

FY2022 NDAA: Active Component End-Strength

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Background

The term *end-strength* refers to either the *authorized* or *actual* personnel strength of a specified branch of the military on September 30th of a given year (i.e., the last day of the fiscal year).

Each year, in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Congress sets an *authorized end-strength* for active component personnel in each of the armed forces. The term authorized strength means “the largest number of members authorized to be in an armed force, a component, a branch, a grade, or any other category of the armed forces” (10 U.S.C. §101(b)(11)). Authorized *end-strengths* are maximum strength levels on September 30th, the end of the fiscal year. Congress also periodically sets minimum end-strength levels for the active component, which may be identical to or lower than the authorized end-strength.

While Congress authorizes minimum and maximum end-strengths, each military service manages its force, through recruiting and retention efforts, to achieve an *actual* end-strength. The actual end-strength is the number of individuals who are members of a given armed force on September 30th. Normally, this actual end-strength falls within the congressionally authorized minimum and maximum end-strengths. However, there are circumstances in which the actual end-strength may fall outside the authorized range. For example, under 10 U.S.C. §115(f), the Secretary of Defense can increase the active component end-strength of any armed force above the authorized end-strength by up to 3%. On the other hand, recruiting and retention shortfalls may cause one or more of the armed forces to fall below their minimum authorized strength.

Congress varies the authorized end-strengths over time in response to various factors, such as national security priorities, force structure changes, and budgetary constraints. For example, from FY2001-FY2011, in response to the demands of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Congress substantially increased the authorized strength of the Army and Marine Corps. Then, from FY2011-FY2016, Congress reversed those increases in light of the withdrawal of most U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011, the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan beginning in 2012, and budgetary constraints.

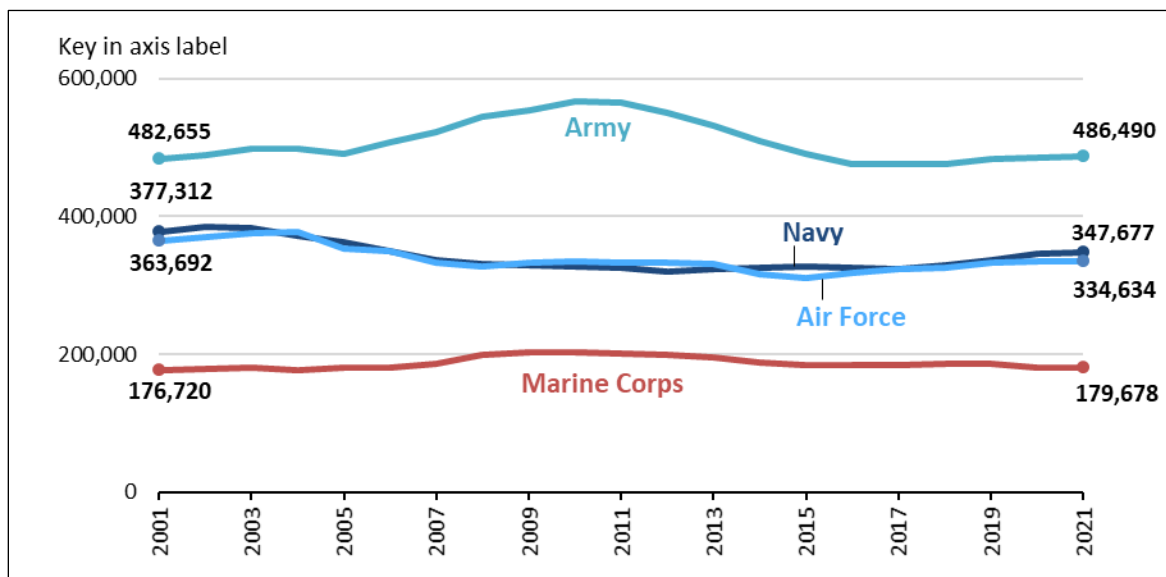
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Figure 1 below depicts changes the actual end-strength of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force from FY2001-FY2021. The Air Force line includes **Space Force** personnel for FY2020-FY2021.

Figure 1. Actual End-Strength of Active Component Armed Forces, FY2001-FY2021



Source: Defense Manpower Data Center, at <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>.

FY2022 NDAA

The Biden **Administration's FY2022 budget** requested end-strengths of 485,000 for the Army, 346,200 for the Navy, 178,500 for the Marine Corps, 328,300 for the Air Force, and 8,400 for the Space Force. In comparison to FY2021 authorized end-strengths, these requests represented decreases for the Army (-900), Navy (-1,600), Marine Corps (-2,700), and Air Force (-5,175), plus an initial Space Force request of 8,400.

In the **FY2020 NDAA**, Congress authorized the establishment of the **United States Space Force**, a new armed force within the Department of the Air Force. At first, **Air Force strength authorizations were used to assign personnel to the Space Force**. However, the FY2021 NDAA conference report (H.Rept. 116-617) stated, "The conferees expect the Department of the Air Force to submit a formal request and justification for [U.S. Space Force] end strength to the congressional defense committees as part of the President's Department of Defense budget request for fiscal year 2022." As a result, **the President's FY2022 budget request asked for a Space Force end-strength authorization of 8,400**.

The initial House-passed version of the FY2022 NDAA, H.R. 4350, sought end-strengths that were identical to the Administration request. The Senate Armed Services Committee reported version, S. 2792, sought end-strengths that were identical to the Administration request for the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Space Force, but a higher end-strength for the Air Force (+920 compared to the Administration request).

The enacted version of the FY2022 NDAA, S. 1605 (P.L. 117-81), authorized end-strengths identical to the Administration's request for the Army, Marine Corps and Space Force, but higher end-strengths for the Navy (+720 compared to the Administration request) and Air Force (+920).

See **Table 1** for a comparison of active component end-strength authorizations in the three versions of the FY2022 NDAA discussed above.

See **Table 2** for a comparison of the FY2021 congressionally authorized end-strengths, the FY2022 President's budget request, and the FY2022 congressionally authorized end-strengths.

Table 1. Comparison of FY2022 NDAA Active Component End-Strength Provisions

H.R. 4350 House Passed	S. 2792 SASC Reported	P.L. 117-81 Enacted
Sec. 401 would have authorized a total active duty end-strength of 1,346,400 as of September 20, 2022, including: 485,000 for the Army 346,200 for the Navy 178,500 for the Marine Corps 328,300 for the Air Force 8,400 for the Space Force	Sec. 401 would have authorized a total active duty end-strength of 1,347,320 as of September 20, 2022, including: 485,000 for the Army 346,200 for the Navy 178,500 for the Marine Corps 329,220 for the Air Force 8,400 for the Space Force	Sec. 401 authorizes a total active duty end-strength of 1,348,040 as of September 20, 2022, including: 485,000 for the Army 346,920 for the Navy 178,500 for the Marine Corps 329,220 for the Air Force 8,400 for the Space Force

Table 2. Comparison of FY2021 and FY2022 Active Component End Strength

FY2021 Authorized, FY2022 President's Budget Request, FY2022 Authorized

Service	FY2021 Authorized (P.L. 116-283)	FY2022 President's Budget Request	Difference Between FY2021 Authorized and FY22 Budget Request	FY2022 NDAA Authorized (P.L. 117-81)	Difference Between FY2021 Authorized and FY2022 Authorized
Army	485,900	485,000	-900	485,000	-900
Navy	347,800	346,200	-1,600	346,920	-880
Marine Corps	181,200	178,500	-2,700	178,500	-2,700
Air Force	333,475	328,300	-5,175	329,220	-4,255
Space Force	n.a.*	8,400	+8,400	8,400	+8,400
Total	1,348,375	1,346,400	-1,975	1,348,040	-335

Notes: The FY2021 NDAA did not specify an authorized end-strength for the Space Force, but the FY2022 President's Budget Request lists the Space Force's FY2021 end-strength as 6,400. This appears to reflect the projected actual end-strength number for the Space Force rather than the authorized end-strength (see discussion above).

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