

What We Spend on Nuclear Weapons

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“We’re not going to be able to go forward with weapon systems that cost what weapon systems cost today.”

- Gen. Robert Kehler, Commander, USSTRATCOM

The United States is projected to spend an estimated \$700 billion on nuclear weapons and related programs during the next ten years. As federal budgets tighten and officials address the most pressing national security needs of the 21st century, the substantial cost of nuclear weapons must be fully examined. By understanding these costs and setting effective national security priorities, policymakers can reduce nuclear budget excesses incurred by the active stockpile of approximately 5,000 nuclear weapons.

Annual Nuclear Weapons and Related Programs Spending

The U.S. government does not produce a full accounting of the annual cost of nuclear weapons and related programs. Independent experts have provided several well-regarded estimates of U.S. spending, with the most recent comprehensive study by Steven Schwartz and Deepti Choubey.¹ In that study, which has not been updated, the authors estimated that the U.S. spent at least \$52.4 billion on nuclear weapons and related programs in FY 2008.²

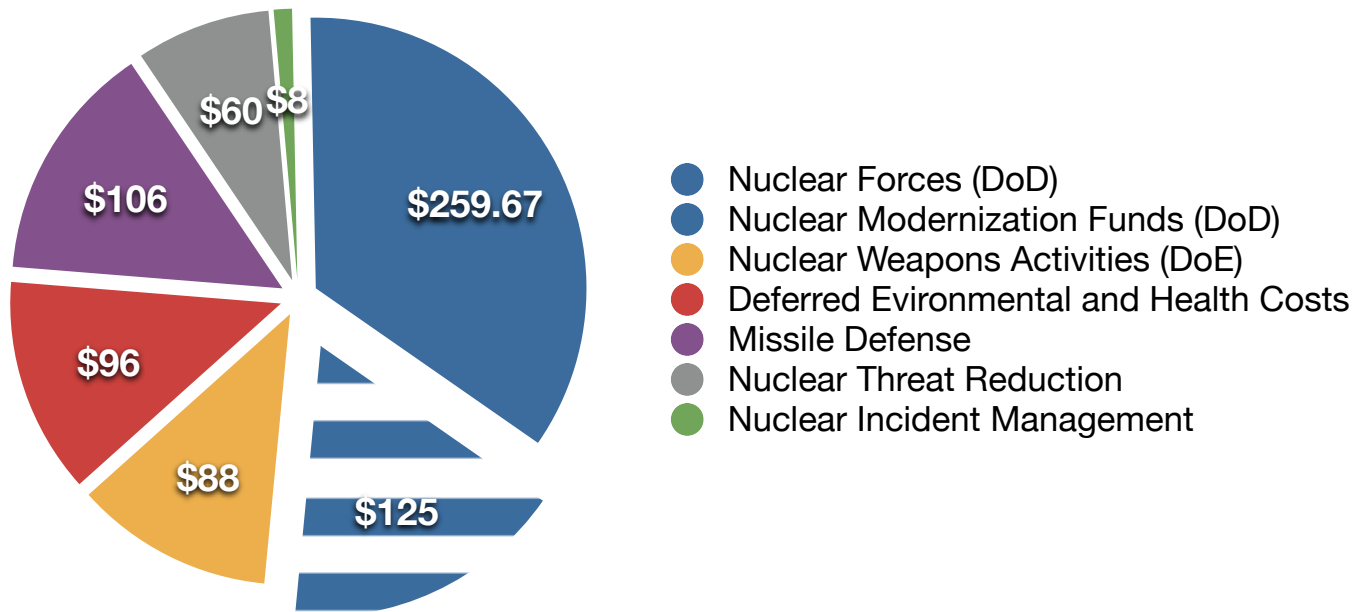
Adjusted for inflation, their estimate would be equivalent to expenditures of \$54.49 billion in FY 2012 - approximately \$31 billion of which would be spent directly on operating, maintaining, and upgrading the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

\$700 Billion Over Ten Years

Assuming that U.S. nuclear weapons budgets will continue to keep pace with the inflation rate, in line with Congressional Budget Office inflation estimates, the projected total base budget expenditures for nuclear weapons and related programs would total approximately \$600 billion over the next decade, from FY 2012 through FY 2021.

The Department of Energy plans to spend an additional \$15 billion to update nuclear warheads and build new production facilities.³ The Department of Defense plans to spend \$125 billion to sustain existing and develop new nuclear delivery systems.⁴ It is unclear how much DoD’s proposed budgets would be new money above base budgets. If the full \$125 billion were added, the total estimated ten-year cost of nuclear weapons and related programs could reach approximately \$740 billion.

Projected Total Budget for Nuclear Weapons and Related Programs FY12-FY21 (in \$ billions)



Reducing the Nuclear Budget Burden

Security budgets are about to tip downward, with the Pentagon set to trim at least \$350 billion from its expected budgets over the next ten years under the Budget Control Act of 2011. Defense experts say that the Pentagon could responsibly save as much as a trillion dollars over the next decade while providing for our national security.⁵ Yet at the same time, the nuclear weapons budget is set to continue growing as the U.S. buys exorbitant weapons systems designed to fight last century's wars.

The U.S. can provide for its security and that of its allies with fewer nuclear weapons on fewer defense dollars. By reducing its nuclear arsenal and scaling back unnecessary new programs, the U.S. can reassert fiscal responsibility while orienting budgets for a 21st century defense posture.

¹ The only other recent study of this type, done in 2006 study by Steven Kosiak of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, found that the U.S. spent \$54.3 billion in FY 2006 on nuclear weapons and related programs.

² Schwartz, Stephen and Deepti Choubey, "Nuclear Security Spending: Assessing Costs, Examining Priorities," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009.

³ The \$15 billion in new funds is in addition to a base budget estimate of \$73 billion. National Nuclear Security Administration, FY 2012 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan. April 15, 2011, p. 67.

⁴ Miller, James, Testimony Before the House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, March 2, 2011.

⁵ Adams, Gordon, "Strategic and Fiscal Discipline: The Defense Budget and America's Fiscal Crisis," Testimony before the House Budget Committee, July 7, 2011.