

# Preface

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Since the inaugural *2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength*, subsequent editions have demonstrated an unsettling trend, and the *2018 Index* leaves no room for interpretation: Our military has undoubtedly grown weaker. Service chiefs confirm these findings in testimony and reports to Congress. Yet, despite widespread agreement, critical maintenance and modernization efforts continue to be deferred and underfunded. Personnel and platforms decline in number as threats proliferate. The result is a force of growing age and declining capability, tasked with greater responsibilities but apportioned fewer resources.

Meanwhile, our competitors and enemies are spending more and acting more aggressively. Russian technological advances in ground combat vehicles rival and may even surpass our own; North Korea's nuclear weapons threaten regional forces as well as the U.S. homeland; and China is cementing its territorial claims in contested waters, militarizing islands, and building the beginnings of a blue-water navy.

Although the U.S. remains the world's dominant military power, recent developments should demonstrate that this status is not assured. In 2017, General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned that "without sustained, sufficient, and predictable funding...we will lose our ability to project power" within the next five years.

Global power projection enables the military to defeat threats before they can reach U.S. shores, protect shipping lanes that support

global commerce, and provide reassurance and support to U.S. allies. It is a critical component of America's security and economic prosperity—and it is at risk.

As U.S. military strength continues to deteriorate, more and more people are taking notice. Since November 2016, when the *2017 Index* was launched online, there have been nearly 950,000 page views—a fivefold increase since the inaugural 2015 edition.

There is also movement on Capitol Hill. Both the House and Senate versions of the FY 2018 appropriations bills authorize defense spending that is above statutorily enacted budget caps and even above the levels requested in the President's budget. Congress understands the sad current state of military readiness and the consequences of sustained underinvestment in military capabilities and programs. Yet it continues to trip on its own shoelaces.

It continues to be our aim to inform Congress about the issues facing our military and nation, but after five years of arbitrary defense budget caps, it is time for Congress to stop discussing the problem and do something to solve it. The problem is clear, and the solution is simple: *Fund the military at a level that matches the importance of securing the country and our national interests.* In other words, stop squabbling and pass a budget that will truly provide for the common defense.

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