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### **PROMOTING NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT THROUGH THE \$ 1 TRILLION NUCLEAR BUDGET**

*Hina Pandey  
Associate Fellow , CAPS*

President Obama's proposal for a trillion-dollar refurbishment of the country's nuclear arsenal has greatly upset the disarmament supporters. On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2015, anti nuclear group in the US, gathered near the White House to protest against his \$1 trillion nuclear arsenal overhaul plan. The protest was launched by an international pro disarmament movement called the 'Global Zero' which is an international movement that demands the elimination of nuclear weapons, supported by 300 leaders all across the globe and nearly half a million citizens worldwide.

Activist all across the country called upon President Obama to abandon his nuclear plans which would likely to cost about \$ 1 trillion over the next thirty years. The outrage of the protesters addressed President Obama's pledge taken six years ago in Prague to pursue a world free of nuclear weapons. The Global Zero co-founder Matt Brown criticized the \$1 trillion upgrade and said that it will lock the future generation into a nuclear weapons future. He insisted that with only two years left in office, the President ought to get back on track by setting the course to zero nuclear weapons worldwide.<sup>i</sup>

It is indeed puzzling to figure that when the original idea was to only modestly renovate the US nuclear complex such that credibility in the nuclear deterrent could be restored, how it transcended into a costly and extensive atomic upgrade. There are no clear answers.

Not only citizens, but nuclear analysts too, have viewed this step by President Obama as a nuclear spending spree which is expensive and also a profound mistake that ignores the limited contribution of nuclear weapons towards US nuclear security.<sup>ii</sup> Non-proliferation and arms control



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stalwarts such as Sam Nunn too have expressed their disappointment President Obama's agenda by stating that this plan has preserved the status quo. The administration however maintains that nuclear arsenal overhaul is necessary customization for making it smaller and flexible for the long term fulfillment of the Prague agenda<sup>iii</sup>.

***What is the 1 Trillion Dollar Budget All About:*** The United States in the coming three decades is planning to rebuild the whole nuclear arsenal including warheads, missiles and the delivery capability such as planes and submarines. This rebuild and modernization would cost approx \$1 Trillion over a 30 year period. According to the National Defense Panel appointed by the US Congress this planned spending is comprised of an enormous rebuild of the whole nuclear "triad" the US currently has including land-based missiles, submarines-based missiles, short- and long-range bombers and their associated warheads.<sup>iv</sup> The complete plan is divided into three categories; a) to modernize and maintain the reliability of the current arsenal of warheads and bombs b) to eliminate weapons designated as no longer needed c) to maintain, modernize and replace the infrastructure needed to perform the first mission of weapon maintenance, modernization and dismantlement.<sup>v</sup> As a part of the modernization, eight of the US nuclear facilities would also be upgraded creating new jobs for 40,000 people. The amount of money being spent includes the modernization of 12 new missile submarines, up to 100 new bombers and 400 land-based missiles, which can either be built from scratch, or refurbish existing models.<sup>vi</sup> Interestingly this trillion-dollar plan is also aimed at producing up to 80 new warheads every year by the year 2030. Such is the scale of the plan.

***Nuclear Weapons as a Financial Burden:*** A debate on nuclear weapons as a financial baggage has already begun in the US. Scholars of nuclear issues have started to argue about the amount of money getting spent to maintain and modernize the nuclear arsenal can be utilized for more pressing challenges such as ISIS etc. The logic dictates that instead of spending \$355 billion on the sustenance of nuclear capability; the estimated total number of which is 10,000 nuclear weapons (including retired/ awaiting dismantlement warhead), the United States should spend on addressing threats which are more real; such as terrorism, cyber attack etc. The US budget to only maintain the nuclear capability has increased to 16 percent in the last three years. Out of the total figure of nuclear



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weapons, which are close to, 4,804 only 1600 are deployed and the rest of 3204 are being maintained as contingency weapons. The remaining thousands of weapons awaiting dismantlement are not being counted. It is argued that since the 1980's no nuclear programme in the US has seen this increased level of funding; a period when the designing, testing and building of nuclear weapons of stockpile was three times larger than today.<sup>vii</sup>

What is surprising is that the US military itself has concluded a requirement of 1000 nuclear weapons to deter nuclear threats. Hence the large amount of spending on the nuclear arsenal overhaul is deemed to be unnecessary. Experts have in-fact advised the Obama administration to limit its total nuclear arsenal to only 1000 weapons including both long and short range weapons (deployed and in reserve). Not only reducing the arsenal would save the tax payer's money but also encourage the disarmament movement as *spending money on new types of warheads undermines efforts to stop additional countries from pursuing these weapons.*<sup>viii</sup>

At a time when the Doms Day clock is only 3 minutes near the midnight; the debate between the proponents and opponents of nuclear arsenal modernization has begun. This debate is here to stay. A wide range of nuclear experts have come to acknowledge the linkages between disarmament and international security, however the differences of opinion today lie more on what kind of security architecture to be followed in a journey towards disarmament; if at all it is to happen.

***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])***

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<sup>viii</sup> Note. 2