**[Democratic-Led House Passes Bipartisan, Bicameral NDAA Agreement](https://armedservices.house.gov/press-releases?ID=A0D354EF-123E-4D2A-9149-DF519D3051EB)**

The House passed a compromise version of the annual defense policy bill Tuesday by a vote of 363-70. The fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act would authorize $768.1 billion in defense spending, $25 billion more than requested by President Joe Biden.

The $25 billion increase to the Defense Department’s budget request comes as no surprise, as both chambers wanted to plus-up the Pentagon’s budget by the same amount. The bill would authorize a $740 billion base budget for the Defense Department, $27.8 billion for nuclear weapons programs under the Department of Energy and $368 million for defense-related activities in other departments.

The authorization measure now heads to the Senate, which is expected to pass it next week. Ultimately, appropriators will decide whether to provide the money to pay for it all.

**Deterring potential adversaries**

The bill would authorize $7.1 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, a Pentagon plan created by last year’s NDAA that would bolster the military’s ability to deter Chinese aggression in the Pacific region. The new authorization level would be $2 billion more than what was requested by the Biden administration.

The PDI is meant to mirror the European Deterrence Initiative, which was created in 2014 to respond to rising threats from Russia. In the latest version of the Pentagon bill, the European Deterrence Initiative would receive $4 billion, an increase of just under $570 million above the president’s request.

Those funds would accompany $300 million for Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which provides support for the Ukrainian armed forces, and $150 million for Baltic security cooperation.

The bill’s release came as Biden held a virtual meeting with his Russian counterpart, President Vladimir Putin, on Tuesday amid a buildup of tens of thousands of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border.

**Military justice revised**

The NDAA that the House passed in September would have empowered special prosecutors in the services to make decisions now reserved for military commanders on whether to prosecute sexual and related offenses. The final measure does that while covering more crimes, such as murder and kidnapping, in addition to sexual crimes, and it would make sexual harassment a crime in the military.

Moreover, the special prosecutors would be more independent of the chain of command than in the original House bill. Under the final measure, commanders would have the power to convene courts-martial, but the new prosecutors’ offices would be the ones to decide whether to bring charges and whether to go to trial.

**Civilian control**

The compromise NDAA includes a provision, authored by Wisconsin Republican [Mike Gallagher](https://www.rollcall.com/members/98216?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=98216), a member of the House Armed Services Committee and former Marine Corps captain, that would extend the “cooling-off period” for former military officers to serve as Defense secretary from seven years to 10.

Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III came under fire from lawmakers during his confirmation process for falling three years short of the seven-year cooling-off period. The members worried that approving the nominee would do further damage to civilian control of the military and set a precedent of ignoring a law that keeps recently retired officers from serving at the helm of the Pentagon.

Austin was given a waiver from Congress, the same waiver that was given to former President Donald Trump’s first Defense secretary, James Mattis, a retired Marine Corps four-star general.

The bill also would extend the cooling-off period for former military officers to serve as a service secretary from five years to seven.

**Afghanistan commission**

The bill also includes a proposal, spearheaded by Sen. [Tammy Duckworth](https://www.rollcall.com/members/24785?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=24785), D-Ill., to create an independent Afghanistan War Commission to look at the complete history of U.S. government failures over two decades of conflict. Anyone who was in a decision-making or policymaking role related to Afghanistan would be ineligible to serve on the 16-member panel, so it would not include any former generals, anyone who served in Congress at any time during the war or any former senior administration officials whose portfolios included Afghanistan.

Reps. [Elise Stefanik](https://www.rollcall.com/members/54019?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=54019), R-N.Y., and [Rob Wittman](https://www.rollcall.com/members/27705?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=27705), R-Va., who pushed for a hard look at the withdrawal of U.S. troops culminating in the chaotic scenes at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul during the summer, issued a joint statement praising the inclusion of some of their provisions.

“It is absolutely essential that we have an objective and thorough examination of America’s longest war to ensure the United States never again makes the same mistakes that were made in Afghanistan,” said Stefanik. “Through the creation of this commission, the American people will be provided with critical oversight for the sake of our national security.”

**Procurement levels**

The bill would support the procurement of 85 F-35 fighter jets for the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps, just as the Pentagon requested, and boost funding for maintenance. The measure also would require a number of reports to Congress on the F-35, including from the secretary of Defense that detail the sustainment costs of the aircraft and what his plan is to reduce those costs.

The legislation would prohibit the use of funds for the retirement of the A-10 Thunderbolt fighter jet, known as the Warthog, for one year. It also would prohibit reductions to the operational capability of any B-1 bomber aircraft squadrons until the Air Force starts fielding the stealth B-21 bomber.

The bill would restore funding for two additional Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and fund the procurement of thirteen battle force ships, including two Virginia-class submarines.

**Choices made**

Republican Sens. [Josh Hawley](https://www.rollcall.com/members/118396?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=118396) of Missouri and [James M. Inhofe](https://www.rollcall.com/members/400?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=400) of Oklahoma, the ranking member on the Armed Services Committee, succeeded in stripping out a provision that would have required women to register for the draft, even though the provision had been present in both chambers’ versions of the bill.

Virginia Democratic Sen. [Tim Kaine](https://www.rollcall.com/members/24568?utm_source=memberLinks&utm_medium=memberlinks&personid=24568)’s effort to repeal the 2002 authorization to use military force in Iraq also did not make it into the compromise bill.

**Helping Vets**

You may remember back in July, that we spoke about Jeffery Heise a Veteran with an amputated left leg, with a poor painful prosthetic and a broken VA issued iPad.

Robert Andersen was able to get this gentleman in contact with appropriate people at the VA, some issues were taken care of right away. Since the first contact in July, he received a new iPad and there have been sixty-nine patient contacts between his Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacy as well as other PAC Team members focused on the immediate and ongoing care of the Veteran’s needs.