

US lawmakers pass 680-billion-dollar defense budget bill

By [Global Research](#)

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Washington: The US House of Representatives passed a 680-billion-dollar defense authorization bill on Thursday that includes funds to train Afghan security forces and more mine-resistant troop carriers.

The bill, which passed 281-146, satisfied most of the funding requests made in the Pentagon's budget submission for the 2010 fiscal year that began on October 1. It reflected a compromise hammered out between the two houses of Congress.

But lawmakers defied President Barack Obama's veto threat and approved 560 million dollars to continue work on an alternative engine for the F-35 fighter jet built by General Electric and British manufacturer Rolls-Royce.

The bill however capped funding for F-22 fighter aircraft at 187 of the jets, meaning only four more of the costly Boeing-Lockheed Martin-built planes will be built, a cap Defense Secretary Robert Gates had pushed for over the vehement objections of air force leaders.

The compromise legislation would also raise military pay by 3.4 percent - half a percentage point higher than Pentagon recommendations - and assign 6.7 billion dollars for mine-resistant armored vehicles known as MRAPs, which is 1.2 billion dollars more than the administration had proposed.

Another 7.5 billion dollars was inked for training and equipping the Afghan police and army.

The measure "orients our country in the direction of the new national security strategy put forward by the Obama administration, which includes redeployment from Iraq and a commitment to the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said in a statement.

It namely requires the Pentagon chief to provide updates on the US troop withdrawal from Iraq, sets benchmarks for progress in Afghanistan, boosts training and funding for Afghan and Pakistani security forces and demands the administration track all defense articles provided to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

For missile defense allocations the bill funded in full the administration's 7.8-billion-dollar request for the Missile Defense Agency.

The legislation also includes measures to transfer detainees held at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to the United States for trial, under strict conditions.

It also demands that sanctions be levied against Iran if the Islamic Republic does not halt its controversial nuclear drive in response to the Obama administration's diplomatic outreach.

Hoyer hailed the bill's "landmark provisions" that expands the definition of hate crimes laws to include attacks based on race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or membership in the armed forces. It also strengthens enforcement of such laws.

The legislation still requires Senate approval.

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