



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

## STUDIES

# The Cost of U.S. Nuclear Forces: From BCA to Bow Wave and Beyond

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Nuclear weapons have underpinned U.S. national security strategy since the early days of the Cold War. For more than half a century, the United States has relied on its nuclear arsenal to deter attacks against its territory, extend deterrence to its allies, and limit the amount of damage that an adversary could inflict if deterrence were to fail. Because of their enormous destructive potential, however, nuclear weapons have also been one of the most controversial elements of U.S. military power. As a result, the size and shape of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, along with the core tenets of U.S. nuclear strategy and doctrine, have been continuously debated for decades.

Notably, the arguments put forth by proponents of a smaller nuclear force have been shifting over the past several years from the realm of strategy to the world of resources. Simply put, several studies have suggested that one reason to cut back U.S. nuclear force structure or scale back modernization efforts would be to save money, and that reason is arguably overshadowing most others.

In this report, Todd Harrison and Evan Braden Montgomery focus on the central—albeit sometimes implicit—question at the heart of these studies: how much money could the United States actually save through nuclear reductions? *The Cost of U.S. Nuclear Forces* provides an in-depth accounting of what U.S. nuclear forces cost and to explicitly address how much could potentially be saved by cutting those forces.