



Forum for American Leadership

How to Spend a Higher Defense Topline

September 7, 2021

Both the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and House Armed Services Committee passed bipartisan increases to the Department of Defense's budget request for fiscal year 2022. This investment would result in ~3% real growth for funding to train and equip America's military and serve as a necessary corrective to the Biden Administration's defense budget request, which called for a real cut despite the urgent challenge presented by China. Following the example set by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, Congress should pass defense authorization and appropriation bills with a significant and necessary topline increase. This needs to be done before September 30 (the end of the federal government's fiscal year) in order to ensure stability and predictability not only in terms of budgeting but also to ensure programs are not slipped and the industrial base is not negatively impacted.

A higher topline is not an end in itself, however. Additional resources – both for procurement and modernization -- for America's military will only be valuable to the extent they are tightly focused on measures that meaningfully enhance the ability to deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression in the most pressing and realistic scenarios. In particular, as the SASC-passed bill emphasizes, additional resources should be focused on maintaining the ability to deny a Chinese *fait accompli* against Taiwan.

While the Biden budget request appeared primarily focused on ensuring America's military advantage in the *long-term*, Congress should also ensure a proper balance of investment by increasing resources for preserving a credible conventional deterrent in the *near to medium term*. America's security can no longer depend on defense budgets that treat China solely as a long-term challenge.

Moreover, Congress must avoid using increased resources simply to reverse divestments proposed in this year's budget request. To be clear, some proposed divestments, such as premature Navy ship retirements, should be rejected. Yet, by supporting the divestment or retirement of systems that have already outlived their usefulness against China or Russia, while using increased resources to procure newer systems on near-term timelines, Congress can help accelerate the shift to a more combat-credible force.

As Congress considers the best way to use increased DoD resources for both procurement and modernization, here are some key areas for targeted investment:

- **Shipbuilding**
 - Additional Guided Missile Destroyer (DDG)
 - Any feasible acceleration of the SSN(X) submarine and full funding for Virginia-class submarine procurement and maintenance
 - Modernizing public and private shipyards through investments in infrastructure and the workforce, including measures proposed by Senator Richard Shelby, Senator Roger Wicker, and others

- **Fighter Aircraft & Unmanned Systems**
 - Additional F-15EX aircraft, spares, and support equipment
 - Maintaining F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program of Record quantities in near term, funding upgrades and maintenance
 - Any feasible acceleration of Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) fighter
 - **Munitions & Long-Range Strike**
 - *Navy*: Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS), Heavyweight Torpedo (HWT), Over-the-Horizon Weapon Systems (OTH-WS), Naval Strike Missile (NSM)
 - *Marine Corps*: Naval Strike Missile (NSM) and Tactical Tomahawk (TACTOM)
 - *Army*: Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRs)
 - *Air Force*: AIM-9X Sidewinder and AIM-120D AMRAAM air-to-air missiles and appropriate air-to-ground munitions
 - **Posture**
 - Guam Defense System
 - Planning and design funds for new Indo-Pacific military construction projects to enable forward force maneuver and resilience
 - APS-4 HADR site in the Philippines
 - Army military construction and quality of life investments on Kwajalein Atoll
 - **Enabling Capabilities**
 - Additional E-2D Advanced Hawkeye aircraft
 - Additional KC-130J tanker aircraft, spares, and support equipment
 - Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force radar procurement and upgrades
 - JADC2 initiatives such as the Naval Tactical Grid and the AI and Data Acceleration (AIDA) program
 - Mission Partner Environment to support interoperability with U.S. allies and partners
 - Military Information Support Operations (MISO) in the Indo-Pacific
 - **Readiness, Maintenance & Logistics**
 - Pacific Multi-Domain Training and Experimentation Capability (PMTEC)
 - Service flying hours programs
 - Aircraft and ship maintenance availabilities
 - Combat Logistics Fleet capability upgrades
 - Army Watercraft modernization and service life extension
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