclear weapons in western Europe since the 1950s as part of its Cold War strategy to counter the threat of the Soviet Union in eastern Europe. At the height of the Cold War, thousands of nuclear warheads were placed in Europe, according to reports from various groups.

Treaties with the Soviets prompted a reduction of weapons even before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and further reductions have taken place since.

Their presence over the years sparked the growth of a European

anti-nuclear movement that survives to this day, still pushing for elimination of American nuclear weapons from Europe. The United States is the only country to deploy nuclear weapons outside its border.

Activists remain pessimistic that their goal will be met anytime soon, even with the announcement of possible troop withdrawals from Europe. D'Huyvetter said, "We think the withdrawal of U.S. troops is the right signal, but we don't see that as related [to reducing nuclear weapons]."

"We've discussed that," said Roland Blach of the German group Nonviolent Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

"So far, I have not much hope. I think the nuclear weapons will be here for another five or 10 or 15 years."

Davida Higgin, an American who created Lakenheath Action Group to campaign for the removal of nuclear weapons from RAF Lakenheath, said: "We would be very glad if the bombs we firmly believe are there were taken away."

But, she added, her worry is that they would be replaced with "mininukes," a new generation of weapon being developed by America.

The purpose of maintaining a nuclear stockpile in Europe escaped the anti-nuke people. Blach called it "really stupid" and D'Huyvetter said the reason was "a mystery."

Norris said, "I think it would be a wise move to bring them home."

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