

The record Pentagon spending bill and America's hidden nuclear rearmament

Andre Damon
14 December 2024

This week, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted, once again, to allocate a record amount of money to fund war all over the world. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), passed by the House of Representatives on Wednesday, stands at \$895 billion, the largest military budget, in nominal terms, of any country in human history.

The annual military funding bill, which is scheduled to be considered by the Senate and signed into law by the end of the month, has grown 47 percent, from \$607 billion a decade ago.

The average American has absolutely no idea what is in the bill or how it compares to historical precedent. This is by design. Beyond a cursory discussion of disagreements between Democrats and Republicans over gender-affirming care for the children of soldiers, there is a total information blackout on the actual contents of the bill.

And that is doubly true for its central policy focus: expanding and modernizing the US nuclear arsenal for what US military planners call the “new nuclear age.” Not a single article by any major US publication has examined in any detail the bill’s plans to expand the nuclear arsenal.

A completely different reality emerges on the House committee write-ups of the bill, which the vast majority of the public will never see.

The official summary of the bill by the Democrats in the House Armed Services Committee prominently highlights nuclear buildup, focusing on the bill’s “funding of nuclear modernization efforts” and its plan to “modernize the land-based leg of the U.S. nuclear triad.”

The bill, according to its official committee summary, “[R]equires a DOD plan for deterring and defeating simultaneous aggression by two near-peer nuclear competitors, including requirements for nuclear force sizing.”

The bill includes provisions for the modernization of every single component of the US nuclear arsenal, from nuclear submarines to intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear bombers, and creates and fields an entirely new class of

nuclear weapons, known as the “Nuclear Sea-Launched Cruise Missile.”

The summary states that the bill “authorizes \$252 million to support continued Navy development of the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile.” It directs the restoration of nuclear capabilities across the entire B-52 strategic bomber fleet, “requires no fewer than 400 responsive, on-alert U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) to be deployed” and mandates a plan for “acquiring and deploying up to 450 Sentinel ICBMs.”

In October, as the NDAA was being drafted, the *New York Times* published a massive feature story, based on over 100 interviews, of the secret plan dedicated to “making America nuclear again” through the creation of a “modern arsenal for a volatile new nuclear age.”

“If you don’t live where the submarines are welded or the missile silos are dug, there’s a good chance you wouldn’t know it’s happening,” the *Times* wrote. “The federal government has said little about the plan in public, outside of congressional hearings and strategy papers, or the vast amount being spent. There has been no significant debate. The billion-dollar programs move under the radar.”

Everything the *Times* wrote about the nuclear buildup proceeding “under the radar” and with “no significant debate” applies in droves to the coverage of this year’s NDAA, including by the *Times*, which hid a brief notice of its passage on page 19.

October’s expansive *New York Times* feature and an associated series of articles detailing the harrowing effects of nuclear war were promptly buried. The nuclear buildup is simply never mentioned in any discussion of the military spending bill in major newspapers, talk shows or the statements of US politicians—outside of official briefing papers.

The plan for the “second nuclear age” transcends administrations. Beyond the often bitter factional warfare within the US state, the semi-secret nuclear modernization plan, first conceptualized in 2010 under Obama and initiated at scale in 2014, has continued and accelerated under Trump,

Biden, and the second Trump administration.

The elements of the nuclear buildup that are hidden from view—by simply never being referenced in news coverage—are accompanied by plans that are truly secret.

Among such secret plans is an alleged update to the “Nuclear Employment Guidance,” on which the *Times* reported in August. “The White House never announced that Mr. Biden had approved the revised strategy, called the ‘Nuclear Employment Guidance,’” the newspaper wrote, “which also newly seeks to prepare the United States for possible coordinated nuclear challenges from China, Russia, and North Korea.”

But the content of the secret strategy paper was hinted at in remarks in June by Pranay Vaddi, senior director for arms control at the National Security Council, who in a speech to a US-based think tank proclaimed a “new era” for nuclear arms in which the US would deploy nuclear weapons “without numerical constraints.”

Vaddi declared, “We’re modernizing each leg of our nuclear triad, updating our nuclear command control and communication systems, and investing in our nuclear enterprise.”

The massive military spending surge in the US is mirrored in every country in the world. European politicians are actively discussing plans to double military spending, shifting from a target of 2 percent of GDP to as much as 4 percent.

“It is time to shift to a wartime mindset,” NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said on Thursday. “And turbocharge our defense production and defense spending.”

Of course, the greatest impact of the nuclear rearmament is what will happen if these weapons are used. But even without this catastrophic scenario, the multi-trillion-dollar modernization program—as part of an unprecedented increase in global military spending—has the most far-reaching social consequences.

Earlier this year, Bloomberg published an article explaining how the global military rearmament will impact public finances and social programs. “A new era of global rearmament is gathering pace, and it will mean vast costs and some tough decisions for western governments,” the article declares.

“The post-Cold War ‘peace dividend’ is coming to an end,” Bloomberg quoted one of its analysts as saying, with a “transformative effect” on “public finances.”

It declared, “How a remilitarized world can reconcile such commitments with finite tax revenues and ever-greater welfare and health needs is set to become a searing political question in the years ahead.”

The implication is clear: As countries all over the world massively expand their militaries, bedrock social programs,

including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid in the United States, will be slashed.

The incoming Trump administration, committed to continuing the unprecedented growth in military spending under Trump’s first term, has vowed to slash social spending to the bone. Under the leadership of Elon Musk, whose net worth has surged to more than \$400 billion, the Trump administration’s new “Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)” has placed everything on the chopping block.

“You look at the way in which that money is being spent through Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security,” said Vivek Ramaswamy, the proposed co-head of the department, “There are hundreds of billions of dollars of savings to extract.”

Meanwhile, the “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party is giving the new administration credibility. “Elon Musk is right,” declared Senator Bernie Sanders, absurdly claiming that DOGE—headed by an individual who runs one of the largest US military contractors—would somehow make military spending less of a bonanza for arms makers.

“Democrats can work with DOGE,” proclaimed fellow “progressive” Ro Khanna, asserting, “I want the U.S. to have the greatest military in the world and the resources to counter increasingly sophisticated threats from our adversaries.” It goes without saying that both Sanders and Khanna are fervent supporters of the US war against Russia in Ukraine and aggressive trade war measures against China.

The entire US political establishment, from the would-be dictator Donald Trump to all factions of the Democratic Party, support the massive US military rearmament, of which the nuclear buildup is, in the words of the Biden White House, “foundational” and “a top priority for the Nation.”

The passage of this bill, funding the massive US military under the would-be dictator Donald Trump, will mark a new stage in the bipartisan offensive against the working class, which will be made to pay for the military buildup.

For this reason, the struggle against war is inseparable from the struggle to defend the social and economic rights of the working class. The plans of the ruling classes for world war, dictatorship and massive social austerity must be countered through the building of a mass movement in the working class on the basis of a socialist program.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)