



# EXPLAINER

PROGRESSIVE  
CAUCUS  
ACTION FUND

NATIONAL  
PRIORITIES  
PROJECT

Institute for  
Policy Studies

## A Ten Percent Pentagon Cut Would Recover Trump Increases and Endless War Spending

Last updated: July 17

***Thanks to the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies for authoring this Explainer.***

As part of the annual must-pass military spending and policy bill (the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, or “NDAA”), progressive lawmakers have put forward a proposal to cut the massive \$740 billion Pentagon budget by 10 percent. The amendment is being introduced on the Senate side by Senator Bernie Sanders, joined by Senators Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren, and on the House side, by Representatives Barbara Lee and Mark Pocan.

With the Pentagon budget at historically high levels, and with additional increases under President Trump, a ten percent cut is an overdue correction to the bloated Pentagon budget.

### **A ten percent cut begins to bring Pentagon spending in line with historical spending:**

- Under President Trump and the proposed \$740 billion budget for FY 2021, Pentagon spending will have **increased by \$48.2 billion dollars and nearly seven percent in real terms**, since the last year of President Obama’s tenure.<sup>1</sup>
- A ten percent cut of \$74 billion would bring the Pentagon budget to \$666 billion, **on par with previous budgets from FY 2015 (\$657 billion) and FY 2016 (\$676 billion), and with President Obama’s FY 2017 budget request (\$666 billion).**<sup>2</sup>
- In recent years, Pentagon budgets have been historically high. **Prior to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military spending had only reached current levels during World War II – not during the Vietnam War, the Korean War, or the Cold War.** Immediately prior to the current wars, in 2000, total Pentagon spending was \$491 billion (in 2020 dollars).<sup>3</sup>

**Trump Pumps Up Pentagon Spending:** The Pentagon’s budget has been historically high for years, and has drastically increased under President Trump.

In the first year under President Trump, the Pentagon budget jumped from \$692 billion to \$741 billion – a \$49 billion, or seven percent, real increase in a single year.<sup>4</sup> A \$74 billion cut pays back that increase and returns the Pentagon budget to the level of the last budget request by President Obama, which was \$666 billion in today’s dollars.

A 10 percent cut is a strong step toward better spending priorities, and could make a tremendous difference in other programs ranging from health care and education to job creation at a time when it is desperately needed.

<sup>1</sup> Inflation-adjusted figures from the [Congressional Research Service](#) and the [Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019](#).

<sup>2</sup> Inflation-adjusted figures from President Obama’s final [budget request for FY 2017](#).

<sup>3</sup> Inflation-adjusted figures from the [Office of Management and Budget](#).

<sup>4</sup> Inflation-adjusted figures from the [Congressional Research Service](#) and the [Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019](#).