



## FPI Bulletin: Trump, Congress, and a Military in Jeopardy

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Less than four weeks remain before funding for the federal government expires. A shutdown would be a catastrophe for our military, but even if funds are extended at prior-year levels on a continuing resolution (CR), the damage will be grave. Military leaders have warned that planes will be grounded and troops will stop training under a CR. This would be a major setback for President Trump, who pledged to rebuild the Armed Forces after deep cuts under his predecessor.

Tomorrow morning, the chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps will [testify](#) before Congress about the damage that would be done by relying on a CR to fund the Armed Forces for the remainder of the fiscal year through September 31. The chiefs previewed their testimony by [warning](#) that a CR would force the military “to ground large portions of their aircraft squadrons, halt most training exercises, stop paying bonuses, freeze hiring of new military personnel and hold off on modernizing numerous new weapons.”

None of these impacts should be surprising. In a range of hearings over the past three months, military leaders have spoken candidly about the effect of a CR on various capabilities. In anticipation of tomorrow’s hearing, the House Armed Services Committee has [compiled](#) the clearest dangers. The Navy will have to ground four of its nine carrier air wings for the remainder of the year, while delaying or cancelling critical repairs on 14 ships. From July forward, Marine Corps units in the U.S. will cease all flight operations. Army brigades scheduled for deployment to Korea and Europe will stop all meaningful training as of July 15. Already short of pilots and mechanics, the Air Force will not be able to add the 2,000 new Airmen authorized by the most recent National Defense Authorization Act.

Now that a single party holds the White House as well as majorities in both houses of Congress, there is no excuse for failure to provide regular appropriations. Regrettably, it has become customary to [begin](#) each fiscal year with a temporary CR; not since 1997 has Congress passed a full set of appropriations bill before October 1. Yet in that time, there has never been a full-year CR when the same party controlled both the executive and the legislature.

For the past four years, the major roadblock to budget agreements was President Obama’s [insistence](#) that every additional dollar for the military be matched by an additional dollar of non-defense spending. Obama himself consistently asserted that funding for the Armed Forces was tens of billions of dollars less than it should be, yet he preferred to let the military face persistent shortfalls rather than compromise his dollar-for-dollar rule. Likewise, Republican majorities on the Hill preferred to let the military pay the price rather than fund additional domestic programs.

In principle, the Republicans had a stronger case than Obama. According to the Constitution, the federal government has a unique responsibility to provide for the common defense. Republicans pledged to repair this damage once they controlled the White House. Yet now, there is a risk of additional harm to the Armed Forces despite Republicans’ victory in the 2016 elections.

Recognizing that the Armed Forces need immediate relief, the White House [requested](#) last month an additional \$30 billion in defense funding for the remainder of 2017, in order to address “critical budget shortfalls in personnel, training, maintenance, equipment, munitions, modernization, and infrastructure investment.” However, this supplemental request will be dead on arrival if Congress falls back on a CR rather than passing an appropriations bill for the rest of the year.

A defense appropriations [bill](#) for 2017 has already [passed](#) the House by a margin of 371-48. The bill also has bipartisan support in the Senate, yet its fate depends on negotiating an agreement to fund the rest of the government, as well. In some respects, the political dynamics now resemble those of the late Obama years. There is a broad and deep consensus that the military needs extensive relief from the [austerity](#) of the past five years. However, partisan tensions on the domestic front may derail efforts to relieve the military.

The difference between this year and the previous ones is that Republicans cannot blame a Democrat in the White House. Of course, holding both houses of Congress doesn't mean that Republicans can have their way on every issue. Some combination of threat and compromise will be necessary to prevent a Democratic filibuster in the Senate.

Furthermore, the White House cannot afford to outsource responsibility for avoiding a CR. Congress expects the president to lead assertively on the issues that he identifies as national priorities. In the absence of presidential leadership, paralysis will set in. In the end, there is simply no excuse for a year-long CR when a single party holds both the White House and congressional majorities.

Last week, Lieutenant General Jerry Harris Jr. of the U.S. Air Force made a trenchant observation about defense spending in a [hearing](#) before the Senate Armed Services Committee. “A continuing resolution,” he said, would be able to do something to the Air Force that “our adversaries haven't been able to, and that's going to be to ground us.” If our pilots can't get off the ground, only Washington will be responsible.