

Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) Is a Poor Use of Tax Dollars

To address the health and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, spiraling domestic needs, and the imperative of addressing climate change, the United States must reduce its overall defense spending. The FY2021 Pentagon budget enacted into law is \$740 billion, “far more than was spent at the height of the Korean or Vietnam Wars or the Reagan buildup of the 1980s.”¹

There are many areas where the Pentagon budget can be cut without harming U.S. national security. The Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), which would replace existing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), stands out. The GBSD is wasteful, expensive, and unnecessary. There are better and cheaper options.

Wasteful

Last year, the bipartisan Future of Defense Task Force, chaired by Representatives Seth Moulton (MA-06) and Jim Banks (IN-03) of the House Armed Services Committee, recommended that the United States “identify, replace, and retire costly and ineffective legacy platforms” by determining their “relevance and resiliency to emerging threats over the next 50 years.”²

ICBMs in general—and the proposed replacement, the GBSD—are unnecessary for nuclear deterrence. They do not provide any additional capability or resilience to the existing strategic bomber and nuclear submarine force. The only threat they are intended to address is a massive, bolt-out-of-the-blue nuclear strike by Russia, and they may in fact increase the risk of that extraordinarily unlikely event.

Expensive

The Defense Department estimates that GBSD acquisition will cost up to \$111 billion³—around nine times what Operation Warp Speed spent on COVID-19 vaccines in 2020.⁴

Over its service life, the GBSD program is expected to cost up to \$264 billion.⁵ Cheaper alternatives are available. These include seeking further verified nuclear arms reductions with Russia to eliminate the need for GBSD and extending the life of the Minuteman III missiles while the future need for ICBMs is more carefully considered.

Few Cost Controls

In September 2020, the U.S. Air Force awarded a \$13.3 billion contract to Northrop Grumman for the engineering and manufacturing development of GBSB. Northrop Grumman was the only bidder. Lockheed Martin was excluded from the competition and Boeing dropped out. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (WA-9) called the decision to move forward with the contract with only one bidder “very troubling.”

Already, program costs have spiraled by more than \$10 billion above earlier estimates. Without any competition, it is likely that the price tag will continue to rise.

Unnecessary

The planned modernization of U.S. nuclear forces—which includes the GBSB, a new class of nuclear ballistic missile submarines, and a new bomber aircraft—is expected to cost more than \$1 trillion. The same level of taxpayer investment could create millions of jobs addressing real needs like clean energy, infrastructure, health care, and education.⁶

The GBSB is not a national priority and will not make Americans more secure. A national poll recently commissioned by the Federation of American Scientists found that when respondents were asked to allocate hypothetical federal spending across a range of purposes, they consistently favored ensuring that Social Security is fully funded, lowering health care costs, returning money to taxpayers, and investing in clean energy over investing in ICBMs.⁷

Most taxpayers know there are better ways to spend \$264 billion than placing new missiles in 50-year-old holes.

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¹ William Hartung, “*The 3% Delusion on Pentagon Spending*,” Forbes, March 5, 2021.

² House Armed Services Committee, *Future of Defense Task Force Report 2020*, September 23, 2020, p. 8.

³ Anthony Capaccio, “*U.S. ICBM to Replace 1970s Minuteman May Cost \$111 Billion*,” Bloomberg News, October 1, 2020.

⁴ Emily Barone, “*The Trump Administration’s ‘Operation Warp Speed’ Has Spent \$12.4 Billion on Vaccines. How Much Is That, Really?*” Time, December 14, 2020.

⁵ Capaccio, *op. cit.*

⁶ Matt Korda, *Alternatives to the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent*, Federation of American Scientists, February 2021, p. 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.