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## **NNSA's Nuclear Weapons Budget Takes Huge Jump Arms Race Accelerates with MIRVed Warheads Los Alamos Lab Cleanup Cut**

*Santa Fe, NM* – Ironically the day after the film *Oppenheimer* was awarded multiple Oscars, the Department of Energy's semi-autonomous National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) asked Congress for its biggest nuclear weapons budget ever. NNSA's FY 2025 request for "Total Weapons Activities" is \$19.8 billion, \$700 million above what Congress recently enacted for FY 2024. It is also a full billion dollars above what President Biden asked for last year, which Congress then added to and will likely do so again.

The Biden Administration states that the \$19.8 billion will be used to:

"[P]rioritize implementation of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review by modernizing the Nation's nuclear deterrent to keep the American people safe. The Budget supports a safe, secure, reliable, and effective nuclear stockpile and a resilient, responsive nuclear security enterprise necessary to protect the U.S. homeland and allies from growing international threats." [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/budget\\_fy2025.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/budget_fy2025.pdf), page 75.

The 2022 National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review for the first time posited two nuclear "near peers", i.e. Russia and China, that need to be simultaneously "deterred." This hinted at a potentially large nuclear buildup which this budget may now be implementing. That claimed need to deter two nuclear near peers was explicitly taken a step beyond just deterrence in an October 2023 report from the Strategic Posture Commission. It declared:

"Decisions need to be made now in order for the nation to be prepared to address the threats from these two nuclear-armed adversaries arising during the 2027-2035 timeframe. Moreover, these threats are such that the United States and its Allies and partners must be ready to deter **and defeat** both adversaries simultaneously." <https://www.ida.org/research-and-publications/publications/all/a/am/americas-strategic-posture>, page vii (bolded emphasis added)

In fact, the U.S. and the USSR/Russia have never had only "deterrence." Instead, they have both long had a hybrid of deterrence and nuclear warfighting capabilities that could end civilization overnight. That is why both countries have 1,000s of nuclear weapons rather than just the few hundred needed for only deterrence (and now China is expanding its own arsenal from a few hundred). That is why the U.S. has a \$2 trillion "modernization" program to keep nuclear weapons virtually forever with new production facilities expected to be operational until ~2080. Nevertheless, the "deter and defeat" advocated by the Strategic Posture Commission is a new twist, perhaps just making explicit the nuclear warfighting capabilities that have long been ready to launch Armageddon.

Concerning the Biden Administration's claim that it is maintaining a "reliable" stockpile, the production of plutonium pits (the critical radioactive cores of nuclear weapons) is being expanded at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). However, no future pit production is to maintain the reliability of the existing, extensively tested nuclear weapons stockpile. Instead, it is all for new-design nuclear weapons that can't be tested because of the existing international testing moratorium, which may erode confidence in the stockpile. Alternatively, new-design nuclear weapons could prompt the U.S. to resume testing, which would have severe international proliferation consequences. In sum, NNSA's FY 2025 request of \$19.8 billion for its nuclear weapons programs further ratchets up the accelerating arms race. The recent news that the CIA predicted a 50-50 chance of Putin using a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine in late 2022 dramatically illustrates the grave and growing dangers.

According to the independent Government Accountability Office (GAO), the first 800 new plutonium pits will be for W87-1 warheads for the new, overbudget Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile. These ICBMs, spread across parts of Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska and Colorado, are meant in part to act as a "nuclear sponge" to absorb a Russian first strike. The large number of new plutonium pits could enable the uploading of multiple warheads on each missile, known as Multiple Independently-targeted Reentry Vehicles (MIRV), which the Strategic Posture Commission specifically recommended. This would also coincide with the February 2026 expiration of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which limits U.S. and Russian strategic warheads to 1,550 each.

MIRVed warheads are themselves very apt first-strike nuclear weapons, which conversely could prompt a first strike to destroy them. Ultimately, new plutonium pits are about rival nuclear warfighting capabilities that can end civilization. To add practical issues to this, NNSA has no credible cost estimates for pit production, no credible schedules, no publicly released evidence suggesting that plutonium pit aging justifies ~60 billion dollars in expanded production, and no updated public reviews required under the National Environmental Policy Act. Finally, DOE's nuclear weapons and environmental management programs have been on the GAO's "High Risk List" for project mismanagement and waste of taxpayers' dollars since 1991.

In contrast to the sharp jump in nuclear weapons spending that will bring more contamination and radioactive wastes, funding for cleanup and disposition of excess facilities at the Los Alamos Lab is taking a major cut from \$331.8 million in FY 2024 to \$280.9 million in FY 2025 (-15.3%). <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/doe-fy-2025-budget-in-brief-v2.pdf>, page 69

Jay Coghlan, Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, "The U.S.' existing nuclear weapons stockpile has been extensively tested and proven to be reliable. There are already enough nuclear weapons to destroy civilization many times over. Increasingly important national security concerns such as disruptive climate change, preventing the next global pandemic and cleaning up and protecting the environment should be prioritized above unneeded new nuclear weapons."

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Today's federal budget release contains only topline numbers. More details will become available in the coming weeks as DOE gradually releases them (typically in two or three successive tranches).

This press release is available at <https://nukewatch.org/nnsas-nuclear-weapons-budget-takes-huge-jump/>