

Barack Obama Signs \$619 Billion Pentagon Budget



Washington, December 27 (RHC)-- U.S. President Barack Obama has signed into law a massive \$619 billion military spending bill for the next year. In a statement, Obama said he had signed the bill despite being "disappointed" with Congress' refusal to apply his proposals for the 2017 budget.

"Congress again failed to enact meaningful reforms to divest unneeded force structure, reduce wasteful overhead, and modernize military healthcare," the outgoing president said. "Instead, the Congress redirects funding needed to support the warfighter to fund additional end-strength that our military leaders have not requested," he added.

The White House initially threatened to veto the budget because it was \$3.2 billion more than what Obama had proposed. By signing the bill, Obama also agreed with a 2.1-percent pay raise for the troops. He was aiming for 1.6 percent at first.

The lawmakers also voted to increase the end strength across various services, which means that under the new legislation the Army should keep its troops level above 476,000 in 2017, some 16,000 more than what Obama had requested.

The figure was set at 321,000 troops for the Air Force and 185,000 for the Marines Corps, respectively 4,000 and 3,000 more than what the White House had in mind.

Still, Obama said he would sign the bill since it "authorizes fiscal year 2017 appropriations principally for the Department of Defense and for Department of Energy national security programs, provides vital benefits for military personnel and their families, and includes authorities to facilitate ongoing operations around the globe."

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed the bill with veto-proof votes earlier this month. The legislation also included a ban on the government's efforts to close military bases.

Sponsored by Republican Senator John McCain, the act also featured language restricting the closure of the military prison at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo, located on illegally occupied Cuban territory, provoking criticism from the president. Obama, who has failed to deliver on his 2008 campaign pledge to close the infamous prison, said that unless Congress changes course on Guantanamo, "it will be judged harshly by history."

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