

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4402

April 7, 2006

Mr. James Tegnella, Director
Defense Threat Reduction Agency
8725 John Kingman Road Stop 6201
Ft. Belvoir, VA 22060-6201

Dear Mr. Tegnella,

I am writing in regards to the Divine Strake test, scheduled for June 2, 2006. Although I understand that this test is not a nuclear test, I am greatly concerned that you have not provided the public with adequate assurances that the test is not being conducted in order to further misguided attempts to build new low-yield nuclear devices.

In 2003, Congress mistakenly repealed the Spratt-Furse ban on research and development of low-yield nuclear weapons. Some Members of Congress, including myself, were concerned that advocates for repealing the ban were yielding to those who actively support the development of new nuclear weapons. At the time, the Department of Defense and the National Nuclear Security Administration assured Congress that the ban should be repealed because it hindered research efforts and that no actual weapon was being stealthily developed.

You are well aware that at 700 tons (595 ton equivalent yield) this demonstration will not simulate an actual conventional bomb because no bomber in the U.S. fleet has the capacity to carry a weapon of this size. Based on publicly available unclassified information, the 0.6 kt simulation is much smaller than any nuclear weapon the U.S. currently possesses. Therefore, in spite of your public assurances reported in the press this week that this test is not part of plans to develop a new nuclear weapon, I remain greatly concerned that DTRA is in fact working to assist in the development of a low-yield nuclear weapon.

Another cause of my concern is that just this past week, DTRA confirmed that Divine Strake is the Tunnel Target Defeat Advanced Concept and Technology Demonstration specified in the FY2007 Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) budget. The document states that the demonstration *"will develop a planning tool that will improve the warfighter's confidence in selecting the smaller proper nuclear yield necessary to destroy underground facilities while minimizing collateral damage."* That sounds like preparation for a low-yield nuclear weapon to me.

The budget document also specifies that funds will be used to “conduct the Tunnel Target Defeat ACTD large-scale tunnel defeat demonstration using high explosives to produce the desired ground shock environment at the Department of Energy’s Nevada Test Site.” This begs the question: what is the desired ground shock environment?

These statements seem to indicate that this demonstration is indeed linked to nuclear arsenal objectives. Yet, in today’s *Washington Post*, a DTRA spokesperson was quoted as saying that “although DTRA was not ‘disavowing’ the budget documents, ‘things change. That has changed and the wording got left in’ improperly, she said, meaning the references to ‘nuclear.’” I find these inconsistencies to be very disturbing and I would like to know what changed and what is currently the specific intent of this project. In my experience, budget documents and the stated intent of planned experiments do not typically change on a whim.

Finally, I would like to know exactly what precautions are being taken to ensure that any pollutants or radioactive remnants from previous rounds of nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site are not dispersed. Specifically, what kind of monitoring system is in place at the demonstration location and how can the downwind public be assured that there is no risk to them? What is the maximum wind speed under which Divine Strake would be conducted? How far is the large dust cloud expected to travel under that condition?

I have long supported efforts to enhance conventional weaponry, instead of nuclear options. However, I am understandably worried that this demonstration is publicly being billed as a conventional demonstration when its actual intent is to further the pursuit of a new nuclear weapon.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I understand that you have briefed some Members of Congress about this proposal. I request a response to this letter in advance of the June 2, 2006 Divine Strake test.

Sincerely,


JIM MATHESON
Member of Congress