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Expanding Brigade Combat Teams: Is the Training Base Adequate?

Esli T. Pitts

ABSTRACT: Given our poor track record of predicting the nature of the wars that have transpired since Vietnam, this article describes a model for transitioning the current Army into a force that might be needed in the event of a great power war.

In a world where America, its allies, and its partners do not maintain large standing armies, our potential enemies still believe in maximizing military strength. In March 2016, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the “distinct challenge to our national security” posed by Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, who continue “invest[ing] in military capabilities that reduce our competitive advantage.”¹ Much of this investment is in the form of modernized conventional warfighting capabilities. In February 2011, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates observed “when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right.”² He then warned of the challenge of justifying the expense of a larger force given the decreasing likelihood of a “head-on clash of large mechanized armies.”³ Contrast this statement with Secretary Rumsfeld, who famously observed that countries go to war with the armies they have, not the armies they need.⁴

This article considers how, in the event of a great-power war such as the one Gates discounted, the United States might transition from the Army it has, to the one it might need, by doubling the building blocks of Army units, brigade combat teams (BCTs), with particular focus on armored BCTs. The article discusses key training requirements and offers recommendations for simplifying Army expansion, should it become necessary.⁵

Despite several historical examples of Army expansion since World War II, doubling the number of BCTs is complex and without modern parallel. Within current infrastructure, the Army could double the number of trained BCTs, but to do so rapidly would be extremely challenging. Unless the Army significantly changes end-strength and training capacity in the generating force, imposes stop-loss, assumes

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1 *Hearing on the Department of Defense Budget Posture, Before the Senate Armed Service Committee*, 114th Cong. (March 17, 2016) (posture statement of General Joseph Dunford Jr., US Marine Corps, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff).

2 Robert M. Gates (speech, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, February 25, 2011).

3 *Ibid.*

4 Eric Schmitt, “Iraq-Bound Troops Confront Rumsfeld over Lack of Armor,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2004.

5 The goal of doubling the Army’s BCTs was chosen arbitrarily; some scenarios would require more, some less.

significant risk with inexperienced leadership, and increases stocks of ready equipment, the ability to generate trained brigades will be limited to a largely sequential and time-consuming process.

Training an Expanding Army

In January 2016, the Congressionally mandated National Commission on the Future of the Army warned “significant reductions in the size of the generating force put the ability to expand the Army at risk.”⁶ The Commission noted that there was no link between the size of the generating force, any anticipated Total Army Analysis need for an expansible Army, nor a requirement for the generating force to support expansibility.⁷ In other words, the lynchpin of expansibility is insufficient, and there is no plan to address it.

The Army must, therefore, consider its goals carefully and align the Total Army Analysis process to right-sizing the generating force—even if the goal is not to double brigades but to reach a specified planned capability. The Army grew by 16,000 soldiers in Fiscal Year 2017 through a combination of increased recruiting and higher retention of senior soldiers.⁸ Some portion of that growth may go into the generating force, but the damage caused by the recent loss of trained leadership who could support future expansibility is already done.

The Fiscal Year 2017 Modified Table of Organization and Equipment adopted a triangular brigade structure for the armored BCT (4,184 soldiers) with three maneuver battalions and a cavalry squadron. Each of the maneuver battalions has a headquarters company and three line companies. Two of the battalions are tank-heavy and one is infantry-heavy. The cavalry squadron is comprised of a headquarters, three reconnaissance troops, and a tank troop.⁹ About 35 percent of the brigade combat team (1,479 soldiers) are so-called trigger-pullers, including 355 tankers, 340 scouts, and 667 infantry, and 117 armor or infantry officers.¹⁰ The remaining soldiers in the brigade require a similar training process, but analyzing it is outside the parameters of this article.

Doubling the Army’s armored BCTs would require the Army to train a high volume of soldiers. With attrition at 12–14 percent during initial entry and 12 percent during unit training, 15 new armored brigade combat teams would require about 27,700 tankers, scouts, and infantry. The remaining infantry and Stryker brigades could require roughly 100,000 more soldiers.¹¹ Despite the seeming simplicity, the following approaches entail a high degree of friction.

A modern BCT is much more complicated than a brigade of the early 2000s. Likewise, training and education requirements are much more

6 Carter F. Ham et al., *National Commission on the Future of the Army: Report to the President and Congress of the United States* (Arlington, VA: National Commission on the Future of the Army, 2016), 57.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Tom Vanden Brook, “Army To Spend \$300 Million on Bonuses and Ads To Get 6,000 More Recruits,” *USA Today*, February 12, 2017.

9 FMS-Web (1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, and subordinate units).

10 *Ibid.*

11 Given ongoing force structure changes, including adding additional infantry battalions to overseas infantry brigade combat teams, the number of 100,000 is more of an informed estimate than based on Force Management System’s specific data.

demanding. Missions and operating environments can also be more complex, and unit cohesion and proficiency can take years to develop fully.¹² Despite these factors and the specialized training required for large subsets of the Army, the following model, derived from historical examples, can serve as a starting point for producing new brigades.¹³ In this model, the Army identifies the manning requirements, establishes dates, or aimpoints, for forming the new brigade and schedules institutional training to prepare new recruits and cadre to join soldiers who already meet those requirements at the unit's formation. This theoretical capacity is subject to filling initial training courses, procuring required equipment, and assembling cadres of mid- and senior- grade leaders to reach the aimpoint.

Institutional training involves basic and specialized instruction for large cohorts of recruits and leaders. Assuming brigades are formed on a sequential and consistent timeline, trained soldiers can also be provided on a predictable schedule with limited difficulty. The more rapidly brigades must be built, however, the more the current infrastructure will be challenged. Moreover, a significant amount of centralized management will be required to balance education with tactical or technical skills during expansion efforts.

A key consideration, the total quantity of soldiers required, varies based upon the assumption that a stop-loss will accompany any event that leads to doubling the force. Therefore, unless the Army is in active combat, the primary problem is filling the ranks of new units, not replacing combat losses or soldiers whose term of service has expired.

A 25 percent overage for training would offset historical rates of attrition during both initial training and after forming brigades. But, this allocation does not consider replacing significant combat losses. Were it necessary, the training requirement would rapidly consume not only the overage but also a potentially high percentage of training capacity. Accounting only for attrition during training, an armored BCT would require the following enlisted soldiers (E1–E4): 186 tankers, 229 scouts, and 413 infantry. Sergeant (E5) requirements would include 87 tankers, 52 scouts, and 135 infantry. With overage, the brigade would require 1,035 junior enlisted soldiers and 343 sergeants.

Training Brigades

The armor training brigade at the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Georgia, conducts One Station Unit Training (OSUT) for both tankers and scouts.¹⁴ The training lasts roughly 16 weeks for either skill and currently produces 1,440 tankers per year after 12.7 percent attrition and 2,340 scouts after 14.1 percent attrition.¹⁵ Additional capacity, added in the summer of 2017, should increase the total graduates per year to 1,920 tankers and 2,748 scouts.¹⁶ Given modest

12 Hornick, Burkhart, and Shunk, "Rightsizing the Army," 43.

13 The National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFA) concluded the Army "could not provide [the Commission with] a formal plan for expanding the Army." See NCFA, *Force Generation (FG) Subcommittee Monthly Meeting* (Arlington, VA: NCFA, October 21, 2015), briefing slides, 7.

14 The armor training brigade includes one armor battalion and one cavalry squadron.

15 Armored brigade commander, email messages to author, February 13–14, 2017.

16 *Ibid.*

additional resources, the existing brigade infrastructure could support three additional companies to train such soldiers.¹⁷ The infantry training brigade graduates 12,900 infantry per year after a typical attrition of 14 percent.¹⁸ With classes filled to normal capacity, the brigade could graduate 19,300 infantry per year; however, it could produce 21,100 graduates under surge conditions.¹⁹

Given overage and current rates of attrition, the Maneuver Center of Excellence would be required to start training for 342 tankers, 352 scouts, and 685 infantry to fill one armored BCT. At current rates of throughput, Fort Benning could train sufficient tankers for 1.23 armored BCTs, enough scouts for 1.4 armored BCTs, and enough infantry for 4.15 armored BCTs per quarter. Should the Army return the two mechanized infantry companies it removed from the armored BCT structure in 2017, it could only generate 3.1 armored BCTs per quarter. This rate builds 1.7 infantry BCTs per quarter. Should additional replacement requirements be necessary due to combat losses, the Army could either activate the existing surge capacity at Fort Benning or use the National Guard's system of Regional Training Institutes to train additional soldiers.

Newly-formed brigades will not have the time or skills to train soldiers on many essential tasks, such as drivers' licensing, job-specific skills, and combat lifesaver training, which are usually left to a new soldier's first unit. To form BCTs rapidly, OSUT could be lengthened; thereby, economies of scale and experienced instructors could be leveraged to conduct such training prior to soldiers arriving at newly-formed BCTs.

Noncommissioned Officers

A sufficient quantity of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) would not likely be available to fill more than 1 or 2 armored BCTs per quarter. Accordingly, manning the NCO ranks in brigades requires multiple solutions such as training potential leaders identified during initial training, cross-leveling experience from existing brigades, recalling experienced leaders to active duty, and employing contractors or other nondeployable leaders in the generating force.

Sergeants. Sergeants serve as fire-team leaders and vehicle gunners while providing first-level leadership in their platoons. An armored BCT requires 87 tanker, 52 scout, and 135 infantry sergeants with an overage totaling 343 sergeants.

One primary source of sergeants would be reminiscent of the Vietnam War's Noncommissioned Officer Candidate's Course, which produced sergeants from soldiers who demonstrated promise during basic training. One model involves sending the top 25 percent of each graduating OSUT class immediately to a modified Basic Leader Course. This course would focus, first, on small unit leadership, followed by several weeks of training specific to the soldier's field and rank, including tactics, maintenance, and gunnery.²⁰ These new NCOs would

17 Ibid.

18 G-3 Training staff member, Maneuver Center of Excellence, email messages to the author, February 22 and February 27, 2017.

19 Ibid.

20 Required percentages differ significantly depending on the needs of armor, scout, and infantry organizations, combined with the unknown variable of how many other sources are providing soldiers to train as sergeants.

be effectively prepared for leadership and receive a different brigade assignment than their peers from initial training. While most of these NCOs would join the newly-forming brigades, some would also report to existing units to allow experienced NCOs to cross-level to the new brigades.

Midgrade and Senior NCOs. The biggest personnel challenge of generating brigade combat teams is filling midgrade and senior NCO ranks with experienced leaders while maintaining existing brigades and meeting the requirements of the generating force. An armored BCT requires 42 tanker, 47 scout, and 80 infantry staff sergeants with an overage total of 211. The distribution of sergeants first class equates to 23 tankers, 12 scouts, and 26 infantry, an overage total of 76. Master sergeants and command sergeants major fill 17 tanker or scout billets and 13 infantry slots with an overage total of 38. Given the performance of midgrade NCOs during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite deferring NCO education, the Army might accept the risk of rapid promotion in a cross-leveling strategy, which might also favor technical or tactical training over leadership courses.²¹ Nevertheless, the Master Gunner's School is an essential course to ensure the master gunners within the armored BCT are indeed combat vehicle weapons systems experts.²²

Officers

The unique roles, responsibilities, and training requirements for, as well as the smaller numbers of, officers means every effort should be made for them to complete all professional military education and training requirements to support the brigade's aimpoint.

Lieutenants. Except for the two-year option for Cadet Initial Entry Training through the Reserve Officer Training Corps, there is no way to accelerate commissioning through a university. Therefore, Officer Candidate School will be the primary source for lieutenants—1,080 graduates per year—for the first two to four years of an Army expansion effort.²³ With five months' notice, the school could expand its courses and increase the number of graduates to 3,200 officers.²⁴ The Army National Guard also has substantial officer-training capacity.²⁵

After initial training, all lieutenants would attend the armor or infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course, which is the minimum training required to lead a platoon. In 19 weeks, these courses respectively graduate 480 and 1,440 officers per year with additional capacities of 840 and

21 Some examples of alternate training include Ranger School, the Tank Commander Certification Course, Army Reconnaissance Course, Mortar Leaders Course, Mechanized Leaders Course, Stryker Leaders Course, and Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course.

22 The authorization is for a master gunner at each tank and infantry company, plus tank and Bradley master gunners at both the battalion and brigade levels. The squadron is authorized one master gunner at the squadron level and one for the tank company, but a Bradley master gunner is not authorized at the troop level. For more details, see FMS-Web (1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, and subordinate units; accessed February 18, 2017).

23 "Army ROTC: Army ROTC Leader Development: Cadet Initial Entry Training," US Army, March 17, 2016, <http://www.goarmy.com/rotc/courses-and-colleges/curriculum/cadet-initial-entry-training.html>; and regimental commander, email message to author, December 9 and 16, 2016.

24 Battalion commander, email.

25 Essentially every state and some territories conduct Officer Candidate School at their Regional Training Institute. Most states currently conduct 2–3 small classes of 10–20 students per year. For one example, see "Officer Candidate School: Apply: OCS Program Dates," Alabama National Guard, December 19, 2016, http://al.ng.mil/ALABAMA/Careers/OCS/Pages/OCS_Apply.aspx.

2,200 students.²⁶ A new armored BCT would require, with overage, 76 junior lieutenants—33 armor officers filling armor or cavalry billets, 19 infantry officers, and 9 more from either branch. A secondary manning requirement for 51 junior lieutenants would be created per brigade to replace senior lieutenants or newly-promoted captains assigned to the Maneuver Captain's Career Course during the expansion. The combined output of the armor and infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course are sufficient to fill three armored BCTs per quarter.

Most new officers attend unit-specific training such as the Army Reconnaissance Course, Bradley Leaders Course, Stryker Leaders Course, Airborne School, Ranger School, or the Mortar Leader Course after completing the Basic Officer Leadership Course. Thus, training for a new infantry or armor officer lasts 9–12 months.²⁷ Despite the need to build brigades and the risks associated with selecting scout or mortar platoon leaders prior to their arrival at the unit, new lieutenants must continue to receive this training before they are assigned to their brigades as such opportunities after arriving will be limited. Other positions, such as executive officer, require more experience and should be filled from existing brigades.

Captains. The 51 senior lieutenants or newly promoted captains required to man a new armored BCT would include 15 armor, 12 infantry, and 14 officers from either branch. The secondary manning requirement would replace 15 senior captains departing their brigades to attend the Command and General Staff College. During the last decade, unit commanders have typically hesitated to send their senior lieutenants to the Captain's Career Course; however, immediate completion of this program would be essential to building new brigades. With the majority of captains stabilized, the Maneuver Captain's Career Course, which currently achieves 800 graduates per year, can build 2.75 new armored BCT's per quarter while allowing for attrition.²⁸ The primary concern arises from the resultant loss of experience among captains who will serve as company commanders or fill battalion and brigade staffs. Sequentially building new armored BCTs mitigates such loss by spreading it over time and across units.

Majors. Unlike the other officer grades, there is a large population of senior captains and majors serving in nonessential positions such as graduate school students, instructors, or other broadening assignments. Each brigade would require 10 armor or infantry majors to be trained and assigned as the operations and executive officers in the brigade and its four maneuver battalions. Typically, such officers are graduates of the one-year resident Command and General Staff College program or the fourteen-week Intermediate Level Education. Subject to training requirements, these officers could rapidly fill the required billets in a new brigade.

Closed during World War I to ensure officers were available for the war, the Command and General Staff College continued training during World War II, graduating more than 19,000 staff officers in 27

²⁶ Battalion commander, Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course, email message to author, December 16, 2016.

²⁷ Cavalry squadron commander, email message to author, December 7, 2016.

²⁸ G-3 Training staff member, email.

shortened staff courses that closely resembled the current Intermediate Level Education timeline.²⁹ By shortening the resident program and conducting multiple iterations per year, enough field grade officers could be trained to form leadership cohorts for the new armored BCTs.

Commanders. The typically low selection rate for command at the battalion and brigade levels leaves a significant population of available high-quality lieutenant colonels and colonels. In the first year of expansion, alternates from the most recent command select lists could be selected for the authorizations of one colonel to command each brigade and four lieutenant colonels to lead the maneuver battalions. In subsequent years, the command select list would align with manning requirements. The increased number of commands could impact the ability to fill senior staff positions at and above the corps level, but this deficiency could be offset by deferring retirements.

The Army already conducts a general Pre-Command Course at Fort Leavenworth and a Maneuver Pre-Command Course at Fort Benning. By combining both courses at Fort Leavenworth and scheduling them in conjunction with Intermediate Level Education cohorts scheduled for the same new brigades, the Army could incorporate some basic planning exercises into the course while simultaneously building the command teams for each brigade.

The Army retains significant training capacity in the states' Regional Training Institutes, many of which currently possess armor, cavalry, and infantry military occupational specialty qualification and NCO education programs.³⁰ If this capacity was unnecessary, the institutes could disband and either support building the cadre for new armored BCTs or replace leaders in the generating force who could then fill armored BCT positions.

Brigade Combat Team

On the identified activation date, trained soldiers and leaders would converge on a designated location, whether the infrastructure of a deployed armored BCT, a recently deactivated one, or a mobilization force generation installation capable of housing and supporting the entire brigade's training regimen.³¹ The first five brigades might be partially equipped from the five Army prepositioned stock fleets or from existing units' idle stay-behind equipment. Subsequent brigades would have to wait for new equipment to be procured.

Two potential sources of cadre exist around which to build brigades. First, the Army has six combined arms training brigades with the mission of training and mobilizing the Army National Guard. Combined arms training brigades, consist of commanders and rudimentary staffs at

29 John W. Partin, ed., *A Brief History of Fort Leavenworth 1827–1983* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1983), 37, 41.

30 A typical example of a state's capability is the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's 166th Regiment, which currently offers military occupational specialty qualification for armor, scouts, and infantry as well as the Basic Leadership Course for NCOs. See "166th Regiment," Pennsylvania Army National Guard, November 6, 2017, http://www.png.pa.gov/army_national_guard/166th_regiment/Pages/default.aspx.

31 Mobilization Force Generation Installations have varying capacity in training areas and housing. As of 2015, there are only three such installations capable of housing more than 4,000 soldiers at the same time: Fort Stewart, Georgia; Camp Atterbury, Indiana; and Camp Shelby, Mississippi. For more details, see "White Paper: CATB to ABCT Conversion."

the battalion and brigade levels, and company training teams with a team chief and a cadre of NCOs. In the event that the National Guard's brigades are already mobilized, those training brigades could form the nucleus of the first five armored BCTs. Using the training brigades would allow time to identify, train, and assemble soldiers, junior NCOs, and officers, as well as the entire cavalry squadron, to form the next brigades. The 1st Army conducted a feasibility study of this concept in 2015, concluding it would be possible.³² Secondly, in similar fashion, the Army is currently planning to form six security force assistance brigades. Like the combined arms training brigades, these brigades consist of a cadre of leaders and staff, without a full complement of enlisted soldiers and junior NCOs, around which a brigade combat team might be formed.

Training Model

A 37-week battalion training model that concentrates on combined arms maneuver in a contemporary operating environment and culminates in a combat training center exercise, would enable newly-formed armored BCTs to achieve initial proficiency in brigade maneuver.³³ Because the training progression would require four maneuver battalions to rotate through key training resources, particularly live-fire ranges, a minimum of 40 weeks would be required to sequence all four units through the training. The following schedule for each battalion rotation also includes "white space" for retraining and equipment maintenance. The model does not provide for training in stability operations or other nonessential skills.

During Week 1, soldiers initiate administrative inprocessing, draw their equipment, and start to build teams. The next five weeks include individual and basic collective task training, and also a two-week leader training program and command post exercise. Week 7 involves a situational training exercise on chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear scenarios, which is followed by crew drills and maneuver at the fire team and squad levels in Week 8. Week 9 is allocated for unit needs, while Weeks 10 and 11 focus on tactical training and platoon battle drills. Week 12 is another week of white space for recovery or additional training.

Weeks 13–16 include fire team and squad live fire exercises and crew qualification on all stabilized and unstabilized systems, culminating in platoon gunnery table XII. Another week of unit recovery or retraining time occurs before the company-level situational training exercises during Weeks 18 and 19; a company-level live-fire exercise and battalion-level fire coordination exercise happen during Week 20. Another unplanned training period is available in Week 21. Weeks 22 and 23 include a battalion command post exercise followed by battalion situational training exercises. Finally, while soldiers recover and prepare unit equipment for deployment to a combat training center, unit leaders participate in an armored BCT command post exercise that occurs during Week 24.

³² "CATB to ABCT Conversion."

³³ This training model is informed primarily by my professional opinion as a combined arms battalion commander for two years, as well as a task force senior maneuver trainer at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany, for two years.

At this point, the unit has another week to prepare for the combat training center deployment, which occurs during Week 26. Training at the center—which might be the National Training Center, the Joint Readiness Training Center, or a similar local training area, if necessary—lasts through Week 30. The unit returns to its home station during Week 31 and conducts recovery, retraining, and semiannual or annual services on vehicles and equipment through Week 34. The unit conducts block leave during Weeks 35 and 36 and becomes operationally capable in Week 37.

While the required training time is fixed, the total time required to grow new brigades will vary based on such factors as mobilizing the Army National Guard, vacating the mobilization force generation installations, forward-deploying units to the Army prepositioned stock fleet, building complete equipment sets, and initiating a steady flow of new soldiers, as well as locating, transferring, and training initial unit cadre.

Even building the first brigades around the experienced and intact combined arms training brigades from 1st Army would require augmentation with the entire cavalry squadron and with staff sergeants from either the generating force or the existing brigades. Officer billets could be filled by courses already underway. For the first brigades to form, the force would be dependent upon whether a Basic Leadership Course for sergeants was underway and how far along the various OSUT courses might be in training. A fully-trained enlisted force might not be available for four to six months. Moreover, the assembled force would require about nine more months of training to be minimally ready. Subsequently formed brigades would be more limited by the ability to generate a cadre of experienced midgrade leaders once the flow of enlisted and junior NCOs was established. Once prepositioned equipment was issued, the rate of forming armored brigades would be wholly dependent upon procuring additional matériel.

Risks

Although individual armored BCT's can be built rapidly, there is risk in doing so. Primarily, the entire force would lack experience. Existing brigades would not only release many of their most experienced leaders, but would also acquire inexperienced replacements. New brigades would receive some experienced cadre, but many of those soldiers would likely be inexperienced in their new billets or ranks.

A recent study described the practice of keeping a small Army that is rapidly expandable in a time of war as “a flawed approach.”³⁴ The primary reason 30 months are required to build a brigade combat team is for experience. Currently, soldiers at the unit level average five years in service, while historically, draftees and volunteers alike spent two years in service.³⁵ Considering the increasingly complex battlefield and equipment, there is no replacement for experience. Nevertheless, this proposal would generate brigades with experience measured in months, not years.

34 John R. Evans Jr., *Getting it Right: Determining the Optimal Active Component End Strength of the All-Volunteer Army to Meet the Demands of the 21st Century* (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 2015), 21.

35 Ibid.

The junior leaders from the Vietnam War were a mass-produced expedient to face the pressing needs of that war. They were not trained to be professional and long-serving leaders, but a short-term source of combat leadership. While they did lead well on the battlefield, they lacked the ability to provide mature leadership in garrison. The young sergeants, in particular, were trained to be “good enough to win the war” but were given almost no instruction in discipline or garrison leadership.³⁶ Recall the lesson in the Army’s previous attempt to build more effective and cohesive units that continued to train together as Cohesion, Operational Readiness, and Training units; when average leaders were placed under time constraints and high pressure to form a unit rapidly based on inexperienced soldiers, “vertical” cohesion actually suffered.³⁷

Historically, when the Army expands, it is also forced to lower standards for recruitment and retention. Struggling with recruitment during the early years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army reduced standards to allow up to four percent of recruits in Category IV of the Armed Forces, the lowest aptitude category, to enter the service.³⁸ Currently, 71 percent of American youth do not meet standards for service, and the trend is getting worse.³⁹ Lowering these standards creates both discipline and performance problems. Disciplinary problems will be worsened by the fact that most soldiers’ first line supervisors will be inexperienced junior sergeants barely months ahead of those they are leading. One of many examples of the risks posed to performance by lower quality soldiers is stark. Given the same training as tank gunners, soldiers categorized as IIIA (scoring in the 50th to 64th percentile on the Armed Force Qualification Test) scored 34 percent better on the test than did soldiers categorized as IV (scoring in the 10th to 30th percentile).⁴⁰

The last risk is to mission success. While it is mathematically possible to push the right numbers of soldiers through training, promote them, assign them a billet, and propel them through a modicum of training, they still lack the proficiency and lethality gained only through multiple iterations in diverse conditions associated with day and night operations in inclement weather and during chemical conditions. Failing to train soldiers for proficiency, particularly when combined with the performance of lower-quality recruits, is disastrous.

Recommendations

Although the Army may not decide to double the number of brigade combat teams right now, multiple brigade combat teams may need to be added as part of a future Army expansion. For that reason, the Army should consider the following recommendations:

36 Lee M. North, *The United States Army and the Sergeant Problem: The Army’s Systemic Inability To Produce Enough Sergeants and a Proposal To Fix It* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2014), 26.

37 Kenneth C. Scull, *Cohesion: What We Learned from COHORT*, Study Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 1990), 22–23.

38 Anna Badkhen, “Army Relaxes Its Standards To Fill Ranks / Critics Say Push To Meet Quotas May Let Unstable Recruits Join Up,” *SFGate* (San Francisco), July 11, 2006.

39 Blake Stilwell, “Here’s Why Most Americans Can’t Join the Military,” *Business Insider*, September 28, 2015.

40 Jennifer Kavanagh, *Determinants of Productivity for Military Personnel: A Review of Findings on the Contribution of Experience, Training, and Aptitude to Military Performance* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), 27.

Link the generating force to the Total Army Analysis process. Codify a minimum number of brigade combat teams to be supported immediately from the generating force. Grow the generating force to support expansibility.

Assign battle roster identification numbers to the expansible force. Add a designation for expansible battalion and brigade commanders on the Command Select List as a category separate from principals or alternates. Build the expansible force's battle roster to the extent possible, including coding soldiers in the generating force to specific duty positions in the expansible brigades. Compare the generating force's capacity against battle-rostered cadre and identify manning solutions for any shortfalls.

Formally task the combined arms training brigades and security force assistance brigades with a wartime mission as the cadre of expansible brigades.

Assess current and surge capacity at active and reserve component schools against expansibility goals with, and without, stop-loss in effect. Assess all centers of excellence and state regional training institutes. Capture costs and infrastructure requirements to generate excess training capacity at incremental increases of 10, 25, and 50 percent.

Adjust personnel policies to support expansibility. Enable recalling experienced soldiers who have not met their individual ready reserve commitment or who have retired. Assign battle-roster numbers for those soldiers. Code these soldiers to specific duty positions in the expansible brigades. Encourage national, state, or local programs focused on the health and fitness of America's youth.

Maintain prepositioned BCT equipment sets consistent with Total Army Analysis goals. Reset sufficient combat vehicles in depots or long-term storage. Procure and store all equipment necessary to equip sufficient brigade combat teams. Build additional Army prepositioned stock capability in both armored and Stryker Brigades.

The Army's 2013 Strategic Guidance reads: "The Army must preserve options for the future by retaining the capacity to expand and provide the capabilities needed for future challenges."⁴¹ Clearly, the Army identified the risks assumed by cutting the force structure, particularly in the generating force. Given fiscal realities, however, the Army is currently operating at the edge of efficiency—sufficient capacity to maintain the Army we have, but not the one we might need.

Secretary Gates may be right when he says we have seen the last major combat involving large mechanized formations; then again, he also said our record of predicting future war is perfect—we have always been wrong! Regardless, should America identify the need for a large Army, we will not have the luxury of time. It is, therefore, in the Army's—and the nation's—best interests to minimize the time required to build brigade combat teams.

41 Raymond T. Odierno and John M. McHugh, *Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2013* (Washington DC: HQDA, 2013), 15.

