National Security Matters

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026

Congressional Inaction Continues

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To meet the ION's deadline for this column, I'm drafting this in late October, as Congress continues to neglect its primary responsibility, passing appropriations to keep government functions and programs running.

As of this writing, there is no end in sight.

Regardless of what unfolds in the coming days or weeks, it is nearly certain that any measure to reopen the government will be a short-term continuing resolution (CR), likely composed of one or more omnibus bills, rather than specific appropriations for any of the 12 annual bills that Congress is supposed to enact.

When that future CR expires, we could very well be right back where we are now, at an impasse for funding government operations.

Since the current Congressional budgeting and spending process was established nearly five decades ago, Congress has completed appropriations before the start of the fiscal year (FY) only four times: FY1977 (the first year of the current system), FY1989, FY1995, and FY1997. Given this poor on-time record, it's difficult to have much confidence that appropriations for FY2026 will be in place anytime soon.

FY26 Budgeting Irregularities

Preparing for the FY26 congressional budgeting process began with an unusual twist. On May 2, 2025, the administration released a "skinny" discretionary budget request rather than the traditional full submission typically delivered in early February. This abbreviated request outlined topline discretionary spending levels, including a proposed $163 billion cut to non-defense discretionary spending, but omitted detailed account-level justifications and any proposed changes to mandatory spending or tax policy.

The administration did not release the fuller budget materials, including an appendix with appropriation-level detail, until the end of May, with additional information following later. This delayed and piecemeal approach marked a significant departure from the standard process and made it more difficult for lawmakers, analysts, and the public to fully assess the administration's budget priorities.

National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)

When compared to the appropriations process, Congress has a somewhat better track record with passing annual authorization bills through the NDAA process.

However, even here, deadlines are rarely met. Since 1977, the NDAA has been delayed by an average of 44 days past the start of the fiscal year.

Thirty days into FY2026, both the House and Senate have passed their respective versions of the NDAA. In early July, the Senate Armed Services Committee completed its markup of the FY2026 NDAA. Shortly thereafter, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) finalized its own version.

The full House passed its bill, H.R. 3838, titled the *Streamlining Procurement for Effective Execution and Delivery and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026*, on September 10th. On October 9th, the Senate passed its version, S. 2296, by a bipartisan vote of 77–20. The accompanying report is Senate Report 119-39.

Both chambers must now reconcile their differences in a conference committee. Against that backdrop, the following is a summary of the GPS/PNT-related funding authorizations and reporting requirements included in both bills prior to conference.

GPS/PNT References in the Two Bills

Under the topic of *Precision Artillery Munitions Modernization,* the HASC seeks a briefing from the Secretary of the Army by December 30, 2025, on an assessment to enhance the performance of *Excalibur increment 1b* in GPS-denied environments to include the feasibility of a home-on-jam capability.

Under the topic of *Electronic Warfare Testing and*

Requirements for Group 1-3 Unmanned Aerial Systems and Loitering Munitions, the HASC seeks a briefing from the Secretary of Defense not later than December 1, 2025, on the Department's ability to employ Group 1-3 Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) against adversary Electronic Warfare (EW) systems. The briefing should also include how the Department tests Group 1-3 UAS in realistic EW environments, and what requirements exist for Group 1-3 UAS to enable operations in RF and GPS denied environments.

Under the topic of *Integration of Terrestrial-Based Positioning, Navigation, and Timing Systems for Global Positioning System Denied Environments,* the HASC directs the Secretary of Defense in coordination with the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force to provide a brief on the feasibility, operational impact, and cost-effectiveness of integrating terrestrial-based APNT solutions into the Department's PNT architecture.

Under the topic of *Commercial Low Earth Orbit Resilient Positioning, Navigation, and Timing,* the HASC directs the Secretary of the Air Force to provide a report not later than March 1, 2026, on commercial LEO PNT services to operate in the absence of GPS, ability to resist jamming and spoofing in comparison to GPS, the ability to provide timing accuracy less than 10 nanoseconds, and positioning accuracy of less than 30 centimeters.

Under the topic of *Comprehensive Strategy for GPS Capabilities*, the HASC has expressed concern over the lack of a strategic, comprehensive plan from the U.S. Space Force regarding PNT capabilities. In the bill, the committee noted that in 2024 the U.S. Air Force realigned appropriated funds to support an urgent operational development effort known as Resilient GPS (R-GPS). However, the FY2026 budget request did not include funding for R-GPS, nor did it allocate resources for the procurement of any GPS III Follow-On (GPS IIIF) satellites within the program of record. In response, the HASC directed the Secretary of the Air Force to provide a briefing by February 1, 2026, assessing current and future threats to the existing GPS architecture.

In the Senate's NDAA markup, under Section 1544. *Improving United State Missile Defense Capabilities*, there is a requirement to assess the funding needs to accelerate the development and fielding of resilient PNT solutions capable of operating effectively in GPS denied environments. Such solutions may include quantum-enhanced inertial and atomic clock technologies, terrestrial-based systems, radar-based tracking, vision aid navigation, LEO signals, and commercially available PNT systems that leverage advanced sensor fusion, and artificial intelligence-driven error correction.

With respect to authorization recommendations in both the House and Senate NDAAs, the only deviation from the President's Budget Request related to GPS/PNT appears in the House bill, which includes a $15 million plus-up for GPS IIIF.

In total across all DoD appropriations, the House markup recommends $354 million in additional funds compared to the President's budget and the Senate version of the NDAA, bringing the total authorization to $1.085 trillion.

Critical PNT Decisions

The broad range of resource-driven issues, about which the Congress is seeking GPS/PNT information, highlights the many uncertainties facing the national PNT Enterprise as GPS modernization lags while foreign GNSS challenges mount.

The uncertainties affect not only GPS capabilities for the military, but also the development and use of diverse additional sources of PNT information to complement and backup GPS for all national security applications.

Both the Congress and the new administration must come to closure rapidly on continuing modernization of GPS, the fielding of integrated PNT applications to ensure PNT resilience for the Joint Force, and resilient PNT for domestic critical infrastructure operations.

These resourcing activities must go forward for both military and civil users as the Defense Department adopts a posture more directly focused on its warfighting responsibilities.

Marching Forward as the Department of War

A memorandum from the Secretary of War, dated October 10, 2025, and titled *Department of War Secondary Titles,* directs that, effective immediately, designated officials and organizations within the Department of Defense "will use the secondary title, e.g., Under Secretary of War (Policy), etc., for all official actions … where it does not create confusion with respect to legal, statutory, or international obligations."

The memo concludes with a forecast of an action plan to be developed within 45 days, including a legislative proposal to officially rename the Department of Defense as the Department of War in law.

With these developments underway, it is now up to the Congress to determine how future National *Defense* Authorization Acts will be titled. Time will tell.

Ending Comment

For more than 15 years, this column has carried the title Defense Matters based upon the significant influence DoD activities have had on the evolution of the national PNT Enterprise. My contributions consistently reflect that focus and will continue to do so, though it is neither necessary nor appropriate to carry forward the new Department of War naming convention.

For that reason, the column will now be titled ***National Security Matters.*** This new title continues to reflect the influence of GPS and related PNT systems on national military effectiveness, while also recognizing their vital role in our economy and the resilient operation of critical domestic infrastructure.

It underscores the reality that ensuring PNT resilience is not solely a responsibility of the DoD, but a shared imperative across civil departments and agencies as well as from the legislative and, potentially, even judicial branches of our government.