

Senate overwhelmingly approves record \$700 billion military budget

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Demonstrating the bipartisan support of Democrats and Republicans for militarism and war, the US Senate voted 89 to nine on Monday to authorize \$700 billion in spending for the military and intelligence agencies, an \$80 billion increase from 2016 and \$26 billion more than President Donald Trump requested earlier this year.

The House of Representatives has already adopted a similar version of the bill, called the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The House and Senate versions will now be reconciled, and a final version approved by both houses of Congress and presented for Trump to sign into law.

The NDAA is a clear sign that the US is preparing to launch major wars of aggression, potentially involving nuclear weapons. The bill provides \$200 million to upgrade nuclear launch facilities, \$8.5 billion for missile defense systems in the US and in outer space, and \$6.4 billion for Virginia class offensive nuclear submarines.

Trump hailed the bill's \$700 billion price tag in his warmongering speech to the United Nations on Tuesday, citing it as proof that "our military will soon be the strongest it has ever been."

The bill passed with 42 Democrats and 47 Republicans voting "yes" and six Democrats and three Republicans voting "no." Supporters included supposed "left" Democrats Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Kamala Harris of California.

The bill's total of \$700 billion per year equals \$80 million in military spending per hour and \$22,000 per *second*. The latter figure is considerably greater than the median pre-tax *yearly* individual income for the bottom half of the US population—just \$16,200, according to 2016 data compiled by economists Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman.

The US now spends more than the 10 next largest militaries combined. It spends over three times more on its military than China and over 10 times more than Russia.

On the initiative of the Democratic Party, the budget measure was sharpened to target Russia. The bill authorizes millions of dollars to militarize Russia's western border, including \$500 million to provide weapons to the Ukrainian government and \$100 million to "deter Russian aggression" in the Balkans. In all, the bill mentions Russia 72 times. One amendment attached by Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen blocks the Russian computer security company Kaspersky Lab from contracting with the government.

The House of Representatives' version of the bill includes an amendment titled the "Fostering Unity Against Russian Aggression Act," introduced by New Hampshire Democrat Carol Shea-Porter and co-sponsored by 21 Democratic representatives. This measure paves the way for censorship of the Internet in the name of combating "fake news."

In introducing the measure, Shea-Porter said, "Russia's aggressive actions make clear the need for a comprehensive US deterrence strategy." She added that that the NDAA will "jumpstart needed improvements to our own and our allies' readiness to counter unconventional modes of aggression, including propaganda and cyberattacks."

Aside from \$60 billion for ongoing US wars and military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Pakistan and elsewhere, the Senate bill includes \$705 million for Israeli missile programs, a move aimed primarily against Iran. The Senate version authorizes the following expenditures for facilities and equipment:

- * \$300 million for hypersonic energy weapons
- * \$65 million to develop cruise missiles

- * \$12 billion for 94 F-35 jets, 24 more than the Pentagon requested
- * \$1 billion for 48 Black Hawk helicopters
- * \$1.3 billion for six heavy-lift helicopters
- * \$500 million for advanced weapons technological development

Last Wednesday, the Senate voted to reject an amendment proposed by the right-wing libertarian Rand Paul (Republican of Kentucky) that would have repealed both the Authorization for Use of Military Force passed in September 2001 in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, measures that have been used by the Bush, Obama and now Trump administration to wage unending war in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Senate defeated the amendment by a vote of 61 to 36. Thirteen Democrats voted against the measure, providing the margin needed to block it. This choreographed maneuver freed up other Democrats to take a phony “anti-war” position without affecting the outcome of the vote.

With \$700 billion dollars, humanity could feed the malnourished population, some 815 million people, for 23 years, or provide free vaccines to all children in the world’s 117 poorest countries for 10 years.

In the US, \$700 billion could provide each homeless person with a \$500,000 home, cover the annual health care costs of 70 million Americans, pay off the student loan debt of 19 million borrowers, or finance the total rebuilding cost for every hurricane over the past 20 years. \$700 billion could be used to create a high-speed rail network, provide flood and earthquake protection to every region in danger, or fund planning for safe and comfortable emergency evacuation in case of natural disasters.



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