

How We Got to an \$850 Billion Pentagon Budget

By [Stephen Semler](#)

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Situation

The Senate [might](#) vote on the fiscal year 2023 military budget this month. Or it [might not](#); nobody's sure. What's for certain is that the bill the Senate considers will have [at least as much as \\$850 billion](#) for the Pentagon. In other words, we're staring down a \$72 billion year-to-year increase in military spending with this legislation: The [FY2022 version](#) of the same bill (National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA) licensed [\\$778 billion](#) for the Pentagon.

How we got to an \$850 billion Pentagon budget

In March, Joe Biden proposed increasing annual military spending by \$35 billion—to [\\$813 billion](#)—as part of his [FY2023 budget request](#). In June, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) added another \$37 billion on top of that before advancing the [\\$850 billion](#) bill to the House floor for approval.

This decision was reportedly a matter of course for the committee. According to one HASC member, there was "[almost no debate](#)" on dumping another \$37 billion on top of Biden's own proposed increase. An overlooked reason why the committee's move was so automatic was the 'expertise' that made a \$72 billion year-to-year increase seem appropriate or even natural.

Think tanks are said to be free from the ugly forces that bias in-house policy planning—namely, all the lobbying and campaign cash that encourage members of Congress to make decisions based on parochial interests and not the public's. The problem is that [establishment think tanks](#) are corrupted by the same monied interests members of

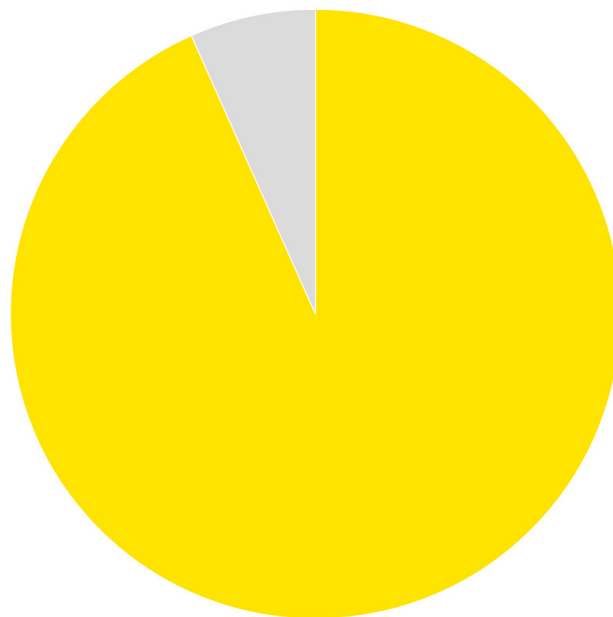
Congress are. In this case, we're talking about the arms industry.

Every think tank represented in a House Armed Services Committee hearing to provide expert testimony from January 1, 2020 through September 16, 2022 that disclosed its donors received funding from military contractors (the one that didn't disclose its donors was the hawkish American Enterprise Institute).

The result? Military contractors were able to launder their profit-driven interests through ostensibly non-political institutions, while powerful lawmakers on the HASC got their parochially-driven policy positions validated by ostensibly unbiased 'expertise'.

Think tanks advising US foreign policy are funded by weapons manufacturers

At least 14 of the 15 think tanks represented in House Armed Services Committee hearings from Jan 2020—Sep 2022 accepted arms industry cash



Data via company disclosures and Ben Freeman's "US government and defense contractor funding of America's top 50 think tanks" report. Full analysis: stephensemmler.substack.com

Chart: Stephen Semler (@stephensemmler) • Created with Datawrapper

UPDATE (19 Sep): AEI is the think tank that doesn't disclose its donors, but after some digging you'll find that AEI has taken money from the military industry by way of its board chair (so the chart above should be a solid yellow pie). Here is Ben Freeman with the receipts:

Excellent, must read, research here. The one think tank that doesn't disclose its funders (for shame, AEI) also has \$ ties to the weapons industry. [#Thread](#) (1/3) <https://t.co/c71RX3irHa>

— Ben Freeman (@BenFreemanDC) [September 19, 2022](#)

AEI's board chair, Daniel A. D'Aniello, is co-founder of the Carlyle Group which owns several DoD contractors: <https://t.co/8RfUogxCUb>

D'Aniello has given at least \$20 million to AEI: <https://t.co/eDNtqNcipi> (2/3)

— Ben Freeman (@BenFreemanDC) [September 19, 2022](#)

In other words, 100% of think tanks represented in HASC hearings since Jan 2020 have accepted \$ from the arms industry. (3/3)

— Ben Freeman (@BenFreemanDC) [September 19, 2022](#)

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