Strategy Research Project

Building the Army: A Strategic Review of a Complex Problem

by

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Abstract

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Designing the future U.S. Army is a complex, ill-structured problem characterized by broadly defined objectives, a robust analytical process, constrained resources, multiple powerful stakeholders, conflicting interests, and a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) operating environment. After framing this problem using the strategy formulation model, this assessment recommends improvements to make the Total Army Analysis (TAA) process more effective and efficient. The Army can realize these improvements by requesting concise strategic direction, documenting resulting risk, considering joint interdependence, analytically prioritizing requirements, and improving relationships with key players in the process. In the long-term, the Army's TAA can serve as an excellent model for the robust and transparent analytic process required to build the future Joint Force.

Building the Army:
A Strategic Review of a Complex Problem

> Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.
>
> —Laurence J. Peter[1]

A Strategic Review

According to Karl von Clausewitz, "war is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case."[2] One cannot predict the shifting colors/characteristics of war, but can only make an educated guess while understanding the unchanging nature and character under the skin. Only time can reveal the unforeseeable details of future wars, but the architects charged with designing the U.S. Army capable of fighting and winning the Nation's wars must employ strategic thinking techniques in order to develop robust solutions for assured victory in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) operating environment.

Dr. Phil Conklin defined a wicked, or complex, problem as "one for which each attempt to create a solution changes the understanding of the problem."[3] Complex problems also have interlocking issues and constraints, cannot be solved in a traditional linear fashion, evolve as new possible solutions are considered, and include stakeholders with different views about what constitutes an acceptable solution.[4] Designing the future U.S. Army is, undoubtedly, a complex, ill-structured problem. Army planners, requirements managers, force management specialists, and resource managers all work in concert as the Army's architects of change to overcome interlocking issues, satisfy multiple stakeholders, and design an affordable Army with constrained resources. The intent of this analysis is not to provide specific details of the future threat environment or determine how many infantry battalions should be in the

Army force structure, but instead to conduct a strategic assessment of the problem and processes involved in designing the future U.S. Army. This comprehensive assessment will examine the numerous complexities of this problem and produce recommended adjustments to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the processes involved with a focus on Total Army Analysis (TAA).

To start, one must frame the problem in order to capture current strategic guidance, factors, and competing requirements that exist or may exist in the uncertain future rather than relying on past force structure solutions as a foundation to build upon. Secondly, one must consider the current system of systems and all of the existing internal and external pressures that impact the generation of Army force structure. Finally, with a clear definition of the problem and an understanding of the processes and factors impacting the development of solutions, one can employ creative thinking skills to develop recommended changes to make the current process more efficient and effective in designing a force that best meets all the competing requirements while satisfying published strategic guidance. The strategy formulation model at Figure 1 provides a framework to facilitate a thorough examination of this complex, ill-structured problem in order to better understand current efforts to build the future Army and develop potential improvements/adjustments.[5]

This review will work down the center of the model in order to frame the task of designing the Army in terms of ends, ways and means. Subsequently one must consider some of the internal and external forces listed in the flanking columns to better

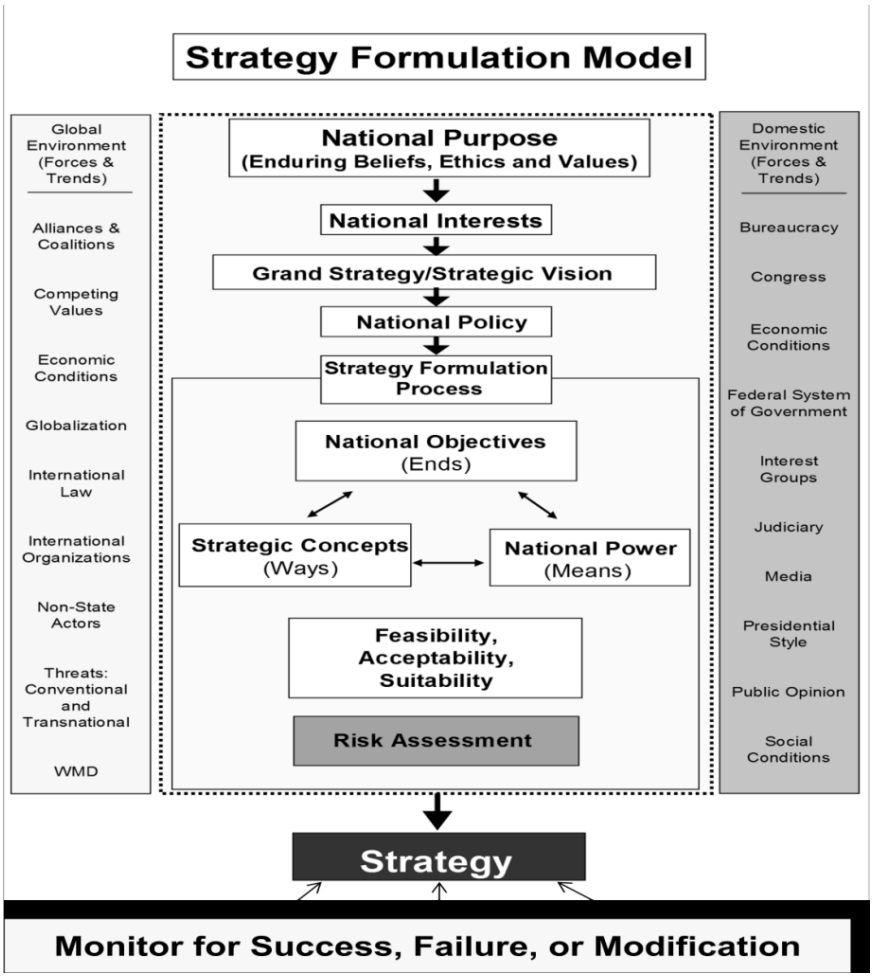

Figure 1. Strategy Formulation Model

understand the intricacies of the current force structure design system prior to addressing the inherent risk and recommending any potential adjustments or improvements. Strategy formulation begins at the top with national purpose.

ENDS - What Army to Build?

In order to frame today's problem of designing the future Army, one must take a trip back in time and build upon the core national values to "insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity," outlined in the *Constitution of the United States*.[6] As should be expected, this national purpose is echoed in the current *National*

Security Strategy (NSS) released in May 2010, which lists the enduring national interests as being: security of the United States, its citizens and its allies; economic well-being; a stable international order; and the promotion of our national values.[7] Although one can argue this strategic direction confirms the requirement for a standing military force, one must dig a little deeper for guidance specific to the character and capabilities of that force. In February 2011, based upon defense objectives in the *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR), the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) published the *National Military Strategy* (NMS) of the United States of America calling for a flexible, agile, and adaptive Joint Force capable of full spectrum operations that could be organized to provide a versatile mix of tailorable and networked organizations operating on a sustainable rotational cycle.[8] This military-focused direction provided more details toward developing force structure, but the CJCS, in summary, directed the Services to build forces that are capable of doing anything, going anywhere, and to do it at a sustainable pace. The Army leadership acknowledged the Chairman's guidance through Congressional testimony, public speaking engagements and the February 2012 Posture Statement that confirmed the Army will "maintain a versatile mix of tailorable and networked organizations, operating on a rotational cycle, to continue providing a sustained flow of trained and ready forces for the full range of military operations."[9] One could reasonably argue it is impossible to design a force that can be ready to go anywhere in the world to fight across the full spectrum of operations, but further examination of this complex problem is necessary before passing judgment on such broadly defined ends. So, with the complexity of the ends established, the next step on the strategy formulation model is determining the ways employed. For this assessment

one must determine how the Army translates lofty ends into the actual force of the future.

WAYS - How to Build the Army?

Although there are several processes the Army uses to develop its future force and capabilities, the TAA process, as depicted in Figure 2, is the primary way the Army translates published requirements and strategic direction into future force structure.[10]

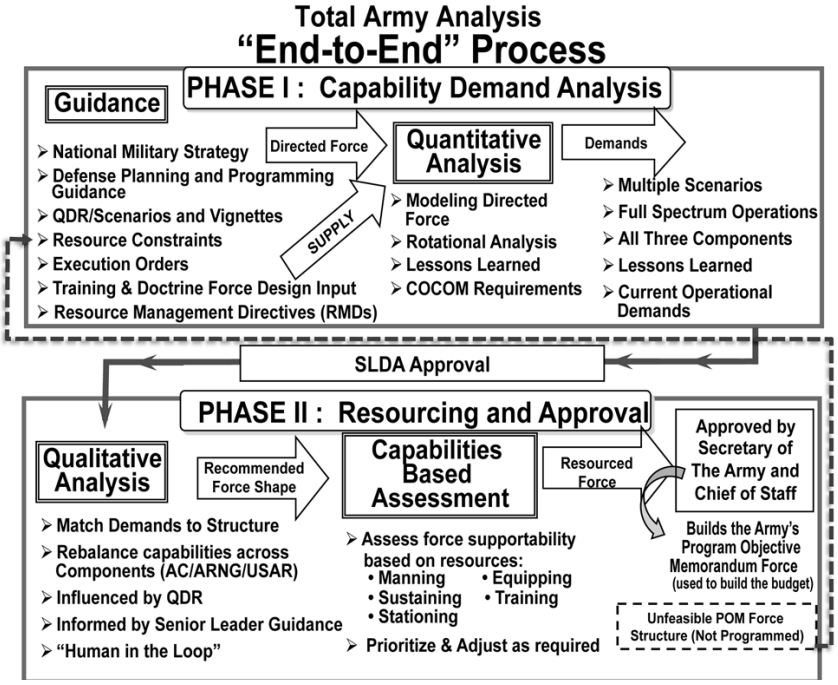

Figure 2. TAA – "End to End" Process

According to Army Regulation (AR) 71-11, the TAA process balances force requirements with currently available and planned resources in order to shape the Army's budget while ensuring alignment with guidance from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Joint Staff (JS).[11] Figure 2 shows the key inputs, outputs, analyses, and influences during the four primary phases of force guidance, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and capabilities based assessment. By examining a few of

the key inputs and influences in greater detail, strengths and weaknesses existing in the process may be addressed in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

The first input worthy of consideration in order to better understand the complex problem at hand is the aforementioned broadly defined end of a force that must be capable of going anywhere in the globe and fighting across the full spectrum of operations. The problem solver's primary concern with this guidance is the lack of specific requirements necessary to measure the effectiveness of potential solutions. On the other hand, the architects of change enjoy the freedom provided by this broad strategic direction. Without additional specificity, the strategic direction merely gets the process started and relies on the remaining inputs and influences of the process to shape the final output. More than the other inputs and influences of the TAA process, resource constraints and resource management directives serve as the preeminent contributors to shaping the future Army force structure.

The U.S. Army War College's *How the Army Runs* describes TAA as a "resource sensitive process" used to develop an "affordable balanced force" that is capable of meeting the requirements defined by published strategic direction and the Combatant Commanders' Army warfighting needs.[12] Unquestionably, the TAA process is designed to react well to changes in the fiscal environment while remaining focused on building an Army to meet numerous demands. AR 71-11 provides flexibility to the routine TAA cycle by acknowledging "compressed TAA excursions for rapid analysis of future requirements may be required due to significant unforeseen changes in Army fiscal resources."[13] Although provisions exist for sudden changes in the fiscal environment, there is no evidence of flexibility to allow for major or rapid changes in the national

military strategy outside of the routine TAA cycle. This shortcoming, along with the absence of any consideration of joint interdependence and risk assessment, will be discussed in the proposed recommendations of this assessment. Despite these shortcomings that may or may not be remedied, one can safely certify TAA as a robust and proven process based solely on the adaptable and tailorable Army that exists today.

A significant aspect of how the Army designs the future force is the existing Army force structure. Although the solution to this complex problem cannot be the same every year, it must start with the existing Army force structure in order to maintain a ready military. Therefore, a secondary method the Army employs in designing the force to meet operational requirements is by modifying the current force structure according to the envisioned future. In 2003, the Army implemented Modularity and reorganized its active force structure into heavy, infantry, Stryker and airborne Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) in order to provide additional flexibility and economy of force when meeting the requirements of the Geographic Combatant Commanders.[14] Despite the Army adapting its design over the past nine years, the BCT has endured as the backbone of the Army's flexible, adaptable, agile and ready force for responding to operational requirements. In August 2012, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced the deployment of two Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB) each consisting of approximately 2800 soldiers tasked with advising and mentoring Afghan National Security Forces.[15] An SFAB does not exist in the Army's force structure inventory, and many will use its deployment as a champion to transform some number of BCTs into organizations designed specifically for security force assistance missions. In a 2009 *Orbis* article,

historian Gian Gentile warned that the Army of the future must be able to fight and should not be built based upon specific mission sets that may be one part of a complex future security environment.[16] Gentile was right. The proven lethality and flexibility of the current BCT structure support his argument and provides a solid foundation for Army architects to respond to current operational requirements and build future force structure. With a better understanding of the adaptability of the current force coupled with the robustness of the TAA process employed to solve the complex problem of building tomorrow's Army, the next logical step is to determine the resources available to accomplish this monumental task.

MEANS - What to Build an Army With?

To this point, this strategic review of building the future Army has yet to address today's fiscally constrained environment. The Army must develop a fully-capable force that can deploy anywhere in the world to fight across the full spectrum of operations and will receive less funds to do so. Furthermore, while the Army was working on developing its force of the future, President Obama signed the Budget Control Act of 2011 mandating reductions in federal spending, including defense spending.[17] More specifically, the Obama administration and Congress have already reduced planned future increases in defense spending over the next decade by nearly $487 billion, and the budgetary process known as "sequestration" is set to trigger approximately $500 billion in additional total reductions over the same period.[18] Shortly thereafter, in January 2012, the DoD published *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* confirming the "national security imperative of deficit reduction through a lower level of defense spending", but also reiterated that the Joint Force will be prepared to confront and defeat aggression anywhere to meet any future threats and remain the

world's finest military.[19] This guidance was echoed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Martin Dempsey, in the February 2012 *Chairman's Strategic Direction for the Joint Force*, when he encouraged the Services to carefully and strategically weigh competing priorities in light of the fiscally constrained environment.[20] Therefore, the resource constraints considered in the guidance phase of the TAA process moved up to the top of the list of factors impacting the design of the future Army without much adjustment to the expectations of the final end product. The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) and the Secretary of the Army (SecArmy) described this complex problem in the Army Posture Statement: "An unpredictable and dynamic global security environment requires the Army, as a force in transition, to adjust and reduce its size while remaining flexible, capable and ready to meet the Nation's requirements and maintaining an ability to reverse course to readily expand if necessary."[21]

The only satisfaction the architects of change find in this guidance is the undeniable fact that the senior Army leadership understands the complexity of this problem. Otherwise, the reality of diminishing means available to solve this multifaceted problem only makes finding a viable solution that much more of a challenge. But before exploring the range of viable solutions, architects of change must consider the impact of the relevant global and domestic forces and trends as listed on the strategy formulation model.

In order to completely understand the intricacies of building the Army, one must look beyond the basic components of the problem in terms of ends, ways and means discussed up to this point. This understanding can only come from a comprehensive review of the pressures and forces that impact the Army's ability to design the future force. In line with the strategy formulation model, this review will categorize and

examine the present day pressures on the Army as either global or domestic. With the guidance to maintain the reputation of the world's finest military, it is only appropriate to first examine the relevant global forces and trends influencing the complex problem of designing the Army.

The predominant global force that directly impacts the process of designing the future Army is the nebulous future strategic environment. Acknowledging the enemy gets a vote, some may argue that the Army should use a strictly threat-based analysis in order to determine future Army force structure and capability requirements. Although useful, this threat assessment is normally narrowly-focused on military capabilities and provides only one aspect of the strategic environment. The 2012 Army Posture Statement provides a comprehensive description of the strategic environment: "A series of powerful global trends continue to shape the current and future strategic environment: increased demand for dwindling resources, persistent regional conflict, empowered non-state actors, the continuing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and failed states."[22]

One could argue that this description is also incomplete; however this characterization of the future strategic environment reinforces the fact that the designers of the Army must consider more than just a potential adversary's military capabilities. Given the constrained means available to build tomorrow's Army; the architects of change must give significant consideration to the capabilities of our international partners.

Another global force that impacts the design of the Army is our nation's contribution to, and reliance upon, the capabilities of our international partners. The 2011 National Military Strategy (NMS) states, "the changing security environment

requires the Joint Force to deepen security relationships with our allies and create opportunities for partnerships with new and diverse groups of actors."[23] Concurrent with recognizing the requirements of remaining the world's foremost military power and enhancing global partnerships, the NMS identifies the U.S. national debt as a "significant national security risk," and warns that our partners' reductions in defense spending may impact their "contributions to our collective security."[24] These codependent global partnerships force the designers of the future Army to consider the capabilities and enablers present on both sides of the relationship prior to recommending any reductions or reorganization to the current force structure. This global-focused analysis will become increasingly more important as resources become even more constrained in the years to come. After acknowledging the impact of our global relationships and the nature of the future threat associated with the complex problem of building the Army, one must understand the more influential forces that reside in the United States, the Department of Defense and within the Army itself.

Contributing to the complexity of building the Army are domestic forces and trends that must be examined to better understand the problem and discover potential efficiencies. The first and most influential of these forces can be found in the U.S. Congress, which is empowered by the Constitution to declare war, raise and support Armies, and make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces.[25] The forces impacting the complex problem of building the Army materialize when Congress believes the recommended force structure conflicts with the interests of their constituents. In a recent speech to the National Press Club, the Secretary of

Defense (SecDef) discussed the "tough decisions to try to build the force of the future" and acknowledged the influence of Congress on those same decisions:

> But nevertheless, there is pressure on the department to retain excess force structure and infrastructure instead of investing in the training and equipment that makes our force agile and flexible and ready. Aircraft, ships, tanks, bases, even those that have outlived their usefulness have a natural political constituency. Readiness does not."[26]

Thus, the same members of Congress charged with raising and supporting Armies may in fact threaten the readiness of the U.S. Army and the entire Joint Force by retaining capabilities, bases or force structure that are currently beneficial to their constituents. The Army's architects of change must fully understand this reality and continue to fight this resistance to change through creative solutions.

The second domestic force that directly influences the problem of designing tomorrow's Army is created by the institutes commonly known as think tanks. The documents published by these organizations directly influence the thought processes of innumerable strategic thinkers to include, but not limited to, members of Congress, DoD and Service leadership, and most importantly, the American people. Most recently, the Stimson Center released a study recommending a defense strategy to include specific reductions in each Service given the current fiscally constrained environment with the stated purpose of ensuring "US defense dollars are spent as wisely as possible."[27] Assuming Stimson's motives are in the best interest of the nation, then the Army's architects of change must give serious consideration to their recommendations on changes to the existing force structure. One could argue that think tanks have the time and resources required to project current trends into the future and conduct the analysis necessary to design an adaptable and affordable Army to fight and win our nation's wars. In a recent *National Affairs* article, Tevi Troy, who was has extensive experience

working for various think tanks, argued that although these organizations have come to "play a central role in policy development," they may become "part of the intellectual echo chamber of our politics, rather than providing alternative sources of policy analysis and intellectual innovation."[28] Regardless of the quality or intent of their products, think tanks have a significant impact on the decision making process of the nation's leadership and have an immense influence on the shape of tomorrow's Army.

The third domestic force that affects the complex problem of building the Army is the rivalry that exists between the military Services compounded by the cultures that exist in each one. In his book, *The Masks of War*, Carl Builder asks the question, "What if military forces were not what we pretend them to be – the military means to political ends – but were, instead, institutional ends in themselves that may or may not serve the larger interests of the nations that support them?"[29] In a system where the Services compete against one another for a portion of the same funding pool, it is not hard to believe that every Service is driven, at least partially, by self-preserving motives. To test this presumption, consider the possible Army reactions to the aforementioned Stimson study and its recommended U.S. defense strategy of Strategic Agility that "would make significant reductions in Army forces if necessitated by budgetary pressures."[30] The designers of the Army could either assume the study is part of the Navy's or Air Force's communications strategy to Congress and start developing a rebuttal, or the architects of change could spend valuable time studying the Stimson analysis in order to better shape tomorrow's Army. The Army's likely overwhelming reaction would be the former, even though the CJCS was clear on this exact matter in his *Strategic Direction to the Joint Force*, which stated, "most importantly, we will put the interest of our Nation before

that of any specific group or Service."[31] Although this conflict of interests will not be resolved immediately, it must be considered as a significant influence on the complex problem of designing the Army of tomorrow.

How to Better Build the Army?

Understanding the leadership's desired endstate, the design processes, and the global and domestic factors is critical to the development of a solution. One must now employ creative thinking skills to consider recommended changes to design the Army that best meets all the competing requirements while satisfying published strategic guidance in the most efficient and effective means possible. Additionally, any proposed modifications to refining the strategic direction, improving the processes, understanding the influential forces, or making more efficient use of all available resources will require senior leadership involvement. Recognizing that not even unlimited resources or a complete overhaul of the processes would simplify this problem, the following recommended enhancements focus on reducing the current complexity by exploring the modification of existing processes and relationships in an uncertain fiscal and threat environment in order to develop the Army of the future in the most efficient and effective way possible.

First, Army leaders must make a concerted effort to refine strategic direction in order to avoid any confusion about the desired endstate. In *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, the SecDef called for "a defense strategy that transitions our Defense enterprise from an emphasis on today's war to preparing for future challenges," while simultaneously directing that "U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scaled, prolonged stability operations."[32] Assuming stability operations will be a mainstay in any future challenges, these two statements

from the same strategic direction could be used separately to defend two completely different force structures. The Army's latest position on stability operations is found in the December 2012 version of *The U.S. Army Capstone Concept*, which calls for the retention of "the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct counterinsurgency or other stability operations in the future."[33] Uncounted dollars and man-hours will be wasted developing solutions that will never meet the desired endstate without a mechanism in place to clarify and communicate the specific intent of strategic direction down to the level of the architects of change. Once again, this clarity will be revealed in multiple forums and publications, but will always depend on the personalities and communication skills of the senior leadership in the Administration, DoD and the Army.

Second, the TAA process must be enhanced. Although TAA is a proven process, it requires the addition of a risk assessment in line with the Army leadership's recognition of the need to "adapt processes to reflect the broader range of requirements."[34] According to AR 1-1 on the Army's Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES), TAA is a computer-aided process that develops a force to meet projected mission requirements within expected end strength and equipment levels.[35] When developing the force in TAA, the architects of change identify risk as the gap between stated requirements and what the Army can actually afford. The challenge is the documentation of this risk. In the summer of 2009, *the Reno Report*, named for the project lead, Lieutenant General (LTG) (R) Bill Reno, analyzed the Army's requirements and resourcing systems and recommended the Army staff develop a means to represent the Army's risk by documenting the un-resourced forces that were required to meet the published strategic direction."[36] The Army must adopt this near-

term recommendation and add a risk assessment as a required output of the TAA process. The Administration and DoD leadership must have a clear understanding of the risk involved with developing an affordable force before making decisions that will impact the nation's security at home and abroad.

Third, the Army leadership must nurture a joint-minded perspective in order to overcome the challenge of self-preserving motivations. The CJCS could not have been any clearer in his guidance to put the interest of our Nation before that of any specific group or Service.[37] The Army's architects of change will be hesitant to rely on the other Services for certain capabilities, but the fact remains that the Army rarely deploys alone. Looking again in the CJCS strategic guidance, he describes joint interdependence as the Services relying on each other to achieve objectives and create capabilities that do not exist except when combined."[38] An outsider to the process would wonder how anyone could design the Army, Navy or Air Force of the future without considering the capabilities that only exist when two or more Services work together. In the short-term this challenge must be overcome with direction from Army senior leadership to include joint considerations in the TAA process. In the long-term, this issue will require a change in Army culture, defense processes, and the law. As long as the Services each receive their own funding and execute their own force design processes, there will always be inter-Service rivalries and, as a result, an inefficient Joint Force. As a long-term solution, DoD must consider the implementation of a Joint force design process facilitated by the Joint Requirements Oversight Committee. This Total Force Assessment would eliminate redundancies by leveraging the common ground between the Services while mitigating self-preservation motives by remaining focused on the

good of the nation. The Army's TAA is a robust and transparent analytic process that can serve as an excellent model to build the joint process.

Fourth, the Army leadership must develop a more analytic method of prioritizing the multitude of requirements that provide the foundation upon which the architects of change build the Army force structure. These requirements are derived from published strategic direction, testimony of the Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC), the interests of Congress, and required support to the other Services. The Army is in the customer service business and their primary customers are the GCCs. In his 2012 testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Commander of United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) identified "the necessary and effective role that Army, Marine Corps, and Special Forces play in engaging with the dominant foreign services," since many of the partners' militaries in the region are army-focused.[39] The Army can collect similar requirements from all of the GCC's testimonies and integrated priority list (IPL) submissions, but the Army must ensure these are fully considered during the TAA process. The *Reno Report* also contained a recommendation for the CSA to chair a 4-Star forum, to include the GCCs, in order to provide his vision of the warfighting capabilities the force must possess.[40] If implemented, the CSA must also provide his priorities in order for the architects of change to design an affordable force that satisfies published strategic direction as efficiently and effectively as possible. These established priorities will not only reduce the problem of un-resourced force structure decisions, but also assist the Army leadership in articulating the resulting risk up the chain of command.

Finally, the CSA and SecArmy must develop a plan to educate and leverage the more powerful players that influence the Army's ability to build a future force structure. The Army must fully leverage the analytic capabilities of the numerous think tanks and incorporate appropriate findings into their strategic guidance. Instead of focusing on their different agendas or opinions, the Army must focus on the common ground. The same Stimson Center that recommended significant reductions to the Army force structure has a mission statement that includes goals of international peace, building regional security, and reducing weapons of mass destruction and transnational threats.[41] The Army must rely on these common objectives while leveraging these invaluable institutes to educate other players involved in the process. The most important and influential of which, is Congress. In a speech at the National Press Club, the SecDef blamed Congress for "a political system that is depriving the department of the budget certainty needed in order to plan for the future," that was creating a significant risk facing the current defense strategy.[42] The Army leadership must do a better job in educating the members of Congress and the American people on the need for a force structure that meets the national security interests of the United States. In his book, *The Masks of War*, Carl Builder argued that "significant restructuring will occur only if the society as a whole aligns itself in such a way that Congress must comply with its wishes; and such an alignment is not likely in the absence of a major trauma."[43] In the absence of a major trauma upon the nation, the Army must continue to build relationships with the most influential players, friendly or not, in order to bring about the changes required to solve the complex, ill-structured problem of building tomorrow's force structure.

Conclusion - A Brighter Future

Designing the future U.S. Army is a complex, ill-structured problem that has interlocking issues and constraints, cannot be solved in a traditional linear fashion, evolves as new possible solutions are considered, and includes stakeholders with different views about what constitutes an acceptable solution. After framing this problem using the strategy formulation model, this assessment confirms the TAA process is a robust analytic process that, with slight modifications, can be more effective and efficient. The Army leadership can realize these improvements by requesting concise strategic direction, documenting and communicating resulting risk, encouraging joint interdependence, analytically developing clear priorities, and enhancing relationships with key stakeholders. Strategist Colin Gray contends that "the future is a book with totally blank pages," but he adds that "the strategist confronting the unforeseeable future has to honor two virtues above all others: prudence and adaptability."[44] Without question, the recommendations presented here cannot erase the uncertainty or complexity that today's Army will face, but the architects of change will most certainly continue to exercise prudence and adaptability when designing the future U.S. Army that will always stand ready to fight and win this nation's wars.

Endnotes

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