

# FY2025 NDAA: Reserve Component End-Strength

October 21, 2024

## Background

Under [10 U.S.C. §115\(a\)](#), Congress sets the maximum size (i.e., end-strength) of the active and reserve components of the Armed Forces annually, typically in a National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Congress is also responsible for appropriating funds for the pay and benefits of these personnel. End-strength specifically refers to the actual number of personnel in a branch on the last day of the fiscal year (i.e., on September 30). The proposed end-strength figures in an FY2025 NDAA would be for September 30, 2025. Congress also periodically sets minimum end strength levels for the Armed Forces, 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.

Typically, 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\(c\)](#), the Secretary of Defense may increase the end-strength of any of the services above the authorized end-strength by up to 2%. Recruiting and retention shortfalls may cause one or more of the services to fall below their minimum authorized strength.

Congress sets annual end-strength figures for the active component of the Armed Forces—comprised of personnel serving in a full-time capacity—and for the reserve component. The reserve component provides “trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in time of war or national emergency, and at such other times as the national security may require, to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever...more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components.” ([10 U.S.C. § 10102](#)).

The Secretary of Defense is required by law ([10 U.S.C. §113a\(b\)\(2\)](#)) to submit end-strength requests for all branches of the reserve component in an annual request to Congress. Congress is not bound by these requests, but has authorized end-strengths similar to the Pentagon’s requested numbers.

The reserve component consists of the reserve forces of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, as well as the Army National Guard (ARNG) and Air National Guard (ANG). The Space

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IN12448

Force does not have a reserve component. It is a single-component Armed Force with personnel serving in an inactive or active-duty status (10 U.S.C. §20001). The National Guard (ANG and ARNG) may be mobilized under federal or state authority, and performs homeland security missions that include responding to civil unrest and [natural disasters](#), as well as guarding domestic airspace.

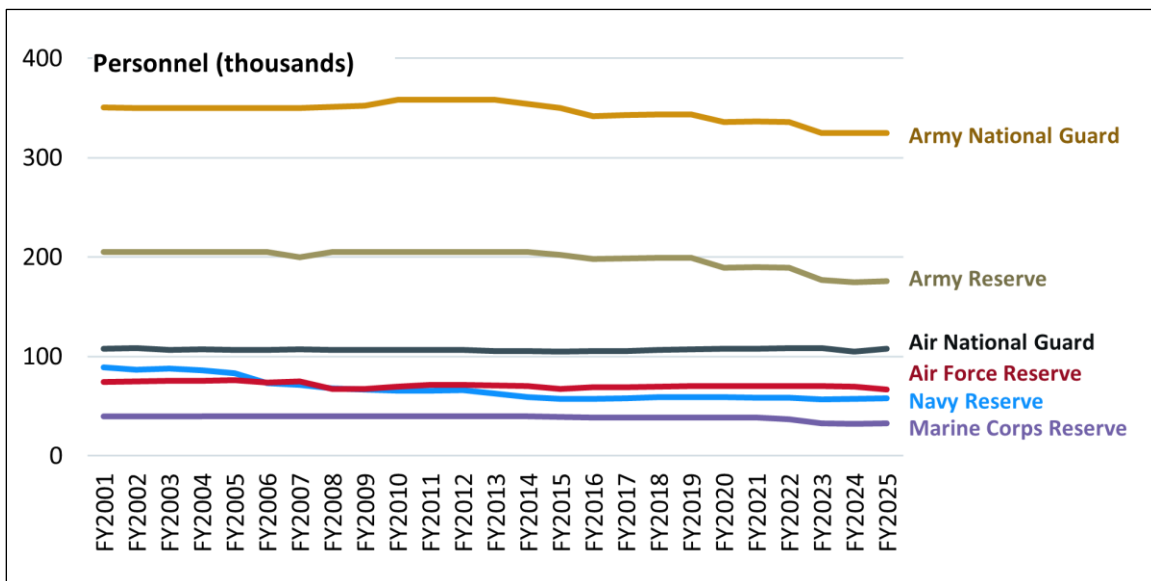
## Recent Trends

Congress varies the authorized end-strengths over time in response to factors such as national security priorities, budget constraints, and recruitment challenges. It has lowered authorized reserve component end-strengths year over year since 2009 (see **Figure 1**), as U.S. commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan diminished and the Services faced growing recruitment challenges.

In S.Rept. 118-58, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) stated that it chose to recommend lower end-strengths than requested because “legislating unreachable end-strength numbers would set the military services up for failure” by forcing them to lower recruiting standards in pursuit of unrealistic manpower quotas. It remains unclear whether incremental reductions in previous years may have stemmed in part from this concern.

**Figure 1. Selected Reserve Component Authorized End-Strength FY2001–FY2025 Request**

Figure is interactive in the HTML version of this Insight.



**Source:** CRS analysis of Congress for FY2001–FY2024 data. FY2025 data from President’s Budget Request.

Each reserve component force has seen declines from FY2001 to FY2024. The total decline is 11.6 %, while the Navy Reserve has seen the highest reduction of 35.1% (See **Table 1**).

**Table 1. Percent Change in Selected Reserve Authorized End-Strength, FY2001-FY2025 Request**

Army National Guard	Army Reserve	Navy Reserve	Marine Corps Reserve	Air National Guard	Air Force Reserve	Total Reserve Component
-7.3%	-14.4%	-35.1%	-17.8%	-0.3%	-9.9%	-11.6%

**Source:** Congress.gov for FY2001-FY2024 data; FY2025 data from President's Budget Request.

## FY2025 NDAA's

**Table 2. Comparison of FY2024 Enacted and FY2025 President's Budget Request for Selected Reserve Component End-Strength**

Service	FY2024 Enacted (P.L. 118-31)	FY2025 President's Budget Request	Difference Between FY2025 Request and FY2024 Enacted
Army National Guard	325,000	325,000	0
Army Reserve	174,800	175,800	+1,000
Navy Reserve	57,200	57,700	+500
Marine Corps Reserve	32,000	32,500	+500
Air National Guard	105,000	107,700	+2,700
Air Force Reserve	69,600	67,000	-2,600
Total	763,600	765,700	+2,100

**Source:** Congress.gov, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller).

The Biden Administration's [FY2025 budget](#) increases requested end-strengths for the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Air National Guard from FY2024 enacted levels. It lowers requested end-strength for the Air Force Reserve and maintains the FY2024 end-strength of the Army National Guard (see Table 2). Its requests represent a total increase of 2,100 over FY2024 enacted levels.

**Table 3. Comparison of FY2025 NDAA Selected Reserve Component End-Strength Provisions**

Service	FY2025 President's Budget Request	House-passed H.R. 8070	Senate Armed Services-reported S. 4638	Notable Differences
Army National Guard	325,000	325,000	325,000	None
Army Reserve	175,800	175,800	175,800	None
Navy Reserve	57,700	57,700	57,700	None
Marine Corps Reserve	32,500	32,500	32,500	None
Air National Guard	107,700	107,700	108,300	Senate committee version authorizes 600 more personnel than requested.

Service	FY2025 President's Budget Request	House-passed H.R. 8070	Senate Armed Services-reported S. 4638	Notable Differences
Air Force Reserve	67,000	67,000	67,000	None
Total	765,700	765,700	766,300	Senate committee version +600

**Source:** Congress.gov, Department of Defense Office of the Comptroller.

The House has passed and the Senate is considering different versions of an FY2025 National Defense Authorization Act. The House-passed version, H.R. 8070, proposes an authorized end-strength that is identical to the President's budget request. The SASC-reported version (S. 4638) proposes similar authorized end-strength, with 600 more personnel for the Air National Guard (see Table 3). S.Rept. 118-188, accompanying the SASC-reported version of an FY2025 NDAA, explained that the increase in the Air National Guard end-strength is intended "to offset any reductions that may occur as a result of transferring units and personnel from the Air National Guard to the Space Force" as authorized under [Section 515](#) of the NDAA.

## Issues for Congress

Congress may consider several actions:

- **Absolute Increase:** Congress may assess whether present and future security challenges require a larger reserve force, and consider whether or not to authorize an absolute increase in the number of reserve component personnel. Such an action may increase the Armed Forces' capacity, with potentially higher costs.
- **Absolute Decrease:** Congress could assess whether the security environment does not justify a reserve force of the present size, and consider whether or not to authorize a reduction in the absolute number of reserve component personnel. Such a reduction may reduce costs, but may also reduce the Armed Forces' capacity.
- **Shift Active End-Strength to Reserve Component:** Congress could assess whether U.S. security objectives would be better served by a larger reserve component, and could consider whether or not to shift end-strength from the active to the reserve component. Such a shift could create a force that may cost less to maintain, but also may be slower to deploy. Such an approach may also reduce the readiness of the active component.
- **Shift Reserve End-Strength to Active Component:** Congress could assess whether U.S. security objectives would be better served by a larger active component, and could consider whether or not to shift end-strength from the reserve to the active component. Such a shift could create a force that may cost more to maintain, but also may be quicker to deploy. It may also increase the tempo of active component operations and thereby reduce retention.
- **Maintain Current End-Strength:** Congress may decide that current end-strength meets U.S. security objectives and make no changes.

## Author Information

Nicholas M. Munves  
Analyst in U.S Defense Policy

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