

In bipartisan vote, US Congress authorizes record Pentagon budget: A blueprint for global war

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With bipartisan votes in both houses of Congress, the two parties of American imperialism this week authorized a record Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2024.

In the face of massive protests in the US and internationally against the US/Israeli genocide in Gaza and collapsing popular support for Washington's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the Democrats and Republicans combined to adopt a National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that calls for \$883.7 billion in military spending in the coming year, an increase of \$145 billion, or 20 percent, since 2020.

The topline figure includes \$841.4 billion for the Department of Defense, \$32.4 billion for "national security" programs within the Department of Energy, and \$438 million in defense-related activities. The total authorization consumes more than half of the annual federal discretionary budget.

This is under conditions where hunger and homelessness are soaring, corporations are slashing jobs, and the Biden administration is using the bogus "end" of the COVID emergency to strip Medicaid and food stamp benefits from millions of workers and poor people. The full cost of the boost in war spending is to be imposed on the working class, while military contractors enjoy a profit bonanza.

The Senate passed the 3,000-page bill by a lopsided 87-13 vote on Wednesday, and the House followed suit by a vote of 310 to 118 on Thursday, easily surpassing the two-thirds margin required for expedited passage under a suspension of normal procedural rules.

The NDAA is not really a "defense" bill. It is a blueprint for global war, including stepped-up preparations for nuclear war, aimed at reversing the world economic decline of US imperialism by military means. It particularly targets China for military aggression,

followed by Russia, Iran and North Korea, while affirming and expanding US military support and involvement in Israel's war of annihilation against the Palestinians.

The "FY24 National Defense Authorization Act" summary released by the Republican-controlled House Armed Services Committee makes this clear. It begins:

America faces unprecedented threats from China and ongoing threats from Russia, Iran, North Korea and terrorist organizations. All of our adversaries are aligned in their desire to end American dominance. Threats from these adversaries are constantly evolving.

The document affirms: "The FY24 NDAA provides sufficient investment to build and maintain the lethal fighting force we need to prevail on future battlefields."

Mike Rogers, the Republican chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said of the bill: "It's laser-focused on deterring our adversaries, especially China."

Republican Senator Roger Wicker, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "Our bill should signal to China, Russia and others that we will not accept a world where America does not have the best fighting force."

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer agreed, declaring, "Passing the NDAA enables us to hold the line against Russia, stand firm against the Chinese Communist Party and ensure that America's defenses remain state-of-the-art."

The single longest section in the House summary, headed "Countering CCP Aggression," begins, "The

FY24 NDAA builds and maintains the overmatch we need to counter CCP aggression.” It lists among the bill’s provisions:

- Implementing the anti-China AUKUS agreement between the US, the UK and Australia and authorizing the sale of nuclear-capable submarines to Australia.
- Increasing the scale and frequency of exercises conducted by the US Indo-Pacific Command.
- Authorizing \$14.7 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and establishing a training, advising and capacity-building program for the military forces of Taiwan, including the training in the US of up to two battalions of troops on new weapons systems and military tactics.
- Increasing funding for new technologies to “deter the CCP on future battlefields,” including AI, autonomous systems, cyber, mobile micronuclear reactors, and high-energy lasers.
- Expanding the deployable capacity of US nuclear forces “to counter the CCP’s unprecedented nuclear buildup.”
- Expanding the list of munitions eligible for emergency and multiyear procurement authorities.
- Adding Israel and Taiwan to a program started last year to expedite the delivery and replenishment of munitions to Ukraine.

The House summary also cites billions of dollars for additional combat aircraft, drones equipped to fire missiles, another seven “C-130J transport aircraft, used to rapidly deploy troops, tanks and artillery to new war zones,” more Army helicopters, more Navy warships, and the redesign of artillery, tanks and armored vehicles for “future warfare against near-peer competitors (war with Russia, China or another major power).”

The document lists a major upgrade and expansion of nuclear war readiness, calling for “across-the-board modernization of US nuclear weaponry, begun under Obama and continued under Trump, including submarine-fired missiles, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and heavy bombers capable of intercontinental flight.”

On Ukraine, the NDAA authorizes an extension of military aid through the end of 2026 and \$300 million in the current fiscal year and the next one for a program that pays industry to produce weapons for Ukraine, rather than drawing directly from US weapons stockpiles. The \$60 billion for Ukraine in Biden’s supplemental spending bill remains in limbo as the White House and House Republicans work toward a bipartisan deal to further gut

the right to asylum and virtually close the US-Mexican border to desperate workers fleeing poverty and oppression.

The NDAA does, however, “fully fund” the deployment of National Guard troops to the southwest border.

On Israel, the NDAA extends Defense Department authority to transfer weapons systems to the Zionist regime, including precision-guided munitions. It further requires the US Central Command to hold regular joint training exercises with Israel and authorizes Israel to participate in NATO pilot training programs.

The bill increases the pay of soldiers and civilian Pentagon employees by 5.2 percent, the biggest annual increase in 20 years, and includes increased benefits for housing, education and childcare. This is a cynical bid to attract young people unable to secure a decent-paying job, as the concentration of wealth in the hands of the top 1 percent in the US hits new records, now surpassing the wealth held by the entire middle 60 percent of households.

The moves by the House GOP toward the impeachment of Biden and its support for Trump did not prevent the White House and the Democrats from joining hands with the Republicans to further Washington’s preparations for World War III.

This spectacle of reaction and war-mongering demonstrates the futility of all attempts—such as those promoted by the pro-Democratic Democratic Socialists of America—to end war, genocide and the danger of fascism through appeals to any section of the ruling class or its political parties. Their response to the growth of the class struggle nationally and internationally and the emergence of a mass, global anti-war movement is to double down on war and repression.

Capitalism is rotting on its feet. Its mortal crisis can be resolved only in one of two ways: barbarism or socialism. The fight against war and dictatorship must be rooted in the working class and the building of an independent, international movement to put an end to the profit system and establish socialism.



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