

Trump budget gives top priority to new generation of nuclear weapons

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The most ominous feature of the new budget document issued Monday by the Trump administration is the prominent place given to the development of a new generation of nuclear weapons, including so-called low-yield weapons, smaller than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which are widely regarded as more likely to actually be used in combat.

The document calls for nearly \$50 billion to be devoted to nuclear modernization, including \$29 billion from the Pentagon budget, and \$19.8 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a unit of the Department of Energy which operates the actual production of nuclear warheads, as well as some of the primary research.

The Trump budget would slash spending on diplomacy and foreign aid while sharply increasing funding for nuclear weapons, a clear indication of the policy direction being given from the White House in the wake of Trump's acquittal last week in the impeachment trial before the Senate. The debacle of the Democratic effort to impeach Trump over foreign policy differences—while ignoring his real and ongoing crimes against the working class and democratic rights—has only emboldened the White House to press ahead with its program of militarism, austerity and attacks on immigrants.

The budget provides the largest amount for the Pentagon's research and development budget in 70 years, since the period when US imperialism was engaged in the initial research on the hydrogen bomb and the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Nuclear weapons modernization funds rose by 18 percent compared to last year's budget.

The modernization program, which was given initial approval under the Obama administration, will last 30 years and cost more than a trillion dollars, split between the three components of the US nuclear triad: ground-based missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and nuclear bombs delivered by long-distance bombers.

An important aspect of the modernization program is the improvement of the delivery systems, including a new generation of nuclear-powered submarines (the Columbia Class) and making the stealth F-35 jet fighter, the most expensive weapons system ever built, capable of carrying nuclear bombs. That configuration would be ideal for a prospective nuclear "Pearl Harbor" sneak attack on Russia or

China, since the warplanes are nearly invisible to radar.

According to one defense industry publication, there had been serious infighting between the NNSA and the White House Office of Management and Budget over the huge figure for nuclear modernization, a conflict won by the NNSA after Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Imhofe (R-Okla) intervened on its behalf.

Senate Democrats like Jack Reed of Rhode Island lost the battle over funding priorities, as the Navy canceled one nuclear submarine—to be built in Groton, Connecticut, and Quonset Point, Rhode Island—as a "pay for" to accommodate the additional spending on nuclear warheads.

NNSA chief Lisa Gordon-Hagerty said that there were five major warhead modernization programs being funded: the B61-12 Life Extension Program, the W80-4 Life Extension Program, the W88 Alteration 370, the W87-1 Modification Program and the W93 warhead program. She cited the need to increase production of plutonium "pits," the key component of a nuclear explosive device, to 80 per year by 2030.

The budget announcement follows the Pentagon's confirmation that it has deployed a new low-yield variant of the W76-1 nuclear warhead used on the Trident missile. The deployment of the W76-2 came on the submarine USS Tennessee, operating from the Kings Bay Submarine Base in Georgia. The escalation of US preparations for nuclear war was first reported by the Federation of American Scientists, which warned that the action would bring forward the danger of a nuclear weapon actually being used.

Building the W76-2 was a direct consequence of the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, which accompanied the more general overhaul of Pentagon military doctrine, elevating "great power" conflict with Russia and China to first place in US war preparations, displacing the so-called "war on terror."

In terms of the overall military budget, while the Pentagon receives a year-to-year increase of 0.3 percent, that figure is misleading on at least two counts. At \$740.5 billion, the proposed Fiscal Year 2021 Defense Department budget would be the largest amount ever spent by the US government on war buildup and dwarfs the spending of all the rivals of US imperialism combined.

Moreover, the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)

fund, a component of the budget that pays for ongoing combat operations in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other locations where US troops, ships and drones are engaged in combat, is open-ended.

While the White House is seeking \$69 billion for OCO, this figure assumes a significant drawdown in US troop strength in Afghanistan. If those troops remain in Afghanistan, or are redeployed to another war zone, the Pentagon will seek a supplemental appropriation that would be swiftly rubber-stamped both by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives and the Republican-controlled Senate.

The release of the Fiscal Year 2021 budget has been accompanied by media commentaries and declarations by leading congressional Democrats that the budget is merely a “wish list” devised for political purposes to appeal to Trump’s right-wing base, and that as a practical matter it is “dead on arrival.”

This may be true for the massive cuts in domestic programs like Medicare, Medicaid and food stamps, which come to some \$2 trillion over ten years. Neither capitalist party is likely to enact such cuts in the nine months before the November 3 election. But the document is nonetheless significant as a blueprint for the social counterrevolution which Trump proposes to carry out if he is reelected—and to which the Democrats have no principled objections, despite their posture of dismay.

Among the cuts proposed—all over a ten-year period—are \$465 billion from Medicare reimbursements to hospitals and doctors, which will undermine the ability of the elderly to get care; \$292 billion from Medicaid, which pays for health care for the poor and disabled, and from food stamps; and \$70 billion from Social Security disability payments.

House Budget Committee Chair John Yarmuth (D-Ky), issued a statement denouncing the Trump budget as “destructive and irrational,” pointing out that it “includes destructive changes to Medicaid, SNAP, Social Security, and other assistance programs that help Americans make ends meet—all while extending his tax cuts for millionaires and wealthy corporations.”

The fact is, however, that the Democrats have never rescinded Republican tax cuts or restored Republican budget cuts, despite their posturing to the contrary. There is a longstanding division of labor in the capitalist two-party system, in which the Republican propose gigantic cuts in social spending which the Democrats “fight” ferociously, eventually reaching a bipartisan agreement that incorporates substantial cuts and sets the stage for the next round in a never-ending onslaught on what remains of the welfare state.

While this pretended conflict takes place in relation to domestic social spending, the two parties usually cooperate openly on increasing spending for the military-intelligence apparatus. This means that while the domestic cuts proposed by Trump may be deferred until after the election, the military

buildup will gain overwhelming bipartisan support, and the plans elaborated in the budget document deserve careful scrutiny.

One significant element is the buildup in ground troops available for the invasion and occupation of foreign territory, or for the suppression of domestic unrest. The Army seeks a significant manpower increase, to 485,900 regular troops, reinforced by 336,500 in the Army National Guard and 189,800 in the Army Reserves. This would bring the total ground force to over one million soldiers—1,012,200 in all.

New weaponry for these soldiers will include hypersonic weapons, laser-based antiaircraft weapons (the Directed Energy Mobile Short-Range Air Defense System), and the Indirect Fire Protection Capability, described as “a mobile capability to defend against unmanned aircraft systems, cruise missiles, rockets, artillery and mortars.”

There is at least \$6 billion to modernize key weapons systems, including the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, the Stryker armored vehicle, the M1 Abrams tank and the Paladin howitzer, and \$3.5 billion in aviation procurement, including 36 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters and 50 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters.

It is also worth noting, in relation to the overall budget numbers, that the federal budget deficit will hit \$1 trillion this year and is likely to soar far beyond that figure next year. While the White House budget office projects the deficit at just below \$1 trillion in FY 2021, this assumes completely unrealistic economic successes: Gross Domestic Product rising at over 3 percent, and interest rates remaining at near-zero levels, so that federal debt can be refinanced cheaply.

When these figures inevitably prove too optimistic, and the deficit soars, there will then be a clamor from the political establishment and the media that social spending must be slashed even more because “there is no money.” In the meantime, the incomes and wealth of the financial aristocracy will continue to rise exponentially.



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