

Nuclear Weapons at What Cost?

It is nearly impossible to calculate total annual U.S. spending on nuclear weapons in a consistent manner. [As explained by the Federation of American Scientists](#): “Most U.S. Government spending on nuclear weapons-related programs is unclassified. But it is functionally secret since such spending is widely dispersed across many programs in several agencies and it is not formally tracked or reported.” Further complicating the calculation is determining the scope of programs functionally intertwined with the most obvious ones: research, development, testing and production of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems.

[According to an analysis by the Carnegie Endowment](#), the U.S. spent over \$52 billion in FY 2008 for nuclear weapons and related programs. This includes nuclear forces and operational support, deferred environmental and health costs, missile defense, nuclear threat reduction, and nuclear incident management. It does not include classified programs, air defense, anti-submarine warfare, or nuclear weapons related intelligence programs.

Obama’s Nuclear Weapons Budget

His nuclear disarmament rhetoric notwithstanding, on May 13, 2010, at the midpoint of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, in connection with submission of the new START U.S. – Russia nuclear arms reduction treaty to the Senate, President Obama submitted a classified report on a Congressionally-mandated plan to maintain and modernize U.S. nuclear forces for the foreseeable future. [According to a White House fact sheet](#): “The plan includes investments of \$80 billion to sustain and modernize the nuclear weapons complex...” and “well over \$100 billion in nuclear delivery systems to sustain existing capabilities and modernize some strategic systems” by the year 2020.

A second White House fact sheet, released November 17, 2010, [An Enduring Commitment to the U.S. Nuclear Deterrent](#), increased the amount projected “to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons complex that supports our deterrent,” to “more than \$85 billion over the next decade.”

[In testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces](#) on March 2, 2011, Dr. James Miller, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy increased the numbers again, stating: “The Administration’s FY2012 budget reflects our commitment to the modernization of our nuclear arsenal for the long term, including some \$125 billion over the next ten years to sustain our strategic delivery systems, and about \$88 billion over the same period to sustain our nuclear arsenal and modernize infrastructure.”

Unprecedented Nuclear Weapons Spending

Calling it an “unprecedented investment in ensuring the nuclear security of our country and our allies,” Thomas D’Agostino, Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Agency (NNSA), a semi-autonomous division of the Department of Energy, on February 16, 2011 [declared](#): “Despite the economic challenges facing our nation and the budget pressures being felt throughout the federal government, the President demonstrated his commitment to our mission by proposing an unprecedented investment in ensuring the nuclear security of our country and our allies.” The President’s FY 2012 budget request includes over \$7.6 billion for programs directly related to nuclear warheads. [As stated in the official budget document](#): “The Weapons Activities request is an increase of 8.9 percent over the President’s FY 2011 Request. This level is sustained and increased in the later out years.”

The FY 2012 request includes increased funding for three new nuclear weapons production plants: the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement building, a new plutonium “pit” manufacturing facility at the Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico; the Uranium Processing Facility, a production facility for thermonuclear components under construction at the Oak Ridge National Lab in Tennessee; and a replacement for the Kansas City Plant in Missouri, where NNSA manufactures most nonnuclear nuclear weapon components. The 2012 budget request also includes “Life Extension Programs” (rebuilt) for three warhead types including the B61 warhead, a U.S. bomb still deployed at NATO bases in Europe.

[According to Dr. Robert Civiak](#), former Program Examiner for Department of Energy nuclear security activities at the federal Office of Management and Budget: “Even though the U.S. stockpile contains only one-fifth as many warheads as it used to, the 2012 request is the largest ever for Weapons Activities. After accounting for inflation, the \$7.63 billion request is 21 percent more than Ronald Reagan’s largest nuclear weapons budget and 19 percent more than President George H.W. Bush’s highest spending level.”

The Department of Energy budget covers only nuclear warheads. In addition, in response to [the President’s commitment to modernize all three legs of the “strategic triad”](#) of nuclear weapons delivery systems, [the Department of Defense FY 2012 budget request](#) includes \$197 million for research and development on a new Air Force long-range bomber that would be ready for fielding in the mid-2020s. In all \$3.7 Billion is slated to be spent in developing this nuclear-capable aircraft over the next five to six years. On January 6, 2011 Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced that the Air Force would begin development of this new nuclear-capable strategic bomber, which can be remotely piloted. At present, there are no nuclear capable “drones” in the U.S. arsenal. Plans are for 80 to 100 of these aircraft to be built.

[The Pentagon budget request](#) also includes \$2.6 million to study a future Intercontinental Ballistic Missile and \$1.07 Billion to develop a new ballistic missile submarine to replace today’s Ohio-class vessels.

Nuclear Weapons Forever?

On May 9, 2011, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon released details about H.R. 1540, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2012. The chairman’s “mark” of the annual defense authorization bill would fully fund NNSA at the President’s requested levels. [The document](#) also reveals the long planning horizon for nuclear weapons, specifying, “The planned Ohio-class ballistic submarine replacement is expected to be in operations through 2080.”

[A 1998 study by the Brookings Institution](#) found, as a conservative estimate, that the U.S. spent \$5.5 Trillion dollars on nuclear weapons from 1940–1996 (in constant 1996 dollars). Nuclear weapons spending during this period exceeded the combined total federal spending for education; training, employment, and social services; agriculture; natural resources and the environment; general science, space, and technology; community and regional development, including disaster relief; law enforcement; and energy production and regulation.

Nuclear weapons have threatened human security since they were used by the United States against Japan nearly 66 years ago. In a time of unprecedented global economic, environmental and political upheaval, can we afford to pay for them for another 70 years, hoping they won’t be used again?

*-- Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Director
(citations available upon request)*