



Defense Primer: The Military Departments

Military Departments

The term *military department* refers to the executive functions of an armed service and the service’s activities, installations, and field headquarters, all of which are under the control and direction of the secretary of the department (10 U.S.C. §101(a)(6)). There are three federal military departments and they are within the Department of Defense (DOD): the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy, and the Department of the Air Force. A military department prepares and provides strategic, conventional, and special operations forces for military operations conducted by DOD (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Typical Structure of Military Departments

Secretary of the Military Department
Office of the Secretary
Service Chief or Chiefs
Service Staff or Staffs
Armed Service or Services

Source: CRS analysis of military department statutory authorities.

There is an executive headquarters in each military department 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 (see **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(f), 8014(f), 9014(f).

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

Each military department is led by a civilian secretary whom the President of the United States appoints with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. The authority of a secretary runs from the President through the Secretary of Defense. A secretary of a military department is responsible for training, equipping, and organizing the armed service or services of the department. Principal officials of the

department reporting to a secretary include the under secretary, assistant secretaries, and general counsel. These officials also 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.

Armed Services

A military department contains at least one armed service. The President appoints a four-star general or admiral in 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.

Military Law

A criminal justice system for servicemembers established under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) applies to the military departments. Active duty servicemembers and regular component military retirees are subject to the punitive measures in the UCMJ at all times and in any place. Military law is meant to promote justice, efficiency, and discipline in the armed services. It is exercised primarily in a judicial forum known as a *court-martial* or an administrative forum known as a *non-judicial punishment proceeding*.

Each armed service usually comprises both active and reserve forces. The Army is composed of the Regular Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard of the United States. The Navy is composed of the Regular Navy, Navy Reserve, and Fleet Reserve. The Marine Corps is composed of the Regular Marine Corps, Marine Corps Reserve, and Fleet Marine Corps Reserve. 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.

U.S. Coast Guard

The Coast Guard is the only armed service not in a military department, as it operates under the Secretary of Homeland Security; however, during war or by the direction of the President, the Coast Guard operates under the Secretary of the Navy as a naval force. The Coast Guard has a service chief and a service staff, and is composed of the Regular Coast Guard, Coast Guard Reserve, and Coast Guard Auxiliary.

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. The department’s armed service is the

Army, which is the principal land force of the United States. The department’s fiscal year (FY) 2023 budget request was approximately \$177.5B, an increase of \$2.8B over the appropriations enacted for FY 2022. The number of personnel in the department is included in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Department of the Army Personnel

Category	FY-2021 Actual	FY-2022 Estimate	FY-2023 Estimate
Active Duty Army	486,490	485,000	473,000
Army National Guard	337,525	336,000	336,000
Army Reserve	184,358	189,500	189,500
Army Civilian	199,472	196,111	196,897
Total	1,207,845	1,206,611	1,195,397

Source: DOD, *Defense Manpower Profile Report – Fiscal Year 2023*, September 27, 2022, pp. 2-3.

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. The department’s armed services are the Navy and the Marine Corps, which are the principal naval forces of the United States. The department’s FY 2023 budget request was approximately \$230.8B, an increase of \$9.1B over the appropriations enacted for FY 2022. The number of personnel in the department is included in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Department of the Navy Personnel

Category	FY-2021 Actual	FY-2022 Estimate	FY-2023 Estimate
Active Duty Navy	347,895	347,441	346,300
Active Duty Marine Corps	179,678	177,249	177,000
Navy Reserve	47,491	47,186	47,623
Marine Corps Reserve	35,240	32,357	33,000
Navy Civilian	200,872	201,810	203,222
Marine Civilian	22,483	22,470	22,486
Total	833,659	828,513	829,631

Source: DOD, *Defense Manpower Profile Report – Fiscal Year 2023*, September 27, 2022, pp. 2-3.

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. The department’s armed services are the Air Force and the Space Force, which are the principal aerospace forces of the United States. The department’s FY 2023 budget request was approximately \$194.0B, an increase of \$20.2B over the appropriations enacted for FY 2022. The number of personnel in the department is included in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Department of the Air Force Personnel

Category	FY-2021 Actual	FY-2022 Estimate	FY-2023 Estimate
Active Duty Air Force	328,071	328,300	323,400
Active Duty Space Force	6,563	8,400	8,600
Air National Guard	108,483	108,300	108,400
Air Force Reserve	70,570	70,300	70,000
Air Force Civilian	175,162	177,816	179,690
Space Force Civilian	1,009	4,548	4,920
Total	689,585	697,664	695,010

Source: DOD, *Defense Manpower Profile Report – Fiscal Year 2023*, September 27, 2022, pp. 2-3.

Uniformed Services

The armed services are six of the eight uniformed services of the United States (10 U.S.C. §101(a)(4)-(5)). Although they are not armed services, the two remaining uniformed services have contingent roles in the military departments during war or by the direction of the President.

Public Health Service

The commissioned corps of the Public Health Service (PHS Corps) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is a uniformed service subject to the control and direction of the Secretary of HHS. The Assistant Secretary for Health within HHS is the uniformed administrator of the Public Health Service (PHS) and is appointed as a four-star officer. If transferred to DOD, PHS Corps would become a branch of the armed services (42 U.S.C. §217). The PHS Corps is composed of a Regular Corps and Ready Reserve Corps and has a uniformed director who is appointed as a three-star officer and serves as the Surgeon General.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

The commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA Corps) in the Department of Commerce is a uniformed service subject to the control and direction of the Secretary of Commerce. If transferred to DOD, NOAA Corps would become part of a military department (33 U.S.C. §3061). The NOAA Corps contains only active duty commissioned officers and has a uniformed director who is appointed as a three-star officer and serves as a vice-admiral.

Related CRS Publication

CRS In Focus IF10543, *Defense Primer: The Department of Defense*, coordinated by Nathan J. Lucas

Alan Ott, Analyst in Defense and Intelligence Personnel Policy

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