

Testimony of Lawrence J. Korb
(Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress)
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Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Senate Budget Committee, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today to discuss the national security implications of the FY2022 defense budget. I am particularly honored to discuss these issues with Chairman Sanders and Senator Grassley. There are no more effective members of Congress, over the last several decades, in ensuring that every dollar authorized and allocated to the Department of Defense is spent efficiently and effectively so that national security is enhanced. Before I begin, I want to note that although I am a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress, I am speaking today in my personal capacity as a former Pentagon official and retired military officer.

Passing the annual defense budget is among the most important things the Congress does because in defense, dollars are policy. This is why I have spent much of my time outside of the military and government, including the last 18 years at the Center for American Progress, analyzing the annual proposed defense budget. Moreover, given the fact that even under the best scenarios fiscal demands on the federal government are great. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic there are even more demands, so it is critical that every dollar the Congress provides to the Pentagon be spent wisely.

In my testimony today, I will make three major points. First, the amount of money that the Biden administration is proposing to spend on defense for FY2022 is significantly higher than

necessary to protect our security. Second, the Pentagon is spending too much money on flawed unnecessary and very expensive weapon systems. Third, the new leadership in the Pentagon needs to make significant improvements in the management of the Department. At the same time, I want to underscore that while I may wish the new administration could have done more, I also appreciate it is an interim budget that it inherited. I welcome the more comprehensive approach the new administration has promised for FY2023.

The Biden administration is proposing a slight reduction in defense spending for FY2022; the outgoing administration had projected a budget of \$722 billion for 051 and \$760 billion for 050. President Biden's budget will call for \$715 billion and \$753 billion respectively, a reduction of less than 1%.

This budget request comes after an unprecedented and unnecessary increase in the level of defense spending in the four years of the previous administration. Upon taking office, President Trump declared that he had to increase the annual defense budget dramatically because of the poor state of the military he inherited from the Obama administration. But, as we have noted several times at the Center for American Progress, this claim was patently false. As we pointed out, General David Petraeus (former CIA Director and former commander of our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan) - in articles he wrote with the distinguished defense scholar, Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution - called the state of the military that Trump inherited from Obama "awesome".

Nevertheless, President Trump, with the support of the Congress, increased the level of defense spending from \$656 billion in FY2017 to \$762 billion in FY2020, an increase of over \$106 billion or 16%. As a result, as the Chairman has pointed out, the United States now spends more on defense than the next 12 countries in the world combined, almost three times as much as China and Russia combined. Even controlling for inflation, it spends more than at the height of the Reagan build-up, which I had the privilege of working on.

Defense budgets during the Reagan years represented 7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), whereas President Biden's budget proposal is 4% of GDP. As I noted previously, it is an interim budget and my hope is that the proposal for FY2023 reflects candidate Biden's campaign statement accusing Trump of abandoning all fiscal discipline when it came to defense spending. Since President Biden committed to withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan before the start of FY2022 – a commitment made after the budget proposal was released - my hope is that the savings will allow the projected size of the FY2022 budget to decrease.

Even if this committee is unable to convince Congress to reduce the size of the President's projected defense budget, there are at least four major programs that should be cut regardless of how much we spend on defense.

First, the \$1.7 trillion F-35 program needs to be dramatically reduced if it is not completely stopped. Continuing to buy 79 of these planes as it did in FY2021, or funding the 85 proposed in Trump's FY2022 budget, or the 95 it projected for FY2023, will - as Representative Adam Smith

(D-WA) the Chair of the House Armed Services Committee recently noted- be “like pouring money down a rat hole.” Not only is the program overpriced (it is nearly double the initial estimate) but it has not yet been fully combat tested. In fact the combat test has been delayed once again. Even if it is tested by the new date of September 2022, the program will already be five years late. The late Senator John McCain correctly called the program a scandal and a tragedy. President Obama's Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition said the program is evidence of acquisition malpractice. His Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said that when it comes to the F-35, we should stop throwing good money after bad.

At a minimum, Congress must stop adding additional F-35s to the service budget requests. As you know, over the last five years, Congress added 97 fighters, or about 20 a year, to the number requested by the Department of Defense.

A second program which does not need to be funded is the proposed new land-based ICBM, which is part of the \$1.3 trillion overhaul of our nuclear arsenal. William Perry, who worked for two presidents in high-level defense positions, including Secretary of Defense, is correct when he argues, in a recent book and op-eds with Tom Collina, that it is unnecessary to spend \$264 billion for 600 of these (an increase of \$43 billion over the initial projections.) Moreover, keeping the land-based ICBM can be dangerous since, in order to be effective and not be destroyed in a preemptive first strike, these weapons have to be launched on warning and cannot be recalled if the warning is false. Unfortunately, on the way out the door the Trump administration signed a contract with Northrop Grumman to begin deploying these weapons,

thus making it more difficult for the new administration and Congress to cancel or cut back the program.

I want to express my hope that the FY2023 budget (as opposed to this year's interim budget) reflects candidate Biden's campaign promise to narrow the role that nuclear weapons play in U.S. military doctrine and implements the Democratic party platform, which characterized the Trump administration's proposal to build nuclear weapons as unnecessary, wasteful and indefensible. I think that, stopping the land-based ICBM would be a good place to start.

A third area to analyze is the Ford Class super aircraft carrier. Not only does the fact that the first one in this class came in over budget at \$16.8 billion (exclusive of the \$4.7 billion spent for R&D) double the cost of the last Nimitz Class carrier, but, as the late Senator John McCain and John Shanahan, acting Secretary of Defense until mid-2019 under President Trump, have pointed out, the era of the large carrier is over. Therefore, I would eliminate advanced funding for the next two carriers in the class which together will cost at least \$30 billion.

Fourth, the committee should take steps to ensure that the Pentagon spends the funds it is allocated more effectively. It should demand that the DOD comptroller's office provide it with a list of the programs it claims waste \$25 billion a year. Next, it should demand that the Pentagon pass an audit. Two years ago it paid \$400 million for 1200 auditors, and still was unable to pass. Third, it should demand that the administration convene another Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) to eliminate the approximately 20% excess capacity and save billions of

dollars a year. Last, it should analyze why the United States needs to maintain some 800 bases around the world.

Thank you for inviting me to testify. I look forward to your questions.