

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

### TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS

- *War with Iran: The Trump administration is beginning to pave the path.*
- *The House okays massive Pentagon spending but will ratchet up oversight on the war in Yemen.*

### TRUMP CEMENTS REGIME CHANGE POLICY WITH TWEET THREATENING WAR TO IRANIAN PRESIDENT

If it wasn't already clear that the Trump administration's Iran policy has centered around forced regime change, there is now little doubt after events of this week.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday gave a speech aimed at fomenting strife inside Iran. One day later, his boss was less subtle in a tweet threatening Iran with annihilation. (Side note: Pompeo [has a history](#) of making [false](#), [misleading](#), and inaccurate claims about Iran, and Sunday's speech was [no different](#)).

While Trump administration hawks would like us to believe that Trump violated the Iran nuclear deal to get a better one, the reality is that negotiating an agreement more stringent than the JCPOA has always been a [complete fantasy](#). In addition to casting the Iran deal aside, despite the fact that the deal was working exactly as intended and the IAEA repeatedly found Iran was complying with the deal, **consider the wider context that paints the regime change policy picture:**

- Within days of taking office, the Trump White House put Iran "on notice."
- U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley cited [flimsy evidence](#) to portray Iran as a malevolent belligerent in the Yemen's civil war.
- Pompeo himself politicized intelligence as CIA Director to portray, again with [flimsy evidence](#), that Iran is in cahoots with Al-Qaeda.
- After Trump withdrew from the Iran deal, Pompeo issued a series of unrealistic demands on Iran that [sounded eerily familiar](#) to the case that the Bush administration was making for war with Iraq in 2002.

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- John Bolton, Trump's National Security Advisor, has been [calling for war](#) with Iran for nearly two decades. Last year, Bolton [said](#): "The declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran."

## IRAN ISN'T NORTH KOREA

While some pundits likened Trump's tweet to the "fire and fury" threats on North Korea and eventual talks, it's unlikely to turn out that way, even if that's what Team Trump was after. Here's why:

- While Japan and South Korea support diplomacy with North Korea and are not pushing for war, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel have consistently lobbied against negotiating with Iran and for the U.S. to be more confrontational.
- In addition to Iran hawks inside the Trump administration, there is a sizable, well funded, and [influential apparatus in Washington](#) and beyond gunning for war and/or regime change with Iran, including some of Trump's [major donors](#) like Sheldon Adelson, who has [advocated](#) launching a nuclear attack on Iran.
- Iran [doesn't seem too interested](#) in [negotiating with Trump](#), at least while Europe is trying to figure out how to meander around reimposed American sanctions and continue to do business in Iran (for more on that, see [last week's Debrief](#)).

And to add to the concern, Australian government officials [appear to be sounding the alarm](#) that **the Trump administration is close to launching strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.**

See the rest of our messaging on this [here](#).

## COALITION OF THE WILLING 2.0

If the [similarities](#) to the run-up to the Iraq war in 2002 haven't been glaring enough, Pompeo pushed back on the claim that the United States is isolated when it comes to Iran during a Senate hearing this week.

"It's not America and America alone," Pompeo said. "We have others who believe that [withdrawing from the Iran deal] was the right decision too: the Israelis, the Saudis, the Emiratis, the Bahrainis, other smaller European governments."

So like, [Poland](#)?

## FURTHER READING/RESOURCES

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- “The American Public Really Does Not Want To Go To War With Iran,” HuffPost [[LINK](#)]
- “Trump’s Iran tweet may trap US in another war,” CNN [[LINK](#)]
- “Inciting regime change in Iran would be a terrible mistake,” LA Times [[LINK](#)]
- “The Ugly Destination of Trump’s Iran Policy,” LobeLog [[LINK](#)]
- “Senators Warn Europe Against Flouting US Iran Sanctions, AP [[LINK](#)]
- “Trump Is Pursuing A Totally Incoherent Iran Strategy, Experts Say,” HuffPost [[LINK](#)]
- “‘This isn’t like North Korea’: Trump’s saber-rattling could put US on a collision course with Iran,” Mic [[LINK](#)]
- Diplomacy Works Digest [[LINK](#)]

## [HOUSE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES BILL AUTHORIZING PENTAGON WINDFALL](#)

Nearly [half](#) of the Pentagon’s budget goes to defense corporations, and last year, the top five defense industry CEOs personally [made a combined \\$96 million](#).

At the same time, tens of thousands of American servicemembers are forced to [rely on food stamps](#), according to government figures from 2013, while two years later nearly half of all children attending Defense Department-based schools qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

More than two-thirds of the House of Representatives yesterday [voted](#) to maintain that dynamic, [passing](#) the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act which okays a whopping \$717 billion in largely unaccountable defense-related spending.

### WHAT ELSE IS BAD?

Here are some of the other problematic provisions in the NDAA:

- **The bill fills Pentagon’s off-the-books slush fund**, or Overseas Contingency Operations budget, as it’s formally known, with \$69 billion, nearly \$40 billion more than what DOD has [said](#) it needs to fight wars.
- The FY2019 NDAA **increases spending on unrequested weapons systems** by hundreds of millions of dollars.
- The NDAA contains a provision requiring a regional strategy to confront Iran that could **take oversight of that strategy out of Congress’s hands**.
- The bill provides \$65 million for a low-yield (considered “usable” by Trump’s war cabinet) **submarine based nuclear warhead**.

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- The bill provides for an expensive, ineffective, and destabilizing space-based missile defense system.
- Despite overwhelming support in the House, the NDAA excludes a measure that would have sanctioned Burmese officials responsible for atrocities against the Rohingya.

## THE GOOD: HOLDING SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UAE ACCOUNTABLE IN YEMEN

Over the last year or so, Congress has been [increasingly inserting itself](#) into the U.S. military's unauthorized role in the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen, which has helped create and exacerbate the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The FY2019 NDAA continues that trend, with provisions that finally place conditions on U.S. refueling assistance, require an investigation of the Pentagon's and the UAE's involvement in torture of Yemenis, and mandate a comprehensive report on U.S. military objectives and humanitarian assistance to Yemen.

"These will be major steps promoting accountability regarding Yemen's civil war. I am pleased that we are able to make concrete progress on this issue," Rep Adam Smith [said](#).

"As we break for August recess, I want to make it clear to the Saudi-led coalition that Congress is watching," [said](#) Rep. Ro Khanna.

Here are some of the other positive developments from the FY2019 NDAA:

- The conference report contains language stating that **there is no existing authorization for war with Iran or North Korea**. (See J Street's [statement](#) on this provision.)
- The bill strengthens oversight of Pentagon reporting on civilian casualties.
- The NDAA requires legal assessments of the Trump administration's missile strikes on Syria and a report on U.S. military activities in Niger.
- The conference report **requires further transparency** on how the Overseas Contingency Operations budget is used and auditing of the Pentagon budget.

For more detail on the FY2019 NDAA, see our [vote recommendation memo](#).

## **BURIED LEDES**

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**Former Obama administration officials are helping Silicon Valley** land big, and [controversial](#), contracts with the Pentagon, but just last week, thousands of artificial intelligence researchers [signed a pledge](#) to never participate in development of robots that can identify and attack people without human oversight.

An Army Reserve officer [had a few things to say on Twitter about the military industrial complex](#) — and now, she's facing repercussions for tweeting facts.

Months of [unrest](#) and protests in Nicaragua demanding that President Daniel Ortega [step down](#) **has led to nearly 500 deaths.**

The International Monetary Fund is [projecting](#) that **inflation in Venezuela will hit 1 million percent by the end of the year.**

The U.S. and Israel [helped evacuate](#) hundreds of Syrian Civil Defense or “White Helmets” rescue workers this week **but still won't help other civilians fleeing fighting in the south.**

A bipartisan group of lawmakers [sent a letter](#) to Defense Secretary Mattis expressing concern that the **DOD's report on climate change mentions the term only once.**

Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Joni Ernst “[are demanding](#) that the **Pentagon release a report that rates the risk of sexual assault at military bases around the world.**”

**Unconditional support for Israeli government policies is becoming more rare** [within](#) the Democratic Party.

And finally, if the U.S. government had just set [this much cash on fire](#), **at least it would have generated some heat.**