

Senate panel approves record US military budget for 2022-2023

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The Senate Armed Services Committee has voted to approve a record \$858 billion in military spending for Fiscal Year 2023, an increase of \$45 billion over the Biden administration's budget request, and nearly \$80 billion over the amount appropriated by Congress for the current fiscal year.

The vote came by a margin of 23-3, demonstrating the support of both capitalist parties, Democrats and Republicans, for a further build-up of the US war machine, including the US intervention in the war in Ukraine.

It is the 62nd consecutive year that the two parties have joined together to approve the yearly National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which has rubber-stamped US wars in Vietnam, Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, as well as military aggression in Bosnia, Kosovo, Panama, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and across the Middle East and North Africa.

The gargantuan sum of \$858 billion proposed under the NDAA is approximately a 10 percent increase over what was authorized last year and nearly 6 percent more than the Biden administration asked for.

Much of the increase was to take into account the impact of inflation, particularly skyrocketing fuel costs, on the operations of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. American workers are expected to tighten their belts to pay for gasoline approaching \$6 a gallon, but the US war machine will not be restricted in any way by such considerations.

The Biden administration budget was already based on assuming a 7 percent inflation rate, but both Senate Republicans and Democrats insisted on a higher figure in calculating the Pentagon's costs. The White House proposed an increase of \$31 billion over the current fiscal year, from \$782 billion to \$813 billion. The Senate committee version of the NDAA thus represents

a total increase of \$76 billion over the current year.

Both the Democratic chairman and the Republican ranking member on the committee praised the legislation effusively. Chairman Jack Reed of Rhode Island said, "The committee held a robust debate and came together to support a bill that will help safeguard the nation against a range of evolving threats while supporting our troops both on and off the battlefield."

This year's NDAA is named in honor of the Republican ranking member, James Inhofe of Oklahoma, who is leaving Congress at the end of this year. Inhofe said of the increased spending, "It's everything I hoped for."

The bill authorizes \$817.3 billion for the Department of Defense, as well as \$29.7 billion in military programs in other departments, mostly for nuclear weapons production by the Department of Energy. Another \$10.6 billion will be provided for other "defense-related" programs, bringing the total to \$857.6 billion.

The rapid approval of the NDAA—it is expected to pass both houses of Congress before the end of July and be sent to President Biden for his signature—is in sharp contrast to the legislative roadblocks erected to the far smaller legislation to fund COVID-19 programs that have exhausted their resources, ending funding to subsidize free vaccinations and prophylactic drug treatments for the deadly pandemic.

The increase in military spending is more than the entire amount requested by the Biden administration for COVID relief, which has since been whittled down to only \$10 billion, less that the Armed Services Committee backed for "other," unidentified military-related spending. The COVID relief bill, now apparently doomed, amounts to barely more than 1 percent of the total military budget.

Under its standard procedure, Congress asked each armed service command to provide an “unfunded priorities” list of spending that had been rejected by the White House as unnecessary. The total came to \$21.5 billion, and the Armed Services Committee funded every dollar, effectively overruling the civilian authority in favor of the military brass.

Among the weapons purchases authorized are 68 F-35 warplanes, an increase of seven over the Pentagon request, and eight new warships, including two more nuclear-powered submarines, two destroyers and a frigate.

The bill provides an across-the-board military pay raise of 4.6 percent, while setting service levels at 1,338,000 total: about half a million for the Army and half a million for the Navy and Marine Corps combined, with the balance in the Air Force and Space Force.

The bill also requires women to register for the draft, which has not been utilized for 50 years but could be required in the event of a major war against Russia or China. Three right-wing Republicans opposed that provision, but it is not clear whether they were the three votes against the overall bill.

Only one Democrat, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, opposed the NDAA in the committee last year. This year, however, she praised the legislation for its “green” character. “The legislation would require at least 75 percent of all nontactical vehicles, such as cars, vans, and light-duty trucks purchased or leased by DoD or procured or leased by the General Services Agency (GSA) for DoD, to be electric or zero-emission vehicles, while applying Buy American and other standards to create good American jobs,” according to a statement from her office.

The House Armed Services Committee passed similar legislation before the vote by the Senate panel but at a lower level of spending. The House committee will mark up a final version of the NDAA on June 22 and is expected to raise spending along the lines of the Senate version.

Certain provisions in the NDAA indicate the priorities of American imperialism for the coming year. Some of the extra money would bulk up funding for Ukraine amid its war with Russia. Specifically, the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative would get \$800 million, instead of the \$300 million requested by the

Biden administration, according to a bipartisan summary of the bill. This is for the fiscal year that begins October 1, indicating that US officials fully expect the war to continue raging.

Another \$2.7 billion is for the Pentagon to order additional munitions, including artillery rounds, to replace those already sent to Ukraine.

Other sums are earmarked for “security challenges posed by China,” including \$1 billion for the National Defense Stockpile to “acquire strategic and critical minerals,” and \$245 million for the establishment of a joint forces headquarters in the Indo-Pacific region.

The bill makes it US government policy to position US forces “to deny a fait accompli” in terms of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. This would involve increasing US deployments in the region to block China from “using military force to unilaterally change the status quo with Taiwan.”

The NDAA also authorizes procurement of several weapons systems from Israel, including the Iron Dome short-range rocket defense system and two others: the “David’s Sling Weapon System” and the Arrow 3 Upper Tier Interceptor Program.



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