

GUIDE TO THE ISSUES

**MAINTAIN PEACE THROUGH
AMERICAN MILITARY STRENGTH**

The United States faces the most diverse range of serious threats than at any point in our history.¹ Every domain of warfare poses new challenges to America’s military competitive advantage.² Protecting the country from these threats is the first duty of the government, and each requires the United States to maintain the most lethal, agile, and robust military in the world.

BACKGROUND

Adversarial nations like Russia and China continue to intimidate their neighbors and rewrite international norms to America’s detriment. Iran and North Korea continue efforts to exert covert influence and destabilize operations in the Middle East and Asia. ISIS and al Qaeda are under pressure, and though they have lost most of their physical territory, they continue to pose a threat.³

In addition to these global threats, America’s defense capabilities face federal policy headwinds. Years of inadequate and delayed budgets during President Barack Obama’s tenure combined with increased deployments and operations created a military readiness crisis. During President Obama’s tenure in office (FY2010 to FY2016), Department of Defense (DOD) spending adjusted for inflation declined by 23 percent.⁴ According to Mackenzie Eaglen of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, lack of military readiness due to funding constrictions explains the many years military training fatalities outpaced deaths in combat.⁵ Despite efforts from the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress, defense spending as a percent of gross domestic product remains at historic lows.⁶

Quick Take

America faces a broad array of threats on the global stage which challenge the competitive advantages enjoyed by America’s armed forces.

Increased activity and spending reductions have contributed to declines in military readiness.

Congress must address these concerns in a manner that maintains American military dominance while protecting taxpayer resources.

DOD Outlays as a Percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) FY1953-FY2025



Source: DoD spending as a percent of GDP compares DoD outlays, both discretionary and mandatory, from the National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2020 (Table 7-7) and projected GDP from OMB’s Economic Assumptions for the FY 2021 Budget.

Peace Through Strength

As President Ronald Reagan stated in March 1983, “We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression—to preserve freedom and peace.”⁷ In that spirit, President Donald Trump released the National Defense Strategy in 2018 prioritizing competition with other global powers to address threats from Russia and China.⁸ To restore military readiness and maintain our competitive edge, senior commanders have testified that the Pentagon budget must grow by three to five percent above inflation through 2025.⁹

With the support of Congressional Republicans, the administration is working to restore readiness and has begun making key investments in the 21st century capabilities, such hypersonics, 5G, Artificial Intelligence, missile defense, and a modernized nuclear deterrent America will need to maintain its competitive edge.

Russia and China are aggressively modernizing their militaries. Russia plans to spend \$28 billion per year to modernize its nuclear triad in addition to investing in six new strategic weapons systems. China is on track to build a 420-ship navy by 2035 that will be the world’s largest.¹⁰ According to former acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, “Accounting for purchasing power and the significant portion of our military budget going to pay and benefits, today, China’s defense spending approaches that of the United States.”¹¹

American Troops Deserve the Best

Congressman Mac Thornberry (R-TX), ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, has said, “It is morally wrong to send men and women out on missions, even routine patrols, without the best equipment, the best training, the best support that our country can provide.”¹² According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), America’s military has begun thirteen of the past eighteen years under a continuing resolution (CR). Since 2010, our troops have had to contend with wasteful and inefficient stopgap funding for 39 months.¹³ The Navy has calculated waste of \$4 billion between 2011 and 2017 as a result of the CRs.¹⁴ This, together with successive years of addressing global threats with inadequate budgets, contributes to a fatal readiness crisis in America’s military.

The *Military Times* found that while total aviation accidents fell for the first time since 2013’s budget cuts, military aviation deaths hit a six year high in 2018.¹⁵ While Congress may have arrested the readiness crisis, it “cannot undo decades of degradation in just a few years.”¹⁶

A Strong Economy Depends on a Strong Military¹⁷

American economic prosperity and our national security are critically linked. A strong, vibrant economy is critical to produce the revenues necessary to fund our military. Economic growth and innovation ensure that our military technology stays ahead of authoritarian, directed economies like China’s that can force a whole-of-nation effort against us.

A strong military is also an essential prerequisite to a healthy economy and to our quality of life. Since World War II, the rules-based international order created and maintained by the United States has benefited people around the globe and none more so than Americans here at home.

American’s military power guarantees freedom of navigation in the sea and in the air for the United States and its allies. It also serves to maintain fair, enforceable international rules that give American companies and workers a chance to compete.

A deteriorating military adds fuel to China's narrative that America is a nation in decline so that Asian nations would do better to enlist in China's alternative economic and military order. If China sets the rules for much of the world's economy, America will feel the consequences in its pocketbook as well as to its security.

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY AND REPUBLICAN PRINCIPLES

Under Article I Section 8, the Constitution requires Congress, "To raise and support Armies,; To provide and maintain a Navy" and to, "make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces." Our troops and their families deserve the best America can provide, and our military strength and economic security demand it.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

Provide Sufficient and Timely Funding

To maintain our competitive edge, our military requires funding to execute the National Defense Strategy. Because of the outsized damage CRs can do to military readiness, Congress must return to regular order appropriations in both the House and the Senate.

Embrace Ongoing Fiscal Reforms

Congress must oversee Pentagon processes and practices to ensure taxpayer resources are being used effectively and that the DOD is agile, maintains its competitive edge, and supports our troops and their families. Since 2014, Republicans have led the way in dozens of reforms including streamlining acquisition statutes and regulations, an updated military retirement system, an improved health care system, a sustainable commissary benefit, an overhaul of the UCMJ, and a major shakeup of the Pentagon's bureaucracy and business processes.

Audit the Department of Defense

The Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 requires annual financial audits of federal agencies' financial statements. This is a law the DOD has struggled to comply with until recently. Republicans held the DOD accountable, and the DOD completed its first-ever agency-wide financial audit in FY2018. It recently completed its FY2019 audit. While the DOD received an agency-wide *disclaimer of opinion*, DOD is on track to receive a clean audit opinion in the next 10 years. Congress should use the audits as the foundation to drive additional reforms across the DOD.

Please contact Cameron Smith or Kelsey Wall with the Republican Policy Committee at (202) 225-4921 with any questions.

¹ Kissinger, Henry, Opening Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 29, 2015.

² General James Mattis testimony before House Armed Services Committee (HASC), 6/12/17, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20170612/106090/HHRG-115-AS00-Bio-MattisJ-20170612.pdf>.

³ U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *National Defense Strategy Summary*, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

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- ⁴ Office of Management and Budget, *A Budget for America's Future – President's Budget, FY 2021, Table 4.1 – Outlays by Agency: 1962 – 2025* (2021).
- ⁵ Mackenzie Eaglin, *America's New Deadliest War is Hiding in Plain Sight*, RealClearPolitics, 9/7/17, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/09/07/americas_new_deadliest_war_is_hiding_in_plain_sight_112244.html.
- ⁶ DOD FY2020 Budget Slides, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2021/fy2021_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf.
- ⁷ Ronald Reagan, *Address to the Nation, Ronald Reagan*, 3/23/83: <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/Missile/Starwars.shtml>
- ⁸ DOD, *National Defense Strategy*, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.
- ⁹ General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Brookings Institution, May 28, 2019 <https://www.brookings.edu/events/a-conversation-with-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-of-staff-general-dunford/>.
- ¹⁰ HASC hearing entitled *DOD's Role in Competing with China*, January 15, 2020.
- ¹¹ Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, Testimony before HASC, March 26, 2019, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20190326/109163/HHRG-116-AS00-Wstate-ShanahanP-20190326.pdf>.
- ¹² Rep. Mac Thornberry, *Thornberry: Budget Control Act Limits on Defense Spending Could End Soon*, USNI News, September 6, 2017, <https://news.usni.org/2017/09/06/thornberry-budget-control-act-limits-defense-spending-end-soon>.
- ¹³ Congressional Research Service, *Defense Spending Under an Interim Continuing Resolution*, August 15, 2019, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45870>.
- ¹⁴ Lauren Williams, *Navy research funds could see scrutiny, secretary says*, Federal Computer Week, October 24, 2019, <https://fcw.com/articles/2019/10/24/navy-spencer-cr-williams.aspx>.
- ¹⁵ Tara Copp, *Is military aviation getting any safer? New mishap data shows mixed results*, Military Times, April 8, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/09/is-military-aviation-getting-any-safer-new-mishap-data-shows-mixed-results/>.
- ¹⁶ General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Testimony before HASC, March 26, 2019, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20190326/109163/HHRG-116-AS00-Wstate-DunfordJ-20190326.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Rep. Mac Thornberry, *Rep. Mac Thornberry: We need a strong vibrant economy to fund our military*, Fox News, February 26, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/rep-mac-thornberry-we-need-a-strong-vibrant-economy-to-fund-our-military>.