

Preface

Recent calls by some elected leaders to reduce defense spending might lead one to conclude that they must believe we live in a world that is completely safe, secure, and free from the need for a robust defense. But the unfortunate reality is that our biggest adversaries are working diligently to surpass our military capabilities at a time when much of our military equipment—including planes, tanks, and ships—is decades-old and years past its useful service life.

Even a glance at the news headlines reveals critical problems in many areas of the world. We see every day that countries like China, Russia, and Iran are willing to invade a neighbor, use their military and militias to bully other countries, and even sponsor terrorist groups and cyber hackers to attack other countries, including the U.S. and our allies.

Rogue states like North Korea and Syria and problematic ones like Iran pose direct threats to their neighbors, to their regions, and ultimately to the security of the U.S. and the rest of the free world. China and Russia, especially, seek to overturn the more freedom-seeking international order that has defined global affairs since the end of World War II in order to move toward more authoritarianism, government control of commerce, and state surveillance of citizens—not just in their own countries but throughout much of the world.

What is there to stop them? Diplomacy has its place in advocating for freedom, free-market capitalism, and healthy international relations, and diplomacy absolutely must be the first tool reached for and the tool most desired in foreign affairs. But when

diplomacy fails, the U.S. must have the ability to protect itself, its people, and its interests physically and to deter aggression by its adversaries. A strong military is also important in assuring allies and friends that the U.S. remains a capable and reliable partner.

At The Heritage Foundation, we have long recognized that one of the very few obligations the U.S. Constitution places on the federal government is to provide for the common defense. That is why Heritage publishes its annual *Index of U.S. Military Strength*: to help decision-makers in government see where our strengths, our challenges, and our opportunities for improvement lie and to help them see how we stand relative to our adversaries. The *Index* also serves to ensure that the American public is aware of how well—or how poorly—their government is handling this most critical and sacred task.

Heritage takes this mission seriously so that the government we elect and empower through our collective treasure does what the American people need it to do—and the things that only a federal government can do—and does not lose focus by straying into things that would ultimately detract from its core function.

We trust that our work assessing the challenges to America's interests and our country's ability to meet those challenges will significantly inform the debate that is so essential to protecting what has made the United States the beacon of hope, opportunity, and liberty for all the world.

Kay C. James, President
The Heritage Foundation
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