

Weekly Report

National Security Division

Week ending February 15, 2019

Items of Interest

Congress Approves Spending Bill, Trump Declares National Emergency

Thursday afternoon, the Senate approved a spending bill to prevent another partial government shutdown. With an 83 to 16 vote, a Presidential veto could presumably be overridden if necessary. Five of the dissenters were Democrats. A few hours later, the House followed suit, handily passing the spending agreement 300 ayes and 128 nays. This included 87 Republicans voting in favor of the agreement, and 19 Democrats voting against it.

Congressional appropriations negotiators released their final agreement late Wednesday night, just ahead of the Friday deadline. The agreement fully funds the rest of the government through the end of the current fiscal year. At the last minute, negotiators dropped particularly contentious provisions that the White House did not support. One such provision was a push to provide back pay for federal contractors negatively impacted by the last shutdown (federal employees are already receiving back pay).

The deal increases discretionary spending for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to \$3.08 billion (which is \$269 million above FY18 levels), giving the FDA a top line budget of \$5.67 billion. Global health programs receive \$3.1 billion, including \$575 million for family planning and \$302 million to fight tuberculosis. More than \$500 million will be made available to bring high-speed Internet access to rural communities, a necessity to expand the use of telehealth in those areas. As part of the border security part of the deal, the agreement provides \$76.9 million to put in place more detection equipment and staffing at international mail facilities to intercept opioid and other narcotics shipments. Finally, the deal also includes a 1.9% pay raise for all federal employees, reversing the President's declaration of a pay freeze. Because of the way the raise is structured, employees located in the Washington, DC and Baltimore areas will actually receive a slightly higher raise.

Because of that 35-day partial government shutdown, the Administration's proposed FY20 budget will not be submitted to Congress until mid-March. However, appropriators on both sides of the Hill are sticking to their planned budget hearing schedules. The Armed Services Committees are also holding posture hearings and briefings. The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) still intends to have its FY20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on the Senate floor by the end of June, according to committee staff. Sources at the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) say they still expect to complete work on the NDAA in April (although floor consideration would come later than that).

Spending bill signed, as well as national emergency declaration

On Friday morning, the President signed the spending bill, even though he did not get more than \$5 billion to build a wall along the southern border. The President also signed a declaration of a national emergency. That will allow him to take money from other parts of the federal budget.

SASC chair Sen. Inhofe (R-OK) told reporters on Wednesday that he has told the President to “leave milcon alone”. Military construction (milcon) funding is an attractive target, with about \$21 billion in unobligated funds available for re-designation, and none of the \$10 billion in the FY19 appropriations bill obligated yet, according to congressional aides. The military is intending to spend that money on the ongoing project at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and family housing in Wisconsin, Korea, and Italy, among other projects. Without additional funding in the FY20 budget and beyond, these projects will need to be delayed or abandoned altogether.

The White House is also reportedly contemplating tapping several Army Corps of Engineers projects, as well as emergency relief funds slated for California and Texas.

Democrats have already promised to challenge the emergency declaration in court. Even the conservative-leaning think tank American Enterprise Institute has warned that this could re-define executive authority for declaring an emergency.

In the meantime, more than 50 Democratic Members have written to HASC chair Rep. Smith (D-WA) asking that language be included in the FY20 NDAA preventing the military from being used to build the wall. Such language has been considered for inclusion in the past two NDAs, with bipartisan support, but committee leadership did not think it necessary to spell out in law such a prohibition.

Based on Republican lawmakers’ comments to reporters in recent days, the President does not have universal support from his own Party for making this emergency declaration. This could become a particularly huge issue if, as threatened, Democrats bring a joint resolution of disapproval for the emergency declaration to the floor, forcing all lawmakers to go on the record with their votes.

Military Housing

The condition of housing available on military bases under the privatization initiative was a top issue on Capitol Hill this week. On Wednesday, the Senate Armed Services Committee held a [hearing on the topic](#). The HASC Subcommittee on Readiness held a less formal roundtable Thursday morning. At both events, lawmakers heard tales of hazardous housing conditions that caused serious health problems for the military families living there. Other complaints included failures by the private companies to respond to maintenance issues, resulting in unsafe living conditions.

The issue first hit the headlines last summer, when a military mom went public with the news that her children had tested positive for lead poisoning in their home on Ft. Benning. Immediately, Army officials declared they were taking action, including preventing families with small children from living in housing likely to have lead-based paint (basically, anything built before the mid-1970s). Reuters followed up more recently with a report indicating widespread problems in housing stock across the Services, and at virtually all military bases.

At the Wednesday hearing, Senators expressed outrage. Chair Sen. Inhofe (R-OK) declared outright: “We will fix this.” After the House roundtable, the subcommittee’s chairman and ranking member released a bipartisan statement declaring “our work is not yet done” on this issue.

China 'greatest long-term strategic threat,' to US, top Pacific commander warns

On February 12, the Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing to receive testimony on the United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea. Testifying were Admiral Philip Davidson, Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command and General Robert Abrams, Commander, United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/United States Forces Korea. Attending on behalf of The American Legion was National Security Policy Advisor Jeff Steele.

The United States is facing the most serious challenge to its national interest and the "rules-based international order" from China, the top U.S. commander for the Indo-Pacific region warned Congress. China's "massive effort to grow and modernize" the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is "eroding" the United States' "relative competitive military advantage" in the Indo-Pacific region, stressing that Beijing's communist leaders are sensing "weaknesses."

Adm. Davidson's warnings came as part of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's (INDOPACOM) annual [posture statement](#) — a comprehensive report on the combatant command's role, missions, accomplishments, plans, and programs — presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday in the form of written testimony.

Davidson, the commander of INDOPACOM, provided a summary of the combatant command's 2019 posture statement during his opening remarks, telling lawmakers:

We need urgent change at significant scale to address the challenges, strategic competition with China. Our military advantage and deterrent edge in the Indo-Pacific is eroding. The Chinese Communist Party leadership in Beijing senses weaknesses. They are testing our resolve, and if we do not act urgently, they may soon conclude that they can achieve their goals through force. We can't take these for granted.

Under President Trump's National Defense Strategy, the American military is prioritizing combating America's strategic competitors China and Russia over everything else, including the war on terror.

In the posture statement, the top admiral described the "rapid modernization" of the Chinese military as "the most important security development in the Indo-Pacific" in recent years, adding:

The scope and scale of that modernization has caused USINDOPACOM's relative competitive military advantage to erode in recent years. With the 2018 National Defense Strategy as a guide, USINDOPACOM is focused on regaining our competitive military advantage and ensuring a Free and Open Indo-Pacific over the short- and long-term.

Adm. Davidson identified the Chinese military as the top menace facing the U.S. military and American citizens in some of the regions covered by INDOPACOM's area of responsibility (AOR). Davidson declared in the statement:

The PLA is the principal threat to U.S. interests, U.S. citizens, and our allies inside the First Island Chain—a term that refers to the islands that run from northern Japan through Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia—and the PLA is quickly increasing its ability to project power and influence beyond the First Island Chain.

Davidson went on to note in the statement that China is pursuing advanced weapons systems and boosting its nuclear force as part of its modernization efforts. He testified:

Beijing continues pursuing next-generation technologies and advanced weapons systems, including hypersonic glide vehicles, directed energy weapons, electromagnetic railguns, counterspace weapons, and unmanned and artificial intelligence-equipped weapons. The PLA has also made significant technological, game-changing developments in its ability to defeat, or drastically reduce, the effectiveness of U.S. sensors and defensive weapons. ... Beijing is also modernizing and adding new capabilities across its nuclear forces.

While North Korea remains the “most immediate challenge until we achieve the final, fully verifiable denuclearization,” China “represents the greatest long-term strategic threat” to the United States, the admiral declared.

The top commander listed China as one of the top five key challenges threatening America’s vital national security interests in the Indo-Pacific region, along with North Korea, Russia, jihadi groups like the Islamic State, and “natural and man-made disasters.”

Adm. Davidson emphasized that the Chinese threat goes beyond mere competition between the traditional U.S. power and a rising China. He explained in his opening remarks:

I believe we are facing something even more serious, a fundamental divergence in values that leads to two incompatible visions of the future. Through fear and coercion, Beijing is working to expand its form of [Communist-Socialist] ideology in order to bend, break and replace the existing rules-based international order. In its place, Beijing seeks to create a new order, one with Chinese characteristics led by China, an outcome that displaces the stability and peace of the Indo-Pacific that has endured for over 70 years.

Specifically, the admiral highlighted Beijing’s actions on the South China Sea as a significant threat against the “international order,” noting, “Beijing maintains maritime claims in the South China Sea that are contrary to international law and pose a substantial long-term threat to the rules-based international order.”

Last year, China reportedly “continued militarizing” its outposts on the South China Sea. Beijing deployed “advanced military systems that further enhance the PLA’s power projection capabilities, including missiles and electronic jammers,” the admiral told the Senate panel, adding, “These actions run directly counter to [Chinese] President Xi’s 2015 commitment not to militarize these features.”

China is also using its military to advance its territorial claims in the East China Sea, the admiral cautioned. In last year’s posture statement, INDOPACOM warned that China’s “impressive military buildup” may soon enable the PLA to challenge America’s military dominance in the Indo-Pacific region “across almost all domains.”

The written testimony and video of the hearing are available [here](#).

Staff Activities

- This week, staff continued planning for the upcoming Washington Conference that will take place February 25 – 28.
- This week, staff continued planning for the National Commander's upcoming Europe travel tentatively scheduled for May 25-June 11.
- Tuesday, National Security staff attended a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing which featured testimony from the commanders of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea. See Items of Interest above for more information.
- Wednesday, National Security staff attended a meeting hosted by DC Executive Director Louis Celli with State Department officials to explore opportunities for collaboration.
- Thursday, National Security staff attended the 2nd Quarter MSO/VSO Army Chief of Public Affairs Round Table. This was an opportunity to hear about operations, issues, and information vital to our organizations as well as provide a location for face to face interaction with Army leadership. During the session we received information on Army operations, family initiatives, medical readiness, budgetary and congressional updates, and a discussion with Secretary of the Army, Hon. Mark T. Esper, concerning proposed changes to eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Read the [Federal Advisory Committee's December report](#), which includes the new eligibility proposals.
- Friday, National Security staff accompanied Lou Celli to a meeting with Donald Benton, Director, Selective Service System. Discussed was the interim report of the Congressionally-mandated [National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service](#), which is tasked to holistically and comprehensively review the Selective Service System, along with military, national, and public service. This report included the analysis of the impact of women serving in combat arms military professions.
- Friday, National Security staff accompanied Lou Celli to a meeting with staff from the [Philanthropy Roundtable](#) to explore opportunities for collaboration and to discuss a grant proposal.

POW/MIA Update

This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency made 4 new announcements. Click on the links to read more:

- 02/12/19: [USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Sampson, K.\)](#)
- 02/12/19: [USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Karli, J.\)](#)
- 02/12/19: [USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Stapleton, K.\)](#)
- 02/11/19: [USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Shelden, E.\)](#)

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