

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: **Making (Budget) Amends**

### **The Takeaway:**

- The House passed the National Defense Authorization Act this week, authorizing another year of outrageous Pentagon spending.
- Progressives have worked hard, however, to add important amendments to the bill that take steps to democratize and humanize U.S. foreign policy.
- These are important steps, but Win Without War and other progressives still oppose a massive defense budget that leaves people less safe with every dollar added to it.

## **The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of The NDAA**

Each year, Win Without War closely tracks the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the law passed every year to [authorize funding](#) for the Department of Defense (DoD) and nuclear weapons programs. The bill is a monument to our sick political system, an annual rush to spend close to a trillion dollars on instruments of violence when measures that would actually keep people safe, like climate action or abortion access, can't even get to a vote. Win Without War [opposes](#) passage of the NDAA and the outrageous \$839 billion the House of Representatives has just pledged to militarism.

In a broken political system, however, “must-pass” bills like the NDAA also create opportunities for progressives to gain ground on issues where securing a standalone vote is highly difficult. This year, House members introduced over 1,200 amendments to the NDAA, including many from progressive champions aimed at either using Congress’s obsession with passing the NDAA to improve U.S. foreign policy, or to change the shape of the national security state itself in order to reduce its hold on U.S. politics. Win Without War advocates for many of these amendments, working with partners on the Hill and our network of dedicated activists to find ways to make Congress’s worst annual authorization work for us.

This week, as the NDAA process in the House wraps up and preparations begin for parallel consideration of the Senate version of the bill, we wanted to use the Debrief to look at three progressive amendments that were offered – two of which were adopted in the House version of the bill and one which was rejected – and discuss the possibilities and limitations of engaging with the defense budget process.

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One of the ways militarism became embedded in U.S. politics is through the huge profits it has provided many of the people who support it. The revolving door between Congress, the Pentagon, and defense contractors creates a system in which the personal wealth of people who move between those institutions rests on there being little accountability between the three. In this year's NDAA, Rep. Katie Porter introduced an [amendment](#) that will dismantle a particularly pernicious part of that system – the part that allows high-ranking Pentagon officials to profit from defense contractors while they are still in the government. Her amendment bans DoD officials from owning stock in any company that took in over \$1 million in Pentagon money in the previous year.

After advocacy from Win Without War and many others, the Porter amendment was allowed to be considered “en bloc,” a procedural move in which a group of amendments are voted on at once, making it more likely that they will pass. The Porter amendment was adopted along with the rest of its bloc by a vote of 362-64.

The NDAA also drew amendments addressing a wide range of issues related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Among the most useful of those amendments was one [introduced](#) by Reps. Chuy Garcia and Jim Himes that directs U.S. representatives at the International Monetary Fund to get the Fund to stop collecting surcharges from countries it lends to while it conducts a comprehensive review of its surcharge policy. We've written about the scourge of IMF surcharges [before](#) – they are a way for the Fund to punish countries in dire economic straits simply for needing the Fund's services. Surcharges are a particular concern in Ukraine, where the government is on the hook to pay nearly \$500 million in surcharges on top of its regular debt service over the next five years, all while dealing with the consequences of an unprovoked invasion. But the Garcia and Himes amendment will pause – and hopefully end – surcharges everywhere, offering much needed economic relief to people in middle income countries around the world.

The amendment on surcharges – an issue Win Without War activists worked to educate Congress on – was also considered en bloc, passing 277-150.

Not all the progressive amendments were as successful, unfortunately. A group of Democrats led by Reps. Barbara Lee and Mark Pocan took a courageous stand against the defense budget itself, offering an [amendment](#) – endorsed by Win Without War and many other organizations – that cut the overall Pentagon budget by \$100 billion. The amendment itself is eminently reasonable. The Pentagon budget is already shockingly large, and even the Congressional Budget Office – not exactly a radical hotbed – has [found](#) that the Defense Department could get along just fine with \$100 billion less. Plus, \$100 billion not going into the pockets of weapons makers is a hefty chunk of change that could be spent on things people actually want – infrastructure, health care, refugee aid, etc.

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Less reasonable, however, is the response of many in Congress to the idea that the Pentagon budget can do anything other than expand indefinitely. During the NDAA floor debate, one Republican representative called the full budget “anemic” even before the \$100 billion cut was proposed, and another said that the proposed cut “guts” the defense budget. If only! In the end, Congress remains in the thrall of a military-industrial complex that demands an ever-increasing share of the public’s money with which to line its pockets. The amendment, which was considered on its own, failed by a vote of 78-350.

Win Without War will continue the fight to change the NDAA, both by improving it at the margins and pushing to transform it at its core. Progress is difficult but possible with concerted effort towards democratizing a foreign policy currently made by and for a small and insular elite. Look for an update on the process in a future issue of The Debrief, as the bill snakes its way through Congress this autumn.

## **BURIED LEDES**

Our policy director, Sam Ratner, and DAWN research director Abdullah Alaoudh [argue](#) in Business Insider that **President Biden’s meeting with leading human rights abuser Mohammed bin Salman during his trip to Saudi Arabia is bad for people in both Saudi Arabia and the U.S.**, and that it’s time for a different approach to the relationship.

Sen. Chris Murphy makes a similar **case in [Foreign Policy](#) for a comprehensive reform of U.S.-Saudi ties** on the eve of Biden’s visit. Unfortunately, the president doesn’t seem to be [listening](#).

The president’s trip to Saudi Arabia also means that **the foreign policy world is on high alert for [orb content](#)**, even if the orb forecast (forecast?) [suggests](#) a low chance of orb.

Justice and reconciliation are slow and grinding processes, but they are possible. **Colombia’s Truth Commission recently [released](#) a report detailing the crimes of a nearly 6-decade civil conflict in the country**, a key outcome of a 2016 peace agreement between the government and FARC. Reckoning with rights violations and naming perpetrators is a key step in stabilizing post-conflict societies, both for the people of those societies themselves and for governments -- [like the United States](#) -- that helped fuel the conflict from afar.

Peace activist Choi Sung-hee [outlines](#) **the dangers that ongoing RIMPAC military exercises in the Pacific pose to the environment, regional stability, and the prospects for peace on the Korean peninsula.**

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Ursula Knudsen-Latta of the Friends Committee on National Legislation [eviscerates](#) the **Biden administration's argument that the U.S. needs a special exception from the global effort to ban anti-personnel landmines in order to use these indiscriminate weapons to guard South Korea from North Korean invasion.** Landmines have killed around 1,000 people just going about their daily lives in South Korea in recent decades, and the South Korean government has moved to clear mines rather than add to them. The U.S. should abandon its defense of landmines in Korea and embrace the goal of ending their use around the world.

On the eve of a coveted handshake with Biden, **Egyptian autocrat Abdel Fattah el-Sisi gets a [failing grade](#) from a former professor.**

[Didi the Devil - a fan favorite](#) - returns to the slopes of the Tour de France.

[John Bolton - not a fan favorite](#) - returns to cable news to brag about being an imperialist goon.

And finally, even when Earth gets a little bleak, **the stars are [very good](#).**