

Strong Defense: STRONG AMERICA

********* An initiative of Congressman Randy Forbes

"Ragged Edge": Analysis of America's Current Military Readiness

Military leaders have described U.S. forces as on the "ragged edge." What does this mean?

The United States has a shrinking force. In 1990, the U.S. had a 546-ship Navy; today we have 288. The U.S. had 76 Army brigades in 1990; today we have 45. Two decades ago, the Air Force had twice as many fighter squadrons and bombers as today.

	1990	2000	Today
Army Brigades	76	42	45
Navy Ships	546	316	288
USAF Fighter Squadrons	82	52	39
Strategic Bombers	360	208	154

Courtesy of the House Armed Services Committee.

The United States has a strained force. In the last four years, inspection failures for Navy ships have nearly tripled. Currently, 1 of 5 ships inspected is either unfit for combat or severely degraded, and a majority of the Navy's deployed aircraft is unable to accomplish all assigned missions. Navy Adm. Jonathan Greenert indicated that "the stress on the force is real, and it has been relentless." Marine Corps stockpiles of critical equipment such as radios, small arms and generators face severe shortages. Over a third of active Army units do not have sufficient personnel to perform their missions; an even higher percentage of units in the Reserve face similar challenges. Gen. Philip Breedlove provided his candid assessment: "Some portions of the Air Force are right at the ragged edge."

The United States has an aging force. Navy ships and light attack vehicles, on average, were built 20 years ago; bombers average 34 years in age. Our tankers are nearly 50 years old.

