

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: A Blank Check for Endless War and a Gift to Donald Trump

The NDAA is a Disaster: What Happened? And What's Next?

The House has voted and the [results](#) are in: with 377 for and 48 against, Congress moves one step closer to handing Donald Trump a \$738 billion check for endless war.

The fiscal year (FY) 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) will head to the Senate next week, where it's almost sure to pass. Given Trump's [enthusiastic tweeting](#) on the subject, a veto isn't looking likely either.

With a \$22 billion increase in Pentagon spending from the previous year, and virtually nothing to constrain Trump's reckless and erratic foreign policy, this year's NDAA is nothing short of a disaster. While some will argue that compromises were necessary, we know better; this is not a compromise — it's a capitulation. We and 37 other national organizations condemned the final text of the NDAA as "fuel for the further militarization of U.S. foreign policy, and a gift to Donald Trump." It calls into question not only Democratic leaderships' commitment to ending endless wars, but the defense authorization process itself.

Read more of our [joint statement](#).

Anything But Progressive

The version of the NDAA that first passed the House contained historic progressive victories — a slew of provisions that would have placed critical restraints on Trump's ability to wage war, and marked a step forward on the path toward [our vision](#) for a progressive foreign policy:

- **Reasserting Congress' war powers over the Trump administration's unilateral march to war with Iran** by blocking funds and clarifying that no existing legal authorities for war exist.
- **Ending all U.S. military assistance and bomb sales to the Saudi/Emirati-led coalition in Yemen** and U.S. complicity in the world's largest humanitarian disaster.

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- **Repealing the 2002 Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against Iraq** that has been used as a justification for endless war.
- **Stopping the discriminatory ban on transgender servicemembers.**
- **Protecting U.S. drinking water from further contamination** by the deadly “PFAS” chemicals that are found at toxic levels in the water near [at least 425](#) military sites.
- **Reducing the risk of nuclear catastrophe** by blocking the development of Trump’s dangerous lower-yield nuclear weapons, a gateway to nuclear war.

Every last one of these essential provisions [and more](#) were stripped from the final bill. The question of whether defense funds should be diverted to pay for Trump’s racist border wall, meanwhile, has been punted to the year-end spending agreement (and signs of Democrats prevailing look grim there too).

Instead, the NDAA is a massive blank check. The topline authorization of \$738 billion is obscene — an astronomical sum of taxpayer dollars that further inflates the Pentagon’s already overstuffed coffers. This comes in the same week that 700,000 were [kicked off](#) of food stamps to save an annual \$1.1 billion... but at least Trump got his Space Force.

Despite what weapons manufacturers may say, this money **will not make the world safer** — quite the opposite, an overfunded DoD is one of the driving forces behind a system that treats military intervention as the solution to all global problems, leading to decades of disastrous, destabilizing, ineffective U.S. foreign policy. Nothing illuminates this point better than the Afghanistan Papers, a trove of classified interviews with senior U.S. officials, published this week [revealing](#) that the Pentagon wasted \$1 trillion in a war that was doomed from the start, and then repeatedly and deliberately lied to the public about it.

The NDAA is a vehicle for unfettered militarism. [It's anything but progressive.](#)

Compromise is Necessary — Capitulation's Not

As House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith pointed out, compromises are necessary. We are under no illusions that the NDAA could have been perfect, and we applaud the few but [meaningful victories](#) that managed to [make it](#) into the final bill. But they came at a steep price. What’s behind the capitulation?

One reason is that no one wants to look like they’re standing in the way of U.S. service members getting paid. In reality, the actual money comes from the defense appropriations bill, not the NDAA. But because Dem leadership doesn’t even want to *appear* to undermine the military, progressives have little leverage to push their agenda.

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To make matters worse, private interests weigh heavily on the process. Politicians are swayed not only by direct lobbying from defense contractors that stand to make billions, but also by the promise of “jobs” from contracting and weapons manufacturing in their home districts (this despite the growing evidence that defense spending is [inefficient](#) at job creation when [compared](#) to education, clean energy, or healthcare). These were not necessary compromises — they were choices.

“Astonishing Moral Cowardice”

Some, however, held their ground. In a joint statement with Senator Bernie Sanders, Representative Ro Khanna [called](#) the FY2020 NDAA “a bill of astonishing moral cowardice.” Representative Rashida Tlaib echoed this sentiment, calling on Congress to stop fueling violence abroad “while children go hungry at night and parents worry how they’ll keep a roof over their heads.” Senator Elizabeth Warren also took to Twitter to [announce](#) her opposition.

These statements may not have been enough to swing a no vote, but they did make one thing clear: the winds are changing. Through the power of the progressive grassroots, and with leadership from the Members of Congress who managed to push progressive priorities through the House, we are slowly but surely changing the narrative. In the [statements of those who refused to be complicit](#) in unrestrained militarism, we see the seeds of a better U.S. foreign policy.

Toward a Progressive Foreign Policy

In the short term, the NDAA will continue to serve as a potential, if imperfect vehicle for attempts to advance progressive policy. Victories like those in this summer’s House bill can help to shift the window of what is possible. But in the long term, we must work toward an alternative to tacking restraints onto a bloated defense authorization: not merely restricting, but [drastically cutting](#) the Pentagon’s budget; not only ending endless war, but proactively developing alternative tools of peacebuilding, diplomacy, and development; not just restraining the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, but reversing it, reorienting toward combating climate change, fostering democracy, and building a global economy for the many.

The FY2020 NDAA is a loss. This is another sign of the power of the forces that we are up against, and the indelible harm that they have caused to our foreign policy. But it is not cause for despair. As we head into the new year, we will only harden our resolve, and redouble our efforts to build an alternative, progressive vision of U.S. foreign policy.

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ICYMI: DoD OIG will investigate misuse of troops at the southern border

This Tuesday, the Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General [announced](#) the launch of an investigation into Trump's misuse of U.S. troops and military resources at the southern border. This action comes after a year-long campaign led by Win Without War, our partners United We Dream, the Southern Border Communities Coalition, and Daily Kos, and Representative Raul Grijalva. This welcome announcement moves us one step closer to reigning in the power of the imperial presidency, demilitarizing the U.S. southern border, and safeguarding the human right to seek asylum.

Read our statement [here](#).

BURIED LEDES

The Afghanistan Papers released this week [confirm](#) what we have suspected all along: **we can't bomb our way to peace.**

18 years after the invasion of Afghanistan, "end endless wars" has become a favorite slogan of politicians across the country, but **let's not forget the NGOs and grassroots movements that got us here.**

Policymakers [will continue](#) to act with impunity as long as **the culture of lying, the failure to take responsibility, and the lucrative profits of the military-industrial complex persists.**

Faith leaders are [calling](#) to redirect funding from the bloated Pentagon budget toward housing, food-assistance, and other critical human needs.

The revised USMCA appears to be [better than the original](#), but still [far from](#) a progressive vision. House Dems agreed anyway, handing Trump a victory on his main campaign promise.

The international trade union movement celebrated Human Rights Day this week by [calling on Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte to end his violent suppression of labor.](#)

As impeachment moves forward in the House, a reminder that **holding Trump accountable is a progressive foreign policy imperative.** Our friends at MoveOn are [organizing](#) demonstrations across the country.

The U.S. government no longer considers Houthis an Iranian proxy, [undermining](#) the administration's own arguments for fueling the world's largest humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

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Burma's leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** continues to [deny](#) the 2016 genocide of the Rohingya and fails to hold the military accountable for perpetrating atrocities, at a U.N. tribunal.

The U.N. is [unable to confirm](#) claims that a September attack on Saudi Aramco was conducted by Iran, undermining the saber-rattling that immediately followed the attack.

If you thought we couldn't sink any lower: **doctors were prohibited from giving children in migrant detention centers the flu vaccine.** At least three have already died.

And finally, **an electable female candidate looks like Beyoncé, a vegan, and a zumba instructor?**