

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY JYOTSNA NAIDU

08.08.2023

Democracy Needs Healthy Debates About War and Peace

If there's one thing that should be subject to rigorous debate and the will of the people, it's decisions about war and peace. Unfortunately, that's not what we got with the huge military policy bill recently passed by the House and Senate

Somehow, the annual National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA — which can bring war or peace, and which now costs nearly \$1 trillion — never sees much serious debate in Congress about those issues.

Before this year, the NDAA passed easily for 61 years straight. The process is intentionally rushed. Hundreds of amendments are filed and voted at once, leaving little room for serious discourse.

This year was a partial exception. Lawmakers did debate the bill, which passed the House only narrowly. But they debated all the wrong things.

Representatives provoked hate with countless culture war amendments. Ignoring issues of war and peace, far-right members of Congress debated cutting funding for service members' abortions and diversity programs on military bases.

Here's what they *should* have discussed.

In 2021, the Congressional Budget Office published a report detailing three ways to cut military spending by \$1 trillion over 10 years without compromising national security. Instead, Congress has given the military even more money each year.

This year, Representatives Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Mark Pocan (D-WI) called to shift \$100 billion of the defense budget toward urgent domestic needs. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced a similar amendment in the Senate, which would have cut the Pentagon budget by 10 percent.

An American Friends Service Committee poll released earlier this year showed 56 percent of Americans would support cutting military spending to reinvest in those funds in public programs.

And amendments efforts would have exempted troops' pay and benefits from any cuts, targeting the bloated military contractors instead.

In the House, the amendment was never allowed for debate — and never got a vote. In the Senate, the Sanders amendment got just 11 votes.

To top it all, the Pentagon has never passed a financial audit! It's the only major federal agency that hasn't passed an audit, despite getting more discretionary dollars than any other. That means that we don't know where our tax money is going.

Who benefits from this lack of transparency? Exactly who you'd think — contractors who profit off war. Around half of the military budget goes to for-profit contractors who make excessive profits at the expense of taxpayers and peace.

With these robber baron-like profits, contractors have funded think tanks to produce favorable research and “expert” media commentary supporting higher military budgets — while lobbying politicians to keep spending on contractors.

In the House, this year's NDAA lost its usual broad bipartisan support because of Democrats' opposition to its far-right culture war amendments, not because there was suddenly political will to address war spending. The Senate simply passed the NDAA without the controversial amendments.

Culture wars aside, we can't let lawmakers go back to idly voting for pro-war and pro-contractor interests.

I do have hope. People are already winning when they fight. In 2016, for example, activists successfully pressured the Massachusetts company Textron to stop producing cluster munitions, which disproportionately hurt civilians.

And as the congressional opposition to those nasty amendments showed more recently, lawmakers can still respond to public pressure. The onus is now on us to demand our lawmakers have a real democratic debate on war, peace, and the military budget.

Democracy is at stake.

Jyotsna Naidu is a Next Leader at the Institute for Policy Studies.

CounterPunch 07.082023