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Defense Primer: The Military Departments

Military Departments

The three military departments within the Department of Defense (DOD), created by the National Security Act of 1947, are the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy, and the Department of the Air Force (P.L. 80-253). A military department prepares and provides strategic, conventional, and special operations forces for military operations conducted by DOD. Each department has an executive headquarters for administering its activities, personnel, and organizations. The type and number of personnel permitted to work in an executive headquarters are limited by law and differ among the three departments (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Executive Headquarters Personnel Limits

Generals/ Admirals	Other Officers	Civilian Employees	Total
Department of the Army			
67	1,833	1,350	3,250
Department of the Navy			
74	1,726	1,350	3,150
Department of the Air Force			
60	1,590	1,100	2,750

Source: 10 U.S.C. §§7014, 8014, 9014.

Note: Personnel limits do not apply in time of war and they may be increased by 15% of such limits in time of national emergency.

Secretary of the Military Department

The military departments are led by a civilian secretary whom the President of the United States appoints with the advice and consent of the Senate. The authority of a secretary runs from the President through the Secretary of Defense. The secretaries of the military departments are responsible for training, equipping, and organizing their departments' armed services. A secretary may present departmental recommendations to Congress after notifying the Secretary of Defense. Principal officials of the department reporting to a secretary include the under secretary, assistant secretaries, and general counsel. These officials typically are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Specific areas of responsibility for the assistant secretaries include logistics, manpower, acquisition, and financial management.

Department of the Army

The Office of the Secretary of the Army administers the Department of the Army; secretarial authorities are set forth in 10 U.S.C. §7013 (**Figure 1**). The department's armed service is the Army, which is the principal land force in

DOD. The Army is composed of the Regular Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard of the United States. The Department of the Army's FY2022 budget request is \$173 billion. The total numbers of actual or estimated personnel in the Department of the Army for FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022 are in **Table 2**.

Figure 1. Department of the Army

Secretary of the Army
Office of the Secretary of the Army
Armed Service
Service Chief and Service Staff
Army

Source: CRS analysis of military department statutory authorities.

Table 2. Department of the Army Personnel

Category	FY2020 Actual	FY2021 Estimate	FY2022 Estimate
Active Army	485,383	486,000	485,000
Army National Guard	336,100	336,500	336,000
Army Reserve	188,700	189,800	189,500
Army Civilian	190,899	194,128	196,111
Total	1,201,082	1,206,428	1,206,611

Source: DOD, *Defense Manpower Profile Report – Fiscal Year 2022*, July 2021, pp. 2-3 (FY2020 Reserve and National Guard data rounded by source).

Department of the Navy

The Office of the Secretary of the Navy administers the Department of the Navy; secretarial authorities are set forth in 10 U.S.C. §8013 (**Figure 2**). The department's armed services are the Navy and the Marine Corps, which are the principal maritime forces in DOD. The Navy is composed of the Regular Navy, Fleet Reserve, and Navy Reserve. The Marine Corps is composed of the Regular Marine Corps, Fleet Marine Corps Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve. The Department of the Navy's FY2022 budget request is \$211.7 billion. The total numbers of actual or estimated personnel in the department for FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022 are in **Table 3**.

United States Coast Guard

The Coast Guard is an armed service normally operating in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It has contingent roles in DOD as a principal maritime force. During wartime, or if directed by the President, the Coast Guard would transfer from DHS to the Department of the Navy (14 U.S.C. §103).

Figure 2. Department of the Navy

Secretary of the Navy	
Office of the Secretary of the Navy	
Armed Services	
Service Chiefs and Service Staffs	
Navy	Marine Corps

Source: CRS analysis of military department statutory authorities.

Table 3. Department of the Navy Personnel

Category	FY2020 Actual	FY2021 Estimate	FY2022 Estimate
Active Navy	336,551	342,316	347,800
Active Marine Corps	180,958	181,204	178,500
Navy Reserve	59,200	59,000	58,600
Marine Corps Reserve	35,500	36,200	36,800
Navy Civilian	196,767	198,614	200,248
Marine Civilian	22,206	22,553	22,653
Total	831,182	839,887	844,601

Source: DOD, *Defense Manpower Profile Report – Fiscal Year 2022*, July 2021, pp. 2-3 (FY2020 Reserve data rounded by source).

Department of the Air Force

The Office of the Secretary of the Air Force administers the Department of the Air Force; secretarial authorities are set forth in 10 U.S.C. §9013 (**Figure 3**). The department's armed services are the Air Force and the Space Force, which are the principal aerospace forces in DOD. The Air Force is composed of the Regular Air Force, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard of the United States. The Space Force contains the Regular Space Force. The Department of the Air Force FY2022 budget request is \$173.7 billion. The total numbers of actual or estimated personnel in the department for FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022 are in **Table 4**.

Figure 3. Department of the Air Force

Secretary of the Air Force	
Office of the Secretary of the Air Force	
Armed Services	
Service Chiefs and Service Staffs	
Air Force	Space Force

Source: CRS analysis of military department statutory authorities.

Table 4. Department of the Air Force Personnel

Category	FY2020 Actual	FY2021 Estimate	FY2022 Estimate
Active Air Force	332,101	336,800	337,700
Air National Guard	107,400	108,100	108,300
Air Force Reserve	69,100	70,600	70,300
Air Force Civilian	169,736	177,453	180,515
Total	678,337	692,953	696,815

Source: DOD, *Defense Manpower Profile Report – Fiscal Year 2022*, July 2021, pp. 2-3 (FY2020 Reserve and National Guard data rounded by source).

Notes: Air Force onboard personnel data include Space Force. Projected military end strength and civilian full-time equivalents for Space Force in FY2022 are 6,434 and 3,545, respectively, for a total of 9,979 authorized personnel.

Armed Services

A military department contains at least one armed service. The President appoints a four-star general or admiral of an armed service as its service chief for four years with the advice and consent of the Senate. A service chief reports to the secretary of the department and is responsible for the activities, personnel, and operations of the service. The service chiefs in the military departments also are members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in DOD. Each armed service has a *service staff* with the principal role of assisting the service chief and the office of the secretary of the department. The secretary of the department determines the duties, titles, and membership of a *service staff*, unless prescribed by law.

Uniformed Services

The armed services in DOD and DHS constitute six of the eight uniformed services (10 U.S.C. §101). The two remaining uniformed services have contingent roles in the military departments during wartime or if directed by the President.

Public Health Service Corps (PHS Corps). PHS Corps is a uniformed service in the Department of Health and Human Services. If transferred to DOD, it would become a branch of the armed services (42 U.S.C. §217).

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Corps (NOAA Corps). NOAA Corps is a uniformed service in the Department of Commerce. If transferred to DOD, it would become part of any military department as determined to be in the best interests of national security (33 U.S.C. §3061).

Related CRS Publication

CRS In Focus IF10543, *Defense Primer: The Department of Defense*, by Kathleen J. McInnis

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