

The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act Directly Benefits the U.S. Military

THE ISSUE

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is the annual authorization legislative vehicle for most of the activities of the U.S. military, from day-to-day costs such as personnel to major purchases such as aircraft carriers. The bill, which has passed every single year since 1962, demonstrates congressional commitment to our troops' mission. It is a result of compromise by both sides of the aisle and both chambers of Congress, and when reconciled, reflects a consensus opinion.

Overall, this year's legislation is a good package that is particularly critical at a time when the United States is refocusing its military on great power competition. The 2017 National Security Strategy started this shift, and it is one of the major themes of this year's NDAA.

BENEFITS OF THE BILL

- The NDAA contains a new initiative, the **Pacific Deterrence Initiative**, which will enhance and focus DOD efforts to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. The effort, funded at \$2.2 billion, includes investments in infrastructure and equipment to better allow the U.S. to compete in the region.
- The bill includes multiple new policy initiatives that will help the **U.S. counter China's attempts to steal technology**, including new transparency for Chinese companies operating in the U.S. and a new presidential assessment on how to counter Chinese espionage. It also contains policy provisions to protect America's defense supply chains from Chinese influence.
- The NDAA authorizes most of the President's requests to **modernize the U.S. nuclear deterrent** advancing the nuclear modernization programs of the nation across the board. These modernization programs have already been delayed to the point where further delay erodes deterrent capabilities.
- **Cyber security** is enhanced as a result of the NDAA. Seventeen of the bipartisan Cyber Solarium Commission's recommendations in the bill will enable the government to better combat cyber threats and improve America's cyber security posture.
- The NDAA authorizes **numerous critical equipping programs** that will help the U.S. maintain the technological edge over our competitors. These include providing an additional \$2.5 billion for an additional *Virginia*-class submarine, an additional \$500 million for a new large-deck amphibious ship to replace the fire-stricken USS *Bonhomme Richard*, and providing for an additional eight P-8A anti-submarine aircraft. The bill increases the number of F-35 jet fighters (the most dominant jet fighter in the world) to be procured to 93 and supports the procurement of an additional 4 V-22 Osprey aircraft.
- The bill authorizes **modest growth in the end strengths** of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, which is necessary for these military services to accomplish their missions.
- The bill contains **important authorizations for military bonuses, hazard pay, and special allowances**. This includes a direct benefit to servicemembers, which is especially important at a time of economic hardship and challenging recruiting circumstances.

- The bill contains a new requirement for the military to maintain a **30-day supply of the key personal protective equipment** necessary for protection against COVID-19. Currently, there is no existing guidance.
- The NDAA advances **defense business reforms** in how the Department of Defense manages itself and its relationship with Congress. It contains important policies on how to provide reports to Congress and the justification books for the annual budget request. These will increase the transparency and trust between the branches.
- The bill provides necessary policy to ensure the safe operation of **child-care facilities on military installations**. It provides discounts for families with multiple children and outlines additional reporting requirements for reports of child abuse.
- The NDAA provides important reforms for **Military Family Housing** to ensure that installations have direct hiring authority so that the necessary civilian employees are on-hand and able to supervise private-housing providers. Tenant complaints are given additional priority and attention.
- **Section 230** of the Communications Decency Act is in serious need of reform, and Congress should address this issue immediately. Congress should properly address Section 230 in a separate context.

BOTTOM LINE

The FY21 NDAA augments our military's ability to engage in great power competition while improving how we treat our servicemembers. Its passage will also send a clear signal to our adversaries that the United States is capable of properly supporting its military during these challenging times.