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The Boston Globe

May 1, 2005, Sunday THIRD EDITION

**SECTION:** OP-ED; Pg. D11

**LENGTH:** 675 words

**HEADLINE:** BILLIONS WASTED ON N-ARMS

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**BODY:**

WHEN I served as an assistant secretary of defense for President Ronald Reagan, the logic of focusing Pentagon resources on nuclear weapons made sense. The priority of the Cold War was avoiding nuclear war through nuclear deterrence.

We wanted to leave absolutely no doubt in the minds of the Soviets that if they tried to destroy us with nuclear bombs, we would destroy them. Thus, peace prevailed.

But times have changed. Osama bin Laden could care less how many nuclear bombs we have. And stopping terrorism is appropriately the priority of our military today.

Despite this, America still has a nuclear arsenal of about 7,000 active nuclear bombs, spread out on submarines, land-based missiles, and bombers and ready to fire at a moment's notice. If you add the nuclear warheads in storage, our arsenal totals at least 10,000.

Not only are these weapons dangerous, but they are expensive. In fact, given the fiscal crisis we face in Washington, it's unaffordable. Here's what I mean.

Today, America spends more than \$27 billion for nuclear deterrence. And what are we getting for this?

President Bush proposes spending a whopping \$11 billion next year on the bombers and land- and sea-based missiles that carry the 7,000 operational nuclear weapons. Another \$6.6 billion would be spent on nuclear weapons research, development, testing, and production, as well as the administration of the nuclear weapons stockpile, which now includes more than 10,000 weapons.

With a few prudent cuts, the cost of nuclear deterrent programs could be decreased without jeopardizing national security.

By eliminating tactical, or battlefield, nuclear weapons in Europe and reducing our strategic arsenal to a maximum of 1,000 as well as forgoing the production of new nuclear weapons, America would save \$10 billion annually, which could be used on tax cuts, state and local priorities, or broader security concerns, like freeing us from our dependence on Middle East oil.

By scaling back national missile defense, seen as part of our nuclear deterrent posture, America could save an additional \$6 billion. Missile defense, a concept that is still a long way from viability, is also a carryover from the Cold War, and makes little sense in today's geopolitical environment.

There's no reason why our nation could not make these nuclear cuts quickly and unilaterally.

And there's no better time to announce them than now, as representatives of 187 nations gather at the United Nations beginning Monday for the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference.

At the conference, which takes place every five years, signatory nations review the status of the 1970 nonproliferation treaty, under which states possessing nuclear weapons pledged to reduce and then eliminate their arsenals.

For their part, the signatories to the treaty who do not have nuclear weapons pledged not to produce their own nuclear bombs.

Most of the nonnuclear states have not built nuclear bombs as promised, but America and the other nuclear states have not lived up to their end of the bargain.

But it's not too late. America should announce an immediate plan to reduce its strategic arsenal to 1,000 warheads even if Russia, China, and the other nuclear powers do not make an identical pledge, for it matters not from our national security perspective whether they do so. We would still have more than enough nuclear weapons to deter any potential adversary.

Such an announcement would certainly be greeted with great approval from the world's nations. It could come at no better time as we continue to try to work with the world community to share the burden of our war in Iraq.

And, perhaps even more important, it would be welcomed by Congress and the American taxpayers who are spending billions of dollars on useless nuclear weapons at a time when our federal checkbook is seriously misaligned.

**NOTES:**

Lawrence J. Korb is a fellow at the Center for American Progress and a member of the military advisory committee of **Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities**.