

Heritage's Index of Military Strength Finds Weaker U.S. Forces, Increasing Threats

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Major new Heritage Foundation report says Russia more dangerous than any other opposing force – even more than ISIS. Follow the link below to download your FREE copy.

WASHINGTON, NOV. 16, 2016 – None of America's four military branches rates higher than "marginal" in its ability to protect American interests, and one -- the Army -- is classified as "weak," according to the *2017 Index of U.S. Military Strength*, released today by The Heritage Foundation. The current U.S. military force is capable of meeting the demands of a single major regional conflict while also handling its other missions worldwide, *Index* editors say. But handling two major conflicts simultaneously -- a distinct possibility, given the growing threats detailed elsewhere in the *Index* -- is likely beyond the ability of the force given its current condition. "The negative trends identified in our 2015 and 2016 editions continue," says Dakota Wood, senior editor for the *Index*. "Our competitors are acting more aggressively and are investing more in their armed forces, which raised our score for the 'threat environment' a notch to 'high,' the second highest category on our scale. The threat posed by North Korea was assessed to have diminished somewhat from last year. Its threat rating shifted from 'severe' to 'high.' But that is one of the few bright spots in the *Index*. Five of the six major 'threat actors' now rank 'high' on the scale of threats to U.S. interests. 'Russia and China continue to be the most worrisome, both because of the investments they are making in the modernization and expansion of their offensive military capabilities and because of the more enduring effect they are having within their respective regions,' the editors write. Middle-East terrorism, meanwhile, has hit the highest *Index* threat level: 'hostile.' Throughout the last year, terrorism degraded political stability across the region. The *Index* now rates political stability there as 'very poor.' Yet the U.S. military is still struggling due to historically low levels of funding imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011. At the same time, however, it's being asked to do more, sustaining a high tempo of operations with a shrinking, aging and less-ready force. Years of sequestration-imposed funding cuts and poorly executed modernization programs have taken their toll. Defense spending has declined by about \$78 billion in real dollars since 2011, forcing U.S. forces to do more with fewer troops and vehicle and equipment kept running well past their prime. The *Index* analyzes three components that impact the security of the U.S.: the ability of the military to defend U.S. security interests, the nature and severity of major threats to those interests, and the environments (presence/absence of allies, geographic challenges, etc.) in which U.S. forces would have to operate. In providing a detailed overview of the status of U.S. forces and the threat faced abroad, *Index* editors hope to inform the ongoing debate over military funding and policy. "A weakened America arguably emboldens challenges to its interests and loses potential allies, while a militarily strong America deters opportunism and draws partners to its side from across the globe," the editors write. Copies of the *2017 Index of U.S. Military Strength* (387 pages, \$24.95) may be ordered online at <http://shop.heritage.org>.

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***The full text, including charts and graphs is also available free, online, at <http://index.heritage.org/military>.**