

Amid impeachment vote, Congress passes record military budget and funds Trump's border wall

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Three pieces of legislation passed Tuesday demonstrate the bipartisan support for war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights within the American political establishment.

First, the Senate voted to approve the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) by the lopsided margin of 86–8, sending the record \$738 billion military bill to President Trump to sign into law.

Later the same day, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives approved two appropriations bills totaling nearly \$1.4 trillion to provide funding to the military and other federal government agencies through September 2020.

The right-wing basis on which the Democrats have impeached Trump is underscored by the bipartisan support for the fascistic president's political agenda demonstrated in these budget measures. The military appropriations bill includes \$1.375 billion to fund Trump's border wall, while removing a provision in an earlier version that would have barred him from transferring money from other Pentagon accounts for his wall project.

At the same time, the House Democrats removed language to lower the limit on the amount the military can shift between accounts from \$9.5 billion to \$1.5 billion. Since, as the Democrats know, Trump will use the border "national emergency" he declared last February to illegally shift Pentagon monies approved by Congress for other items to the border wall, the combined result of these maneuvers is to give Trump all the money he wants to build the wall.

Prior to the vote in the Senate, the NDAA had been approved last week in the House by a huge majority, 377–48. The bill, which the Trump administration has

signaled it will approve, will inject another \$22 billion into the Pentagon to wage war around the globe, including \$15 billion more than Trump had requested for military procurements.

It allocates \$71 billion for overseas operations and includes Trump's demand for a 3.1 percent pay raise for military personnel, as part of his efforts to cultivate a far-right base of support within the military. It also establishes an entirely new branch of the US armed forces, the Space Force, which will accelerate the militarization of space.

While large majorities in both parties in the Senate voted to approve the NDAA, four Democratic presidential candidates were absent, enabling them to posture as anti-war while avoiding any affront to the military brass. The four are Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Amy Klobuchar and Cory Booker.

In contrast to the typical omnibus spending bills previously passed by Congress, to appease Trump and avert another government shutdown, this year's appropriations bills were split into two: one to provide the \$738 billion in funding for the NDAA along with funding for the Department of Homeland Security and other national security agencies, and the other to provide \$632 billion for domestic social programs.

The domestic spending bill, which passed in the House by a vote of 295–120, was largely along party lines, with 112 Republicans and only 7 Democrats voting against it. The bill, which provides services to tens of millions of Americans, is significantly less than the gargantuan military budget.

While the Democrats have hailed this legislation as "progressive" for establishing paid maternity leave for federal employees, the bill does nothing to address the

massive cuts in Medicaid and food stamps under Trump, not to mention the cuts to these and other social programs carried out following the 2008 financial crisis under Obama. The funding package includes reductions in federal subsidies for Medicaid in Puerto Rico of roughly \$5 billion, or nearly half the previous total.

In the House, the appropriations bill to fund the NDAA passed by a margin of 280–138, with 150 Democrats and 130 Republicans voting in favor. The splitting up of the two appropriations bills allowed sections of the Democratic Party to posture as anti-war, with the four Democratic congresswomen who comprise “the squad”—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib—all voting “no” on the military appropriations bill. Democratic presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard, who has at times postured as anti-war, was absent from both votes on Tuesday.

Both appropriations bills will likely be voted on by the Senate today, in order for Trump to sign them into law and avert another government shutdown, which would otherwise take effect midnight Friday.

The expansion of the military under the new NDAA entails an escalation of the drive by US imperialism to assert its hegemony over the entire planet, including cyberspace and outer space. It removes provisions from earlier versions limiting overseas military operations, including a ban on US support for the Saudi-led war against Yemen and a requirement that Trump obtain congressional consent before attacking Iran. It also extends the 2002 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), the threadbare legal pretext used to launch the Iraq War and every subsequent intervention by US imperialism in the Middle East.

The new military framework reaffirms the strategic shift from the “war on terror” to “great power conflict,” as outlined in the Trump administration’s 2018 National Defense Strategy, posing the stark danger of a nuclear conflict with Russia and/or China. The NDAA allows for the deployment of low-yield, submarine-launched nuclear warheads, provides an additional \$300 million in military aid to the far-right Ukrainian government, and includes a series of provocative measures directed against Moscow and Beijing.

Among these are a prohibition on military-to-military cooperation with Russia, a \$734.3 million increase in

funding for the European Defense Initiative, a declaration of support for Hong Kong’s autonomy from China, and the imposition of sanctions on the NordStream 2 and TurkStream pipelines from Russia to Germany and Eastern Europe.



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