

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 it should be, and is burdened by readiness levels that are more problematic than they should be. 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 *2022 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. In other words, the Army is aging faster than it is modernizing. It remains “weak” in capacity with 62 percent of the force it should have but has significantly increased the readiness of the force, scoring the highest level of “very strong.” 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.
- **Air Force as “Weak.”** The USAF scores “marginal” in capacity and capability but has dropped to “weak” in readiness. Retirement of aircraft is outpacing the introduction of new aircraft, worsening the service’s capacity problem. 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 “Strong.”** The score for the Marine Corps was raised to “strong” from “marginal” for two reasons: (1) because the *2021 Index* changed the threshold for capacity, 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
- **Navy as “Marginal,” Trending Toward “Weak.”** The Navy’s overall score remains “marginal” in the *2022 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

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				✓	

U.S. Military Power: Space

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

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				✓	

ready for a broad range of smaller crisis-response tasks, and (2) because of the Corps’ extraordinary efforts to modernize (which improves capability) and enhance its readiness during the assessed year. However, in the absence of additional funding in FY 2022, the Corps intends to reduce the number of its battalions even further from 24 to 21, and this reduction, if implemented, would harm the Corps’ overall ability to perform the role it has set for itself: enabling the projection of naval power into heavily contested combat environments. The service has moved ahead aggressively with a redesign of its operating forces and the acquisition of new warfighting tools, but it remains hampered by old equipment and problematic funding.

- Space Force as “Weak.”** 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. The *2021 Index* provided an overview of the new service, explaining its mission, capabilities, and

challenges, but did not offer an assessment. With an additional year to gain more insight, the *2022 Index* scores the USSF as “weak” in all measured areas. The service has done quite well in transitioning missions from the other services without interruption in support, but it does not have enough assets to track and manage the explosive growth in commercial and competitor-country systems being placed into orbit. The majority of its platforms have exceeded their planned life span, and modernization efforts to replace them are slow and incremental. The force also lacks defensive and offensive counter-space capabilities.

- Nuclear Capability as “Strong” but Trending Toward “Marginal” or even “Weak.”** The U.S. nuclear enterprise rates a score of “strong” primarily because of the serious attention it has received during the past couple of years. There has been strong, largely bipartisan political support for modernizing warheads, delivery platforms, command and control systems, and supporting infrastructure

U.S. Military Power

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

and for the development of essential personnel. However, it should be emphasized that the U.S. must maintain its commitment and allocate resources accordingly. Without this sustained commitment, the overall score for America’s nuclear capability will degrade rapidly to “weak.”

In the aggregate, the United States’ military posture is rated “marginal.” The 2022 Index concludes that the current U.S. military force is likely capable of meeting the demands of a single major regional conflict 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.

In general, 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 the failure of resources to keep pace with inflation leads to cancelations, truncation, or delay. The services have 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.

Mounting U.S. federal debt and creeping inflation will pressure defense accounts further at a time when competitor countries like China and Russia are redoubling their efforts to expand and improve their military forces. If it continues on this trajectory, the U.S. risks falling very short in its ability to secure its core national interests.