



Support for Cuts to Weapons Programs in President Biden's FY2023 Defense Budget Request

Last updated June 23, 2022

Introduction

On March 28, 2022, President Joe Biden released his budget request for [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2023](#). This proposal outlines the amount of funding the Administration believes the various federal agencies should receive for the fiscal year. The president's budget proposal reflects the president's spending priorities. Ultimately, Congress can adopt or amend the president's proposed spending levels through the annual appropriations process.

The Biden Administration's FY2023 defense budget request called for \$813 billion, a \$31 billion increase from FY2022. It is [higher](#) than former President Trump's proposal and [more](#) than what the U.S. spent on defense at the peak of the wars in Vietnam and Korea, as well as the Cold War.

During the closed door markup of the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on June 16, 2022, **the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) added an exorbitant \$45 billion to President Biden's proposal**, for a suggested topline of \$847 billion. The NDAA still needs to be considered by the full Senate. The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) considered its version of the legislation on June 22, 2022. HASC passed an [NDAA](#) which increased the Pentagon topline by \$37 billion. This brought the HASC suggested topline to \$850 billion. The House and Senate will now consider their respective NDAA bills.

One factor in endlessly increasing Pentagon toplines is the failure to phase out unnecessary weapons systems. In its FY2023 budget request, the Biden Administration proposed meaningful cuts to certain outdated and wasteful weapons programs. These proposed cuts are outlined below.

The Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile

The Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile ([SLCM-N](#)) was first deployed in the mid-1980s in the form of a Tomahawk Land-Attack Cruise Missile (TLAM-N). In 1991, [President George H.W. Bush](#) ordered the withdrawal of all TLAM-N. The Navy withdrew the system in 1992. In 2010, President Barack Obama [declared](#) the system "redundant" and retired the missiles. In his [2018 Nuclear Posture Review](#), President Donald Trump called for developing and deploying a new SLCM-N to address what he felt was "limited" U.S. nuclear capability.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that the SLCM-N will cost [\\$10 billion](#) through 2031, however, this doesn't include production, maintenance, and operational costs after 2031. In recent budget hearings, Pentagon officials estimated that the total lifetime costs of the program could reach [\\$31 billion](#). Both the [SASC](#) and [HASC](#) FY2023 NDAA bills authorized \$45 million for research and development of the SLCM-N and its associated low-yield warhead, the W80-4 ALT SLCM.

In addition to the cost, the SLCM-N would place significant burdens on the Navy involving storage, training, and certification. It could also escalate tensions with other nations as both conventional and nuclear weapons would be launched from the same platform. This means adversaries and allies would be forced to respond before knowing whether an attack involved nuclear or conventional weapons, raising the possibility for unintended nuclear conflict.

In his FY2023 budget proposal, President Biden [supported](#) retiring the SLCM-N. **The Navy [stated](#) that canceling the program would save about \$200 million in FY2023 and \$2.1 billion over the next five years.**

The B83 Nuclear Gravity Bomb

The [B83 gravity bomb](#) is a nuclear weapon that was first deployed in 1983. It has a yield of 1.2 megatons, which is 80 times more destructive than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. This nuclear warhead was scheduled to be retired, according to plans set out nearly a decade ago. However, **former President Trump authorized the indefinite sustainment of this highly deadly and destructive nuclear weapon.** In the FY2022 NDAA, Congress authorized [\\$52 million](#) to start replacing limited life components for the B83. In his FY2023 budget proposal, President Biden supported retiring the B83. The SASC markup of FY2023 NDAA required a [study](#) before retiring the B83 bomb, but did not authorize additional funding for extending the life of the program.

The F-35 Fighter Jet

In October 2001, Lockheed Martin received a coveted contract from the Pentagon to develop the new F-35 fighter jet. **The Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates the program could cost taxpayers [over \\$1.7 trillion](#).** Twenty years later, the F-35 program has been [riddled with problems and efficacy issues](#). President Biden proposed a 33% cut to the F-35 fighter jet program in his FY2023 budget request.

The Littoral Combat Ship

The Littoral Combat Ship was purchased by the Navy before development of the ship was completed. The ship has proven to be ineffective, has no clear mission, has been criticized for being susceptible to attacks, and has not been deemed suitable for deployment. Nevertheless, **taxpayers have to foot the massive [\\$600 million bill for each ship that is developed](#).** In February 2020, the Navy [announced](#) its support for retiring four littoral combat ships, which would have cost [\\$2 billion](#) over five years to upgrade into combat ready ships. Despite the Navy's support for retiring four of

these ships, it will still cost [\\$2.4 billion](#) to modify these underdeveloped ships, because of the Pentagon's [concurrency](#) program.

For FY2023, the Navy proposed retiring nine of sixteen littoral combat ships. This would save an estimated [\\$4.3 billion](#) in upgrades and maintenance. Under the [draft](#) House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee bill, the Navy would be prohibited from retiring five littoral combat ships. However, the subcommittee supported the retirement of the remaining four ships of the nine the Navy proposed for retirement. The SASC NDAA markup for FY2023 also [prohibits](#) the retirement of five littoral combat ships.

Conclusion

Enacting President Biden's proposals with regards to these weapons programs would present numerous opportunities to invest in working families' urgent needs. For example, retiring the SLCM-N would save over \$2 billion over the next five years. This would be roughly equivalent to President Biden's FY2023 proposal to invest [\\$2.3 billion](#) in the Title I Aid to Disadvantaged Students Program, which provides grants to school districts in poor communities. President Biden also proposed a [\\$2.2 billion](#) increase to the budget for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These are just two examples of social needs that funding could be redirected towards by retiring the SLCM-N.

Additionally, as noted above, the Navy's FY2023 proposal to retire nine littoral combat ships would save about \$4.3 billion. In his FY2023 budget request, President Biden proposed increasing the budget for Housing Choice Vouchers, a program that helps low-income people afford rent, by [\\$4.8 billion](#). Retiring nine littoral combat ships would allow for greater investments in fair and equitable housing.

The world is still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing to fight the existential threat of climate change. Families in the U.S. are struggling to pay rent and put food on the table. Healthcare and education costs are rising, making access to basic needs a privilege for the few, while marginalized communities and communities of color get left behind. These problems can be meaningfully addressed by diverting funds away from wasteful and inefficient weapons programs that benefit Pentagon contractors, and towards investments in our communities and people. Maintaining these weapons cuts proposed by the Biden Administration will save lives.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus Center thanks the Council for a Livable World, the Institute for Policy Studies—National Priorities Project, the Project On Government Oversight, the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, and the Union of Concerned Scientists for their comments and insights.