

US Projected to Spend \$117B on Nuke Command and Control in Next Decade

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Global Research, July 19, 2023

[DefenseNews](#) 18 July 2023

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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Operating, upgrading and maintaining the systems the U.S. Department of Defense relies upon to monitor, ready and launch devastating nuclear weapons is expected to cost \$117 billion over the coming decade, according to independent analysis of federal spending plans.

The price tag for nuclear command, control and communications, or NC3, in 2023-2032 marks a \$23 billion increase in costs compared to a 10-year estimate made in 2021, [the Congressional Budget Office](#) said in a report published July 14. The office updates projections every other year at the direction of lawmakers.

The CBO attributed the increase to a ramping up of nuclear modernization — including the replacement of the E-4B National Airborne Operations Center and E-6B Take Charge and Move Out aircraft — as well as certain items appearing in budgets for the first time.

Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works and RTX, until recently known as Raytheon Technologies, in April [announced they would collaborate](#) on the so-called TACAMO, which provides airborne coordination for the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The Biden administration promised to beef up NC3 and further protect the no-fail networks from cyber and electromagnetic attack. Newer nuclear arms are expected to enter the stockpile after 2030. With it comes the opportunity to embed contemporary information technology.

Table 1.

Projected Costs of Nuclear Forces, by Department and Function, 2023 to 2032

Billions of Dollars

	2023			Total, 2023–2032		
	DoD	DOE	Total	DoD	DOE	Total
CBO's Projections of Budgeted Amounts for Nuclear Forces ^a						
Nuclear delivery systems and weapons						
Strategic nuclear delivery systems and weapons						
Ballistic missile submarines	11.4	1.2	12.7	172	16	188
Intercontinental ballistic missiles	6.4	0.9	7.3	103	16	118
Bombers	4.2	1.7	5.8	52	11	63
Other DoD nuclear activities ^b	1.6	n.a.	1.6	19	n.a.	19
Subtotal	23.6	3.8	27.5	346	43	389
Tactical nuclear delivery systems and weapons	0.6	0.4	1.0	5	2	6
Nuclear weapons laboratories and supporting activities						
Stockpile services	n.a.	1.1	1.1	n.a.	12	12
Facilities and infrastructure	n.a.	7.3	7.3	n.a.	79	79
Other stewardship and support activities ^c	n.a.	5.1	5.1	n.a.	57	57
Subtotal	n.a.	13.4	13.4	n.a.	148	148
Subtotal, Nuclear Delivery Systems and Weapons	24.2	17.7	41.9	351	192	543
Command, control, communications, and early-warning systems						
Command and control	1.5	n.a.	1.5	24	n.a.	24
Communications	2.7	n.a.	2.7	34	n.a.	34
Early-warning	6.3	n.a.	6.3	58	n.a.	58
Subtotal, Command, Control, Communications, and Early-Warning Systems	10.5	n.a.	10.5	117	n.a.	117
Total Budgeted Amounts for Nuclear Forces	34.7	17.7	52.4	468	192	660
CBO's Estimates of Additional Costs Based on Historical Cost Growth						
Total Estimated Cost of Nuclear Forces	34.7	17.7	52.4	524	232	756

Data source: Congressional Budget Office, using data from the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy. See www.cbo.gov/publication/59054#data.

DoD = Department of Defense; DOE = Department of Energy; n.a. = not applicable.

- These budgeted amounts do not reflect independent estimates by CBO of the costs of U.S. nuclear forces. Instead, they are based on CBO's analysis of DoD's and DOE's budget proposals and accompanying documents, as well as on CBO's projections of those budget figures beyond the next five years under the assumption that programs proceed as described in budget documentation. For several programs, plans are still being formulated. In those cases, CBO based its estimate on historical costs of analogous programs.
- This category includes nuclear-related research and operations support activities by DoD that CBO could not associate with a specific type of delivery system or weapon.
- This category includes security forces, transportation of nuclear materials and weapons, and scientific research and high-performance computing to improve understanding of nuclear explosions. This category also includes \$500 million in 2023 and \$6 billion over the 2023–2032 period for federal salaries and expenses.

The Congressional Budget Office's projections for nuclear-weapons spending. It features both the Defense and Energy departments. (Screenshot/CBO)

About \$756 billion [would be spent on the nuclear arsenal](#) between 2023 and 2032 if budget requests from the Defense and Energy departments are fully satisfied, the CBO said. Much of nuclear weapons infrastructure, including development labs and production sites, has deteriorated since the Cold War. Weapons, similarly, are undergoing complex refurbishment regimens, known as life-extension programs, to keep them ticking.

"Nuclear weapons have been an important component of U.S. national security since they were developed during World War II," the CBO said in its report. "Over the coming years, the Congress will need to decide which nuclear forces the United States should field in the future and thus the extent to which the nation will continue to modernize those forces."

Lawmakers are seeking a potentially clearer catalog of spending on nuclear command, a topic that is closely guarded. Members of the House strategic forces panel, which oversees

nuclear safety, nonproliferation, missile defense and other topics, included in a draft of fiscal 2024 defense legislation a provision establishing [a major force program for NC3](#).

Major force programs are featured in Pentagon budgets as groupings of related efforts and resources. They are one of several lenses through which national security investment can be studied or tracked. Existing collections include research and development and support of other nations.

The [Biden administration opposes a budget filter](#) for NC3, believing it to be administratively burdensome and disruptive of work already underway.

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