



Insight

Trump's Initial Budget Falls Short of Promise to Rebuild the Military

RACHEL HOFF | MARCH 2, 2017

The White House this week announced President Trump's intention to raise the defense budget by \$54 billion, which on its surface sounds like a step toward fulfilling his campaign promise to rebuild the American military. In reality, however, the additional funding is an insufficient increase to address the military's readiness crisis caused by successive years of cuts to the defense budget during the Obama Administration.

The Trump Administration touted the \$54 billion plus-up as a 10 percent increase in defense spending—but the numbers do not necessarily add up. Trump's proposal would bring the defense budget for Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) up to \$603 billion. Determining any percentage increase, of course, depends on which baseline one uses.

The White House uses the FY18 defense cap imposed by the Budget Control Act (BCA) as the baseline to calculate a 10 percent increase. But the BCA cap simply does not make sense as a baseline. (Even President Obama consistently requested defense budgets above the cap.) Instead, it is better to use the expected FY18 defense spending as a baseline. In that calculation, Trump's \$54 billion addition is only a 3 percent increase over President Obama's budget projection for FY18.

Congressional defense leaders have proposed a much more significant defense budget increase to begin rebuilding American military capabilities adequate to meet rising threats around the globe. Armed Services Committee Chairmen Senator McCain and Representative Thornberry called for FY18 military spending up to \$640 billion.

Incidentally, this figure is actually about a 10 percent increase over the FY18 defense budget projection. While the president's initial proposal is the beginning of the FY18 budget process, it is now up to Congress to draft a budget resolution.

Recovering from the damage done by a 25 percent cut to the defense budget in recent years will require significant and sustained reinvestment. Overcoming shortfalls in military readiness and modernization will not be cheap, but it will be necessary to meeting the current and future national security challenges. The true 10 percent increase for FY18 recommended by defense leaders in Congress would be a good start—and it would certainly be far preferable to the president's proposed 3 percent increase.

President Trump has acknowledged that the American military is "badly depleted." Unfortunately, while his initial budget is a step towards increasing the military budget, it still fails to provide a defense budget increase adequate to rebuild it. Congressional Republicans should fully fund the Pentagon to meet the country's defense needs.