

Department of Defense

Timeline of Growth

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- **1787:** The U.S. Constitution empowers Congress to provide for the common defense, to declare war, to provide and maintain a navy, and to call forth the militia to suppress insurrections and repel invasions.
- **1789:** Congress creates the Department of War.¹
- **1794:** Congress authorizes construction of six navy frigates.
- **1796:** In his farewell address, George Washington warns his countrymen to "avoid the necessity of those overgrown military establishments which under any form of government are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to republican liberty."²
- **1798:** Congress creates the Department of the Navy.
- **1802:** Congress establishes the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York
- **1812:** Congress declares war on the British Empire. The number of Americans serving in the war is 286,730, and battle deaths total 2,260.³ The cost of the war is \$1.6 billion in today's dollars.⁴ Total defense spending during the war peaks at 2.7 percent of gross domestic product in 1813.
- **1815:** The War of 1812 ends with the Treaty of Ghent. Congress increases the size of the peacetime army from 3,200 to 10,000.
- **1824:** The U.S. War Department creates the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is later moved to the Department of the Interior.
- **1845:** The United States Naval School is founded at Annapolis, Maryland. The name is later changed to the United States Naval Academy.
- **1846:** Congress declares war on Mexico. The number of Americans serving in the war totals 78,718, and battle deaths are 1,733. The cost of the war is \$2.4 billion in today's dollars. Total defense spending during the war peaks at 1.9 percent of GDP in 1847.
- **1861:** The Civil War begins with an attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston. President Abraham Lincoln suspends *habeas corpus* in July, and several weeks later Congress passes a resolution clarifying that the war aims to restore the Union.
- **1861:** Congress passes the Revenue Act of 1861, which includes the nation's first personal income tax.
- **1863:** Congress passes the Conscription Act authorizing the first military draft in U.S. history. The act spurs violent protests in several cities, including a three-day riot in New York City, which is quelled by federal troops. The violence may have claimed 1,000 lives.⁵
- **1865:** The Civil War ends. More than 2.2 million serve on the Union side, and battle deaths total 140,414. Figures for the Confederate side vary, but an official report at the time found 74,524 battle deaths.⁶ The cost of the war for the Union is \$60 billion in today's dollars. Total Union defense spending during the war peaks at 12 percent of GDP in 1865. The Confederacy spends about \$20 billion in today's dollars.
- **1866:** Congress authorizes the expansion of the peacetime army. The force reaches a peak of 57,000 in 1867 until a later increase during the Spanish-American War in 1898.
- **1870:** A national weather service is established under the Signal Corps of the U.S. Army. Later housed in the Department of Agriculture, it is transferred to the Department of Commerce in 1940.
- **1884:** The Naval War College is established in Newport, Rhode Island.
- **1888:** Congress creates the Board of Ordinance and Fortification to supervise the creation of coastal fortifications.
- **1898:** The United States acquires the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other territories in the Spanish-American War. The number of Americans serving in the war is 306,760, and battle deaths are 385. The cost of the war is \$9 billion in today's dollars, and the war costs 1.5 percent of GDP. The war lasts less than four months, but the U.S. military spends several years in the Philippines putting down a subsequent uprising.
- **1901:** Secretary of War Elihu Root establishes the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.
- **1903:** The Militia Act begins the shift of control over the National Guard from the states to the federal government.
- **1904:** President Theodore Roosevelt issues a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine to justify U.S. military intervention in the Western Hemisphere. The Roosevelt Corollary opens the door for intermittent military occupations during the next three decades in Panama, Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras.
- **1907:** President Theodore Roosevelt tasks the U.S. Army with construction of the Panama Canal.
- **1915:** Legislation creates the U.S. Coast Guard by merging the Revenue Cutter Service and the Life-Saving Service.
- **1916:** The National Defense Act solidifies federal control over the National Guard. The bill increases the size of the peacetime army to 175,000 and the National Guard to 400,000. It also gives the president the power to force private businesses to make defense materials.
- **1916:** Congress passes the Naval Appropriations Act designed to create a U.S. Navy equal to the most powerful in the world. The act stipulates that 50 destroyers will be built over a three-year period.
- **1917:** Congress declares war on Germany, and the nation enters World War I on the side of England and France. The Army's size reaches 3.7 million by the end of the war, as facilitated by the Selective Service Act.⁷
- **1919:** World War I ends. The number of Americans serving in the war is 4,734,991, and battle deaths total 53,402. The war costs \$334 billion in today's dollars. Defense spending during the war peaks at 14 percent of GDP in 1919.
- **1920:** An amendment to National Defense Act triples the number of officers during peacetime and increases the total size of the peacetime army to 280,000.
- **1926:** The U.S. Army Air Corps is organized.

- **1932:** President Herbert Hoover orders the Army, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, to evict thousands of veterans from encampments near the Capitol. The "Bonus Army" is demanding payment of a bonus for their service.
- **1934:** The Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry looks into ties between the War and Navy departments and arms suppliers during World War I amid public suspicions of corruption.
- **1940:** Congress passes the Selective Training and Service Act, the first peacetime draft in U.S. history. Concription was halted in 1973, but American males are still required to register upon reaching the age of 18 as a contingency measure.
- **1941:** Japanese forces attack U.S. military facilities in Hawaii and the Philippines on December 7th. Congress declares war the following day. On December 11th, Germany and Italy declare war on the United States.
- **1942:** President Franklin Roosevelt orders the forced relocation and internment of approximately 110,000 people of Japanese descent. Two-thirds of the internees were American citizens, and none of them were charged with a crime.⁸
- **1943:** The world's largest office building, the Pentagon, is completed after numerous construction problems. The building "was built upon a foundation of lies, secrecy, and cost overruns," according to one author.⁹ It was originally supposed to cost \$35 million to build, but ended up costing \$75 million.
- **1945:** World War II ends. Americans serving in the war total 16.1 million, and battle deaths total 291,557. The cost of the war is \$4.1 trillion in today's dollars. Defense spending during the war peaks at 37.5 percent of GDP in 1945.
- **1946:** The War Department establishes the Air War College at Maxwell Field, Alabama.
- **1947:** Congress passes the National Security Act and unites the War and Navy Departments within a National Military Establishment, which is renamed the Department of Defense in 1949. The Act creates the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the U.S. Air Force as separate branches of the military.
- **1949:** The United States joins the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Under the treaty, the United States is committed to considering an attack on 10 Western European countries and Canada as synonymous with an attack on the United States.
- **1950:** The size of the U.S. Army drops to 591,000 soldiers, after peaking at 8 million soldiers in 1945.
- **1950:** Following North Korea's invasion of South Korea, President Truman sends U.S. military forces to the Korean peninsula without a congressional declaration of war.
- **1953:** Hostilities in Korea end with an armistice, but no formal end to the war. Americans serving in the war total 5.7 million, and battle deaths total 33,739. The cost of the war is \$341 billion in today's dollars. Defense spending during the war peaks at 13 percent of GDP in 1952. Today, more than 30,000 U.S. troops remain on the peninsula.
- **1955:** The United States joins the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) as a charter member following Senate ratification. The treaty later serves as a justification for expanding the U.S. military role in Vietnam.
- **1955:** Instead of being divided on a functional basis, the military budget is divided, and remains divided, on a service basis. One result is that each service strives to acquire a full range of weapons and capabilities.
- **1959:** President Eisenhower fails in his attempts to shrink the reserve force due to the political power of reserve units spread across the nation. Indeed, Congress passes legislation forbidding the president from decreasing the size of reserve forces below 700,000.
- **1961:** In a farewell address to the nation, President Eisenhower warns Americans of the dangers of the growing military-industrial complex. He calls for "an alerted and knowledgeable citizenry" to block it from gaining "unwarranted influence" that would "endanger our liberties and our domestic processes."
- **1961:** President Kennedy sends 3,000 military advisers and various equipment to Vietnam to support the South Vietnamese government in its war against the communist Vietcong.
- **1964:** After an alleged attack on the USS Maddox by the North Vietnamese, Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which allows the president to authorize any necessary actions to defend Southeast Asia.
- **1965:** President Johnson increases the number of troops in Vietnam to 60,000.¹¹ Troop levels peak at 537,377 in 1968.
- **1973:** The United States ends formal combat operations in Vietnam. Americans serving in the war total 8.7 million and battle deaths total 47,434. The cost of the war is \$738 billion in today's dollars. Defense spending during the war peaks at 9.5 percent of GDP in 1968.
- **1989:** The Cold War ends with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November and the unification of Germany at the end of the following year.
- **1991:** In the Persian Gulf War, U.S. troops invade Kuwait and Iraq and force Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to withdraw all forces from Kuwait. U.S. forces remain in Saudi Arabia to police no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq. Americans serving in the Persian Gulf War total 2.2 million and battle deaths total 147. The cost of the war is \$102 billion in today's dollars. Total defense spending during the war peaks at 4.6 percent of GDP in 1991.
- **2001:** The Department of Defense has 1.4 million uniformed service members and 649,000 civilian employees.
- **2001:** Islamic terrorists hijack passenger planes and fly them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon causing a terrible loss of life. The attacks prompt large increases in military spending and lead to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have cost more than \$1 trillion.
- **2004:** A senior Air Force procurement officer and a Boeing executive plead guilty to illegal dealings in negotiating a \$23 billion air tanker contract. The officials receive short prison terms.
- **2005:** Congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) pleads guilty to charges of bribery and tax evasion. Cunningham resigns his House seat after admitting to receiving money from defense contractors in return for influencing military purchases from his position on the House Defense Appropriations subcommittee. He is sentenced to eight years in prison.
- **2010:** The Obama administration proposes a \$721 billion budget for the Defense Department in fiscal 2011, of which \$159 billion is for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁴ The department has 1.5 million uniformed service members and 757,000 civilian employees.¹⁵ Defense is the largest item in the federal budget after Social Security.

¹ Many of the facts in this timeline are from the army's history website at www.history.army.mil. In particular, see www.history.army.mil/books/AMH-V1 and www.history.army.mil/books/AMH/amh-toc.htm.

² Available at www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/farewell/sd106-21.pdf.

³ Casualty figures in this timeline are from Anne Leland and Mari-Jana Oboroceanu, "American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics," Congressional Research Service, February 26, 2010.

- ⁴ War costs in this timeline are from Stephen Daggett, "Costs of Major U.S. Wars," Congressional Research Service, July 29, 2010.
- ⁵ Virtual New York City, "Draft Riots," undated, www.virtualny.cuny.edu/draftriots/Aftermath/aftermath_set.html.
- ⁶ Cited in Anne Leland and Mari-Jana Oboroceanu, "American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics," Congressional Research Service, February 26, 2010.
- ⁷ Lisa Daniel, American Forces Press Service, "Remembering the War That Built the Modern U.S. Military," March 6, 2008, www.defense.gov/home/features/2008/0308_ww1/story1.html.
- ⁸ Smithsonian Institution, "Letters from the Japanese American Internment: Clara Breed," undated, www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japanese_internment/index.html.
- ⁹ James Mann, "The House That War Built," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2007.
- ¹⁰ www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwightdeisenhowerfarewell.html.
- ¹¹ www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/timeline/index.html.
- ¹² Tim Kane and David Gentilli, "Is Iraq Another Vietnam? Not for U.S. Troop Levels," Heritage Foundation, July 21, 2006.
- ¹³ *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2003, Analytical Perspectives* (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 2002), p. 258.
- ¹⁴ *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2011* (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 2010).
- ¹⁵ *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2011, Analytical Perspectives* (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 2010), p. 108.

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