

Democrats back massive Pentagon budget for war and repression

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Senate Democrats joined Republicans this week to approve a massive expansion of the US military as demanded by President Donald Trump. Congressional action on the near-record Pentagon budget is taking place behind a veil of silence, with no public discussion and virtually no media coverage.

Even as the Trump administration steamrolls ahead with plans to gut social spending, winning a House vote Thursday to slash \$23 billion from food stamp spending and advancing a scheme to consolidate the departments of Labor and Education in the name of “cutting costs”, both houses of Congress have approved a bill that expands military spending at the fastest rate since the highpoint of the war in Iraq.

The so-called “John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019”, which passed the Senate 85-10 Monday after having been approved by the House of Representatives in May, allocates \$716 billion for the Defense Department, an increase of \$82 billion.

This increase alone is larger than the total budget of the Department of Education, approximately \$70 billion. It is also larger than the annual military budget of Russia (\$61 billion). The increase in Pentagon spending between 2017 and 2019, \$165 billion, is larger than the entire defense budget of China.

When funding for the US intelligence agencies, the Department of Homeland Security, federal aid to local police and various “black” operations are factored in, the budget for the United States “total army” amounts to over a trillion dollars, a figure larger than the gross domestic product of Indonesia, a country with a population of 261 million.

Just over one third of the Pentagon’s annual budget, or \$265 billion, could end world hunger, according to figures from the Stockholm Peace Institute. Another

third, or \$239 billion, would provide primary and early secondary education for the entire world population.

Instead, these vast sums are squandered on building and deploying the tools of mass murder.

The budget includes provisions for Trump’s unprecedented and undemocratic military parade, which will involve the deployment of US troops on American streets. The spending bill authorizes “any kind of motorized vehicle, aviation platform, munition, operational military unit or operational military platform” to roll down the streets of Washington at the president’s discretion.

It likewise authorizes the continued operation of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp by extending “prohibitions on transfers of detainees into the United States”.

Despite these provisions, which the Democrats claim to oppose, only seven out of 47 Democratic senators voted “nay”, ensuring passage by a lopsided margin.

The Democrats raised only one substantial criticism. They demanded more aggressive trade war measures against Chinese technology company ZTE and inserted a provision keeping in place penalties against the firm that Trump had sought to eliminate.

The budget provides President Trump and the military with funding for every single program on their bloated wish list:

* **The Navy:** The budget includes provisions for the construction of ten new ships in 2019, including two new Virginia class nuclear attack submarines costing \$2.7 billion apiece, three new Arleigh Burke destroyers, costing \$1.8 billion apiece, and an additional Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier at a cost of over \$12 billion.

* **The Air Force:** The budget includes \$2.3 billion for the development of the B-21 raider, “the next generation long-range strike bomber”, as well as

billions more for the expansion of the US fleet of B-52, B-1 and B-2 bombers.

* **Nuclear forces:** By far the most radical aspect of the budget is its massive expansion of the US nuclear arsenal. It lifts a “15-year prohibition on developing and producing low-yield nuclear warheads” and provides for “developing and producing a low-yield warhead to be carried on a submarine-launched ballistic missile”, as well as a nuclear-capable air-launched cruise missile. The budget prohibits the Pentagon from “reducing the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles” and expands the production of “pits” for building new nuclear weapons.

There is virtually no public debate or oversight of the vast social resources devoted to the military. There is even less public control over or even knowledge of the deployment of US forces all over the world. One study released this week by the *Intercept* reported that the US military has carried out over 550 drone strikes in Libya alone, twice as many as previously believed.

According to Pentagon data analyzed by *Truthdig*, the American military has dropped one bomb every 12 minutes during Trump’s first year in office, a rate four times greater than under Obama and five times greater than under George W. Bush.

Away from the cameras, the United States is participating in the bloody Saudi-led onslaught against Yemen’s Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, an operation directly targeting the food and medical supply for Yemen’s starving and cholera-stricken population. The United Nations is warning that the operation could lead to a quarter million additional deaths.

Imperialist crimes of this magnitude cannot coexist with democratic forms of rule at home. To this end, the military is playing a leading role in Trump’s “zero tolerance” immigration policy, involving the mass round-up, imprisonment and torture of refugees, including children, thousands of whom have been separated from their families. On Friday, the Navy produced a plan to hold up to 120,000 people on military bases, setting a precedent for mass detention of the civilian population by the military.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States has been perpetually at war for 27 years. This period of unending warfare has been accompanied by the most sustained increase in social inequality in modern US history and an unrelenting and escalating

attack on democratic rights, from the stolen election of 2000 to the Bush administration’s CIA torture program and the Bush-Obama regime of domestic spying, to the current drive by the government and major technology companies to censor the Internet.

With the recent National Defense Strategy’s declaration of a new era of “great power conflict”, the neo-colonial wars of the past quarter-century are metastasizing into the run-up to a new world war, posing the threat of nuclear annihilation. This is what the Pentagon budget is preparing for.



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