

Feeding Militarism: The US Imperial Consensus

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The US military industrial complex reigns like a ravenous ruler in search of new funding prospects. It has done well this year, with the Trump administration pushing the sale that the imperium needs more ruddy cash and indulgent expenditure to cope with all manner of evils. Empire must be without equal.

The dissenters to this program have been pitifully small, concentrated amongst such outliers as Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky. Those on the GOP side of the aisle have barely squeaked but relative to the Democrats, their sounds have been spectacularly noisy. There is, in fact, something to be said that, in the boisterous era of Donald Trump, the Democrats have shown very little by way of bucking any trend whatever in the continuingly expansive program that is US military spending.

As Peter Beinart [observed](#) in February this year, the Democrats might be moving to the left on the domestic front (a murmuring more than a lurch, it must be said); in terms of a foreign or defence policy, nothing of note comes to mind. Terrified of being left behind in the rat race of reaction, the Democrats have, for instance, done their bit to promise funding for the border wall with Mexico, albeit offering a lesser \$1.6 billion in 2019 to the \$5 billion demanded by Trump.

Beinart took note of the remarks of Nancy Pelosi, chipper in the run-up to the budget deal that dramatically increased US defence spending.

“In our negotiations,” she enthused to fellow House Democrats in an email, “Congressional Democrats have been fighting for increases in funding for defence.”

Defence, notably when aligned with imperial cravings, supplies its own logic. The military industrial complex is an economy within, given the armouring rationales that make a reduction of spending heretical. Firms and employees need to be supported; infrastructure maintained. Forget those other menial things: roads, public transport, train tracks, bridges and airports can be left to one side. To reduce the amount would be tantamount to being treasonous, an anti-patriotic gesture.

“It’s not just a matter of buying fewer bombs,” [suggests](#) Brian Riedl of the conservatively inclined Manhattan Institute. “The United States spends \$100,000 per troop on compensation – such as salaries, housing, health care – which also contributes to our defence budget exceeding that of countries like China.”

As with such empires as Rome, the entire complex entails compensation, remuneration and nourishment for the industry of death and protection.

It became clear this month that, even with short-term spending bills, this rationale would repeat itself. Last week, the Senate considered such a bill that further supplemented the earlier budget package that would not only fund the Labor, Education and Health and Human Services departments; it would also add further largesse to the Pentagon. By a margin of 93-7, the package was passed and the Democrats found wanting, refusing to stage any protest that might result in an expiration of government funding come September 30.

Trump, in his amoral calculations, is all for such a disruptive measure, having expressed a desire both for and against a shutting down of the government in an effort to push funding towards his pet border security projects. "Finish the Wall!" he has intoned between sessions of hectoring, directed both at the Democrats and the GOP.

The Democrats have been weak in conviction.

"This is necessary," [explained](#) an unconvincing Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) of the Senate Appropriations Committee, "to ensure that we do not face a government shutdown in the event that we do not finish our work on other remaining bills."

This supposedly necessitous state of affairs sees the Pentagon budget for 2019 receiving an outlay of \$606.5 billion, an increase of \$17 billion from 2018. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky)'s [words](#) were those of the patriot turned fetishist.

"After subjecting America's all-voluntary armed forces to years of belt tightening, this legislation will build on our recent progress in rebuilding the readiness of our military and investing more in the men and women who wear the uniform."

As for what the appropriations [will fund](#), 13 new Navy ships will be added to the inventory, including three DDG-51 guided missile destroyers and two Virginia-class submarines. The air arm can look forward to 93 of the previously mocked (by no less or more a person than Trump) F-35 aircraft, 58 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, 66 AH-64 Apache helicopters, 13 V-22 aircraft. A further \$1.5 billion will be set aside for upgrading 135 Abrams tanks.

In the tactics that ultimately saw a grand capitulation on the part of the Democrats, a policy obscenity manifested itself: to avoid squabbling over non-defence spending bills, the Senate agreed to pack the military budget bill along with that of full-year funding for the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and Education. In wrapping these bills in the same ribbon, an abysmal reality surfaced: the military industrial complex finds a home in any legislative orientation, and will not be denied.

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