U.S. Army

The U.S. Army is America’s primary land warfare component. Although it addresses all types of operations across the range of ground force employment, its chief value to the nation is its ability to defeat and destroy enemy land forces in battle.

As is the case with all of the other services, the U.S. Army has sought ways to absorb the budget cuts driven by the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 in a responsible manner while still meeting the missions outlined in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG). Fiscal challenges have strained the Army’s ability to meet the national security requirements outlined in the DSG even as it has worked to find a proper balance among readiness, modernization, and end strength.

The Army has continued to reduce its end strength and accept greater risk to its modernization programs to preserve readiness levels—an even more challenging problem given that its budget in FY 2015 was $4 billion lower than it was in FY 2014.

From a height of 566,000 in FY 2011, the Army’s end strength has shrunk to 490,000 Active Army soldiers in FY 2015. The ongoing debate between the White House and Congress (and within Congress) over funding levels as constrained by the BCA will determine whether the Army is able to sustain a projected end strength of 450,000—the minimum force level required to execute the DSG—or must reduce its end strength even further to 420,000 soldiers. It should be noted that in July 2015, the Army announced that it would accelerate its troop reduction timeline, shedding 40,000 soldiers by the end of FY 2018 to arrive at the 450,000 minimum outlined in the DSG. (Since these cuts are not in effect in FY 2015, they do not factor into the Army scoring for the 2016 Index.)

Operationally, the Army has 140,130 soldiers forward stationed across 150 countries. This is a slight decline from the previous year’s level of 150,090 soldiers. Of these 140,130 soldiers, approximately 45,000 are actively engaged in named operations, with the Army maintaining less than 8,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, a dramatic decline from the 32,000 stationed there in 2014.

Capacity

In FY 2015, total Army end strength was 1,042,000 soldiers: 490,000 Active soldiers, 202,000 in the Army Reserve, and 350,000 in the Army National Guard. In FY 2015, all soldiers in the Active Component were paid for in the base budget. This is unlike FY 2014, where a portion of personnel costs was paid through the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget function.

The Army also refers to its size in terms of brigade combat teams (BCTs). BCTs are the basic “building blocks” for employment of Army combat forces. They are normally employed within a larger framework of U.S. land operations but are sufficiently equipped and organized so that they can conduct independent operations as circumstances demand. A BCT averages 4,500 soldiers in strength depending on...
its variant: Stryker, Armored, or Infantry. A Stryker BCT is a mechanized infantry force organized around the Stryker ground combat vehicle (GCV). Armored BCTs are the Army’s principal armored unit and employ the Abrams main battle tank and the M2 Bradley fighting vehicle. An Infantry BCT is a highly maneuverable motorized unit.

The Army also has a separate air component organized into combat aviation brigades (CABs), which can also operate independently. CABs are made up of Army rotorcraft, such as the AH-64 Apache, and perform various roles including attack, reconnaissance, and lift.

CABs and Stryker, Infantry, and Armored BCTs make up the Army’s main combat force, but they do not make up the entirety of the Army. About 90,000 troops form the “Institutional Army” and provide support, such as preparing and training troops for deployments and overseeing military schools and Army educational institutions. The troops constituting the “Institutional Army” cannot be reduced at the same ratio as BCTs or CABs, and the Army plans to insulate these soldiers from drawdown and restructuring proposals in order to “retain a slightly more senior force in the Active Army to allow growth if needed.” In addition, a great number of functional or multi-functional support brigades provide air defense, engineering, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), military police, military intelligence, and medical support among other types of battlefield support for BCTs.

While end strength is a valuable metric in understanding Army capacity, counting BCTs is a more telling measure of actual hard-power capacity. In concert with the end strength reduction to 490,000 soldiers, the Active Army underwent brigade restructuring that decreased the number of BCTs from 38 to 32 by the end of FY 2015. As a part of this reorganization, the Army is also adding a third maneuver battalion to its infantry and armored BCTs by the end of FY 2015. Additionally, all BCTs will receive additional engineer and fire support capabilities (i.e., additional 105mm and/or 155mm howitzers). In FY 2015, the Active Army retained 13 CABs, and the Army National Guard maintained eight CABs, although under the Aviation Restructure Initiative, two more CABs are expected to be inactivated from the Active Component by the end of the fiscal year.

The reduction in end strength in the past year has had a disproportionate effect on BCTs. To illustrate, the Active Army has been downsized from 45 BCTs (552,100 soldiers) in FY 2013 to 32 BCTs (490,000 soldiers) in FY 2015. Thus, a 12 percent reduction in troop numbers resulted in a 29 percent reduction in BCTs. The Army Chief of Staff told the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2015 that the Army can meet the missions outlined in the 2012 DSG with this current force size, but he also warned that the continuation of sequestration would prevent the Army from executing the DSG.

**Capability**

The Army’s main combat platforms are ground vehicles and rotorcraft. The M1A1 Abrams and M2 Bradley vehicles are used in Armored BCTs, and Stryker BCTs, as one would expect, are equipped with Stryker vehicles. Infantry BCTs rely on the inventory of M113 armored personnel carriers (APCs). CABs are made up of Army helicopters including AH-64 Apaches, UH-60 Black Hawks, and CH-47 Chinooks.

Overall, the Army’s equipment inventory is relatively healthy. While some equipment has been worn down by usage in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army has undertaken a “reset” initiative that is discussed below in the readiness section. The bulk of Army vehicles are young because of recent remanufacture programs for the Abrams and Bradley that have extended the service life of both vehicles. For example, the M1A1 Abrams main battle tank has recently been completely upgraded and is now only 5.5 years old. The Army also maintains an inventory of battlefield-tested and reliable rotorcraft, including its UH-60 Black Hawks, AH-64 Apaches, and CH-47 Chinooks.

The Army has been methodically replacing the oldest variants of its rotorcraft and upgrading others that still have plenty of airframe service life. Today, the UH-60M, which is a newer version of the UH-60A, makes up more than half of the total UH-60 inventory. Similarly, the Chinook, the Army’s heavy-lift helicopter, is expected to remain in service until 2030.

In addition to the viability of today’s equipment, the military must ensure the health of future programs. While future modernizing programs are not “current hard power capabilities” that can be applied against an enemy force, they are a significant indicator of a service’s overall fitness for sustained combat operations: The service may be able to engage an enemy but be forced to do so with aging equipment
and no program in place to maintain viability or endurance in sustained operations.

The U.S. military services are continually assessing how best to stay a step ahead of competitors, whether to modernize the force today with currently available technology or wait to see what their investments in research and development produce years down the road. Technologies mature and proliferate, becoming more accessible to a wider array of actors over time. U.S. forces will be challenged by state and non-state competitors that will leverage the latest developments in matériel, computing, platform sciences, and designs.

The Army is currently undertaking several modernization programs to replace or improve its ground combat vehicles and current rotorcraft fleet. However, budget reductions levied in previous years have significantly affected modernization, with Research and Development, Acquisition, and Procurement accounts all experiencing cuts. In fact, “the Army has ended 20 programs, delayed 125 and restructured 124.”\(^7\) For example, current and projected budget pressures led the Army to cancel the ground combat vehicle program,\(^8\) which was intended to replace the M2 Bradley fighting vehicle, to free funding for its readiness account.

The Army’s most high-profile joint service Major Defense Acquisition Program (MDAP) is the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV), a program shared with the Marine Corps. Intended to combine the protection offered by Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs) with the mobility of the original unarmored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), the JLTV is a follow-on to the HMMWV (also known as the Humvee) and features design improvements that will increase its survivability against anti-armor weapons and the now commonly found improvised explosive device (IED) threat.

The JLTV is still in development, but the Army plans to procure a total of 49,099 vehicles,\(^9\) replacing only a portion of the current HMMWV fleet. The program is heavily focused on vehicle survivability and is not intended as a one-for-one replacement of the HMMWV.\(^10\) In fact, the JLTV is intended to take on high-risk missions traditionally tasked to the HMMWV, to include scouting and troop transport in adverse environments, guerrilla ambushes, and artillery bombardment.\(^11\) Several issues, including changed requirements and some technical obstacles in the early development phases, have delayed the program from its originally intended schedule by about one year. In FY 2015, the Army purchased 184 JLTVs,\(^12\) and the proposed funds for FY 2016 supported a low rate initial production (LRIP) decision in 2015 and selection of the vendor for production.\(^13\)

Other Army MDAPs of note in FY 2016 include the M1A2 Abrams, M2 Bradley, M109A6 Paladin 155mm Howitzers, and Stryker.\(^4\) These platforms will undergo various structural modifications and upgrades that are needed to keep them ready to meet future contingencies.

The M1A2 is currently being enhanced with Vehicle Health Management and Power Train Improvement & Integration Optimization in order to upgrade the tank’s reliability, durability, and fuel efficiency so that it can provide ground forces with superior battlefield firepower.\(^45\) Similarly, the M109A6 is being outfitted with the Paladin Integrated Management (PIM) program, which consists of a new drivetrain and suspension components, in order to sustain the platform’s utility in combat through 2050.\(^46\) Planned upgrades for the Stryker include a major Engineering Change Proposal (ECP) aimed at improving mechanical and electrical power, an enhanced chassis, and electronics network.\(^47\)

The Army’s rotorcraft modernization programs do not include any new platform designs. Instead, the Army is upgrading current rotorcraft to account for more advanced systems.

The Army’s main modernization programs are not encumbered by any major problems, but there is concern about the future direction of Army capability. For example, cancellation of the Ground Combat Vehicle (GCV) program raises the question of replacing the M2 Bradley. Although the DOD officially cancelled the GCV program, the possibility of replacing the M2 Bradley at some point in the future could still be considered, as the Army set aside $150 million in funding for GCV research and development in FY 2015 despite the absence of a budget request for the program for that year.\(^48\) Updating the capability that the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle provides remains a requirement, and the Army is currently “refining concepts, requirements, and key technologies” in preparation for a future modernization program.\(^49\)

The Army is also continuing development efforts for the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV) to replace its 1960s-vintage M113 Armored Personnel Carrier.\(^50\) The AMPV will have five mission modules, including General Purpose, Medical Treatment, Medical Evacuation, Mortar Carrier, and Mission
Command. Because it is still in development and has not yet entered LRIP, the AMPV is not yet an MDAP and is not included in this year’s scoring.

Readiness

As a result of sequestration in FY 2013, the Army experienced a shortage in readiness funding that resulted in “significantly and rapidly degraded Army readiness,” which the Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff testified would “translate directly into FY 14 and beyond.” Although a higher level of funding in FY 2014 allowed for some degree of budget relief, the Army received $5.1 billion less in funding dedicated to rebuilding its readiness in FY 2015. Army Vice Chief of Staff General Daniel Allyn explained that:

"To operate under this budget, we are significantly reducing key installation services, individual training events, and modernization to such an extent as to jeopardize future readiness and quality of life. For example, Logistics Readiness Centers were underfunded by $350 million in FY15, which covers funding for dining facilities, contract operations at ammo supply points, central issue facilities, maintenance, laundry and dry cleaning operations. In addition to the effect on Soldier quality of life, these cuts force Commanders to divert Soldiers from training to perform logistics tasks."

Recognizing the risk that degraded readiness introduces into its ability to respond to an emergent threat, the Army chose to prioritize operational readiness over other expenditures, such as near-term modernization, for FY 2015. A return to “full spectrum combat readiness” would require sustained investment and a projected timeline stretching to FY 2023.

This tiered readiness strategy means that only a limited number of BCTs are available and ready for decisive action. Accordingly, the tiered readiness model employed by the Army has resulted in approximately one-third of the 32 Active BCTs being ready for contingency operations in FY 2015. This is an improvement from early in 2014 when 80 percent of the Army was considered to be “at a lower readiness level.” As stated, the Army had prioritized funding in readiness over capacity and modernization, allowing it to regain some of the readiness lost as a result of sequestration the prior year.

The Army uses Combat Training Centers (CTCs) to train its forces to desired levels of proficiency. Specifically, the mission of the CTC Program is to “provide realistic Joint and combined arms training” to approximate actual combat and increase “unit readiness for deployment and warfighting.” In FY 2015, the Army financed 19 CTC rotations, the same number as in FY 2014, despite lower levels of funding. Although utilizing CTCs continues to be a priority for the Army, resource constraints have limited investment in readiness.

In FY 2015, the Army supported the Army Contingency Force (ACF) initiative that is developing “a contingency response force which provides Combatant Commanders an initial response capability that can achieve early objectives for most contingency plans.” Under the ACF model, the Army maintains readiness for only 24 of the 60 total BCTs maintained by the Active, National Guard, and Reserve Components, which “receive sufficient funding to conduct training at CTCs and home station.” The other 36 BCTs maintained by the Total Army are limited to “minimum Individual/Crew/Squad resourcing levels through sufficient Training Support Systems.” The aforementioned numbers can be misleading, as the Active Component maintains only 32 BCTs in total and realistically maintains only about 30 percent of them at acceptable levels of combat readiness.

Another key factor in readiness is sustainment of equipment. At the most basic level, a unit’s equipment must work when the unit is deployed. As a result of extensive combat usage in Afghanistan and the lingering effects of nearly a decade of combat operations in Iraq, the Army has continued with its reset program to restore used equipment to desired capability or to replace worn-out equipment for use in future engagements. In 2014, the Army estimated that it would require three years of reset funding “after redeployment of the last piece of equipment from theater” to complete redeployment and retrograde operations.

Reduced funding throughout FY 2013, a consequence of sequestration, forced the Army to postpone the reset of several pieces of equipment, totaling “700 vehicles, 28 aircraft, and 2,000 weapons” in 2014. However, the Army was able to synchronize equipment retrograde out of Afghanistan efficiently in 2014, and “retrograde operations remain on schedule” in 2015. Furthermore, after identifying “potential requirement reductions in contractor logistics and training support” and reducing depot maintenance, the Army was able to enhance
the capability of its prepositioned stocks program without raising the associated costs. If the necessary funding is again reduced by the BCA, the Army’s efforts to recover from recent operations and prepare for the future will be further stymied.

Scoring the U.S. Army

Capacity Score: Weak

Historical evidence shows that, on average, the Army needs 21 brigade combat teams to fight one major regional conflict. Based on a conversion of roughly 3.5 BCTs per division, the Army deployed 21 BCTs in Korea, 25 in Vietnam, 14 in the Persian Gulf War, and around four in Operation Iraqi Freedom—an average of 16 BCTs (or 21 if the much smaller OIF contingency is excluded). In the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, the Obama Administration recommended a force capable of deploying 45 active BCTs. Previous government force-sizing documents discuss Army force structure in terms of divisions; they consistently advocate for 10–11 divisions, which equates to roughly 37 active BCTs.

Considering the varying recommendations of 35–45 BCTs and the actual experience of nearly 21 BCTs deployed per major engagement, 42 BCTs would be needed to fight two MRCs. Taking into account the need for a strategic reserve, the Active Army force should also include an additional 20 percent of the 42 BCTs.

- **Two-MRC Benchmark:** 50 brigade combat teams.
- **Actual 2015 Level:** 32 brigade combat teams.

The Army’s current Active Component BCT capacity meets 64 percent of the two-MRC benchmark and thus is scored as “weak.”

Capability Score: Marginal

The Army’s aggregate capability score remains “marginal.” While the Army will continue to pursue a model of tiered readiness with the aim of improving, if only slightly, troop readiness levels in FY 2015 over the previous year, the service’s overall capability score remains static due to continued reductions to end strength, which degrades capability. Capability is further diminished by the fact that the Army now has fewer soldiers deployed around the world than it has had in recent years.

Additionally, in spite of progress with the JLTV and AMPV, subsequent budget reductions and continuing resolutions have led to inadequate and short-sighted funding for the development of future modernization programs, negatively affecting platform innovation and modernization. These subsequent reductions have set back the Army’s development of future capabilities needed to remains dominant in any operational environment.

This aggregate score is a result of “marginal” scores for “Age of Equipment,” “Size of Modernization Programs,” and “Health of Modernization Programs.” The Army scored “weak” for “Capability of Equipment.”

Readiness Score: Weak

Only 12 Active BCTs were ready for action according to official Army testimony by the Vice Chief of Staff in March 2015. The Army had 32 BCTs; therefore, roughly a third of the Active Army was considered ready for combat. For that reason, this Index assesses Army readiness as “weak.” However, it should be noted that the Vice Chief of Staff also reported in March that of the BCTs fully trained for “decisive action operations,” the readiness of nine had been consumed in support of ongoing operations, which means that only three were uncommitted and ready for use. With this in mind, actual readiness is therefore likely dangerously close to nearing a state of “very weak.”

Overall U.S. Army Score: Weak

The Army’s overall score is calculated based on an unweighted average of its capacity, capability, and readiness scores. The average score was 2.3; thus, the overall Army score is “weak.” This was derived from the aggregate score for capacity (“weak”); capability (“marginal”); and readiness (“weak”).
### U.S. Military Power: Army

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