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Pentagon Readies \$6 Billion Supplemental OCO Request

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Related Expert: Katherine Blakeley

Kate Blakeley, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments who previously worked at the Congressional Research Service, said splitting the \$6 billion OCO supplemental between supporting troop levels in Afghanistan and the fight against ISIL would give both Democrats and Republicans "additional ammunition in the upcoming budget fight."

"Those like Rep. Thornberry who support using OCO to raise DOD funding levels overall will be able to argue that DOD faces an even greater funding shortfall; those who have been skeptical of DOD's over-reliance on OCO will be able to argue for a much smaller use of OCO, tying it more closely to actual operational demands," she said.

Blakeley also said the \$3 billion request to maintain troop levels in Afghanistan could also help "illuminate how much of recent OCO requests have actually been necessary to support Operation Inherent Resolve versus supporting base-budget regional presence."

The Pentagon recently told Inside Defense that half of its \$58.8 billion OCO account is used to finance enduring requirements like forward basing and troop readiness.

Blakeley said the supplemental could put the Pentagon in an awkward position with some Democrats because it has previously requested that \$5.2 billion of the OCO budget be authorized for base operations.

"Asking for a \$6 billion supplemental for Afghanistan and the [ISIL] fight does risk Democrats in Congress -- who have opposed greater defense spending without equal increases in non-defense funding -- blocking it, arguing that DOD should use the surplus \$5.2 billion in the original FY-17 OCO request instead," she said, adding: "If you continue to hold that all of the OCO request supports contingency operations, this position has a certain amount of internal logic to it."

Blakeley said she could imagine the argument.

"The Pentagon had a negotiated ceiling of \$58.8 billion for OCO," she said. "The Pentagon said only \$53.6 billion of it was for actual contingency needs? Great, use the extra \$5.2 billion for base budget requirements. Now the Pentagon needs about \$6 billion more in OCO for troops in Afghanistan and fighting ISIS? Guess that \$5.2 billion isn't extra anymore, [so] allocate that to actual OCO needs before asking for more money."