



## Trump's Military Rebuild in Limbo for First 100 Days

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Trump has requested increased defense spending for 2017 from Congress, but that now hinges on what happens by the end of this week, when a short-term government spending measure for 2017 runs out.

In March, Trump requested \$30 billion more to supplement the \$583 billion in expected defense spending for 2017.

“We are going to spend a lot more money on military. We really have to. We have no choice. A lot of people think it’s a tremendous amount of money. It could be actually \$30 [billion] more than that. We are going to upgrade our military very substantially,” he said February 27 in Washington, D.C.

Of the \$30 billion, \$5 billion would go to war fighting. But \$25 billion would go towards a mixture of growing the size of the military, restoring its readiness to fight, buying more aircraft and other things he had talked about on the campaign trail.

Trump’s budget director, former Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.), called it the “first step in investing in a larger, more ready and more capable force.”

This past Sunday, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus on NBC’s “Meet the Press” touted the request as “one of the biggest increases in military spending in decades.”

However, that funding now hangs in the balance, as Congress seeks to avoid a government shutdown on Friday.

Passing a spending bill will require the support of at least eight Senate Democrats, making a compromise all but unavoidable.

In one prospective deal, reported by The Hill on Tuesday, Democrats would agree to only a \$15 billion increase in military spending, in exchange for Republicans agreeing to fund healthcare subsidies.

With \$5 billion slated for war fighting, that would leave \$10 billion for more troops and the things Trump said he wanted to spend on.

Republican defense hawks on Capitol Hill are fuming, and don't understand why Trump, or any administration official, is not fighting for his original \$30 billion request, according to a source.

"What is frustrating to defense hawks is that this White House could get every dollar of the supplemental they asked for, if only if they would be willing to fight for it," said a congressional staffer close to defense hawks.

"And that would be a huge win on a top priority of the president's in the first hundred days. Instead, they appear to be settling for less than half, leaving people to question how serious they are about rebuilding the military in 2018," the staffer said.

The White House did not respond for a request for comment by deadline.

"The fact that not much has changed in the defense budget in the first 100 days should not be a surprise," said Todd Harrison, director of the Aerospace Security Project and Defense Budget Analysis at the non-partisan Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The politics that brought us to gridlock on the budget were not fundamentally altered by the election," he said.

The prospect for Trump's plan to increase defense spending in 2018 is not so bright either, budget analysts say.

Trump has submitted a \$54 billion increase in defense spending for 2018, which lawmakers in both parties have called "dead on arrival" since it would be off-set by cuts in non-defense spending that Democrats — and some Republicans — oppose.

"Everyone's been saying it's dead on arrival, because it is," said Benjamin Friedman, defense analyst at the libertarian CATO Institute. "The accomplishment is that they submitted a skinny budget. The problem is that they submitted a skinny budget that is not going to pass the Congress."

"It doesn't even look to me that they designed their request to be passed, but sort of to make a point. If you design a budget that's going to cut domestic, non-defense spending entirely to pay for this, zero Democrats will vote for it, and you can't pass it in the Senate," he said. "So it's going nowhere."

Budget analysts say the \$54 billion — which is three percent above what former President Obama had projected for 2018 — would also not be enough to achieve the plan Trump laid out on the campaign trail.

That plan called for growing the Army by another 60,000 soldiers, the Marine Corps by another 12,000, the Navy by 76 more ships, and the Air Force by at least another 100 combat aircraft.

"The budget levels he has proposed for [fiscal year 2017 and fiscal year 2018] would not come close to supporting the growth in the size of the military he talked about during the campaign," said Harrison.

"To support the force he campaigned on would require a budget increase of almost double what he proposed," he added.

Harrison said it's possible that Trump will seek higher defense spending increases after 2018, but said it's unlikely given the political circumstances.

"It is possible to keep increasing the budget over the [five year outlook] but if he can't get a budget deal in [fiscal year 2018] then there is little reason to think he would get an even bigger deal in the future," he said.

Trump also promised to end the sequester, which refers to the budget caps that began under the 2011 Budget Control Act and will slash the defense budget by \$500 billion by 2021.

Depending on the deal lawmakers work out for the defense supplemental, the caps might be lifted for 2017 — much as how they have been lifted for several years at a time since 2013.

But eliminating the caps permanently would require a deal between Republicans and Democrats on tax and spending reform. Without that, Trump will continue to face an uphill battle to spend more on defense without also spending more on non-defense.

Friedman said without any major changes, the current defense budget outlook is more of the same.

"The basic problem here is that the deficit is really high. In 10 years, the latest [Congressional Budget Office] estimate is we're going to have a \$23 trillion national debt. Trump meanwhile is proposing a huge tax cut, which would add to that.

"And what happens when we have concerns about our deficit is Republicans say, 'Well we can't increase taxes to cover deficits,' and Democrats say, 'We can't cut entitlement spending to cover deficits.' And in this case they're joined at least for the moment by Trump, so what's left?

"It's the 35 percent or so of the budget that's for discretionary spending. We control that. Sixty percent of that 35 percent is military. So the basic dynamic of the circumstances haven't changed much since the passage of the Budget Control Act, which is that the defense budget is going to get squeezed," he said.