

# FY2023 NDAA: Active Component End-Strength

August 23, 2022

## Background

The term *end-strength* refers to either the *authorized* or *actual* personnel strength of a specified branch of the military on September 30 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 30, 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 30. 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 increased the authorized strength of the Army and Marine Corps substantially. 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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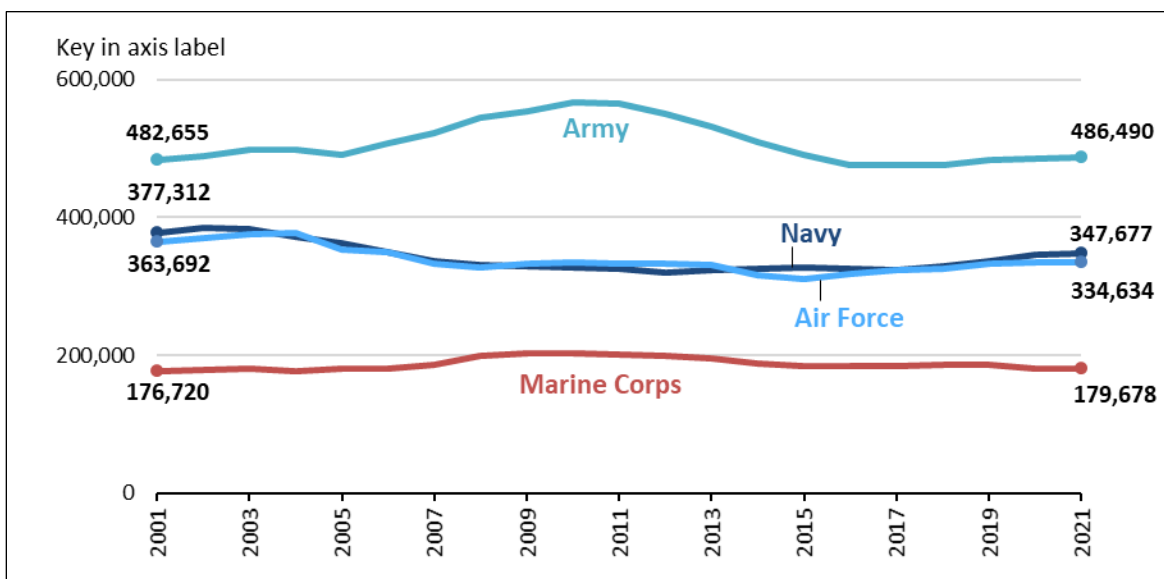
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In the FY2020 NDAA, Congress authorized the establishment of the United States Space Force, a new Armed Force within the Department of the Air Force. At first, Air Force strength authorizations were used to assign personnel to the Space Force. In the FY2022 NDAA, Congress provided the Space Force with its own end-strength authorization of 8,400.

**Figure 1** below depicts changes in 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>.

Actual end-strength for FY2022 will not be available until October 2022, but as of June 30, 2022, the current personnel strengths of the Armed Forces were as follows: Army (465,239), Navy (344,022), Marine Corps (174,484), and Air Force/Space Force (333,455). Significant recruiting challenges are making it difficult for the Armed Forces, particularly the Army, to meet their FY2022 end-strength goals.

## FY2023 NDAA

The Biden Administration's FY2023 budget requested end-strengths of 473,000 for the Army, 346,300 for the Navy, 177,000 for the Marine Corps, 323,400 for the Air Force, and 8,600 for the Space Force. In comparison to the FY2022 authorized end-strengths, these requests represented decreases for the Army (-12,000), Navy (-620), Marine Corps (-1,500), and Air Force (-5,820), with an increase for the Space Force (+200). See **Table 2**.

The House-passed version of the FY2023 NDAA, H.R. 7900, seeks end-strengths that are identical to the Administration's request for the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force, but a higher end-strength for the Navy (+1,920) compared to the Administration's request. The Senate Armed Services Committee-reported version, S. 4543, would provide end-strengths that are identical to the Administration's request for the Army, Marine Corps, and Space Force, but a higher end-strength for the Navy (+7,700) and Air Force (+1,944) compared to the Administration's request.

See **Error! Reference source not found.** for a comparison of active component end-strength authorizations in the two versions of the FY2023 NDAA discussed above.

See **Table 2** for a comparison of the FY2022 congressionally authorized end-strengths and the FY2023 President's budget request.

**Table 1. Comparison of FY2023 NDAA Active Component End-Strength Provisions**

H.R. 7900 House-Passed	S. 4543 SASC-Reported	Enacted
<b>Sec. 401</b> would have authorized a total active duty end-strength of 1,330,220 as of September 20, 2023, including: 473,000 for the Army 348,220 for the Navy 177,000 for the Marine Corps 323,400 for the Air Force 8,600 for the Space Force	<b>Sec. 401</b> would have authorized a total active duty end-strength of 1,337,944 as of September 20, 2023, including: 473,000 for the Army 354,000 for the Navy 177,000 for the Marine Corps 325,344 for the Air Force 8,600 for the Space Force	

Source: CRS

**Table 2. Comparison of FY2022 Enacted and FY2023 President's Budget Request for Active Component End-Strength**

FY2022 Authorized, FY2023 President's Budget Request

Service	FY2022 Authorized (P.L. 117-81)	FY2023 President's Budget Request	Difference Between FY2022 Authorized and FY23 Budget Request	FY2023 NDAA Authorized	Difference Between FY2022 Authorized and FY2023 Authorized
Army	485,000	473,000	-12,000		
Navy	346,920	346,300	-620		
Marine Corps	178,500	177,000	-1,500		
Air Force	329,220	323,400	-5,820		
Space Force	8,400	8,600	+200		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,348,040</b>	<b>1,328,300</b>	<b>-19,740</b>		

Source: CRS

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