



June 1, 2022

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

Defense Policy and the Midterms

PRO POINTS

- **Despite an initial push to slow the major increases in defense spending** by President Joe Biden, the Pentagon budget has continued to increase under a unified Democratic-led government, and lawmakers are again weighing another increase to Biden's \$813 billion national defense spending proposal.
- **A Republican takeover of the House and Senate in the midterm elections** would increase the prospect for more hikes to defense spending to cope with inflation and counter China and Russia.
- **More emergency funding on top of the proposed Pentagon budget** could be on the way as the U.S. looks to sustain Ukraine against a long-term Russian offensive, finance higher troop levels in Europe and replace weapons sent to the fight from military inventories.

HOW WE GOT HERE

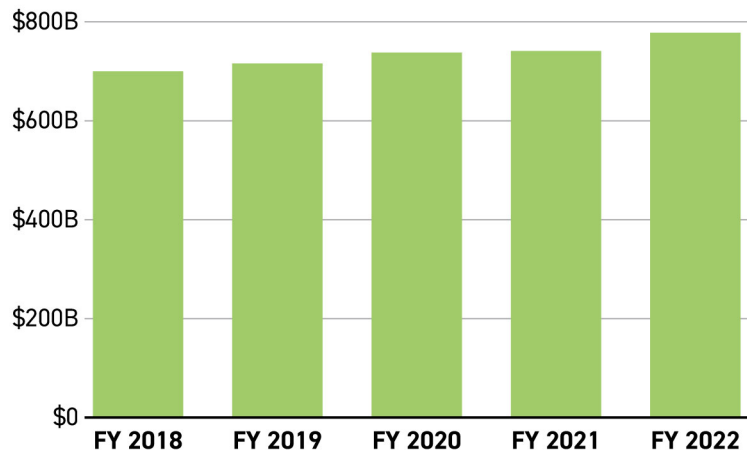
With Democrats holding razor-thin majorities in both the House and Senate, lawmakers in both parties have joined forces to endorse historically high levels of military spending as part of annual defense legislation.

The House and Senate Armed Services committees approved a \$25 billion boost to Biden's military budget last year as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, which sets Pentagon policy and budget priorities but doesn't allocate funding. A final government appropriations package went even further, adding \$29 billion to Biden's request.

Biden has requested an \$813 billion national defense budget for fiscal 2023 — including \$773 billion for the Pentagon — a roughly \$30 billion increase from the current level.

Defense spending on the rise

Enacted levels of the National Defense Authorization Act



Source: House and Senate Armed Services committees

The administration's proposed budget is the largest ever in nominal terms, but Republicans have argued inflation will devour the billions of dollars lawmakers added to meet challenges posed by China and Russia.



The individual military services have also outlined \$17.8 billion in unfunded requirements — priority programs that didn't make it into the Pentagon budget — that will likely guide lawmakers as they proceed.

With a tough midterm election landscape ahead, Democrats will again be confronted with whether to rebuke Biden's proposal for even more military spending.

House Armed Services Democrats already face a large swath of retirements, and others are preparing for tough reelection fights. A Republican takeover of the House and Senate, as well as the raft of personnel turnover, will reshape the Armed Services committees in both chambers and their oversight of the Pentagon.

WHAT'S NEXT

Even before a midterm flip, Republicans maintain considerable leverage to demand more Pentagon funding in a closely divided House and a 50- 50 Senate, where defense legislation can't pass without GOP backing.

The House and Senate Armed Services committees will consider their versions of the NDAA in June. Both panels appear to be leaning toward authorizing more Pentagon spending than Biden requested, but how much is unclear so far.

Republicans on those committees — led by Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma and Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama — are seeking a 5 percent increase, above the rate of inflation, from the current year's level. With thin margins on both committees, just a few Democrats need to sign off to boost the topline.

In addition to coping with runaway inflation, lawmakers in both parties are already at odds with the Pentagon over its efforts to scrap some weapons systems, including planes and ships, to save money.

With a sparse legislative calendar in both the House and Senate ahead of the elections, time will be short for lawmakers to iron out defense policy or spending legislation before the midterms.

Even if Democrats hang onto the majority, the House Armed Services Committee is set for a major shift as some of its most senior members head to the exits. The list of Democratic retirements includes Reps. Jim Langevin of Rhode Island, Jim Cooper of Tennessee and Jackie Speier of California — who chair subcommittees that oversee cybersecurity, nuclear weapons and personnel issues, respectively.

Should the House and Senate flip, Republicans will be in an even stronger position to boost defense spending. Democrats, however, would retain some leverage to demand higher domestic spending as part of any deal to increase Pentagon funding.

A Republican majority will also be able to bat down other proposals by the Biden administration, such as overturning efforts to curb spending on certain nuclear weapons. Biden



and Democrats want to halt the development of a new nuclear-tipped sub-launched cruise missile and scrap the aging B83 nuclear gravity bomb.

A GOP majority will also be able to more readily challenge Pentagon policy initiatives ramped up under Biden, such as ramping up the use of alternative fuels by the military to combat climate change and efforts to root out extremism in the ranks.

Biden could also request even more emergency funding to aid Ukraine as Russia's offensive in the country's eastern Donbas region drags on.

Armed Services committees in flux

Four representatives and one senator **face tough races** for their seats in the 2022 midterm elections



Rep. Elissa Slotkin
D-Mich.



Rep. Jared Golden
D-Maine



Rep. Elaine Luria
D-Va.



Rep. Steven
Horsford
D-Nev.



Sen. Mark Kelly
D-Ariz.
Chairs Emerging
Threats subcommittee

Eight representatives and one senator are **retiring or running for other office.**



Rep. Jim Langevin
D-R.I.
Chairs Cyber,
Innovative
Technologies and
Information Systems
subcommittee



Rep. Jim Cooper
D-Tenn.
Chairs Strategic
Forces subcommittee



Rep. Jackie Speier
D-Calif.
Chairs Military
Personnel
subcommittee



Rep. Anthony Brown
D-Md.



Rep. Kai Kahele
D-Hawaii



Rep. Stephanie
Murphy
D-Fla.



Rep. Mo Brooks
R-Ala.



Rep. Vicky Hartzler
R-Mo.



Sen. Jim Inhofe
R-Okla.
Senate Armed Services
Ranking Member

Sources: U.S. Congress, POLITICO reporting



POWER PLAYERS

- **Sen. Roger Wicker:** The Mississippi senator is the second most senior Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee. With Inhofe's departure at the end of the current session, he's poised to chair the committee if the GOP wins back the majority. He's advocated increasing the defense budget and expanding shipbuilding efforts. His state is home to shipyards that build Navy destroyers and amphibious ships.
- **Sen. Jack Reed:** Reed chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee after leading Democrats in the minority since 2015. As chair, the Rhode Island Democrat has walked a fine line on Pentagon spending, but ultimately backed GOP-led efforts to increase Biden's budget request last year. He'll return to the ranking member spot if Democrats lose their majority in the midterms.
- **Rep. Mike Rogers:** The Alabama Republican is now the House Armed Services ranking member, and is set to chair the committee in a Republican-led chamber. In his stint as the top GOP member, Rogers spearheaded efforts to boost the NDAA budget topline and has pushed for a harder line against China. During the Trump administration, he negotiated legislation to establish a Space Force as a military service under the Air Force.
- **Rep. Adam Smith:** Smith is in his fourth year as House Armed Services chair. He's resisted steep increases to Pentagon spending but has been out-voted by Republicans and Democrats on his committee. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he's conceded, will likely necessitate a larger defense budget. The Washington state Democrat will likely return as the panel's ranking member if his party loses its majority.