# The Army and the New National Security Strategy

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The Cold War is long over and with it its particular brand of security challenges. Gone is the single enemy operating in a predictable theater. In its place is a set of security challenges that has evolved more dramatically than anyone anticipated: threats can emerge anywhere, including at home, and operations can range from all-out war to feeding the hungry. The nation has crafted a new national security strategy to address these challenges, and it will require all the military services to change, none more so than the Army. The large, armor-heavy Army that was carefully assembled over decades to defeat attacking waves of Soviet tanks now finds itself called on to be truly expeditionary. The change involved is enormous, cutting across all aspects and echelons of the Army. And the Army is furiously implementing that change by transforming itself into what it calls the Objective Force. While many aspects of that transformation provide what the new national security strategy requires, the basic concepts need significant refinement. The U.S. Army and the New National Security Strategy explores how this might be achieved in a series of essays whose topics range widely, addressing some of the most difficult challenges confronting the Army today.

THE SEARCH FOR FASTER DEPLOYMENT

No aspect of Army Transformation has received more attention than the Army’s goal to deploy a brigade anywhere in the world in 96 hours. The unpredictable and potentially global distribution of today’s security challenges underpins the need for speed. Yet many observers debate the urgency of this need. Most deployments over the past decade did not crop up all that quickly, although there were occasions when a rapid response was necessary. The fact that sealift can deliver heavy forces worldwide within weeks suggests that not all of the Army need be configured for speed. Meanwhile, in some scenarios—Afghanistan, for example—the Army’s light force, already rapidly deployable, may still be very useful.

Less debatable is whether the Army can meet the 96-hour goal. It cannot—at least not with full brigades based in the United States. This report suggests ways to make the Army sufficiently expeditionary through a combination of prepositioning (both ashore and afloat) and overseas basing and then a restructuring of the Army’s units to make them smaller and lighter than the new medium-weight brigades being fielded.

DESIGNING A FULL-SPECTRUM FORCE

Another signal characteristic of the transformation is a quest for a homogeneous force capable of the full spectrum of missions that the Army might have to perform. This quest for a single force of like units runs sharply against history and logic. It is difficult to see how the desired light, readily deployable units will have the flexibility demanded of a full-spectrum force. Afghanistan proved the worth of light forces configured as they currently are, and Iraq has shown the need for heavy armor. The report suggests that flexibility is better achieved by combining pieces from a diversified force structure to suit the circumstances.

TURBULENCE AND SMALL DEPLOYMENTS

Regardless of mission or location, the relatively small units the Army now routinely sends overseas must be fully ready to go when asked—even on short notice. In the 1990s, the Army gave the nation just such units but only at the cost of much organizational stress. The personnel system, designed over the years to support the Army in a big war, keeps all units mostly ready, knowing that there will be time to plug gaps. This system does not work well when the nation needs small, highly ready units, as in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Pulling these ready units out of the existing Army creates a scramble to flesh out small units, with ripple effects that wreak havoc on readiness and soldier quality of life. Units deploying must borrow personnel from other units and then train them. A complex mix of turbulence, rising workload, and movement to and from overseas assignments has stressed the organization.

This stress has prompted interest within and outside the Army in an overhaul of the personnel system. The individual replacement system could be supplanted by unit manning, in
which a cohort of soldiers joins and leaves a battalion or 
brigade together. The report offers a caution, however: with 
some units very ready, others must be very unready, leading 
to “tiered readiness.” A less wrenching alternative would be 
to expand the rotation base by drawing more heavily on 
active forces overseas and reserve brigades and by further 
modifying peacetime personnel policies to reduce the number 
of soldiers who cannot deploy.

THE RESERVE COMPONENTS

Mention of the Army’s Reserve Components raises a 
number of complex—and occasionally contentious—issues. 
One, raised most vocally after September 11, involves the 
role of Reserve Components in homeland security. Many offi-
cials would give the entire homeland security mission to the 
Reserve Components, particularly the Army National Guard. 
While superficially attractive, this tack warrants considerable 
scrutiny. Most major disasters ultimately require active 
forces, largely because governors run out of local reserve 
forces. Nor is it clear that reserves can mobilize fast enough. 
The report offers, as a more viable approach, that the Army 
dedicate active units to this mission in the near term, while 
looking for ways in the future to develop a fast-response capa-

bility in the Reserve Components. Another issue is the con-

tinuing and in some cases long-term commitment of reserve 
forces overseas. The Army’s current force structure makes it 
difficult to deploy active forces overseas without involving 
reserves. Such deployments have occurred frequently in the 
past decade and seem likely to continue. Ultimately, the 
report suggests that the Army may have no choice but to 
alter the skill mix of the Active and Reserve components.

THE NEED FOR MORE JOINTNESS

Transforming a large military organization has an 
intensely inward focus. But as the Army transforms itself, it 
must pay close attention to the capabilities of the other ser-

vices, because jointness improves military effectiveness and 
can help Army Transformation. Recent trends in long-range 
attacks with precision weapons have given U.S. forces greater 
capability than ever before to destroy fielded forces while 
offering the attraction of fewer casualties. Thus, the air-
ground combination, always lethal, has become more deadly 
than ever. The report argues that as the Army designs its new 
units and weapon systems, it should seek to complement the 
weaponry of the other military services, focusing particularly 
on integration of arms at relatively low levels of its combat 
organization.

FIGHTING IN COALITIONS

Operations in Afghanistan and other post–Cold War 
operations suggest that the Army’s ability to cooperate fruit-
fully must extend beyond the other services to an array of 
coordination partners almost as hard to identify in advance as is 
the scene of the next crisis. Understanding the potential 
problems involved in accommodating different political 
agendas, in sharing intelligence, and in operating with differ-

cent concepts and capabilities is but the first step. The report 
argues that the Army must introduce coalition requirements 
into every dimension of its transformation planning—in the 
design of its combat systems, in its warfighting concepts of 
operations, in its support requirements, and in its require-
ments for transport from the other services.

FOOTING THE BILL

Can the Army afford transformation? The report answers 
with a qualified yes. But can it afford some of the other 
actions suggested in this report, such as retaining diversified 
units? Both heavy and light units remain important to the 
Army. But the former will particularly require continued 
investment to remain effective over the next decades. That 
investment will be difficult because funds have been drawn 
off to field the Objective Force in this decade.

THE WAY AHEAD

The Army, like its sister services, must provide political 
leaders with options in the uncertain world that lies ahead. 
Army Transformation has already begun to do this, with the 
fielding of Stryker brigades and the further development of 
communications networks. And the transformation-related 
surge in R&D spending has given the Army’s senior leaders 
an array of options with which to shape future forces. 
Although it endorses that transformation in general, this 
report suggests refinements to it that may threaten deeply 
held Army beliefs and require the resolution of issues of 
extreme sensitivity. The report is dedicated to helping the 
Army in that difficult task.