

Preface

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The Heritage Foundation's *Index of U.S. Military Strength* is the only nongovernmental and only annual assessment of U.S. military strength. This 2020 edition marks the sixth anniversary of this publication.

Last year saw the first positive trends since publication of the first edition of the *Index* in 2015, as all military branches, especially the Army, have seen vast improvements in readiness. The good news is that there is room for optimism again this year as these trends continue.

Unfortunately, we are not able to declare victory just yet. We have yet to see a change in size and capability large enough to ensure the ability of our military to meet the growing threats from around the world. Our ships, tanks, and planes remain largely carryovers from the buildup in the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan, and many of them are on the verge of retirement.

For many years following the end of the Cold War, the military was reduced in size and, in many ways, ignored. Its prowess was taken for granted by lawmakers eager to cash a so-called peace dividend that they believed resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union and spend it on other priorities.

When America was rocked by the terrorist attacks of 9/11, America's military was quickly called into action. It has been "in action" ever since.

Since 2017, Congress and the Administration have stabilized military budgets and provided resources for the military to improve its

condition, and this has led to improvements in readiness for all military branches. However, although that funding has aided America's military recovery, the defense budget is artificially capped for the next two years at well below historical averages (and well below what is actually needed). Additionally, future funding levels will remain uncertain through changing Administrations and shifts in the makeup of Congress.

Moreover, a few years of solid investment in our armed forces during the Trump Administration are not enough to undo the damage caused by years of neglect and constant use. It is also insufficient to get our military in position to compete against the growing threats from nations such as Russia, China, and Iran, as well as from terrorism.

Increased and sustained investment is absolutely critical in this period of renewed military competition among nations. The United States faces potential adversaries with growing militaries that desire to use them to reshape the world to suit their needs at the expense of others.

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. faces threats from nations that may soon match or surpass our military power. Russia and China are investing significantly in the most modern forms of combat power and technology with the express intention of challenging U.S. military dominance. We cannot afford to allow our military to fall behind.

As George Washington said so eloquently in his first annual address to Congress, "To be

prepared for war is the most effectual means of preserving peace.” A strategy centered on this concept of peace through strength is the best way to ensure our safety, freedom, and prosperity at home. Maintaining American military dominance also ensures a safer and more peaceful world, as it reassures our allies and deters potential adversaries.

Over the coming years, sustained investment will be necessary if we are serious about strengthening our military. This *Index*, backed by an irrefutable body of research, points out exactly what investments are needed and

where so that the American people, both today and in generations yet to come, will have a military that is capable of defending them.

Peace through strength and funding a military that is actually capable of fulfilling its constitutional mandate of providing for the common defense should be a nonpartisan issue and a top priority for all members of Congress and the Administration.

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