

Trump proposes huge hike in military and police spending

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The Trump administration sent instructions to federal agencies Monday proposing a \$54 billion increase in spending for the Pentagon, the intelligence agencies and the Department of Homeland Security, to be offset by \$54 billion in cuts for other agencies, mainly those involved in domestic social services and regulation of business.

Trump's budget outline sets the stage for his first address to Congress on Tuesday. It provides further evidence that the Trump administration will be dedicated to radically rolling back social spending to finance a dramatic escalation of military operations, both in the neo-colonial wars in the Middle East and against the United States' 'great power' rivals: China and Russia.

Federal departments are being told to file budget requests for the fiscal year that begins October 1, 2017 based on the numbers they were given by the Office of Management and Budget. Each agency will be responsible for working out the cuts required to meet proposed reductions, while the Pentagon, CIA and DHS will propose expanded operations with the additional funds they are to be awarded.

There were no details made public about the exact budget ceilings given to each federal department, but White House officials made it clear that foreign aid programs in the State Department and anti-pollution regulation through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would suffer some of the largest cuts.

The total budget of the EPA is only \$9 billion, so many other domestic programs are certain to be hard-hit, involving such departments as Education, Labor, Transportation, Agriculture (which includes food stamps), Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services.

The biggest federal social programs, Social Security,

Medicare and Medicaid, are not affected by the budget order, which involves only funding for so-called discretionary programs, those financed through annual congressional appropriations. Entitlement programs, where benefits are paid out automatically to those who establish their eligibility, are covered by a separate budget process.

OMB Director Mick Mulvaney appeared at the White House press briefing Monday afternoon to explain the action taken by the Trump administration. He emphasized that setting what he called the "top-line budget number" for each department was only the start of a protracted process.

The OMB will use the figures from each department and agency to prepare a budget outline to be submitted to Congress on March 16. A full budget will not be ready until sometime in May, Mulvaney said. He also indicated that while spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid were not addressed in the action taken Monday, "entitlement reform"—i.e., cuts in these critical programs—would be a subject of discussion with congressional leaders later in the budget process.

Press reports identified the three White House officials who have played the main roles in the initial budgeting: Mulvaney, who was confirmed on February 16 as budget director; National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn, the former president of Goldman Sachs, the huge investment bank; and Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, the former chief executive of the fascistic Breitbart News site, who exercises increasingly broad sway over all White House policy decisions.

While no details have yet been released of what the \$54 billion increase in military-police spending will pay for, the scale of the increase, in and of itself, shows

the real character of the Trump administration. This is to be a government of war abroad and mass repression at home.

Trump himself touched on this theme in typically rambling and unfocused remarks to a meeting of the National Governors Association Monday. “We never win a war,” he said. “We never win. And we don’t fight to win. We don’t fight to win. So we either got to win, or don’t fight at all.”

He continued, telling the governors, “My first budget will be submitted to the Congress next month. This budget will be a public safety and national security budget, very much based on those two with plenty of other things, but very strong. And it will include a historic increase in defense spending to rebuild the depleted military of the United States of America at a time we most need it.”

Additional money for the Pentagon is likely to go to a dramatically increased tempo of operations in Iraq and Syria. Defense Secretary James Mattis delivered proposals to the White House Monday for an offensive against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as required by an executive order issued by Trump last month. No details are available yet, but any acceleration of the bombing campaign, let alone the deployment of significant numbers of the US ground troops, would increase the cost of that war by many billions.

The \$54 billion increase would also presumably include funds for the construction of Trump’s planned wall on the US-Mexico border, as well as a massive increase in spending on detention facilities for the hundreds of thousands of immigrants to be rounded up under the executive orders already issued by the White House.

The federal budget is operating under the constraints imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act, the bipartisan legislation negotiated by the Obama White House, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, and a Democratic-controlled Senate. This set up the so-called sequester process, under which all discretionary spending is subject to a budget freeze, for both domestic and military programs.

Each year, increased spending for programs under the sequester has been worked out on the basis of roughly equal increases for domestic and military programs. Last year, for fiscal year 2016, Congress approved \$543

billion for domestic discretionary programs and \$607 billion for the military. The Trump White House plan would thus represent a cut of about 10 percent for domestic programs, and an increase of nearly that amount for the military.

Any significant change in the sequester process would require support from congressional Democrats, particularly in the Senate, where the Republican party holds only a narrow 52-48 edge, and any major legislation would require a 60-vote majority to pass.

Several congressional Republican leaders criticized the White House plan as insufficiently skewed to the military. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry of Texas issued a statement criticizing the “low budget number” and adding, “The administration will have to make clear which problems facing our military they are choosing not to fix.”

Senator John McCain of Arizona, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, declared that the Trump plan is “a mere 3 percent above President Obama’s defense budget, which has left our military underfunded, undersized and unready.”

For all the statements by Trump and the Republicans bemoaning the supposedly “depleted” state of the US military, the United States spends more on its armed forces than the next 15 countries in the world combined. The military budget is only inadequate if the mission of the US military is assumed to be the conquest of the entire planet and the subduing of all armed resistance from any quarter—which is actually the perspective of the American ruling elite.



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