

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 07/31/2020

SL: The NDAA, the “HEALS” Act, and the Future of Pentagon Spending

The Takeaway:

- Last week, the House and Senate each approved a \$740 billion fiscal year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Beyond the obscene topline authorization, these massive bills contained both policy wins and losses.
- Though amendments to cut the Pentagon budget by 10% ultimately didn't pass, they received levels of support that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago — a sure sign of changing times.
- But the Senate GOP's recently proposed COVID-19 relief bill — which contains another \$30 billion for the Pentagon — is a reminder of just how much further we have to go.

The Tides are Turning on Pentagon Spending... But There's a Long Way to Go

Every year for 60 years, Congress has passed a massive National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) greenlighting hundreds of billions of dollars for warmaking. This year — in the face of a deadly pandemic, economic collapse, and a nationwide eviction crisis — we came closer than ever to taming this reckless spending. The tides are beginning to turn on the Pentagon budget. But we still have a long way to go.

Wins and Losses in the NDAA

Earlier this month, we gave [a preview](#) of what to expect from the FY 2021 NDAA. With the passage of both House and Senate versions last week, here's how a few of our priority amendments shook out:

Passed:

- Rep. Khanna's [amendment](#) to end U.S. military support for the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen
- Rep. McAdams' [amendment](#) to block new nuclear weapons testing
- Rep. Ocasio-Cortez's [amendment](#) to stop US support for aerial spraying of poisonous herbicides in Colombia

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Rejected:

- Rep. Omar's [amendment](#) to establish a withdrawal framework on and take steps toward ending the U.S. war in Afghanistan
- Rep. Jayapal's [amendment](#) to stop requiring the Pentagon to make "wish lists" for more money from Congress (why is this even a thing?!)
- Rep. Johnson and Sen. Schatz's [amendments](#) to reform the 1033 program and limit the provision of military gear to domestic police

Reason for Hope on Pentagon Spending

The fight that took center stage was about the budget itself. Each version of the NDAA put forth an obscene \$740 billion Pentagon budget. Representatives Pocan, Lee, and Jayapal, and Senators Sanders, Markey, and Warren, however, proposed amendments to cut this figure by 10% and reinvest the funds in education, housing, and poverty alleviation. After a hard-fought battle – fueled by a massive display of grassroots support – the amendments [received](#) support from nearly 40 and 50 percent of the Democratic Caucus in each chamber, with 93 votes in the House and 23 in the Senate.

Just a few years ago, this would have been *unthinkable*. Though Congress ultimately failed to cut the out-of-control Pentagon budget, the unprecedented level of support for the two amendments made unequivocally clear: [the era of limitless Pentagon funding and endless wars is coming to an end.](#)

For more on why there's cause for optimism, read our own Erica Fein's take [here](#).

P.S. You can find out how *your* members of Congress voted, and hold them accountable, [here](#).

The Senate GOP Tries Bombing the Virus

While some Dems may be coming around on righting our misplaced budget priorities, Republicans reminded us this week that the fight won't be easy. In what could hardly be a more blatant display of inhumanity, Senate Republicans announced a plan to spend our COVID-19 relief money on weapons of war. Under the proposed "[HEALS](#)" Act, \$30 billion more would be appropriated to the Pentagon – that includes \$11 billion in payments to contractors to boost their profits (despite their [profits soaring](#) during the pandemic), funds to reimburse the Pentagon for helping fund Trump's racist border wall, and over \$7 billion to buy more weapons, including \$686 million for the bungled, trillion-dollar, might-never-be-combat-ready F-35 fighter jet program.

Sadly, there is no evidence that fighter jets can be used to defeat a disease, which has killed more people in the United States than [every U.S. war casualty since the start of the Korean War, combined.](#)

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Money for the People, Not the Pentagon

This proposal comes in addition to the \$10.5 billion in COVID-19 relief funds already appropriated for the Pentagon under the CARES Act earlier this year – funds that haven't even been fully [spent](#) yet. At that time, we [led](#) a letter urging Congress to ensure that no additional COVID-19 relief funds be appropriated to the DoD. With the addition of more signatories, bringing the total up to 75 organizations, [we say once again](#): *not one more pandemic relief dollar for the Pentagon.*

What's Next?

The fight continues. Just today, the House [passed](#) an appropriations minibuss that would appropriate the \$740 billion authorized by the NDAA for the Pentagon, and with each COVID-19 relief bill, there is the risk of raising this bloated figure further. Next year, the budget caps put in place by the Budget Control Act of 2011 will come to an end and the country will have the opportunity to fundamentally reform U.S. security spending for the first time in nearly a decade. As the Senate GOP just reminded us: this fight won't be easy. The forces of warmongers in Congress and the influence of the weapons industry are strong. But if this year is any indication, we have the momentum of a movement behind us. Change is coming.

Talk of the Town: What are our partners on the Hill saying about Pentagon spending?

"While doing nothing to address food security or provide payroll protection for state and local workers in critical jobs, Senate Republicans have instead splurged on weapons systems," [said Rep. Nita M. Lowey \(D-NY\)](#). "Amphibious ships don't feed hungry children, and the Senate Republican bill doesn't meet the desperate needs of the American people."

"What does this [the HEALS Act] have to do with the immediate crisis?" [said Senator Patrick Leahy \(D-VT\)](#) "The bill provides nothing to address the long lines at food banks and shortchanges education and childcare, but we can shore up the defense industry? I am at a loss for words."

"Wasteful defense spending does not make our communities safer – it only weakens our ability to respond to crises," [said Rep. Barbara Lee \(D-CA\)](#), and "For too long, Congress has put the profits of defense contractors above the needs of the American people," [said Rep. Mark Pocan \(D-WI\)](#), jointly [announcing](#) a new Defense Spending Reduction Caucus.

BURIED LEDES

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Though John Lewis may be gone, his words and deeds [live on](#).

Trump has used the ongoing anti-racism protests as justification to deploy a secret police force to detain and assault protestors in cities around the country. Our Kate Kizer [writes](#) about **how this creeping fascism comes courtesy of the post-9/11 police state**.

The title [says](#) it all: **"It's Time to Put Climate Action at the Center of U.S. Foreign Policy."**


Iraq is now effectively [run](#) by a growing class of kleptocrats. Surprise: the U.S. helped to enable their rise.

Time to get off Twitter: A new study [found](#) that **people who use social media to get political news are far less likely to be engaged and knowledgeable about current events and crises** such as COVID-19 and the BLM protests.

After weeks of protests and police abuse, **Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced federal officers and paramilitaries would [pull out](#) of Portland** following escalating pressure from governors and mayors from 11 states. But Trump and his monstrous acting head of DHS sowed confusion right after – [are they actually leaving?](#)

With the **Philippines' repressive new "[anti-terror](#)" law**, the post-9/11 endless war paradigm **continues to give cover to human rights abusers the world over**. Now, the U.S. labor movement [has called](#) for solidarity.

With the end of the Coronavirus pandemic nowhere in sight, **the U.S. economy saw its sharpest contraction in decades, [shrinking](#) by almost almost 33%**. Now, 28 million people are [at risk](#) of eviction. We say again: we don't need more money for fighter jets.

And finally, 2020 continues to get stranger and stranger, with **a massive swarm of flying ants  flying over southeast Britain**. At over 50 miles-wide, the swarm could be seen clearly from SPACE. 