**United States Armed Forces**

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| **United States Armed Forces** | |
| United States Joint Service Color Guard on parade at [Fort Myer, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Myer,_Virginia). | |
| **Service branches** | [U.S. Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army)  [U.S. Marine Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps) [U.S. Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy) [U.S. Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force) [U.S. Coast Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard) |
| **Headquarters** | [The Pentagon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pentagon), [Arlington, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arlington,_Virginia) |
| **Leadership** | |
| [**Commander-in-Chief**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) | [President](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) [Barack Obama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama) |
| [**Secretary of Defense**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Secretary_of_Defense) | [Leon Panetta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Panetta) |
| [**Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_Joint_Chiefs_of_Staff) | [General](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_(United_States)) [Martin Dempsey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Dempsey) |
| **Manpower** | |
| **Military age** | 17–62 years old |
| **Available for military service** | 73,270,043 males, age 18–49 (2010 est.), 71,941,969 females, age 18–49 (2010 est.) |
| **Fit for military service** | 60,620,143 males, age 18–49 (2010 est.), 59,401,941 females, age 18–49 (2010 est.) |
| **Reaching military age annually** | 2,161,727 males (2010 est.), 2,055,685 females (2010 est.) |
| **Active personnel** | 1,456,862 ([ranked 2nd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_number_of_troops)) |
| **Reserve personnel** | 1,458,500 (ranked 7th) |
| **Expenditures** | |
| **Budget** | $549.4 billion (FY11)  ([1st by total expenditure, 11th as percent of GDP](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_federations_by_military_expenditures)) |
| **Percent of GDP** | 4.9% (2011 est.) |
| **Related articles** | |
| **History** | [American Revolutionary War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War) [Early national period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_the_United_States#Early_national_period_.281783.E2.80.931815.29) [Continental expansion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_the_United_States#Continental_expansion_.281816.E2.80.931860.29) [American Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War) (1861–1865) [Post-Civil War era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_the_United_States#Post-Civil_War_era_.281865.E2.80.931917.29) [World War I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) (1917–1918) [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) (1941–1945) [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) (1945–1991) [Korean War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War) (1950–1953) [Vietnam War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War) (1959–1975) [Gulf War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War) (1991) [Kosovo War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_War) (1999) [War on Terrorism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terrorism) (2001–present) [War in Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%93present)) (2001–present) [Iraq War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War) (2003–2011) [Other](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_involving_the_United_States) |
| **Ranks** | [Army officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_officer_rank_insignia)  [Army warrant officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_(United_States)) [Army enlisted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_enlisted_rank_insignia) [Marine Corps officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps_officer_rank_insignia) [Marine Corps warrant officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_(United_States)) [Marine Corps enlisted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps_enlisted_rank_insignia) [Navy officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy_officer_rank_insignia) [Navy warrant officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_(United_States)) [Navy enlisted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy_enlisted_rates) [Air Force officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force_officer_rank_insignia) [Air Force enlisted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force_enlisted_rank_insignia) [Coast Guard officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard#ranks) [Coast Guard warrant officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_(United_States)) [Coast Guard enlisted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard#ranks) |

The **United States Armed Forces** are the [military forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armed_forces) of the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). They consist of the [Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army), [Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy), [Marine Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps), [Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force), and [Coast Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard). The United States has a strong tradition of [civilian control of the military](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_control_of_the_military). The [President](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) is the overall head of the military, and helps form military policy with the [United States Department of Defense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Defense) (DoD), a [federal executive department](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_federal_executive_departments), acting as the principal organ by which military policy is carried out. The DoD is headed by the [Secretary of Defense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Secretary_of_Defense), who is a civilian and [Cabinet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Cabinet) member. The Secretary of Defense is second in the military's [chain of command](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chain_of_command), just below the President, and serves as the principal assistant to the President in all matters related to the Department of Defense. To coordinate military action with diplomacy, the President has an advisory [National Security Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_National_Security_Council) headed by a [National Security Advisor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Security_Advisor_(United_States)). Both the President and Secretary of Defense are advised by a seven-member [Joint Chiefs of Staff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Chiefs_of_Staff), which includes the head of each of Department of Defense service branches as well as the chief of the [National Guard Bureau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Guard_Bureau). Leadership is provided by the [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman_of_the_Joint_Chiefs_of_Staff) and the [Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vice_Chairman_of_the_Joint_Chiefs_of_Staff). The [Commandant of the Coast Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commandant_of_the_Coast_Guard) is not a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

All of the branches work together during operations and joint missions, under the [Unified Combatant Commands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unified_Combatant_Command), under the authority of the Secretary of Defense with the exception of the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard falls under the administration of the [Department of Homeland Security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Homeland_Security) and receives its operational orders from the [Secretary of Homeland Security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Secretary_of_Homeland_Security). The Coast Guard may be transferred to the [Department of the Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_the_Navy) by the President or Congress during a time of war. All five armed services are among the seven [uniformed services of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uniformed_services_of_the_United_States); the others are the [United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Public_Health_Service_Commissioned_Corps) and the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Oceanic_and_Atmospheric_Administration_Commissioned_Corps).

From the time of its inception the military played a decisive role in the [history of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States). A sense of national unity and identity was forged out of the victorious [Barbary Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbary_Wars), as well as the [War of 1812](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_1812). Even so, the [Founders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founding_Fathers_of_the_United_States) were suspicious of a permanent military force and not until the outbreak of [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) did a large standing army become officially established. The [National Security Act of 1947](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Security_Act_of_1947), adopted following World War II and during the onset of the Cold War, created the modern U.S. military framework; the Act merged previously Cabinet-level [Department of War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_War) and the [Department of the Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_the_Navy) into the [National Military Establishment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Defense) (renamed the Department of Defense in 1949), headed by the Secretary of Defense; and created the [Department of the Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_the_Air_Force) and National Security Council.

The U.S. military is one of the largest militaries in terms of number of personnel. It draws its manpower from a large pool of paid [volunteers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volunteer_military); although [conscription](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_in_the_United_States) has been used in the past in various times of both war and peace, it has not been used since 1972. As of 2011, the United States spends about $550 billion annually to fund its military forces, and appropriates approximately $160 billion to fund [Overseas Contingency Operations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terrorism). Put together, the United States constitutes roughly [43 percent of the world's military expenditures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures). The U.S. armed forces as a whole possess large quantities of advanced and powerful equipment, along with widespread placement of forces around the world, giving them significant capabilities in both defense and [power projection](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_projection).

**History**

Main article: [Military history of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_the_United_States)

The history of the United States Armed Forces dates to 1775, even before the [Declaration of Independence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence) marked the establishment of the United States. The [Continental Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Army), [Continental Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Navy), and [Continental Marines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Marines) were created in close succession by the [Second Continental Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Continental_Congress) in order to defend the new nation against the [British Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) in the [American Revolutionary War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War).

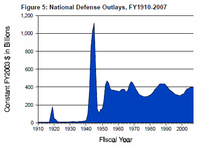
These forces demobilized in 1784 after the [Treaty of Paris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_(1783)) ended the War for Independence. The [Congress of the Confederation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_the_Confederation) created the [United States Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army) on 3 June 1784, although the founding of the Army is celebrated as occurring on 14 June 1775. The 1787 adoption of the [Constitution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution) gave the [Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress) the power to "raise and support armies," "provide and maintain a navy," and to "make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces," as well as the power to [declare war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_war_by_the_United_States) and gave the President of the United States the responsibility of being the military's [commander-in-chief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commander-in-chief).

Rising tensions at various times with [Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_of_Great_Britain_and_Ireland) and France and the ensuing [Quasi-War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quasi-War) and War of 1812 quickened the development of the United States Navy (established 13 October 1775) and the United States Marine Corps (established 10 November 1775). The United States Coast Guard dates its origin to the founding of the [Revenue Cutter Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenue_Cutter_Service) on 4 August 1790; that service merged with the [United States Life-Saving Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Life-Saving_Service) in 1915 to establish the Coast Guard. The [United States Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force) was established as an independent service on 18 September 1947; it traces its origin to the formation of the [Aeronautical Division, U.S. Signal Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeronautical_Division,_U.S._Signal_Corps) in 1907 and was part of the U.S. Army before becoming an independent service.

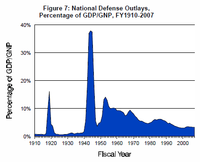
The [reserve branches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve_components_of_the_United_States_armed_forces#Mobilization) formed a military [strategic reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_reserve) during the Cold War, to be called into service in case of war. [Time Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_Magazine) writer [Mark Thompson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Thompson_(reporter)) has suggested that with the [Global War on Terrorism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_War_on_Terrorism), the reserves deployed as a single force with the active branches and America no longer has a strategic reserve.

**Budget**

Main article: [Military budget of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_budget_of_the_United_States)



U.S. military spending from 1910 to 2007, adjusted for inflation to 2003 dollars. The large spike represents [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) spending.



US defense spending by GDP percentage 1910 to 2007.

The United States has the [largest defense budget in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures). In fiscal year 2010, the Department of Defense has a base budget of $533.8 billion. An additional $130.0 billion was requested for "Overseas Contingency Operations" in the [War on Terrorism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terrorism), and over the course of the year, an additional $33 billion in supplemental spending was added to Overseas Contingency Operations funding. Outside of direct Department of Defense spending, the United States spends another $218–262 billion each year on other defense-related programs, such as Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, nuclear weapons maintenance, and the State Department.

By service, $225.2 billion was allocated for the Army, $171.7 billion for the Navy and Marine Corps, $160.5 billion for the Air Force and $106.4 billion for defense-wide spending. By function, $154.2 billion was requested for personnel, $283.3 billion for operations and maintenance, $140.1 billion for procurement, $79.1 billion for research and development, $23.9 billion for military construction, and $3.1 billion for family housing.

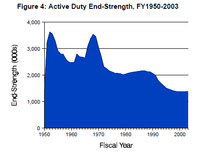
In fiscal year 2009, major defense programs also saw continued funding. $4.1 billion was requested for the next generation fighter, [F-22 Raptor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F-22_Raptor), which will roll out an additional twenty planes for FY 2009. $6.7 billion was requested for the [F-35 Lightning II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F-35_Lightning_II), which is still in development. Sixteen planes will be built as part of the funding. The [Future Combat System](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Future_Combat_System) program is expected to see $3.6 billion for its development. A total of $12.3 billion was requested for missile defense, which includes [Patriot CAP](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medium_Extended_Air_Defense_System), [PAC-3](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MIM-104_Patriot) and [SBIRS-High](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space-Based_Infrared_System) systems. $720 million was also included for a third missile defense site in Europe. $4.2 billion was also requested to continue the [aircraft carrier replacement program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_R._Ford_class_aircraft_carrier). With the addition of [AFRICOM](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Africa_Command), $389 million was requested to develop and maintain the new command.

Historically, defense-related spending in the United States is at its highest inflation-adjusted level since World War II. Per-capita spending is at approximately the same inflation-adjusted level as the peak of the late-1980s Cold War military build-up and the 1968 peak of the Vietnam War. In his Fiscal Year 2011 budget, President Obama has proposed a 4% increase in Department of Defense spending, followed by a 9% decrease in FY 2012, with funding remaining level in subsequent years.

Loren Thompson has blamed the "vast sums of money" squandered on cutting-edge technology projects that were then canceled on short sighted political operatives who lack a long term perspective in setting requirements. The result is that the number of items bought under a given program are cut. The total development costs of the program are divided over fewer platforms, making the per-unit cost seem higher and so the numbers are cut again and again in a death spiral.

Critical parts of the Obama future years plan are the cost containment measures provided by the [Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patient_Protection_and_Affordable_Care_Act) and the [Energy policy of the Obama administration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_policy_of_the_Obama_administration) as health care and fuel costs are the two fastest growing parts of the defense budget.

**Personnel**



Active duty U.S. military personnel from 1950 to 2003. The two peaks correspond to the [Korean War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War) and the [Vietnam War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War).

As of 30 September 2010, 1,430,895 people were on active duty in the military, with an additional 848,000 people in the seven reserve components. It is an all-volunteer military, but conscription through the [Selective Service System](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selective_Service_System) can be enacted by the request of the President and the approval of Congress. All males aged 18 through 25 who are living in the U.S. are required to register with the Selective Service for a potential future draft.

The United States military is the [second largest in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_number_of_active_troops), after the [People's Liberation Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Liberation_Army) of China, and has troops deployed around the globe.

In early 2007, Secretary of Defense [Robert Gates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Gates) proposed to the President to increase the overall size of the Army and Marine Corps to meet the needs of the War on Terrorism. Current plans are to increase the Army to 547,400 and the Marine Corps to 202,000 by 2012. The expansion will cost a total of $90.7 billion between 2009 and 2013 as the Navy and Air Force undergo a limited force reduction. In addition, in 2009, Gates proposed increasing the size of the Army by 22,000 troops in order to reduce fatigue from multiple trips overseas, and to compensate for troops who are in recovery away from their units. The Fiscal Year 2011 Department of Defense budget request plan calls for an active military end strength of 1,406,000, an increase of 77,500 from the 2007 baseline as a result of increments in the Army (65,000 more troops) and Marine Corps (27,100 more troops) strength and decrements in the Navy (13,300 less troops) and Air Force (1,300 less troops) strength.

As in most militaries, members of the U.S. Armed Forces hold a rank, either that of [officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Officer_(armed_forces)), [warrant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_(United_States)), or [enlisted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlisted_rank), to determine seniority and eligibility for promotion. Those who have served are known as [veterans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veteran#United_States). Rank names may be different between services, but they are matched to each other by their corresponding [paygrade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._uniformed_services_pay_grades). Officers who hold the same rank or paygrade are distinguished by their date of rank to determine seniority. Officers who serve in certain positions of office of importance set by law, outrank all other officers in active duty of the same rank and paygrade, regardless of their date of rank.

The failure of the educational systems in the United States may force the armed forces to seek math and science qualified recruits elsewhere, such as through accelerated citizenship for foreign nationals. Currently only one in four Americans of the proper age meet the moral, academic and physical standards for military service.

**Personnel in each service**

*2010 Demographic Reports*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Component** | **Military** | **Enlisted** | **Officer** | **Female** | **Civilian** |
| Army | 561,979 | 467,537 | 94,442 | 75,507 | 299,644 |
| Marine Corps | 202,612 | 181,221 | 21,391 | 13,493 | 20,484 |
| Navy | 323,139 | 270,460 | 52,679 | 51,385 | 179,293 |
| Air Force | 329,640 | 263,439 | 66,201 | 63,310 | 174,754 |
| Coast Guard | 41,327 |  |  | 6,790 | 7,057 |
| **Total Active** | **1,458,697** | **1,182,657** | **234,713** | **210,485** | **688,628** |
| [Army National Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_National_Guard) | 362,015 |  |  |  |  |
| [Army Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Reserve) | 205,281 |  |  |  |  |
| [Marine Corps Forces Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps_Reserve) | 39,222 |  |  |  |  |
| [Navy Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy_Reserve) | 65,006 |  |  |  |  |
| [Air National Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_National_Guard) | 107,676 |  |  |  |  |
| [Air Force Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Force_Reserve_Command) | 70,119 |  |  |  |  |
| [Coast Guard Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard_Reserve) | 7,942 |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** [**Reserve Components**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve_components_of_the_United_States_armed_forces) | **857,261** |  |  |  |  |
| Other DOD Personnel |  |  |  |  | 108,833 |

**Personnel stationing**

Main article: [United States military deployments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military_deployments)

**Overseas**

As of 31 December 2010, U.S. Armed Forces were stationed in 150 countries. Some of the largest contingents are the 103,700 in [Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan), the 52,440 in [Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), the 35,688 in Japan ([USFJ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Forces_Japan)), the 28,500 in [Republic of Korea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Korea) ([USFK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Forces_Korea)), the 9,660 in [Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy), and the 9,015 in the United Kingdom respectively. These numbers change frequently due to the regular recall and deployment of units.

Altogether, 77,917 military personnel are located in Europe, 141 in the [former Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-Soviet_states), 47,236 in East Asia and the Pacific, 3,362 in North Africa, the [Near East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near_East), and South Asia, 1,355 in [sub-Saharan Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-Saharan_Africa) and 1,941 in the [Western Hemisphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Hemisphere) excluding the United States itself.

**Within the United States**

*Including U.S. territories and ships afloat within territorial waters*

As of 31 December 2009, a total of 1,137,568 personnel were on active duty within the United States and its territories (including 84,461 afloat). The vast majority, 941,629 of them, were stationed at various bases within the [Contiguous United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contiguous_United_States). There were an additional 37,245 in Hawaii and 20,450 in Alaska. 84,461 were at sea, 2,972 in [Guam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guam), and 179 in [Puerto Rico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puerto_Rico).

**Types of personnel**

**Enlisted**



Service members of the United States at an [American football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_football) event, L-R: [U.S. Marine Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Marine_Corps), [U.S. Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Air_Force), [U.S. Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Navy) and [U.S. Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Army) personnel.

Prospective service members are often [recruited](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_recruitment) from high school or college, the target age being those ages 18 to 35 in the Army, 18 to 28 in the Marine, 18 to 34 in the Navy, 18 to 27 in the Air Force, and 18 to 27 (up to age 32 if qualified for attending guaranteed 'A' school) in the Coast Guard. With the permission of a parent or guardian, applicants can enlist at the age of 17 and participate in the [Delayed Entry Program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delayed_Entry_Program) (DEP). In this program, the applicant is given the opportunity to participate in locally sponsored military-related activities, which can range from sports to competitions (each recruiting station DEP program will vary), led by recruiters or other military liaisons.

After enlistment, new recruits undergo [Basic Training](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recruit_training) (also known as boot camp in the Navy, Coast Guard and Marines), followed by schooling in their primary [Military Occupational Specialty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military_occupation_codes) (MOS) or [rating](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_Navy_ratings) at any of the numerous training facilities around the world. Each branch conducts basic training differently. For example, Marines send all non-infantry MOS’s to an infantry skills course known as [Marine Combat Training](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps_School_of_Infantry) prior to their technical schools, while Air Force Basic Military Training graduates attend Technical Training and are awarded an [Air Force Specialty Code](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Force_Specialty_Code) (AFSC) at the apprentice (3) skill level. All non-infantry Army recruits undergo [Basic Combat Training](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Combat_Training) (BCT), followed by [Advanced Individual Training](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advanced_Individual_Training) (AIT), while all combat arms recruits go to One Station Unit Training (OSUT) which combines BCT and AIT, while the Navy send its recruits to Recruit Training and then to "A" schools to earn a rating. The Coast Guard's recruits attend basic training and follow with an "A" school to earn a [rating](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_Coast_Guard_ratings).

Initially, recruits without higher education or college degrees will hold the pay grade of E-1, and will be elevated to E-2 usually soon after the completion of Basic Training. Different services have different incentive programs for enlistees, such as higher initial ranks for college credit and referring friends who go on to enlist as well. Participation in DEP is one way recruits can achieve rank before their departure to Basic Training.

There are several different authorized pay grade advancement requirements in each junior enlisted rank category (E-1 to E-3), which differ by service. Enlistees in the Army can attain the initial pay grade of E-4 (Specialist) with a full four-year degree, but the highest initial entry pay grade is usually E-3 (Members of the Army Band program can expect to enter service at the grade of E-4). Promotion through the junior enlisted ranks occurs upon attaining a specified number of years of service (which can be waived by the soldier's chain of command), a specified level of technical proficiency, and/or maintenance of good conduct. Promotion can be denied with reason.

**Non-commissioned officers**

With very few exceptions, becoming a [non-commissioned officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-commissioned_officer) (NCO) in the United States military is accomplished by progression through the lower enlisted ranks. However, unlike promotion through the lower enlisted tier, promotion to NCO is generally competitive. NCO ranks begin at E-4 or E-5, depending upon service, and are generally attained between three and six years of service. Junior NCOs function as first-line supervisors and squad leaders, training the junior enlisted in their duties and guiding their career advancement.

While considered part of the non-commissioned officer corps by law, senior non-commissioned officers (SNCOs) referred to as [Chief Petty Officers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Petty_Officer) in the Navy and Coast Guard, or staff non-commissioned officers in the Marine Corps, perform duties more focused on leadership rather than technical expertise. Promotion to the SNCO ranks, E-7 through E-9 (E-6 through E-9 in the Marine Corps) is highly competitive. Personnel totals at the pay grades of E-8 and E-9 are limited by federal law to 2.5 percent and 1 percent of a service's enlisted force, respectively. SNCOs act as leaders of small units and as staff. Some SNCOs manage programs at headquarters level and a select few wield responsibility at the highest levels of the military structure. Most unit commanders have a SNCO as an enlisted advisor. All SNCOs are expected to mentor junior commissioned officers as well as the enlisted in their duty sections. The typical enlistee can expect to attain SNCO rank after 10 to 16 years of service.

Each of the five services employs a single [Senior Enlisted Advisor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senior_Enlisted_Advisor) at departmental level. This individual is the highest ranking enlisted member within his/her respective service and functions as the chief advisor to the service secretary, service chief of staff, and Congress on matters concerning the enlisted force. These individuals carry responsibilities and protocol requirements equivalent to [three-star](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-star_rank) [general](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_officer) and [flag officers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_officer). They are as follows:

* [Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senior_Enlisted_Advisor_to_the_Chairman)
* [Sergeant Major of the Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergeant_Major_of_the_Army)
* [Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergeant_Major_of_the_Marine_Corps)
* [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_Chief_Petty_Officer_of_the_Navy)
* [Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Master_Sergeant_of_the_Air_Force)
* [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_Chief_Petty_Officer_of_the_Coast_Guard)

**Warrant officers**

Additionally, all services except for the Air Force have an active [warrant-officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_officer_(United_States)) corps. Above the rank of Warrant Officer One, these officers may also be commissioned, but usually serve in a more technical and specialized role within units. More recently though they can also serve in more traditional leadership roles associated with the more recognizable officer corps. With one notable exception (helicopter and fixed wing pilots in the U.S. Army), these officers ordinarily have already been in the military often serving in senior NCO positions in the field in which they later serve as a Warrant Officer as a technical expert. Most Army pilots have served some enlisted time. It is also possible to enlist, complete basic training, go directly to the [Warrant Officer Candidate school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warrant_Officer_Candidate_School_(U.S._Army)) at [Fort Rucker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Rucker), Alabama, and then on to [flight school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_school).

Warrant officers in the U.S. military garner the same customs and courtesies as commissioned officers. They may attend the Officer's club, receive a command and are saluted by junior warrant officers and all enlisted service members.

The Air Force ceased to grant warrants in 1959 when the grades of E-8 and E-9 were created. Most non-flying duties performed by warrant officers in other services are instead performed by senior NCOs in the Air Force.

**Commissioned officers**

There are five common ways to receive a [commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Officer_(armed_forces)) as an officer in one of the branches of the U.S. military (although other routes are possible).

* [Reserve Officers' Training Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve_Officers%27_Training_Corps) (ROTC)
* [Officer Candidate School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Officer_Candidate_School) (OCS): This can be through active-duty OCS academies, or, in the case of the National Guard, through state-run academies.
* [Service academies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Service_academies) ([United States Military Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Military_Academy) at West Point, New York; [United States Naval Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Naval_Academy) at Annapolis, Maryland; [United States Air Force Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force_Academy) at Colorado Springs, Colorado; the [United States Coast Guard Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard_Academy) at New London, Connecticut; and the [United States Merchant Marine Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Merchant_Marine_Academy) at Kings Point, New York.)
* [Direct commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_commission_officer): civilians who have special skills that are critical to sustaining military operations and supporting troops may receive direct commissions. These officers occupy leadership positions in the following areas: law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nurse corps, intelligence, supply-logistics-transportation, engineering, public affairs, chaplain corps, oceanography, and others.
* [Battlefield commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battlefield_commission): Under certain conditions, enlisted personnel who have skills that separate them from their peers can become officers by direct commissioning of a commander so authorized to grant them. This type of commission is rarely granted and is reserved only for the most exceptional enlisted personnel; it is done on an *ad hoc* basis, typically only in wartime. No direct battlefield commissions have been awarded since the [Vietnam War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War). The Air Force and Navy do not employ this commissioning path.
* [Limited Duty Officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limited_Duty_Officer): Due to the highly technical nature of some officer billets, the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard employs a system of promoting proven senior enlisted members to the ranks of commissioned officers. They fill a need that is similar to, but distinct from that filled by Warrant Officers (to the point where their accession is through the same school). While Warrant Officers remain technical experts, LDOs take on the role of a generalist, like that of officers commissioned through more traditional sources. LDOs are limited, not by their authority, but by the types of billets they are allowed to fill. However, in recent times, they have come to be used more and more like their more-traditional counterparts.

Officers receive a commission assigning them to the officer corps from the President (with the [consent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advice_and_consent) of the [Senate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senate)). To accept this commission, all officers must take an [oath of office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Uniformed_Services_Oath_of_Office).

Through their careers, officers usually will receive further training at one or a number of the many [staff colleges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staff_college).

Company grade officers in pay grades O-1 through O-3 (known as "junior" officers in the Navy and Coast Guard) function as leaders of smaller units or sections of a unit, typically with an experienced SNCO (or CPO in the Navy and Coast Guard) assistant and mentor.

Field grade officers in pay grades O-4 through O-6 (known as "senior" officers in the Navy and Coast Guard) lead significantly larger and more complex operations, with gradually more competitive promotion requirements.

General officers, or [flag officers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_officer) in the Navy and Coast Guard, serve at the highest levels and oversee major portions of the military mission.

**Five-star ranking**

Main article: [Five-star rank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five-star_rank)

These are ranks of the highest honor and responsibility in the armed forces, but they are almost never given during peacetime service and have only been held by a very few officers during wartime:

* [General of the Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_of_the_Army_(United_States))
* [Fleet Admiral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleet_Admiral_(United_States))
* [General of the Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_of_the_Air_Force_(United_States))

No corresponding rank exists for the Marine Corps or the Coast Guard. As with three- and four-star ranks, Congress is the approving authority for a five-star rank confirmation.

The rank of [General of the Armies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_of_the_Armies) is considered senior to General of the Army, but was never held by active duty officers at the same time as persons who held the rank of General of the Army. It has been held by two people: [John J. Pershing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_J._Pershing) who received the rank in 1919 after World War I, and [George Washington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington) who received it posthumously in 1976 as part of the [American Bicentennial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Bicentennial) celebrations. Pershing, appointed to General of the Armies in active duty status for life, was still alive at the time of the first five-star appointments during World War II, and was thereby acknowledged as superior in grade by seniority to any World War II era Generals of the Army. George Washington's appointment by [Public Law 94-479](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Public_Law_94-479) to General of the Armies of the United States was established by law as having "rank and precedence over all other grades of the Army, past or present," making him not only superior to Pershing, but superior to any grade in the United States Army in perpetuity.

In the Navy, the theoretically corresponding rank to General of the Armies is [Admiral of the Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiral_of_the_Navy_(United_States)). It was never held by active duty officers at the same time as persons who held the rank of Fleet Admiral. [George Dewey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Dewey) is the only person to have ever held this rank. After the establishment of the rank of Fleet Admiral in 1944, the Department of the Navy specified that the rank of Fleet Admiral was to be junior to the rank of Admiral of the Navy. However, since Dewey died in 1917 before the establishment of the rank of Fleet Admiral, the [six-star rank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-star_rank) status has not been totally confirmed.

**Order of precedence**

Under current Department of Defense regulation, the various components of the Armed Forces have a set order of seniority. Examples of the use of this system include the display of service flags, placement of Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen in formation, etc. When the United States Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Navy, the cadets, United States Coast Guard Academy, the United States Coast Guard, and the Coast Guard Reserve shall take precedence, respectively, after the midshipmen, United States Naval Academy; the United States Navy; and Navy Reserve.

* Cadets, US Military Academy
* Midshipmen, US Naval Academy
* Cadets, United States Coast Guard Academy (*when the Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Navy*)
* Cadets, US Air Force Academy
* Cadets, United States Coast Guard Academy (*when the Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Department of Homeland Security*)
* Midshipmen, US Merchant Marine Academy
* United States Army
* United States Marine Corps
* United States Navy
* United States Coast Guard (*when the Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Navy*)
* United States Air Force
* United States Coast Guard (*when the Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Department of Homeland Security*)
* Army National Guard of the United States
* United States Army Reserve
* United States Marine Corps Reserve
* United States Navy Reserve
* United States Coast Guard Reserve (*when the Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Navy*)
* Air National Guard of the United States
* United States Air Force Reserve
* United States Coast Guard Reserve (*when the Coast Guard shall operate as part of the Department of Homeland Security*)
* Other training and auxiliary organizations of the Army, Marine Corps, [United States Merchant Marine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Merchant_Marine), [Civil Air Patrol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_Air_Patrol), and [United States Coast Guard Auxiliary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Coast_Guard_Auxiliary), as in the preceding order.

**Note:** While the United States Navy is actually older than the United States Marine Corps, the Marine Corps takes precedence over the Navy due to previous inconsistencies in the Navy's birth date. The Marine Corps has recognized its observed birth date on a more consistent basis. The Second Continental Congress established the Navy on 13 October 1775 and the Marine Corps on 10 November 1775. The Navy did not officially recognize 13 October 1775 as its birth date until 1972 when, then-[Chief of Naval Operations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Naval_Operations), Admiral [Elmo Zumwalt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elmo_Zumwalt) authorized it to be observed as such.

**See also**

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|  | [***Military of the United States portal***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Military_of_the_United_States) |

* [Awards and decorations of the United States military](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awards_and_decorations_of_the_United_States_military)
* [Full-spectrum dominance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Full-spectrum_dominance)
* [List of active United States military aircraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_active_United_States_military_aircraft)
* [List of currently active United States military land vehicles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_currently_active_United_States_military_land_vehicles)
* [List of currently active United States military watercraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_currently_active_United_States_military_watercraft)
* [Military expression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_expression)
* [Military justice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_justice)
* [Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Servicemembers%27_Group_Life_Insurance)
* [State Defense Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Defense_Force)
* [TRICARE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TRICARE) – Health care plan for the U.S. uniformed services
* [United States military casualties of war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military_casualties_of_war)
* [United States Service academies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Service_academies)

This page was last modified on 28 August 2012 at 18:28.