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ALLIANCE

for Nuclear Accountability

U.S. Nuclear Weapons Fact Sheet

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While the United States possesses far fewer nuclear weapons than it did during the Cold War, taxpayers spend significantly more money each year maintaining and upgrading them. Over the next decade, the U.S. plans to expend \$85 billion on nuclear weapons. Given the extraordinary fiscal challenges faced by Americans today, Congress will need to make tough decisions about funding priorities. It must differentiate between what is technically required to maintain real national security and what is little more than “nuclear pork.”

Life Extension Programs

Life Extension Programs (LEPs), originally intended to maintain the reliability of nuclear weapons without testing, are increasingly being used to make major changes to basic well-proven weapons designs. Tampering with original designs reduces the reliability of weapons that have already been proven effective. It is also exorbitantly expensive.

The proposed B61 LEP will cost \$4 billion. Its principal mission is deployment in NATO countries, some of which have already called for its removal. In addition, the new aircraft on which B61 bombs are supposed to be carried is seriously over budget and behind schedule.

DOE is planning a nearly \$5 billion LEP for the W78 warhead, which is currently deployed on some Minuteman III missiles. However, recently refurbished W87 warheads with more modern safety features are already deployed on other Minuteman missiles. The stockpile includes enough W87s for all the Minuteman missiles planned under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, making the W78 LEP unnecessary.

Nuclear Weapons Complex

Much of the money in the FY2012 National Nuclear Security Administration budget request is intended to build new facilities that would increase warhead production capacity at three sites in the U.S. nuclear weapons complex: the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (CMRR) in New Mexico, for work on plutonium pits or the cores of nuclear weapons; the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) at the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee, which builds uranium “secondaries;” and the Kansas City Plant, which manufactures 85% of non-nuclear components in warheads. The cost of the first two plants has grown to nearly \$12 billion. The Kansas City Plant has a questionable financing package that means the plant will be owned by the city government and then leased to the federal government for \$1.2 billion over 20 years. Though much of their mission is to support LEPs, neither the CMRR nor the UPF will be operational until after most currently scheduled LEPs are completed. Before the CMRR and UPF are built, there should be an independent analysis to determine if existing facilities can meet the projected need for uranium and plutonium production.

Dismantlement

The U.S. currently has thousands of retired warheads awaiting dismantlement. The number will likely grow with the stockpile reductions mandated by the recent nuclear weapons treaty agreed to by Russia and the United States. However, the facilities used to conduct warhead dismantlement are also used for LEPs. Unfortunately, LEPs have been considered a higher funding priority. Recent Department of Energy planning documents show that warhead dismantlement was not scheduled to be completed until 2022. However, statements by the Obama administration indicate that this deadline is being pushed back even further.

Nonproliferation Programs

Programs to secure vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide are crucial to prevent nuclear terrorism. Congressionally mandated bipartisan reports have outlined the danger posed by vulnerable nuclear materials and warned that more needs to be done to prevent nuclear terrorism. Given the incalculable costs of nuclear terrorism, inadequately funding programs directly undermines U.S. national security. Sufficiently funding programs like the Global Threat Reduction Initiative would help further the goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear material worldwide.

The Mixed Oxide (MOX) Plutonium Fuel Program, part of the nonproliferation program budget account, is a boondoggle. The MOX program uses plutonium from nuclear weapons to manufacture fuel for commercial reactors. This potentially increases proliferation risks by putting plutonium into international commerce. Eliminating funding for the MOX program would free up billions for true nonproliferation programs.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

The U.S. has observed a moratorium on explosive nuclear weapons testing since 1992. Failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), however, has undermined constraints on other nations that would deter them from joining the “nuclear club” or improving existing nuclear arsenals. With testing banned, it would be much more difficult for any country to develop new weapons. Great advances in detection and verification have been made since the Senate last considered ratifying the CTBT in 1999. Experts agree that the U.S. will be able to reliably monitor other countries’ compliance with the treaty. Stockpile Stewardship programs and computer modeling have also proven that the U.S. can safely maintain its nuclear arsenal far into the future.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Congress should stop funding for projects that expand U.S. nuclear weapons production capacity. Require an independent evaluation of the plutonium and uranium infrastructure across the complex.**
- **Limit all Life Extension Programs (LEPs) to refurbishment of components necessary to maintain the existing safety and reliability of the stockpile. Require an independent review of all LEPs to determine the necessity and consequences of warhead modifications.**
- **Increase dismantlement rates consistent with mandated reductions for the stockpile. Congress should increase funding and require more dismantlement each year.**
- **Fund nonproliferation programs that secure nuclear materials around the world to enhance U.S. security.**
- **Encourage Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty without attaching requirements to increase spending on the nuclear weapons complex.**