A SPENDING BINGE ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS:

The Dire Economic and Security Consequences of a $1 Trillion Nuclear Weapons “Modernization” Plan

BACKGROUND

- The United States developed its nuclear arsenal during the Cold War arms race, and continues to maintain it today, based on a theory of nuclear deterrence: that the threat of using nuclear weapons, and the resulting destruction and loss of life, will prevent an aggressor from initiating an attack using their own weapons.
- In 1970, the United States joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons with the eventual goal of achieving global disarmament. 191 countries have joined the Treaty, which was renewed indefinitely in 1992.\(^1\)
- A 2014 Defense Review by the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the United States could maintain U.S. security with two-thirds of the current arsenal.\(^2,\(^3\)
- Despite numerical reductions in the nuclear stockpile, the U.S. plans to develop the capability of its nuclear arsenal by **investing in qualitative improvements in existing weaponry.**
  - The U.S. and Russia signed the New START Treaty in 2010, which outlined agreements for bilateral reductions in the total number of weapons and created mutual verification mechanisms to prevent the escalation of conflict.\(^4\)
  - However, New START does not constrain technological developments in the existing stockpile.\(^5\) **Thus, under the auspices of New START, the U.S. has significantly bolstered its nuclear weapons systems.** These qualitative improvements include technological developments that augment the capability of existing weapons and the replacement of current systems with new nuclear weapons.

THE COST

- The U.S. government has channeled substantial investments into developing the nuclear arsenal. The Department of Defense and Department of Energy requested a combined $23 billion for nuclear weapons spending in 2016.\(^6\)
- Overall, projected spending on nuclear weapons development over the next ten years is estimated to reach $400 billion.\(^7\) **Over the next 30 years, investments to upgrade the U.S. nuclear weapons program are estimated to cost over $1 trillion.**\(^8\)
- There has been significant concern over the funding sources to upgrade the nuclear arsenal, and budget experts have predicted that these plans would siphon funds from the conventional military budget.\(^9\)

WHERE WILL THE MONEY GO?

- Proposed spending will upgrade existing weapons and delivery systems, as well as completely replace current systems with new ones. The effort would include spending on:\(^10\)
  - A new fleet of 12 ballistic missile submarines to replace retiring submarines. Each submarine will hold 20 missiles, which each carry up to 8 warheads.
  - Replacing Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles with new missiles and supporting infrastructure.
A new strategic bomber fleet and continuing modification of current bombers, including the purchase of 80-100 new bombers to replace older models.

- Developing a new fleet of long range standoff missiles (LRSOs) to replace air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs). This would entail the purchase of 1,000 new missiles, roughly doubling the size of the existing ALCM fleet.

These programs have differing lifespans, but the overall scheme would extend the U.S. nuclear weapons program into the 2080s.\(^{11}\)

**A 21\textsuperscript{ST} CENTURY NUCLEAR ARMS RACE**

- Investing in significant upgrades to the U.S. nuclear arsenal signals to other countries that the U.S. is not honoring its disarmament obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Rather, the spending proposal shows that the U.S. is committed to maintaining their nuclear arsenal.

- The U.S. spending binge encourages other countries to invest in developing their nuclear weapons programs. All other countries that possess nuclear weapons have increased spending to expand the capability of their stockpiles.\(^{12}\)

- Former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry warns that the $1 trillion buildup spurs a new arms race and undermines global security. Secretary Perry stated, “Today, the danger of some sort of a nuclear catastrophe is greater than it was during the Cold War.”\(^{13}\)

Martin Fleck, Security Programs Director at PSR, summarizes PSR’s stance on the proposed spending binge on nuclear weapons: “We cannot afford the nuclear weapons spending binge, as it does nothing to enhance our security. The most dangerous aspect of the trillion-dollar plan is that it encourages other nuclear-armed countries to upgrade their own arsenals, and encourages countries without nuclear weapons to acquire them. Our current program obstructs progress toward true disarmament at a time when the U.S. should be supporting global efforts to prohibit nuclear weapons, for the same reasons chemical and biological weapons have already been prohibited.”

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11. Ibid.