



War Hawks Want More: Claim Trump Budget ‘Dead on Arrival’

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May 24, 2017

Despite a profoundly skinny budget that eliminates deficits in 10 years, some Capitol Hill Republicans are unhappy with President Donald Trump’s initial defense bid in the 2018 budget negotiations.

The usual suspects are led by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who is Trump’s leading critic in the Senate, and a determined advocate for massive defense-spending increases.

Despite the fact the president’s budget, presented to the public Tuesday, includes a boost to defense, McCain and some other congressional Republicans claim it is not enough.

Trump has requested \$639 billion, including \$574.5 billion for the basic Pentagon budget and \$64.6 billion for contingency operations, such as current missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to CNN.

McCain says that is deficient.

“This budget is totally inadequate,” McCain told CNN’s Dana Bash on Tuesday. “It’s a 3 percent [defense] increase. It does not rebuild the military, it doesn’t give us the personnel we need.”

To some, the criticism continued McCain’s pattern of advocating for endless military missions and lavish Pentagon budgets, at a time that Trump has questioned some Pentagon priorities.

“The real question is, how much is enough?” said Christopher Preble, vice president of defense and foreign-policy studies at the CATO Institute. “The real issue is, how do we pay for it?”

Preble said the U.S. military is overworked with too many global missions, all of which he suspects McCain supports.

McCain's criticism is important, as he is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

McCain's public statement to the press was much more blistering, claiming that the defense request makes Trump's budget "dead on arrival."

"President Trump's \$603 billion defense budget request is inadequate to the challenges we face, illegal under current law, and part of an overall budget proposal that is dead on arrival in Congress," McCain said in a Tuesday statement. "After years of budget cuts amid growing threats around the world, this budget request fails to provide the necessary resources to restore military readiness, rebuild military capacity, and renew our military advantage with investments in modern capabilities."

And he wasn't the only congressional defense big shot who was upset.

"It's basically the Obama approach with a little bit more, but not much," said Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, speaking to the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution on Monday.

Trump officials quickly blasted the comparison to former President Barack Obama's lean defense budgets, often blamed by Trump for degrading military readiness.

"First of all, three percent is not inconsequential," said John Roth, the acting undersecretary of defense, speaking to reporters on Tuesday in the Pentagon. "The \$52 billion is real, it's a real request. Anything before this was sort of a notional paper exercise."

Roth said he would argue that \$52 billion "is not chump change," according to The Hill. And Roth told reporters that the initial budget is just the first step in Trump's attempt to increase the defense budget.

McCain, however, wants another \$30 billion in the 2018 defense budget.

Preble says he believes defense hawks likely desire at least \$700 billion annually for defense, even though current defense spending exceeds proportional spending during the Cold War.

For Trump, the GOP whining comes at an inopportune time. Trump is in Brussels, Belgium, where he will meet with NATO leaders. Trump will likely bend the ears of member nations about spending more on their own defense.

Most NATO nations do not meet alliance guidelines on spending at least two percent of their economic output on defense. Trump is perturbed because the less money NATO nations spend, the more reliant they become on U.S. defense spending, which includes longtime U.S. spending on European bases.

McCain's carping is also likely to cause Secretary of Defense James Mattis, a popular pick with Republicans, to have to reach out more to Capitol Hill — which takes time away from his Pentagon duties.

With Trump in Europe, McCain took his grievances to NBC's "Late Night" with Seth Meyers. McCain said he likes Trump's commitment to spend more on defense and to "rebuild" the military, but again said the budget was "dead on arrival" — which won applause from the liberal Meyers and his audience.