

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Will COVID-19 Tip the Scales in the Pentagon Budget Fight?

The Takeaway:

- For three weeks, Win Without War and movement partners have been leading the call to ensure that COVID-19 relief legislation does not add more money to the Pentagon's already bloated budget. This week, House Democrats unveiled the Heroes Act... and at least for now, we won.
- Two lawmakers are previewing the fight ahead over security spending: decoupling the requirement that any increases to spending on human and environmental needs must come with attendant spending increases to the Pentagon.
- "China" is no excuse for further militarization. An arms race with China won't make us safer. Diplomacy and international cooperation will. It's time to rethink our approach to national security.

COVID-19 Makes It Clear: It's Time To Cut the Pentagon Budget

Things can't go back to the way they were before the COVID-19 crisis. For decades, the United States has funneled trillions of dollars into the Pentagon's ever-expanding, unaccountable coffers in the vain attempt to bomb its way to security. As the pandemic has made all too clear: this strategy is a complete and total failure.

Throwing money into the bottomless Pentagon pit instead of spending it on critical human needs, like public health, the climate crisis, and the social safety net has left us all less safe, not more. As we head into a new budget cycle, now is the time to start setting our priorities straight.

COVID-19 Relief For the People, Not the Pentagon

Even before the present crisis, the Pentagon budget was an eye-popping \$745.6 billion — about [15 times](#) annual U.S. contributions to the World Health Organization and the budgets of the Centers for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health, combined. In its first COVID-19 relief bill, Congress expanded this reckless sum by an additional \$10.5 billion. Never content, the Pentagon returned at the behest of the arms manufacturing industry with a [request](#) for billions more. We saw this for what it was: an attempt to leverage a crisis to further entrench the military status quo and line the pockets of defense contractor CEOs.

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A Heroes Act Victory

That's why we led a [letter](#) to Congress signed by more than 60 other organizations, and alongside partners, mobilized tens of thousands of grassroots activists to take action demanding that no more COVID-19 relief money be spent on the Pentagon. Thanks to leaders in Congress, movement partners, and a groundswell of grassroots support: [we won](#). This week, when House Democrats released the text of the Phase IV COVID-19 relief bill — [the Heroes Act](#) — there was not a single new dollar for the Pentagon. The Heroes Act is not yet law, and our pressure must be sustained throughout the crisis. But this is a massive step forward, and a sign that when we mobilize, we can match the pressure brought to bear by the arms industry.

The Fight Continues

But this is just the beginning. Even if no more COVID-19 relief funds are wasted on militarization, our spending priorities are still dramatically out of whack. Next year is a vital chance to put them back in order — not only because the COVID-19 crisis should be a wake-up call, but also because it will be the first year without the constraints of the Budget Control Act (BCA). Since the BCA was enacted in 2011, any increase to the human needs budget — known in budgetary terms as the “non-defense budget” — has been required to be proportionally matched in the Pentagon budget. The idea that any increase in spending on social goods should be matched by more funds for war is absurd enough to begin with. It's only made worse by the fact that naturally growing costs in non-defense spending, including rising needs from caring for our veterans and increased Embassy security squeeze out other social spending unless the Pentagon budget is also raised.

Next year, as these restrictions come to an end, we will face a choice: do we continue down the same path, or do we put human and environmental needs before Pentagon greed? Fortunately, Representatives Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Mark Pocan (D-WI) are showing us a path forward. In a letter to be released next week, they and their cosigners will make a clear demand: to make us all safer, we must *cut* the Pentagon budget, *and increase* spending on public health.

The China Pitfall

For those who would rather see arms dealers enriched than the government provide basic human needs, there is a powerful tool in their arsenal: China. For years, politicians on both sides of the aisle have been [fearmongering](#), ratcheting up rhetoric about the threat of China, and calling for the further inflation of the Pentagon's coffers to keep pace. But this is just another version of the old failed way of thinking. Increased militarization and a new Cold War would do nothing to make anyone safer — not in the United States, and not in China. COVID-19 reminds us that our security is shared. In the 21st century, the threats to human security — inequality, climate change, pandemics — must be solved by cooperation, not military confrontation. Future security challenges look a lot more like coronavirus than the Cold War. We must not fall into the [China trap](#).

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Time for a New Approach

The lesson of this crisis should be clear. The military-first approach has failed. It's time to stop throwing endless money at endless war, and start spending where it can actually make us safer.

Help Build a More Progressive U.S. Foreign Policy (Without Paying A Dime)!

Got 30 seconds? Vote in [this poll](#) to help Win Without War win a share of a \$150,000 grant from CREDO. More votes means more funding to end endless war — your vote really does count!

BURIED LEDES

Trump's threats toward Iran haven't ceased during the global health crisis, and will very likely continue into the 2020 election. Our own Erica Fein [explains](#) why **Congress must continue to act to rein in the administration on Iran**.

When Jonas Salk was asked about patenting the polio vaccine, he responded: "Can you patent the sun?" In that spirit, **130+ world politicians signed a letter urging that when a COVID-19 vaccine is developed, it be free to everyone**, with the costs borne by wealthy countries.

But that's not the only admirable case of global solidarity this week: **over 300 lawmakers from around the world, including Bernie Sanders, Ilhan Omar, Jeremy Corbyn, and more, joined a call for Global South debt relief** and additional Special Drawing Rights — essentially a reserve global currency issued by the IMF.

Pro-democracy protests have returned in Hong Kong. Authorities [reported](#) that 230 people were arrested during a sing-along demonstration that spilled into the streets earlier this week.

This week, a chemical factory in India leaked gas into a nearby city, killing at least 12 people and putting hundreds more in the hospital. Reports now [show that the factory was operating illegally, flouting mandatory environmental regulations, since 2019](#). It's a tragic reminder of how little progress has been made since the [Bhopal disaster](#).

[Speaking of the Trump administration:](#) **Mike Pompeo arrived in Israel this week to meet with the newly formed government** to continue demagoguing Iran and discussing possible plans for annexation of regions in the West Bank. Reckless U.S. foreign policy apparently doesn't stop for a pandemic.

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And finally, [an unbearably cute story](#) — a restaurant in Thailand is seating stuffed pandas at its **tables** so lonely diners can have a bit of company while following social distancing guidelines.