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Nuclear Weapons Budget Increased Nonproliferation and Cleanup Budgets Cut Good News: Wasteful Plutonium Program Shuttered

The Obama Administration has released topline numbers for its FY 2015 budget for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), which owns the nation's nuclear weapons complex of design laboratories and production plants. The NNSA's budget category "Total Weapons Activities" is slated to be increased to \$8.3 billion, \$534 million above FY 2014 (+ 6.9%). Of particular interest is "Directed Stockpile Work," increased by \$305 million (+12.5%), whose overwhelming focus is Life Extension Programs. These programs not only extend the operational lives of existing nuclear weapons by decades, but also arguably give them new military capabilities, despite denials at the highest levels of government. Details are not yet available, but the increase for Directed Stockpile Work will probably mostly be for the B61 Life Extension Program. Its refurbishment of each nuclear bomb will cost more than twice their weight in gold.

This is the beginning of a pattern where the U.S. will spend massive amounts on nuclear weapons "modernization," while nonmilitary domestic services are cut or flat lined. In December 2013 the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released its study *Projected Costs of Nuclear Forces 2014 -2023*. Its stunning conclusion was that estimated costs for maintenance and "modernization" of the nuclear weapons stockpile, delivery systems, and research and production complex would total \$355 billion over the next decade. The CBO also reported that costs after 2023 would increase yet more rapidly since "modernization" is only now beginning. The report did not attempt to project costs for maintenance and modernization of nuclear forces over the planned period of the next thirty years, but given current trends it will easily exceed one trillion dollars.

In stark contrast, key nonproliferation programs designed to halt the spread of nuclear weapons have been slashed by \$300 million (-21%), even though nuclear weapons are recognized as the greatest existential threat to the United States. "Defense Environmental Cleanup", the nation-wide program to clean up the Cold War legacy of radioactive and toxic contamination, is being reduced from \$5 billion to \$4.87 billion, despite the fact that estimated costs keep climbing.

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch New Mexico Director, noted how Obama's proposed nuclear weapons budget is upside down. He commented, "It's common knowledge that NNSA's nuclear weapons programs have a staggering track record of cost overruns, schedule delays and security breaches. It's less well known that these

programs may undermine stockpile reliability by introducing unneeded, incredibly expensive changes to existing nuclear weapons that have been extensively tested and are known to be even more reliable than originally thought. Clearly, NNSA's nuclear weapons programs should be cut to help pay for the expansion of nonproliferation programs that actually enhance national security and cleanup programs that actually create jobs."

In one piece of good news the NNSA is finally putting the MOX Fuel Fabrication Facility at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina on "cold standby." The MOX program is a failed attempt in the laudable goal of disposing of 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium. The MOX Program's life cycle costs have exploded to an estimated \$30 billion, and NNSA is now studying cheaper alternatives. This has major positive impacts on the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), which was slated to process 2.5 metric tons of plutonium every year as feedstock for the MOX Fuel Fabrication Facility. It also further undermines the need to build massive new plutonium facilities at LANL.

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Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration topline budget numbers are available at

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2015/assets/doe.pdf>

and

<http://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2014/03/f8/15Highlights.pdf>