

BACKGROUNDER

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How Congress Can Improve the President's 2020 Defense Budget Request

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Abstract

The current National Defense Strategy (NDS) represents a substantial departure from the counter-terrorism operations to which the country and the military services have grown accustomed over the past 18 years. As such, to adapt our military to its ends will require deep thinking and substantial changes in how the military services operate and organize themselves. The 2020 defense budget contains much that is necessary, but there are still some areas that require modification—and others where greater explanation from the services is needed. In that endeavor, the main question lawmakers need to ask themselves and the services is: "How does this program help in great power competition against Russia and China?"

Introduction

The President's Budget Request for the Department of Defense (DOD, or department) was released on March 12, 2019, with a stated focus on maintaining the readiness gains of the services, while starting to shift focus toward modernization efforts. In 2018, the DOD experienced a substantial budgetary growth, and in 2019, the defense budget contained inflationary growth accompanied with the stability associated with an on-time budget.¹

These budgets were translated by the military into real readiness gains that are already observable in The Heritage Foundation's *Index of U.S. Military Strength*, published in October 2018.² For maximum effect, the 2020 defense budget must maintain these gains, while continuing the effort to prepare the nation's military for great power competition, as outlined by the National Defense Strategy (NDS).³ The budget carries the initial changes of direction, such as the reduc-

KEY POINTS

- The President's Budget Request for the Department of Defense was released on March 12, 2019, with a stated focus on maintaining the readiness gains of the services while starting to shift toward modernization efforts.
- For maximum effect, the 2020 defense budget must maintain current gains, while continuing to prepare the nation's military for great power competition, as outlined by the National Defense Strategy.
- The level of budgetary growth in the budget request is a welcome development—and is aligned with the needs expressed by the Commission of the National Defense Strategy.
- However, there are still some areas that require modification—and others where greater explanation from the services is needed.
- The main question lawmakers need to ask themselves and the services is: "How does this program help in great power competition against Russia and China?"

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3402>

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tion in the number of legacy Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle modifications packages and an increase in attack submarines, needed for conflict and deterrence against great powers.

Congress now has the opportunity to shape the Department of Defense's request to even greater effect. In order to help Congress with this task, this *Backgrounder* identifies some of the more important elements of the budget request from each of the services, as well as defense-wide issues.

Department-Wide Issues

The Topline. The President's Budget Request for Defense has a topline of \$750 billion, which is a 4.7 percent increase over the \$716 billion appropriated in 2019. This level of growth is a welcome development and is aligned with the needs expressed by the Commission of the National Defense Strategy.⁴ Their recommendation builds on the assessment shared by former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Joseph Dunford on the need to grow the defense budget by 3 percent to 5 percent annually above inflation in order to meet the threats outlined by the NDS.⁵ As stated by the Commission, "In accordance with the testimony of Secretary Mattis and Chairman Dunford in 2017, this Commission recommends that Congress increase the base defense budget at an average rate of three to five percent above inflation through the Future Years Defense Program and perhaps beyond."⁶

Leveraging OCO for Base Expenditures. The Heritage Foundation has long advocated for having an Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account that is truly dedicated to emergencies, not to augment base funding requirements.⁷ This is why our recommendation was to lower the amount dedicated to OCO in 2020 to \$45 billion and transfer \$24 billion to the base budget.⁸ It is the start of a process to properly size the base and the OCO budgets and align them with their actual functions.

The proposal of relying on OCO to get the necessary increase for this year takes a short-sighted view of the rebuild. The process of rebuilding the military and preparing it for great power competition takes time and resources on a long-term scale. It is not a process that will be done in one year—or in three years, for that matter. It is a generational engagement that will take time. While budgeting in this manner would provide the resources necessary in the next budget, it would not set the department on a solid financial footing for the coming years.

End-Strength Growth. The budget request is very modest in its end-strength growth. It requests an increase of 6,215 to the active component: Of those, 2,000 would be in the Army, 1,623 would be in the Navy, 100 in the Marine Corps, and 2,492 in the Air Force.⁹ Previous Heritage Foundation research recommended an increase of 16,000 in the active component, which would go toward filling all the readiness gaps.¹⁰

1. Frederico Bartels, "The Earliest Signing of the NDAA in 40 Years Is a Giant Step in Rebuilding the Military," *The Daily Signal*, August 13, 2018, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/08/13/the-earliest-signing-of-the-ndaa-in-40-years-is-a-giant-step-in-rebuilding-the-military/>.
2. Dakota L. Wood, ed., *2019 Index of Military Strength* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2018), <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength>.
3. U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America," January 2018, p. 10, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2019).
4. National Defense Strategy Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessments and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission*, United States Institute of Peace, November 13, 2018, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/11/providing-common-defense> (accessed March 18, 2019).
5. Frederico Bartels, "Current Planned Defense Budget Falls Short," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3352, September 21, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/current-planned-defense-budget-falls-short>.
6. National Defense Strategy Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense*, p. xii.
7. Emil Maine and Diem Salmon, "The Future of Overseas Contingency Operations: Due Diligence Required," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4294, November 4, 2014, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-future-overseas-contingency-operations-due-diligence-required>.
8. Frederico Bartels, ed., "The Role of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in Rebuilding the U.S. Military," Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 208, February 6, 2019, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/SR208_0.pdf.
9. U.S. Department of Defense, "Defense Budget Overview: United States Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request," Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, March 12, 2019, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2020/fy2020_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf (accessed March 12, 2019).
10. Bartels, "The Role of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in Rebuilding the U.S. Military."

This issue is more acute in the Army, where its leaders portray this decision as being based on a tight financial situation and a poor recruiting environment. Yet they have also testified that the Army is too small to meet its missions under the National Defense Strategy at anything less than high risk and stated that the active Army needs to be at least 500,000 in size.¹¹ However, under a growth rate of 2,000 soldiers a year, it will take until 2030 for the Army to reach 500,000. The Army, Department of Defense, and the nation need to systematically and broadly take on the challenges of military recruiting, and the Army needs to grow more quickly.¹²

Avoiding Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC). The Department failed to request a new round of base closure and realignment, despite the National Defense Strategy stating that the “Department will also work to reduce excess property and infrastructure, providing Congress with options for a Base Realignment and Closure.”¹³ In 2017, then-Defense Secretary James Mattis wrote, “[T]he BRAC process provides opportunities for military forces to be more effective, for capabilities to be enhanced, and for savings to be applied to higher priorities.”¹⁴

A new round of BRAC is estimated to save \$2 billion, savings that can and should be reinvested in the force.¹⁵ The Pentagon is estimated to carry 19 percent of excess infrastructure that would be best reduced through a new round of BRAC.¹⁶ Currently, instead of

working a new round of closures, the Department is engaged in yet another infrastructure capacity study due with the fiscal year (FY) 2021 budget request.¹⁷

The Army

Army Modernization. The Army has achieved a better match of its modernization priorities to its Research, Development, Testing, and Evaluation (RDTE) funding. Of the roughly \$12 billion in RDTE funding the Army requested for 2020,¹⁸ they draw a direct link in their budget highlights to about \$5.4 billion worth of investments in their top six modernization priorities—(1) long-range precision fires, (2) next-generation combat vehicles, (3) future vertical lift platforms, (4) Army network, (5) air and missile defense, (6) and soldier lethality.

Army’s Improving Readiness. The Army continues to invest in additional Combat Training Center (CTC) rotations, requesting funding for 25 decisive-action training rotations, an increase of five from the 2019 request.¹⁹ Included in that number are four CTC rotations for the Army National Guard, signaling a continued commitment by the Army to National Guard readiness.

Army Joint Lightweight Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). The Army chose to reduce its procurement of the JLTV from 3,393 in 2019 to 2,530 in its 2020 request.²⁰ This is a program that by most measures is successful. The Army acquisition objective is about

11. Amy Bushatz, “Army Secretary Wants to Boost Active-Duty End Strength Above 500,000,” Military.com, August 9, 2018, <https://www.military.com/dodbuzz/2018/08/09/army-secretary-wants-boost-active-duty-end-strength-above-500000.html> (accessed March 13, 2019).
12. Thomas Spoehr and Bridget Handy, “The Looming National Security Crisis: Young Americans Unable to Serve in the Military,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3282, February 13, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-looming-national-security-crisis-young-americans-unable-serve-the-military>.
13. U.S. Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” p. 10.
14. James N. Mattis, Letter to The Honorable Mac Thornberry, Chairman, House Committee on Armed Services, October 6, 2017, https://armedservices.house.gov/_cache/files/f/b/fb219638-b7c1-4564-80f2-0c842313f6bb/10D7A4343FCD5F18CEBDCA60C80B7171.secdef-letter-to-congress-brac-report.pdf (accessed March 18, 2019).
15. Frederico Bartels, “Guidelines for a Better—and Necessary—Round of BRAC,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3257, October 19, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/guidelines-better-and-necessary-round-brac>.
16. U.S. Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Infrastructure Capacity,” October 2017, http://federalnewsnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/101717_DoD_BRAC_Analysis.pdf (accessed March 13, 2019).
17. Frederico Bartels, “New Department of Defense Infrastructure Study Would Delay BRAC Until 2021,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4856, May 21, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/new-department-defense-infrastructure-study-would-delay-brac-until-2021>.
18. U.S. Army, “Army FY2020 Budget Overview,” March 2019, <https://www.asafm.army.mil/documents/BudgetMaterial/fy2020/Army%20FY%202020%20Budget%20Overview.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2019).
19. Ibid.
20. U.S. Army, “FY 2020 President’s Budget Highlights,” Assistant Secretary of the Army, March 2019, <https://www.asafm.army.mil/documents/BudgetMaterial/fy2020/Army%20FY%202020%20Budget%20Highlights.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2019).

50,000 vehicles, and so by procuring at the rate of 2,500 per year, it would take the Army 20 years to meet its objective. The Army should procure the JLTV at a rate of no fewer than 5,000 per year, allowing it to complete this program by 2029 (versus 2039).

Army Joint Air-to-Ground Missiles (JAGMs). It is unclear why the Army did not choose to request to procure more JAGMs in its 2020 request. They chose only to request 233, even though the missile is scheduled to undergo a full-rate production decision in September 2019.²¹ The 2019 Army budget request reflected an intent to buy 6,741 missiles between 2019 and 2023.²² A balanced procurement would reflect procurements above 1,000 missiles per year. Congress should question the Army's leaders on the reduction and assess if the reasoning is valid.

The Navy

Naval Shipyard Upkeep. The Navy's FY 2020 budget provides \$454 million in 2020 and a total of \$2.7 billion over the next five years to modernize its public shipyards to increase efficiency and better accommodate new submarines and aircraft carriers.²³ This long-term shipyard improvement plan is necessary to the workload capacity of the public shipyards and to reduce maintenance backlogs. The Navy's decision to proactively schedule some attack submarine depot maintenance at private shipyards to better balance workload between the public and private shipyards is a welcome development.²⁴ This

will allow increased preparation and identification of the scope of maintenance earlier, which will reduce the maintenance period in cost and time.

Early Retirement of the USS Truman. The decision to prematurely retire the *USS Truman*, which has over 20 years of service life left, is shortsighted and counter to the desires of U.S. military commanders and the Navy's own force-structure analysis.²⁵ The Navy states that canceling *Truman*'s refueling overhaul will save approximately \$5.5 billion with an additional savings of \$1 billion per year from not operating the carrier and its air wing.²⁶ The actual savings to the Navy will be significantly less.

The Navy has already purchased two new reactor cores for *Truman* (for approximately \$538 million), and the projected costs of decommissioning and disposing of the carrier and its reactors are an additional \$2.5 billion.²⁷ A more prudent decision would be to delay any decision to retire an aircraft carrier early until the Navy completes its updated force-structure analysis.

Navy Procurement Delays. The decision to delay the procurement of two amphibious ships and cancel the modernization and life extension for other ships (such as the guided missile cruiser) should not be pursued.²⁸ These force structure decisions would result in the fleet only growing to 314 ships by 2024, instead of 326 ships by 2023 as outlined by the Navy's 2018 30-year shipbuilding plan.²⁹ The fleet is still too small to meet the global demand of U.S. combatant com-

21. Jen Judson, "Problems with Army's Future Air-to-Ground Missile Fixed Ahead of Production Decision," DefenseNews, February 22, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2018/02/23/problems-with-armys-future-air-to-ground-missile-fixed-ahead-of-production-decision/> (accessed March 13, 2019).
22. U.S. Army, "Justification Book of Missile Procurement, Army," Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Estimates, February 2018, <https://www.asafm.army.mil/documents/BudgetMaterial/FY2019/missiles.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2019).
23. Megan Eckstein, "FY 2020 Budget: Navy Cuts Ship, Aircraft Procurement; Vows High-End Weapons Procurement," USNI News, March 12, 2019, <https://news.usni.org/2019/03/12/fy-2020-budget-navy-cuts-ship-aircraft-procurement-vows-high-end-weapons-procurement> (accessed March 13, 2019).
24. U.S. Navy, *Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY 2020 Budget*, Office of Budget, March 2019, <https://www.secnav.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Documents/20pres/Budget%20Highlights%20Book.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2019).
25. Thomas Callender, "Does USS Truman's Early Retirement Herald a New War on Carriers?" Defense One, March 11, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/03/does-uss-trumans-early-retirement-herald-new-war-carriers/155443/> (accessed March 13, 2019).
26. U.S. Navy, *Highlights of the Department of the Navy, FY 2020 Budget*.
27. Paul McLeary, "Navy Unveils Record Budget, Pushing Above 300 Ships," Breaking Defense, March 12, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/03/navy-unveils-record-budget-pushing-above-300-ships/> (accessed March 13, 2019).
28. Paul McLeary, "Two LPD Amphibious Ships Cut From 2020 Budget Plan," Breaking Defense, March 1, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/03/two-lpd-amphibious-ships-cut-from-2020-2024-budget-plan/> (accessed March 13, 2019).
29. U.S. Navy, "Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2019," Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, February 2018, https://www.secnav.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Documents/19pres/LONGRANGE_SHIP_PLAN.pdf (accessed March 13, 2019).

manders, and delaying its growth to 355 ships would only increase the stress on the current fleet. The Navy should defer any decision to make significant force-structure changes through cutting new construction or retiring additional legacy ships until its force-structure assessment is complete.

The announced delay in construction of the next “big deck” amphibious assault ship until 2024—creating a seven-year gap in America-class construction—and deferment of the next two LPD-17-class amphibious ships until after 2024 further delays the increase of our amphibious fleet from its current 32 ships to a needed 38 vessels.³⁰ It also continues to hamper the Marine Corps’ ability to regain seagoing and amphibious operations experience that has been neglected both because of sustained operations since 2001 and the shortage of amphibious ships available for training.

Naval Command and Control. With the increased focus on unmanned systems and developing a more distributed force, it was surprising that the Navy’s 2020 budget and supporting documentation did not highlight any efforts to develop a survivable and redundant command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (known as C4ISR) architecture. Distributed maritime operations that are heavily dependent on unmanned systems hinge on naval command, control, and communications systems that can operate in a contested electromagnetic spectrum environment.

Navy Rushing into Unmanned Vessels. The Navy accelerated the acquisition of the Large Unmanned Surface Vessel (LUSV) with the purchase of two LUSVs in 2020 at a cost of \$373 million—and allocating for 10 over the next five years—for a total of \$2.7 billion.³¹ The Navy has yet to determine the concept of operations and command-and-control capabilities needed to employ these unmanned systems, as well as the desired platform characteristics and capabilities. While accelerated development and acquisition of emerging technologies is appropriate, history has repeatedly shown that commencing pro-

duction on a system whose design and requirements have not been finalized would almost certainly result in increased costs and construction delays. The Navy should build and experiment with two LUSV prototypes to refine requirements for these platforms before building additional vessels.

Challenges to the Naval Industrial Base. The addition of a third Block V Virginia-class submarine (SSN) in the Navy’s budget submission might challenge the current defense industrial base capacity. The Navy’s 2018 30-year shipbuilding plan did not show additional shipyard capacity for a third submarine in 2020.³² Previously, 2022 was identified as the earliest the shipbuilding industry could support building three SSNs. Accelerating that timeline by 2 years might lead to increased scheduling risk to the Virginia-class program—and potentially the Columbia-class program.

The Virginia program is just entering Block V production with the added complexity of the Virginia Payload Module, while construction of the new ballistic missile submarine starts in earnest in 2021. This presents a challenge for shipyards to have enough sufficiently trained and experienced workers for the increased workload in 2020. Additionally, with the current focus on building a more agile and lethal force that can project power into contested environments, it is surprising that only two of the three SSNs will be built with the Virginia Payload Module.³³

The Marine Corps

Marine Corps Ground and Air Procurement.

The budget request continues to support the Marine Corps’ efforts to replace obsolete combat platforms like the AV-8B Harrier and Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV) and to improve the mobility and lethality of its operational forces.³⁴ It doubles funding from \$167 million to \$318 million for the new Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) intended to complement and partially replace the aged AAV. This budget would procure 56 ACVs (of a planned 204) of the first variant, which is the correct path to follow.

30. U.S. Navy, “Department of the Navy FY 2020 President’s Budget,” March 2019, <https://www.secnav.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Documents/20presRoll-Out%20Brief.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2019).

31. Ibid.

32. U.S. Navy, “Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2019.”

33. U.S. Navy, *Highlights of the Department of the Navy, FY 2020 Budget*.

34. Ibid.

The budget also funds two important Navy-managed aviation programs supporting the Corps—the purchase of six CH-53K heavy-lift helicopters and 20 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters (10 STOVL [Short Take-off and Vertical Landing] variant F-35Bs and 10 carrier version F-35Cs).³⁵ The F-35s continue the Corps' transition to a fifth-generation tactical air fleet, while the CH-53Ks are needed to move and support Marine Corps forces, of increasing weight, across a highly distributed battlespace as envisioned in the Corps operational concept documents.

Lack of Emphasis on Experimentation and Testing in the Marine Corps. The 2020 budget request was a missed opportunity to make a more explicit case for robust experimentation efforts essential to determining the capabilities and potential new combat formations needed to move the Marine Corps' operational concepts from rhetoric to reality.

The Air Force

Air Force Munitions. The Air Force continues on the right path to rebuild and modernize its stockpile of munitions, adding 45,000 more GPS-guided bombs, 360 JAGMs, and 5,200 Hellfire Missiles.³⁶

Space Emphasis. The Air Force continues to prioritize space in this budget and has set aside \$2.4 billion in space systems acquisition and \$72.4 million for the initial stand-up of the new Space Force Headquarters, equating to 160 personnel billets to establish the initial elements and proposed structure of the U.S. Space Force.³⁷

Decreased Funding for Air Force's Flying Hours. Operational flying unit readiness rates are directly linked to flying hours, and this budget decreased flying-hour funding by \$129 million.³⁸

This budget proposes a reduction in flying hours from 1,454,383 in 2019 to 1,325,156 in 2020—a 6 percent decrease. With maintenance-manning levels now having fully recovered from the almost 4,000 manpower shortfall it had two years ago,³⁹ it is hard to fathom how a decreased level of funding leading to reduced flying hours represents the service's maximum executable level.

Air Force's Fourth-Generation Mistake. The budget includes the purchase of eight fourth-generation F-15Xs.⁴⁰ The way the DOD's acquisition process is organized, the U.S. will always have two generations of fighters on the books. However, purchasing for a "new" F-15X over the next eight to 12 years would mean acquiring a design that would be over *50 years old* when it is fielded—20 years after first accepting delivery of the last F-22.

Using modern-day sustainment strategies as a guide, the F-15X will be with us for the next 35 years. However, due to the expanding footprint of modern-day surface-to-air missiles, it will be all but limited to operations in the continental United States when the last one comes off the production line.⁴¹ The Air Force needs to acquire 72 fighter aircraft per year to ensure it has the capacity and capability required to meet the National Defense Strategy and, without another fifth-generation platform in production, those aircraft need to be F-35s.

Air Force's Misprioritization. In the fall of 2018, the Secretary of the Air Force stated that her service was too small to support the National Defense Strategy, that it needed to grow from 312 to 386 operational squadrons by the year 2030, and that it would field nothing but fifth-generation fighters and bombers to that end.⁴² However, this budget in no way reflects

35. U.S. Navy, "Department of the Navy FY 2020 President's Budget."

36. U.S. Air Force, *Budget Overview Fiscal Year 2020*, SAF/FMB, March 2019, [https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY20/FY20%20PB%20Brief_.pdf](https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY20/FY2020%20Air%20Force%20Budget%20Overview%20Book%20Final%20v3.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2019).

37. U.S. Air Force, "Budget Overview Fiscal Year 2020 Presentation," SAF/FMB, March 2019, https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY20/FY20%20PB%20Brief_.pdf (accessed March 13, 2019).

38. Ibid.

39. Stephen Losey, "'Going to Break This Force': Air Force Warns Cuts, Manning Woes Could Hurt War Zone Fight," *Air Force Times*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2017/11/21/break-this-force-air-force-warns-cuts-manning-woes-could-hurt-war-zone-fight/> (accessed March 13, 2019).

40. U.S. Air Force, *Budget Overview Fiscal Year 2020*.

41. John Venable, "The Air Force Wants to Buy More F-15X Jets, and It's a Huge Mistake," *Washington Examiner*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/the-air-force-wants-to-buy-more-f-15x-jets-and-its-a-huge-mistake> (accessed March 14, 2019).

42. U.S. Air Force, "The Air Force We Need: 386 Operational Squadrons," Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, September 17, 2018, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1635070/the-air-force-we-need-386-operational-squadrons/> (accessed March 13, 2019).

that assessment. Both the fighter and tanker acquisition plans do not match programmed retirements. This means that the Air Force will continue to shrink in size, and eight of the 56 fighters that will be purchased in 2020 will be “new” fourth-generation platforms—F-15Xs—that will be unable to operate in the environment described in the 2018 NDS.⁴³

Recommendations

Congress has a pivotal role to play in shaping how the Department of Defense prepares for great power competition. As such, Congress should:

- **Fully fund defense.** Regardless of how the Trump Administration chooses to split its budget request between base budget and OCO funds, Congress cannot lose sight of the need to properly fund defense. If the United States is actually going to compete as a great power as outlined by the NDS, it is going to need the 3 percent to 5 percent above-inflation increase in the coming year. Congress should not shortchange the Department when it is moving in a new direction.
- **Help the Pentagon further the military rebuilding.** The Pentagon has offered its vision to rebuild the military and prepare it for the future. Congress needs to take ownership of the process, as well, and help the department explain the nation’s defense needs to the American people.
- **Question the rationale of the Department of Defense.** There are questionable decisions being made by the services in this budget request, from the early retirement of the USS *Truman* to the purchase of fourth-generation fighters and avoiding BRAC, the most successful reform mechanism available to the Pentagon. Congress needs to investigate the reasoning behind these decisions and assess if they are adequate.

Conclusion

The current National Defense Strategy represents a substantial departure from the counter-terrorism operations to which the country and the military services have grown accustomed during the past 18 years. As such, the NDS will require deep thinking and substantial changes in how the military services operate and organize themselves. The 2020 defense budget contains much that is necessary, but there are still some areas that require modification—and others where greater explanation from the services is needed. The main question that lawmakers need to ask themselves and the services is: “How does this program help in great power competition against Russia and China?”

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43. U.S. Air Force, *Budget Overview Fiscal Year 2020*.