

Conclusion: U.S. Military Power

The Active Component of the U.S. military is two-thirds the size it should be, operates equipment that is older than should be the case, and is burdened by readiness levels that are problematic. Some progress has been made, but it has been made at the expense of both capacity and modernization. Accordingly, this *Index* assesses the:

- **Army as “Marginal.”** The Army’s score remains “marginal” in the *2021 Index*. The Army has fully committed to modernizing its forces for great-power competition, but its programs are still in their development phase, and it will be a few years before they are ready for acquisition and fielding. It remains “weak” in capacity with 70 percent of the force it should have but has significantly increased the readiness of the force, scoring the highest level of “very strong” in 2020. The Army has a better sense of what it needs for war against a peer, but funding uncertainties could threaten its ability to realize its goals.
- **Navy as “Marginal.”** The Navy’s overall score remains “marginal” in the *2021 Index* but is trending toward “weak” in capability and readiness and remains “weak” in capacity. The technology gap between the Navy and its peer competitors is narrowing in favor of competitors, and the Navy’s ships are aging faster than they are being replaced. The Navy sustained its focus on improving readiness in 2020, but it has a very large hole to fill, its fleet is too small relative to workload, and supporting shipyards are overwhelmed by the amount of repair work needed to make more ships available.
- **Air Force as “Marginal.”** The USAF scores “marginal” in all three measures but is trending upward in capability and capacity. The shortage of pilots and flying time for those pilots degrades the ability of the Air Force to generate the amount and quality of combat air power that would be needed to meet wartime requirements. Although it could eventually win a single major regional contingency (MRC), the time needed to win that battle and the attendant rates of attrition would be much higher than they would be if the service had moved aggressively to increase high-end training and acquire the fifth-generation weapon systems required to dominate such a fight.
- **Marine Corps as “Marginal.”** The score for the Corps’ capacity was raised to “marginal” from “weak” but only because this *Index* has changed the threshold, lowering it from 36 infantry battalions to 30 battalions in acknowledgment of the Corps’ argument that it is a one-war force that also stands ready for a broad range of smaller crisis-response tasks. However, the Corps intends to reduce the number of its battalions further from 24 to 21, which would return it to a score of “weak.” The service is moving ahead aggressively with a redesign of its operating forces, but it remains hampered by old equipment, and

U.S. Military Power: Army

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Capacity		✓			
Capability			✓		
Readiness					✓
OVERALL			✓		

U.S. Military Power: Navy

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Capacity		✓			
Capability			✓		
Readiness			✓		
OVERALL			✓		

U.S. Military Power: Air Force

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Capacity			✓		
Capability			✓		
Readiness			✓		
OVERALL			✓		

U.S. Military Power: Marine Corps

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Capacity			✓		
Capability			✓		
Readiness			✓		
OVERALL			✓		

problematic funding continues to constrain its deployment-to-dwell ratio to 1:2 (too few units for its workload), forcing it to prioritize readiness for deployed and next-to-deploy units at the expense of other units across the force.

- **Space Force as “Not Assessed.”** The Space Force was formally established on December 20, 2019, as a result of an earlier proposal by President Trump and legislation passed by Congress. As of mid-2020, the Space Force is still in the process of

U.S. Military Power: Space (not assessed this year)

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Capacity	n/a				
Capability					
Readiness					
OVERALL	n/a				

U.S. Military Power: Nuclear

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Nuclear Stockpile				✓	
Delivery Platform Reliability				✓	
Warhead Modernization			✓		
Delivery Systems Modernization				✓	
Nuclear Weapons Complex			✓		
National Labs Talent			✓		
Force Readiness				✓	
Allied Assurance				✓	
Nuclear Test Readiness		✓			
OVERALL			✓		

being established, and personnel numbers are very small. Given the nascent state of the Space Force, we do not render an assessment of it in the *2021 Index*. We hope to assess its strength in future editions of the *Index*, but this will be complicated by the classified nature of the force.

- **Nuclear Capability as “Marginal.”** This score is trending toward “strong,” but it should be emphasized that this assumes that the U.S. maintains its commitment to modernization of the entire nuclear enterprise—from warheads to platforms to personnel to infrastructure—and allocates needed resources accordingly. Without this commitment, this overall score

will degrade rapidly to “weak.” Continued attention to this mission is therefore critical. Although a bipartisan commitment has led to continued progress on U.S. nuclear forces modernization and warhead sustainment, these programs remain seriously threatened by potential future fiscal uncertainties. The infrastructure that supports nuclear programs is very aged, and nuclear test readiness has revealed troubling problems within the forces.

In the aggregate, the United States’ military posture is rated “marginal.” The *2021 Index* concludes that the current U.S. military force is likely capable of meeting the demands of a single major regional conflict

U.S. Military Power

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	MARGINAL	STRONG	VERY STRONG
Army			✓		
Navy			✓		
Air Force			✓		
Marine Corps			✓		
Nuclear			✓		
Space					
OVERALL			✓		

while also attending to various presence and engagement activities but that it would be very hard-pressed to do more and certainly would be ill-equipped to handle two nearly simultaneous major regional contingencies.

The military services have continued to prioritize readiness and have seen improvement over the past couple of years, but modernization programs continue to suffer as resources are redirected toward current operations and sustainment of readiness levels. The services have also normalized the reduction in size and number of military units, and the forces remain well below the level they need to meet the two-MRC benchmark.

Congress and the Administration took positive steps to stabilize funding for fiscal years 2018, 2019, and 2020 through the Bipartisan Budget Agreement of 2018, and the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019 sustained support for funding above the caps imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA). While this allays the most serious concerns about a return to the damaging levels of the BCA, more will be needed in the years to come to ensure that America’s armed services are properly sized, equipped, trained, and ready to meet the missions they are called upon to fulfill.