

# President Trump's Defense Budget and the New National Security Strategy

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[War Agenda](#)

*In the early hours of Friday morning, the US Senate agreed to pass yet another controversial budget deal; this time spearheaded by the Trump administration. Despite the tirade from GOP Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, lecturing his fellow colleagues on the bill's lack of fiscal prudence and oversight, a massive expenditure added trillions to the swelling US debt. The most noticeable increase was \$300bn of new spending for the Pentagon which would increase the overall defense budget for 2018 and 2019 to \$1.4tn.[1] Military leaders no doubt reveled as President Trump tweeted moments after signing the bill, stating,*

*"We love and need our Military and gave them everything - and more."*

The newly contracted defense budget is built upon a blue print advocating a massive rearmament, in accordance with the new national defense strategy outlined by Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis. It aims to redirect the US military towards a conventional confrontation with another great power state, discredit present and future budgetary restraints and further the empower the military-industrial elites all at the expense of the future prosperity of the American people. America's continuous war path is determined to safeguard the interests of the military class, sustain the country's war economy and reinvigorate its declining influence on the world stage.

Since the advent of the "War on Terror", American has undertaken in numerous military engagements in the Middle East and Africa. Described as the era of "low-tech wars," America's enemies have predominately taken the form of armed insurgency groups lead by religious extremists in protracted struggles of guerrilla warfare. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, America embarked on "nation building" policies to prop up democratic regimes supported by the recruitment of local law enforcement under the guidance of the US military. Like the war in Vietnam, the Middle East has sunk previous administrations into an expanding quagmire with little room to maneuver strategically. However, Defense Secretary Mattis recently remarked,

*"Great Power competition, not terrorism, is now the primary focus of US national security." [2]*

America's shift in military posture parallels the re-emerging powers of China and Russian onto the international stage. China's unmatched economic growth has given its General Secretary, Xi Jinping, not only newly found prestige, but also an ability to flex China's military muscle in its "apparent" home waters in the South China Sea; all to the ire of

America's regional allies.

Russia on the other hand, ruled by the acerbic President Vladimir Putin, has struggled economically, due to low oil prices and Western contrived sanctions, yet the country is determined to uphold its sphere of influence as evidenced by its military interventions in both Ukraine and Syria. With America's focus primarily on the Middle East, previous administrations' attempts to curb Chinese and Russian military ambitions have largely rung hollow. Trump's new defense budget and national security strategy is meant to be a concerted effort to redirect American influence to confront the encroachment of its rivals in East Asia and Eastern Europe.

One of the more subtle pitfalls of the new defense budget is its attempt to discredit the legal budgetary restraints directly imposed on the military establishment since August of 2011.[3] In response to the consequential debt rise by the stimulus package enacted by Congress amid the financial recession of 2007-08. The Budget Control Act, as it became known, installed several budget caps and "sequestrations," including "the reduction of roughly \$1tn over 10 years" in defense expenditures to help stem the tide of government spending.[4] However, thanks to several conveniently placed loopholes, the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), a broad based funding program for military endeavors, remained effectively uncapped allowing the military to appropriate most of lost revenue back into its coffers through the OCO. Despite the loophole and t the relatively insignificant reduction in military spending, it did not prevent Defense Secretary Mattis from stating,

"no enemy in the field has done more to arm the readiness of the US military than the combined impact of the Budget Control Act..."[5]

According to a statement made by the Undersecretary of Defense and Chief Financial Officer, David L. Norquist, the current defense budget proposes to surpass the budget cap by \$52bn.[6] Obviously the "cry wolf" tactics of the military did not go unheeded.

It remains clear that even the very gesture of reducing defense spending was enough to unnerve the military establishment. Their empowerment largely relies on appropriating the necessary cash flow to fund their military exploits abroad, thus preserving their indispensability to succeeding administrations. President Trump's defense budget should come as an alarm for many as it seeks to redirect the military away from the "low tech wars" in the Middle East to conventional style rearmament reminiscent from the days of the Cold War. This includes modernizing every facet of the American military arsenal, from nuclear missiles, to cyber-security to satisfy the eclectic tastes of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. Russia and China will no doubt perceive this massive military buildup as an excuse to begin arming their own initiatives, therefore provoking another unnecessary arms race.

The real losers in this unfortunate circumstance will be the American people. According to the Financial Times, the new two-year budget will "raise the US public debt burden to nearly 100 per cent of the country's economic output within a decade." [7] Trillions of dollar deficits are the reality that many Americans will soon have to face in the form of higher taxes to pay for today's wars of aggression. In a recent audit in 2016 by the Defense Department's Inspector General, "mistakes" in the military's accounting detailed up to \$6.5tn dollars of misappropriated funds channeled through the maze of the Pentagon's books.[8]

The level of accountability from the military establishment remains at an all-time low.

However, in a war economy, where the Department of Defense and armament industries are depicted as pillars of economic growth, it is of little surprise that the days of endless war are far from over. This is certainly not conducive to a healthy economy nor is it a suitable foundation for a stable long-lasting democracy.

It is an appropriate reminder, that perhaps a nation built from war, knows only how to war.

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## Notes

[1] Gould, Joe, "Senate reaches budget deal with huge defense boost," *Defense News*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/breaking-news/2018/02/07/congress-reaches-budget-deal-with-huge-defense-boost/>

[2] Secretary of Defense Mattis, James N, "Remarks made by Secretary Mattis on the National Defense Strategy," *Department of Defense Official Website*, January 19, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1420042/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-on-the-national-defense-strategy/>

[3] Harrison, Todd, "What Has the Budget Control Act of 2011 Meant for Defense," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, August 1, 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-has-budget-control-act-2011-meant-defense>

[4] Ibid

[5] Secretary of Defense Mattis, James N, "Remarks made by Secretary Mattis on the National Defense Strategy," *Department of Defense Official Website*, January 19, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1420042/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-on-the-national-defense-strategy/>

[6] Norquist, David L, "DoD Releases Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Proposal," *Undersecretary of Defense Official Website*, [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018\\_Press\\_Release.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018_Press_Release.pdf)

[7] Sevastopulo, Demtri. "Trump signs deficit-swelling budget deal," *The Financial Times*, February 9, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/9ec9af4a-0d88-11e8-839d-41ca06376bf2>

[8] Crawford, Jamie, "Audit reveals Army's Trillion-dollar gaffes," *CNN*, August 23, 2016. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/23/politics/us-army-audit-accounting-errors/>

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**Michel Chossudovsky**

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